

**Reflections & Recommendations on Working with Young People from
Disadvantaged Backgrounds in Transnational Voluntary Service**

A contribution from 3 Networks : Creative Cooperations, ENVOL, Step-by-Step

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Background

This booklet has been produced within the framework of the project entitled '*Extending Long-Term Voluntary Service to Young People from Disadvantaged Backgrounds*' which was supported under by the European Commission's YOUTH programme as a large-scale 'Support Measure'. Support Measures are designed to assist the implementation of the YOUTH programme action lines (in this case the European Voluntary Service – Action 2) and to contribute to the overall strengthening of European youth policy. The project took place between October 2001 – January 2003.

Project aims & objectives

The overall aim of this project was to promote long-term voluntary service as a possible means of intervention for young people faced with social exclusion. It also aims to facilitate their inclusion in long-term voluntary service in general, and the European Voluntary Service (EVS) in particular, by contributing to policy development.

The specific objectives of the project are therefore:-

- To evaluate, consolidate and promote the experience of 3 centralised EVS networks, set up in 1996 to test different approaches to the inclusion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in long-term voluntary service;
- To evaluate the long term impact of these networks on the participating young people and organisations;
- To identify and develop solutions to specific problems which limit the full integration of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in EVS;
- To increase the dialogue between organisations working at a centralised and decentralised level, and organisations working on long-term and short-term volunteering with this target group.

Project activities

The project has been divided into three main activities:-

I Networks' Exchange & Dissemination

Two meetings were held involving 2 partners and the coordinators of each of the 3 networks in November 2001 and February 2002 together with representatives from AVSO. The first meeting focused on the exchange of experience and best practice, the second on the role and benefits of networks. A third editorial meeting was held in May 2002 between the network coordinators and AVSO. The booklet '*Reflections and Recommendations from the 3-Networks*' is a result of this exchange process.

II Research Project

An independent research project was carried out in parallel to the networks' exchange. This research carried out by Regine Schröer of AVSO, involved interviews with volunteers, organisations and National Agencies. It assesses the role of transnational voluntary service in tackling social exclusion among young people in five countries: UK, Germany, France, Greece and Italy.

III Transfer of Experience/Consultation

The networks' recommendations were circulated to all the National Agencies in October 2002. Three meetings were held between representatives of the networks and the National Agencies of Germany, France and the UK. Of the others only Spanish National Agency responded to the recommendations. The networks also participated in a staff-training event for National Agencies in January 2003 which provided an opportunity to discuss the recommendations. This booklet takes account of the results of this consultation process.

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SUMMARY

This project brings together the experience of three networks (ENVOL, Step-by-Step, Creative Cooperations) that target young people from disadvantaged backgrounds within the framework of the European Voluntary Service programme.

Since the start of their operation in 1996, they have collectively worked with almost 300 volunteers, each going away to undertake a period of volunteering abroad for periods of between 3 weeks and 12 months.

Each network has a different history and evolution. In the current projects (which will last until 2003), ENVOL (*ENVOL Plus*) will involve 80 young people in projects of 3-9 months, Creative Cooperations 25 young people in 12 month projects, and Step-by-Step (*Further Steps*) around 60 young people for average periods of 3-4 months.

The networks have refined their approach to recruiting and selecting volunteers over the years. All agree that the sending organisations are in the best position to judge if the young person is in need of the extra support provided through the networks.

Creative Cooperations is unique in that it is theme oriented. All its partners are involved in community arts projects. Step-by-Step and ENVOL do not have a typical partner profile. All have the capacity and interest of working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The specific characteristics of transnational volunteering offer several benefits to this target group. It has a so-called 'shock-effect', it encourages personal engagement and 'role-reversal', it enables mobility, and it provides a safe yet flexible environment for the young person to grow.

Sending and hosting projects benefit too. It offers a 'new' tool for empowering young people, it is attractive to young people in the local community, it creates new transnational partnerships, and hosting placements benefit from the volunteer's contribution (over the longer-term).

In order to successfully involve this target group in transnational volunteering projects, it is essential that the following six quality criteria be in place:-

- An understanding of the notion of volunteer pathway or process
- On-going volunteer support
- Communication & creation of trust in partnerships
- On-going learning, reflection & evaluation
- Active participation
- A flexible exchange system

There are different ways that these criteria can be met. It is best that organisations and networks develop their own approaches, building on the experience of others.

A network has an added-value beyond the sum of its parts. Networks working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds offer mutual support, enforcement of quality standards, a pooling of good practices, a diversity of partners and continuity.

Centralised coordination is always necessary in a network, although it may play different roles according to the network structure. The tasks of the coordination unit are many and varied from technical and financial management to volunteer tracking and mediation. These tasks require a realistic investment of time and resources. The management of a 'static' network exchanging 25 volunteers over a period of 2 years requires a minimum of 2 part-time staff members and office overheads. The management of a 'dynamic' network, which is more 'hands-on' and flexible in terms of the type of activity and duration of voluntary service, requires 2-full time staff members plus overhead costs (for 60-80 volunteers over a 2-year period).

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is desirable that many more young people from this target group have access to transnational volunteering opportunities through EVS. However, it is important that by attracting more young people, the quality of the experience is not compromised. This can only be achieved by adopting the following measures and institutional changes:-

1. Recruitment of new organisations should focus on those working in the following areas:
 - at a local level with this particular target groups;
 - in international mobility;
 - as intermediaries in volunteering or voluntary service.
2. New organisations must be adequately prepared and trained. An organisation must consider the volunteer exchange within their overall profile and future strategy. It should not be a one-off experience.
3. Any training must build on experiences had so far. Real life examples are the best means of demonstrating the complexity of the tasks involved, but also of inspiring individuals and organisations.
4. A network approach is the most effective means of meeting the quality criteria. The operations of networks should have a longer-term perspective in order to ensure continuity and accumulation of experience.
5. There should be greater publicity and media attention given to the results of this work in order to increase support from politicians and civil servants.
6. The value of networks should be acknowledged and supported. Other thematic networks (ecological, social, cultural) should be targeted by awareness campaigns to encourage them to include marginalized youth
7. The role that civil society organisations play in conceptualising, developing and implementing volunteer exchange programmes must be acknowledged and supported. Institutions should avoid heavy control and micro-management by public administrations and allow great autonomy to civil society.

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is the collective work of three networks that have been working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds for over 6 years within the pilot phase of the European Voluntary Service and the YOUTH programmes of the European Commission. Collectively they have worked with almost 300 volunteers, each going away to undertake a period of volunteering abroad for periods of between 3 weeks and 12 months.

The content of this booklet is based on discussions held in 2 meetings involving network partners, co-ordinators and the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (a European NGO representing the voluntary service sector). The first meeting focused on sharing experience between the networks about the different approaches and methodologies used; the second focused on areas of commonality between the networks and how to transfer their experience to facilitate wider participation of this target group in long term volunteering.

This booklet is therefore a compilation of the experiences, the lessons learnt and the recommendations for the future, from the networks' point of view. It is hoped that it will inspire organisations and individuals to develop more opportunities for this target group. But it is also hoped that it offers a 'reality check'. That means that readers should have a real insight to the organisational and personal investments required to ensure that each young person receives a quality experience through their volunteering.

A word of caution. We do not pretend to offer 'off-the-shelf' methodologies that can be applied to working with this target group. Just as each young person is different, so is each youth worker, each organisation and each network. They all have different approaches based on their experiences, history and personality. Each may work equally well. There are some common criteria and examples of successful approaches and these have been documented in detail. However, it is intended as a source of ideas and inspiration, not as a prescriptive toolkit.

SECTION 1: EXPERIENCES

A more detailed discussion of the evolution of each network is provided in Section 5. However, by way of introduction, it is necessary to provide a short overview of the experience of each network, on which this document is based.

1.1 The ENVOL Network

The **ENVOL** network has its beginnings in a centralised flagship project OEIL-ENVOL. Set up in 1996, this network involved national co-ordinators from 8 countries, where BAG JAW was the co-ordinator for Germany. In July 1998 BAG JAW took over transnational co-ordination of the ENVOL project after the European organisation OEIL dissolved, and they completed the third and final phase of the pilot project called ENVOL 3. A further 16-month EVS centralised project began in September 1999 named ENVOL 2000, and most recently ENVOL PLUS was approved under Action 2 of the YOUTH programme, which has been operational since July 2001. ENVOL PLUS aims to involve 80 young people for an EVS period between 3 and 9 months. A total of 150 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been volunteering in partner organisations since January 1997.

Around 16 partner organisations with more than 20 local projects are involved in sending and hosting volunteers across 6 European countries. The daily work of the projects is the integration of young people who are disadvantaged in different ways. Some work with young people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, others with the homeless, refugees or migrants, and others deal with those with a history of substance abuse and school drop-outs or those with no formal educational qualifications. The activities over the past 4 years have included a number of partner and evaluation events, and an on-going evaluation process. Several products focusing on 'good practice' have been produced as a result of their experience.

1.2 Creative Cooperations

Creative Cooperations was founded in July 1996. 21 partners from 10 EU Member States established the network with a view to collaborating under the European Voluntary Service programme, and offering disadvantaged teenagers and young adults the opportunity to have a European experience in the field of artistic and creative community work. The first volunteers were selected, prepared, deployed and given follow-up support in the flagship action phase from May 1997 to October 1998. A second programme between 1999 and 2001, involved some 25 volunteers each engaged in a period of voluntary service of 12 months. The most recent programme began in November 2001 and will last for 2 years. It expects to place 25 volunteers in 12-month projects. In total Creative Cooperations has worked with some 65 young people since 1996.

All the 22 organisations involved in Creative Cooperations are involved in community arts. They may undertake different kinds of activities but they all subscribe to the following principles:-

- youth arts work begins with artistic experience & production;
- youth arts work demands and encourages active participation & creative expression;

- youth arts work is focused on areas of social concern;
- youth arts work is community work and plays an important part in solving the problems of our times.

1.3 Step-by-Step

Step-by-Step has its beginnings as a pilot action in the framework of the European Youth Forum's Combat against Poverty & Social Exclusion Campaign (1995), in which 12 young people participated in a period of volunteering abroad for 3 weeks to 10 months. It was followed by a flagship project involving 17 volunteers for a minimum of 3 months over a period of 2 years, in parallel with another 1-year short-term volunteer programme enabling 14 young people to volunteer for shorter periods in preparation for a longer stay. The last project (1999-2001) enabled 55 young people to complete one or more periods of volunteering abroad (for average periods of 4 months), bringing the total number of young people that have participated as volunteers in Step-by-Step to 90 by August 2001. A further 35 young people participated in one of the 9 European-level preparatory events organised within the various phases - but chose not to go away. The most recent project, which began in January 2002 aims to support a further 60 young people to volunteer over a 2-year period for average periods of 3-4 months.

The approach of the network is reflected in its name 'Step-by-Step' - the young people are encouraged to go away initially for a short period of time (minimum 4-6 weeks), and then extend their stay or go to a longer-term project after gaining more autonomy and confidence. The participating organisations are many (around 40 in total throughout the various pilot projects) and varied, but all share a common interest in offering transnational volunteering opportunities to young people who would otherwise be denied access.

SECTION 2: WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED?

2.1 The Volunteers

Each network has had its own internal discussions with regards to how to define and reach out to this specific target group. Step-by-Step, for example, make a distinction between those young people 'in difficulty' and those young people 'from disadvantaged backgrounds'. The former may be considered those who are emotionally or psychologically at risk – i.e. having been involved in delinquent or pre-delinquent behaviour, substance abuse (alcohol/drugs), or having experienced emotional/sexual abuse, they may have a tendency to put themselves at risk or be accident prone. Those from 'disadvantaged backgrounds', on the other hand, are those who may themselves not be at risk as such, but they may have limited access to mobility because of the areas in which they live, a lack of social skills or simply a need for extra support. They may be first or second-generation migrants, early school-leavers, from remote rural areas or from inner city areas with high levels of unemployment and/or delinquency. In most cases it is the young people 'in difficulty' that are most difficult to deal with and require the most support.

Step-by Step has also supported 1 or 2 young people with a physical disability, although their needs are so different that it proved difficult to integrate them into the network on a larger scale.

The main criterion for ENVOL is that the young people must 'be in need of extra support'. It is also true that the young people do not come forward themselves to volunteer, but are instead always referred to ENVOL through a sending organisation. All the sending organisations have a profile of working with local youth and hence are in the best position to judge if the young person needs additional support or could participate in the conventional EVS programme. However, the actual type of 'disadvantage' varies enormously and there are also clear differences in the perception of disadvantage between the different countries. They may be migrants with fewer opportunities or at risk of being excluded (homeless, early school leavers, unemployed, lack of social skills).

For Creative Cooperations, the young people by definition must have limited access to transnational opportunities and be at risk of exclusion. They should also have expressed an interest in community art projects, although he/she does not need to have any particular experience or skills. Again by working with this specific target group the sending organisations are best equipped to judge the degree to which a young person is 'disadvantaged' or has a problematic background.

It is clear that each network has refined its approach to recruiting and selecting volunteers over the years, and is increasingly effective at targeting not only those that lack access to other mobility programmes, but also those that demand high levels of individual support.

2.2 The Partner Organisations

Creative Cooperations is perhaps unique among the networks in terms of being theme oriented. All the partner organisations within the network are Community Arts organisations and all share a common concern with tackling social issues in their local community through participative arts projects. This partner profile is very important to the coherency of the network and ensuring the quality of the volunteer experience. If a partner does not match this profile it can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties.

On the other hand both ENVOL and Step-by-Step do not have a 'typical' profile of a partner organisation. All have a capacity and interest in working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and can be local, regional or national level organisations. It is important that the sending organisations have strong links within a local community and that they work directly with young people. Usually they are encouraged to host volunteers too. Incoming volunteers, coming from another country and participating in voluntary activities within a local community, can act as positive role models for young people from that community. It also helps the organisations understand and empathise with 'both sides' of the volunteer exchange. Some host projects may be linked to a specific field of activity such as environmental or cultural projects, but it is most important that they have the capacity and willingness to give individual attention and reinforced support to the in-coming young person.

SECTION 3: WHY WORK WITH THIS TARGET GROUP?

3.1 What are the benefits to the young people?

The so-called 'shock effect': There is accumulating evidence of the value of taking young people out of their familiar environment, requiring them to cope in completely new surroundings.

The networks identified the following values that this process of rupture with their old environment can provide to a young person:-

- It allows them to dissociate themselves from any 'labels' they may have been given among their family, friends or in the local community whilst growing up. It provides an opportunity for a new level of self-awareness and confidence in their own identity;
- Linked to this point, the young person no longer has the support or recognition of a peer group, which may have encouraged destructive behaviour. They are forced to take individual responsibility for their own actions;
- It creates a certain discomfort and insecurity initially, which may be necessary to force them out of their 'excluded' position, which has provided some 'comfort' and an excuse not to move on in the past;
- It provides an opportunity to 'experiment' - as they are unknown in the new environment and there are no expectations of how they should or will behave;
- It requires the young person to cope with a lot of changes and new challenges, and hence develop a new sense of self-reliance and autonomy;
- It opens the young person's mind to new choices for the future, beyond the limitations they may have experienced at home (high unemployment, delinquency etc.);
- It may also open their mind to their own cultural differences, and hence develop a new sense of understanding and tolerance towards differences in their own country or environment.

The benefits of voluntary work. Voluntary activities must contribute to the common good, by giving support to other individuals, the wider community, or the environment. They must also be carried out within the framework of a non-profit making organisation. The fact that the young person volunteers offers particular benefits.

- It offers the opportunity for 'role reversal'. A young person may be used to being the recipient of support through the social system, while as a volunteer they become the provider of support. This may serve to give them a new sense of self-worth and of the value of their contribution to society;
- The young person should be personally engaged in the activities and goals of the organisation. It may broaden their mind to new employment opportunities. It may also help to develop new values based on solidarity and respect for other people and the environment;

3-Net Reflections & Recommendations

- As a volunteer the young person is normally given specific tasks or objectives, but within that framework they also have opportunities to create and develop new projects or activities. It allows for greater personal determination and participation in the development of their work. This type of flexibility is not normally provided in professional training or formal education environments;
- It gives the volunteer a sense of their individual responsibility towards the completion of tasks. It may also give them experience of working as part of a team.

The benefits of going abroad. The fact that the volunteering is carried out in another country offers additional benefits to the young participants.

- It helps to overcome the fear of mobility, as most participants have rarely (if ever) travelled alone;
- It confronts them with a completely different reality and requires them to face up to their individual cultural belief systems;
- It encourages openness and tolerance to other cultures, overcoming racism and xenophobic ideas;
- It may allow them to learn another language - or, at least, develop better communication skills;
- It enables new international friendships, appreciation of other cultures, and discovery of new environments;
- It offers an experience that is exciting and different, and that is usually well respected among their peers and their community.

The benefits of a specialised, managed volunteer programme. The networks are made up of partner organisations which all have a good understanding of volunteer work and the special needs of this target group. This provides many additional benefits to the young person, in particular:-

- They are not judged on appearance or past behaviour. The young person has a sense of being accepted and trusted by others;
- They get focused individual attention from staff within the sending and the hosting organisation;
- Volunteer activities can be developed which demand little autonomy at the start but increasingly allow the volunteer to grow - moving from being a simple participant to being an actor;
- They can develop a sense of ownership of their project and activities.

3.2 What are the benefits to the partner organisations and their communities?

While the benefits to the young participants are clear, it requires the investment of a lot of time and energy from the staff of the organisations. The networks therefore asked themselves what benefits their organisations receive from involving this target group in their activities. These were some of their answers.

3-Net Reflections & Recommendations

- The involvement of young people from other countries is particularly worthwhile for projects targeting marginalised groups within their local community. They may help to attract local young people into the project, and inspire others to follow a similar path - either to undertake voluntary work or to travel or both.
- The fact that organisations can offer opportunities in other countries also attracts young people into a project. Ex-volunteers returning to their sending project can share their experience with local young people and their friends and family. They play an important role in recruiting new candidates for a period of volunteering as well as, more generally, acting as positive role models for others in the community. In addition, staff in the sending project can see the growth in an individual through the volunteer period. It may give a new perspective on the young person's capabilities and change the dynamic of their relationship - often ex-volunteers return to the project with the potential to be a 'helper' and no longer needing to be 'helped'.
- The staff receive value from being part of a process that empowers young people and gives them opportunities and future perspectives.
- The host projects gain value from the activities and contribution of the volunteer - although sometimes this may be only after some months. However, the volunteer shares a news perspective and may challenge the working methods within the organisation. If the volunteer stays for a longer period of time they can really contribute to the longer-term development of the organisation.
- The exchange of volunteers enables the creation of new transnational partnerships, which may lead to new projects, new ideas for exchange and new friendships. The international exchange of ideas and experiences can help the development of an organisation and staff. The support and trust in partners may enable an organisation to take more risks.

3.3 Wider benefits and policy issues

The involvement of this target group in transnational voluntary service has wider social and political benefits.

- It gives access to mobility to those who are not highly educated or who lack the financial resources;
- It gives a sense of participation to social groups who may feel excluded or powerless in their local community or society;
- It helps to create responsible citizens by raising the self-esteem and enabling the positive contribution of individuals who have been marginalised;
- It contributes to overcoming xenophobia and intolerance between different cultures.

SECTION 4: QUALITY CRITERIA

Much of the discussion between the representatives from the 3 networks focused on the quality criteria that need to be in place to involve this particular target group in transnational volunteering. As mentioned in Section 2, the networks have refined their approach to recruiting and supporting young people over the years. From this experience, the network participants identified 6 quality criteria that they consider essential if the needs of this target group are to be adequately met:-

- An understanding of the notion of volunteer pathway or process
- On-going volunteer support
- Communication and creation of trust in partnerships
- On-going learning, reflection & evaluation
- Active participation
- A flexible exchange system

The following section identifies the principles behind each of these quality criteria and why they are essential.

4.1 An Understanding of the notion of Volunteer Pathway / Process

Common Principles

- **The volunteer experience is just one part of the young person's personal development.** Support workers must consider how the volunteer's past has influenced their present, while avoiding any negative stereotyping. They should also consider the future expectations of the volunteer in terms of the human capacities and skills to be developed.
- **The volunteer him/herself should be encouraged to see how the volunteer experience fits into their life path.** They should be given responsibility and ownership of whatever skills and capacities they take from the experience and freedom to develop activities that may fit into their future plans. They should also understand the nature of the contract they are entering into with the host project and their responsibility for fulfilling certain obligations. They should also understand - and fulfil - their responsibility for disclosing any information that may put themselves (or others) at risk.

Why is the notion of pathway essential?

- It is clear that a period of volunteering abroad is not appropriate for everyone. It has a destabilising effect on the young person, which for all the reasons identified in Section 3 can have a very positive effect. But it is vital that the sending organisations consider the voluntary service in the context of the young person's past and future. It is important the sending organisation can anticipate the young person's reaction and ability to cope in a new environment. It is also important that they anticipate the guidance that will be necessary for the volunteer on their return. The sending of a volunteer abroad should never be seen as an end in itself.
- By seeing the voluntary period in a larger context, it helps the young person and the sending organisation to set clear attainable objectives. These should be developed in the light of past

experiences and the future expectations and aspirations of the young person. It also allows the young person and youth worker to evaluate the longer-term impact of the volunteer experience.

- By focusing on the volunteer's pathway, the volunteer is encouraged to take ownership of the process and to fit it within his or her own pathway. It encourages autonomy and the awareness by the volunteer of their own development, and avoids over-dependence of the volunteer on the partner organisations. It also helps to focus the young person's attention on all the steps they have taken to get where they are, and to make a link between their experience of the volunteer activity and their personal history.

4.2 On-going volunteer support

Common Principles

- **This target group demands an intense level of professional support before, during and after the exchange.** Project staff must be committed and prepared to give this extra time to supporting the volunteer. To achieve this level of support, the networks agreed that:-
 - the partner organisations must be familiar with working with this target group and must have contact with local young people;
 - the volunteer must be personally known to the sending organisation before sending them to a volunteer host activity (therefore necessity of 2-3 months preparation in the home country);
 - the partners must be familiar with and trust the value of the 'shock effect' of a period of volunteering abroad on the young person's development;
 - the sending organisation, host organisation and the volunteer must be in regular personal contact prior to the volunteer period;
 - project staff must be sensitive to inter-cultural issues, the volunteer's background and different ways of self-expression.
- **The role of the mentor is very important, especially in the early stages of the project.** They should be sensitive to the inter-cultural and language issues and be able to 'translate' the new environment to the volunteer. The mentor must have their own 'alarm system', meaning they should anticipate any crisis situation or need for extra support and not wait to be asked for help.
- **There must be a 'neutral party' available for mediation between the partners involved (volunteer, sending, host projects).** They must be external to the partner organisations but must be trusted by the partners and the volunteer.
- **There must be a source of external support to the organisations and staff to avoid any potential conflict or crisis situations.**
- **Volunteers must have access to other sources of support,** such as contact with other transnational volunteers with whom to share their experiences.

Why is on-going support essential?

This level of support is essential to reduce the inherent risks of working with this target group. It helps to soften the impact of the experience, allowing the young person to absorb the changes at his

or her own pace. It ensures that any difficulties are anticipated and dealt with before a crisis situation. It is also necessary to ensure the necessary level of protection and confidence in the partner organisations for the young people themselves.

4.3 Communication & Creation of Trust in Partnership

Common Principles

- **Partners must understand and trust one another.** This means not only that they are able to communicate and relate well concerning the individual volunteer exchange, but also that they have a common philosophy and other activities or goals in common. This may relate to common values, an understanding of one another's professional practice, a resemblance between groups worked with or areas worked in etc..
- **Partners must be clear of each other's interpretations and ways of working in the 3 core areas involved in promoting EVS to this target group: volunteering, "disadvantaged" youth, transnational mobility.** Often new partners may engage in volunteer exchanges with experience in only one of the above fields. It is important that they build their knowledge and understanding of those areas where they have no experience through a 'buddying' system or creative local partnerships.
- Particularly with this target group, **partners should see the desirability of reciprocal exchanges.** This means that host projects should be involved in sending and vice versa. This is because it creates a greater feeling of solidarity and understanding between partners that is vital for building trust and co-operation.
- **Communication between partners must be direct and open** in order to give as real a picture as possible of the volunteer activity and host environment to the sending organisation and volunteer and, on the other hand, of the volunteer's background and situation to the host organisation. Organisations must involve the volunteer as much as possible as an active partner in the communication process.
- **Partners should be committed to a long-term co-operation**, enabling them to learn from mistakes and deepen the level of trust and co-operation over time.

Why is trust and cooperation essential?

- This target group is particularly vulnerable. The young people may face emotional or psychological problems, or have had experiences that make their behaviour unpredictable. Certainly the young people targeted do not have the same expectations or self-confidence as other young people more integrated into the system.
- The precariousness of many of these young people's lives makes this particular target group much more likely to drop out at the last minute or to return early. Good communication and understanding between the partners can help to avoid this.
- Youth workers involved with target group need strong guarantees that their young people will be given all the support they need. This degree of trust can only be built by adopting the principles above.

- High levels of trust and co-operation between the partners enable more efficient and easy resolution of problems as they arise.
- The personal contact and trust between partners can help to find a balance between ensuring confidentiality for the volunteer, while also providing all the necessary information to the host partner.

4.4 On-going learning/ reflection/ evaluation

Common Principles

- **Organisations must continually question their own practice and auto-evaluate their results.** They should also be prepared to participate in evaluation events with their partners to collectively evaluate their work.
- **Every experience (good & bad) is valued within the learning process,** from both the perspectives of the organisations & volunteers.
- **Sharing with other partners in the network passes on the experiences and the lessons learnt.**

Why is on-going learning & reflection essential?

- The principle of on-going evaluation is essential if learning and improvements are to take place. Taking time to reflect and evaluate creates the space for creativity, change and evolution. It allows mistakes to be addressed and new ideas to come forward.
- Regular evaluation also provides a point of reference from which to monitor change and positive impacts.
- Collective evaluations (between volunteers or between the organisations) are a valuable means of training and building the competencies of everybody involved.

4.5 Active Participation

Common Principles

- **Volunteers must be fully engaged in the negotiations with the sending and hosting organisations to decide on their placement**
- **Volunteers are given as much autonomy as possible in decision-making,** giving them responsibility for their past and future.
- **All the partners are given equal access to participate in all decision-making activities** and that the contributions of the volunteers and organisations are valued equally.

Why is there a need for active participation?

- By giving all partners the opportunity to understand and value their individual contribution, they have the chance to experience and acknowledge their own value. This process can be very empowering for all partners, who can see their ability to change things.

- Active participation is about handing over responsibility to all concerned. The opportunity to influence the decision-making process also comes with a responsibility, to themselves, to other people, to the environment and to the community. It allows the partners (most especially the volunteers) to feel that they have more control of their future, and that they are no longer a victim of circumstance or other people's decisions.

4.6 A flexible exchange system

Common Principles

The system that financially supports the volunteer exchange must be sufficiently flexible to respond to the specific needs of the volunteers. This means that

- it must allow for *different volunteer rhythms* - giving organisations or networks the autonomy to choose the duration of service, the type, duration and content of training provision etc.;
- organisations must be able to respond to the volunteers in *a timeframe that maintains their interest and motivation*;
- there must be *flexibility over rules / procedures where this does not compromise the long-term quality of the experience* for the volunteer or organisation involved. For example there should be 'hard-standards' which are unchangeable and 'soft-standards' which can be adapted if it benefits the volunteers and the organisations involved;
- there must be *a flexible budget* to be able to respond to emergencies or unanticipated costs.

Why is there a need for a flexible exchange system?

According to the experience of the networks the exchange system supported through the decentralised European Voluntary Service process faces the following challenges:-

- the application process can take anything between 6 to 9 months. Most young people in this target group will lose interest when confronted with this delay;
- there is always a risk that the application process will not be successful which can lead to disappointment and frustration, and reinforce a perception of failure and of being marginalised;
- EVS requires that individual applications be submitted for every volunteer. It is often not possible to anticipate all the costs for special needs. The system allows no flexibility in the different allocations of the budget.

SECTION 5: NETWORKS' APPROACHES TO THE QUALITY CRITERIA

After agreeing these basic quality criteria that must underpin any exchange of young volunteers from this target group, the 3 networks exchanged information on how these criteria translate into concrete practice within their network. This section describes the different practices that each network employs to implement the quality criteria identified in Section 4. At the end of this Section there is a table providing a summary of the different practices of each Network.

5.1 Notion of 'volunteer pathway'

Within the ENVOL network, the youth workers that recruit young people always look at the volunteer experience in the context of an individual **personal development plan**. Voluntary service abroad is just one of the options available to the young people to help them on their path. Sending organisations are also encouraged to follow-up each young person 6 months after their return from the project, to assess the long-term impact of the experience.

ENVOL partners also take steps to pass responsibility and ownership to the young person, by training them to be 'ambassadors' for their country, sending project and their own history. They are encouraged to collect material and examine their own past and their origins, so that this can be presented in their hosting country.

Creative Cooperations also place a lot of emphasis on encouraging the volunteers to become conscious of their own story and the links between all the steps that have brought them to this point in their lives. This can be done in the preparation meeting where volunteers have the opportunity to 'tell their story' in a creative way.

In the Step-by-Step preparation events, the 'individual learning plan' is used as a tool through which independent trainers help complement the work of the sending projects in assisting the volunteers to set - and give information about - their own personal objectives.

5.2 Volunteers' on-going support

Creative Cooperations places a lot of emphasis on peer support from current and past volunteers. The volunteer period is 6 or 12 months and the volunteers in each cycle start at the same time, beginning with a joint preparation seminar. The evaluation meeting for 'out-going' volunteers takes place just prior to the arrival of the 'newcomers'. They have the chance to evaluate their experience separately and then transmit their experience during the preparation seminar. The relationship that develops between the volunteers in one 'cycle' is an important source of support. They meet together through the preparation and evaluation meetings, and maintain contact throughout the period of service through a regular newsletter *'Melting Pot'* - where the volunteers share their experience or stories in whatever creative way they prefer.

In the same way, the sense of sharing experiences and team-building as well as encouraging peer support opportunities where possible between volunteers at collective, European-level

preparation and evaluation events is also an important part of the process for the volunteers within Step-by-Step.

In both ENVOL and Step-by-Step, the central co-ordination body plays an important role in offering an external, neutral party for mediation between partners. The co-ordination body has a more global overview of the projects and partners and may intervene if support is inadequate or if there is the possibility of conflict between any one of the partners.

In all 3 networks, support and counselling is offered to the participating projects, particularly projects that are new to the network, and direct contact between partners is encouraged through regular project meetings as well as project visits where possible.

5.3 Communication and creation of trust between partners

One of the ways Step-by-Step has adopted these principles is through the **Step-by-Step Charter**. This document which was first developed during Phase II (1997-1998) sets out the philosophy of the Network and specifies common quality standards for all partners. New projects are all required to sign up to the Charter, which, among other things, sets out the responsibilities of the sending and hosting organisations.

The appointed contact person within the sending organisation must ...	The appointed contact person within the hosting organisation must ...
Know the young person personally & have discussed obstacles, potential problems with him/her Provide the host project with the agreed level of information about the young person Be well informed about the host project & the activities to be performed Be in regular contact with the volunteer during their stay abroad Be prepared to support and guide the young person on their return.	Prepare a full welcome and orientation procedure Organise, along with the volunteer participant, activities that are realistic and achievable Offer support through the various learning and understanding processes of the volunteer Meet regularly with the volunteer to elaborate their personal project, follow it up and finally evaluate the results

The ENVOL Network has produced its own '*Companion to the European Voluntary Service Users Guide*'. This comprehensive guide takes readers through the different stages of the volunteer cycle providing hints on how to ensure the necessary quality for the involvement of young people that require additional support. It outlines the steps that the sending and hosting organisations need to take before, during and after the period of service, and gives tips to the volunteers themselves on how to get the most out of the experience.

The companion is designed in a loose-leaf file - allowing projects to include their own project-specific resource material for EVS purposes and to include notes and observations on problems, new ideas, new solutions which may arise as the volunteers progress from the beginning to the end of their EVS experience.

All the networks place considerable effort on continuity of partnerships. This does not mean that the networks are static, but the regular participation of some of the same partners allows them to deepen the level of trust, and learn from past experience and challenges.

Creative Cooperations emphasises this approach more strongly within their network. Because the network is based on a common theme (community arts), the partners have a common understanding and are involved in many common projects and activities outside the framework of the volunteer exchange programme. This co-operation has important benefits to the quality of the volunteer experience. It means partners are already very familiar with the activities of their partners and can present them accurately to young prospective volunteers. It also results in regular personal contact and trust building between the organisations.

5.4 On-going learning / reflection / evaluation

Creative Cooperations asks that the volunteers themselves take time to produce 'reports' every 3-months on their own experience. The presentation and transfer of experience is an important element of their learning process, and is included as a core element of their training. Preparation, intermediate and final seminars are organised at the same time and place, in order to allow an overlap between 'old' and 'new' volunteers in the seminars. Another important approach to the transfer of experience developed in Creative Cooperations is the youth panel, in which volunteers and project coordinators together present their projects and approach of community arts work to the public.

Collective evaluations also offer an important means of on-going reflection and learning. Each of the networks have evaluation events at different stages of their evolution for both volunteers and projects.

The relationship between mentor and volunteer is another forum for reflection, learning and evaluation. For each of the networks, the mentor plays a special role in giving the volunteer the opportunity and safety to share their experiences and learn from them.

5.5 Active participation

ENVOL engages the volunteer as early as possible when matching them with a potential host activity. Volunteers are encouraged to get as much information as possible for themselves about the project, to create their own image of where they are going. They are also encouraged as early as possible to consider how the experience fits into their future plans, so that they can get maximum benefit and determine to some extent the activities and results.

At the heart of Creative Cooperations is the concept of individual expression in whatever form. Therefore the seminars focus on enabling everybody's participation through the use of different communication media - arts, music, written, oral etc.

The 'match-making' between volunteers and host opportunities is carried out during the collective volunteer preparation events of Step-by-Step. The process engages the volunteers' responsibility to find out as much as possible about the various activities and to 'weigh up' the demands of each with their own needs and capacities before choosing which activity/environment they prefer. On the other hand, regular 'project encounters', complemented by project visits by the co-ordinators, enable partner organisations to actively participate not only in the activities but in ongoing political discussion of the work.

5.6 A flexible exchange system

The networks are all supported through the centralised strand of the European Voluntary Service. They have each been responsible for designing and implementing their own financial guidelines and administrative procedures for sending and hosting an agreed number of volunteers over a period of between 18-30 months (within the framework provided by the EC). Each network has evolved a slightly different approach that matches the needs of their partners and the particular target group of volunteers.

- ENVOL have 'waves of sending' every 2 months. Volunteer applications are therefore processed according to regular deadlines, much like in the decentralised process, but the process is quicker and the volunteer can be assured of a hosting placement within 2-3 months. The period of voluntary service is flexible - between 3-9 months, which can be extended to 12 months. Any special financial needs for individual volunteers can be applied for via the co-ordination unit. They are able to respond immediately to any extra financial needs without a complicated application procedure. There is a strong co-ordination unit that provides administrative, financial and moral support to the partners.
- The Creative Cooperations model is based on a 12 month volunteer cycle. Volunteers from different partners are sent to their hosting placements at the same time. The emphasis is on the group learning process - whereby the same volunteers come together at the preparation and evaluation seminars and maintain contact throughout the period of service through regular newsletters. The co-ordination body plays less of a supervisory role in the network, and is more of an equal partner (also sending and hosting volunteers). It does nonetheless take on the administrative and financial responsibilities for management of the centralised project, and the organisation of seminars. The network stimulates cooperation at other levels, resulting in other activities between project partners and volunteers.
- The Step-by-Step model is based on a strong co-ordination unit that provides administrative, financial and moral support to the partners. The 'waves of sending' are based around regular international preparation events (3 or 4 per year) organised by the co-ordination unit, involving prospective volunteers - who have not yet found a host project. For the participants it is an opportunity to find out what is involved, have their first inter-cultural experience, and

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also discuss an appropriate host activity. New partners in the project are also invited to this event to get a better understanding of the young people and the Step-by-Step approach. Volunteers can normally expect to leave for a period of volunteering within as little as one month after attending such a preparation event.

Table 1: Summary of the Network Approaches to the 6 Quality Criteria Identified

	Volunteer Pathway	On-going Volunteer Support	Communication & Trust between Partners
All networks		Trained mentor at each side of exchange for each individual volunteer - with a 'deputy' in case of their absence (in both the sending & hosting projects)	Regular meetings/ encounters between the project partners Collective evaluation meetings Regular contact (virtual & real) between partners
ENVOL	Use of personal development plans Volunteers trained to be ambassadors - for themselves & their country of origin. Volunteers encouraged to look at the 'distance travelled' to get where they are Volunteers 'tracked' after their return as part of the network's evaluation system	Training models on pre-departure, on-arrival, on-return & follow-up Web-based volunteer forum External consultant to check & control the quality of the support to the volunteers Neutral party mediation provided by external mentor	Bi-lateral cooperation between partners in mainstream EVS & other European programmes Published guidelines for partners - 'the Companion to the EVS Users Guide' Project visits by the coordination unit to train & build confidence among new organisations
Creative Cooperations	Volunteers are ambassadors of the sending projects The network philosophy is to focus on learning through reflection & understanding experiences within a 'life path'	Regular newsletter 'Melting Pot' produced by the volunteers for the volunteers Focus on transmission of experience from ex-volunteers	Co-operation between partners outside the field of volunteer exchanges (e.g. group bi-, tri- and multilateral group artistic exchanges) Documentation about partners & the activities/reports of the volunteers List of common standards and checklist of minimum requirements for sending/hosting projects
Step-by-Step	Co-ordination unit has responsibility for 'tracking' individual volunteers Ex-volunteers can be trained as trainers in 'peer education training' Sending projects give extra support for agreed 6-week periods before and after the volunteer going abroad	Neutral party mediation provided by co-ordination unit Buddy system between partners - where an experienced organisation partners a less experienced one Projects / volunteers matched according to the level of support available / needed Collective projects with other transnational volunteers provide protective environment for first step	Charter to be signed by all the partners before joining the network. Project visits from the co-ordination unit - to train and build the confidence of new organisations Files for all partners with information about partners / checklists / copies of all administrative procedures etc.

Table 1 (part 2): Summary of the Network Approaches to the 6 Quality Criteria Identified

	On-going Learning & Reflection	Active Participation	A Flexible Exchange System
All networks	<p>Regular meetings between the volunteer & the mentor</p> <p>Separate collective evaluation meetings for the volunteers and for the projects</p> <p>Network meetings allow the partners to learn from one another</p>		<p>Development of their own internal financial & administrative management system - in consultation with network members</p>
ENVOL	<p>External consultant carries out the evaluation – which includes interviews with volunteers, mentors, tutors & coordination</p> <p>Co-ordination unit ensures central collection of all reporting in order to obtain "case study" material for reflection</p>	<p>Coordination unit shares its responsibilities within the network - such as organising partner meetings, reporting of workshops etc.</p> <p>Participation of a 'core group' of partners in network decision making process</p> <p>Former volunteers are involved in the recruitment & preparation of new volunteers</p>	<p>On-going applications from volunteers to join the programme. Waves of sending every 2 months</p> <p>Projects apply for individual financial needs - quick response by the coordination</p> <p>On-going selection of host activities.</p> <p>Extension of volunteer periods (no extra administration).</p>
Creative Cooperations	<p>Volunteers are asked to write a report every 3 months</p> <p>Reports are made available to new volunteers</p> <p>'Youth Panel' - gives the opportunity to projects & volunteers to present themselves during the seminars and in public</p>	<p>Former volunteers take responsibility for newcomers - 1 day 'transfer of experience' during the preparation event</p> <p>Volunteers encouraged to develop their own project - during & after the EVS</p> <p>Use different methods of self-expression to allow everyone to participate</p>	<p>Fixed exchange dates and duration (12/6 months) sending in cycles every half year</p> <p>Transparency and flexibility to formulate and create adjust tailored placements/ projects</p>
Step-by-Step	<p>Detailed reports available analysing the experiences/problems encountered at end of each phase of experimentation</p> <p>Co-ordination unit ensures central collection of all reporting - especially mid-term in order to obtain "case study" material for reflection</p>	<p>Network elects partners for the 'Steering Group' which has responsibility in decision-making & influencing the evolution of the network.</p> <p>Organisation of events rotated around partner organisations in different countries</p> <p>Evaluation sessions for volunteers organised in parallel with preparation events for new volunteers</p>	<p>No minimum or maximum volunteer periods imposed</p> <p>Complete 'fluidity' between movement from short- to longer-term volunteering (no extra administration)</p> <p>Open dates for applications from volunteers to join the programme and on-going selection of host activities</p>

SECTION 6: THE ADDED VALUE OF A NETWORK

A 'network' is a rather nebulous term. It is difficult to visualise and can take on many different forms. Within EVS there appears to be a trend away from networks towards bi-lateral partnerships between organisations. The three networks therefore focused some of their discussion on :-

- what do we mean by a network?
- what benefits do they offer?
- how have each of our networks evolved and what makes them unique?
- what questions still remain about the operation and effectiveness of networks?

6.1 What do we mean by a network?

A network is 'more than a sum of its parts'. The whole network forms a body that has its own 'life' which continues even with changes in its membership. To create this 'life of its own', every network must have a core, with leadership given either by a co-ordination body or by a committed group of individuals or organisations;

- A network must have a common goal that links all the partners together;
- A network must give equal access to participation to all the partners : they should be able to share in the evolution, decision-making process & on-going learning of the network;
- A network should be based on a common interest and solidarity between partners. It should facilitate regular contact (face-to-face and virtual) between partners and the development of trust;
- A network is not about uniformity. They are inclusive and should allow the participation of different types of organisations and individuals, representing a wide variety of opinions;
- A network has a limited size. A network has out-grown its own capacity when it prohibits regular contact, development of trust and solidarity between partners, and the working together towards a common goal.

6.2 Benefits of working as a network with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds

The participants in the 2 meetings came up with several benefits of being part of a network when working with this target group.

- It offers a forum through which to bring together best-practice, and to learn from other people's experience;
- It allows for more self-determination and ownership of the volunteer exchange process;

- It provides mutual support for the partners, and enables them to involve young people that may be too 'risky' for a bi-lateral partnership;
- It enforces certain quality standards because of peer pressure and the importance of trust and co-operation between partners;
- It offers a diversity of partners;
- It offers partners a real experience of the values at the heart of EVS: tolerance, intercultural learning and a European approach;
- It offers a 'reservoir' of experience provided by all the partners through joint evaluation meetings and reports. This knowledge and experience is not lost with changes in staff or the network membership.

6.3 How have each of our networks evolved and what makes them unique?

Creative Cooperations

The network partners share a common understanding at both an ideological and practical level.

All partners share a common belief in the principle of empowerment of individuals. They believe in the empowering value of experience, moving from being a passive consumer to being a constructive actor. In this training through reflection is essential.

The network places strong emphasis on the transfer of information and experiences; at the level of volunteers, projects, and partners, within the network and towards the outside world.

'Continuity' is a recurring theme within the Network. This means recording and passing on the experiences of the organisations through a Network environment. It also reinforces the idea of the voluntary experience being only a part of the young person's life. The emphasis is therefore on offering training on how to transform events into experiences, emphasising how to integrate these experiences into their lives, by developing a capacity to reflect, understand and communicate. This is called '*alive and creative cooperation's of experiences*' in individual biographies, project-partnerships, and as a network. The group training element (coming together before, during and after the volunteer experience) makes an important contribution to this philosophy.

In terms of structure Creative Cooperations can be considered as a 'flat' structure. All network participants collaborate bi-laterally and multi-laterally on different projects and activities. EVS is additional to all the other activities carried out by the different partners. Communication is largely bi-lateral. The co-ordinator is also a project partner. The key factor reinforcing the Network is the partner profile: all share a common goal in developing community arts projects. The co-ordination unit has responsibility for quality control, administration, external liaison, and planning and development of the project.

Step-by-Step

The network began in 1996/97 with the hypothesis that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds could be encouraged to go into long-term voluntary service, which has been successfully proven. It was also assumed that the network should continually experiment and change in order to raise new questions and subsequently improve the quality of its work.

This has been a continual theme of the network, from the production of the Charter, through continued visits to project partners, encouraging exchange between partners (e.g. a buddy system between experienced and new partners / invitation to a few project partners each time to attend volunteer prep events), the establishment of a Steering Group, continual revising of the training and support framework for the volunteers (European-level preparation / evaluation and peer education events for volunteers and annual encounters of project partners).

What is specific about the Step-by-Step Network is that it has been committed to creating a warm and friendly environment, likened by some to a 'family feeling' – the commitment to a shared vision. Partners are given a support framework and training, but there is also a certain internal pressure amongst partners in the network to adhere to quality standards. It also offers an informal environment for challenging, questioning and improving in the hope that this will give new partners a feeling of 'ownership'.

The EVS programme, for most partners, is an annex activity coming on top of other work. The networking aspect (and centralised co-ordination) provides the external impetus necessary to keep the projects involved in exchanging.

The 'family' feeling gives extra energy and enthusiasm as personal relationships are created not only between volunteers but also between project partners and an expectation and a will to contribute to the development of further activity.

A centralised approach has been adopted for the matchmaking and placement process for volunteers to open as wide a variety of places as possible to each volunteer - as well as to facilitate the task of finding an appropriate project for each volunteer. The network approach pushes the partners to be more inclusive and not just have the same experienced partners exchanging amongst themselves for the sake of simplicity. It also allows a sharing of the different levels of expertise and permits the transfer of the spirit of the network.

By way of structure Step-by-Step can be considered the inverse of Creative Cooperations. Projects are more satellites of the co-ordination – which comprises the co-ordination unit and the elected Steering Group.

ENVOL

The Network partners share a holistic approach to individual young people - meaning equal attention is given to the period before, during and after the period of voluntary service.

European co-ordination offers the means through which local partners establish partnerships. It helps and supports partners in developing transnational exchanges. The quality control element is provided by an external consultant who feeds into the evolution of practice through an on-going evaluation system.

This on-going evaluation is central to the successful operation of the Network. The core group (partners with long-standing participation in the Network) also have an important role in feeding in new ideas and continually developing the Network's practice and reflection. This is especially important for smaller organisations.

The ENVOL structure is someway between Step-by-Step and Creative Cooperations. The transnational co-ordination office is responsible for administration, quality control, reporting, technical support to the projects, external evaluation, documentation (publication of ENVOL Companion). The core group support the co-ordination office in planning and decision-making. The partners have bi-lateral contact with each other outside the framework of ENVOL and most are involved in de-centralised EVS with 'classic' volunteers. ENVOL Plus places considerable emphasis on follow-up (tracking of volunteers) and information dissemination including training models for preparation, induction and follow-up and developing and maintaining a Web site (*see Further Resources*).

6.4 What questions still remain about the operation and effectiveness of networks?

Each of the three networks was established in the pilot phase of EVS to test the possibilities of extending opportunities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This raises questions not only about the long-term role of these networks, but also about the value of networks in general for targeting this particular group of young people. During the network exchange meetings, participants themselves addressed the following questions about the value of the networks and their future role.

Do networks exist solely for their experimental/ innovation value?

This was undoubtedly the main impetus behind the initial establishment of the 3 networks. Step-by-Step, in particular, has retained this objective of 'action research' as a continual theme throughout the lifetime of the network. Nonetheless, the question now arises: having proved the success of a network approach in engaging this particular target group, should the approach not be supported on a longer-term basis?

Most partners agreed that the value of the network goes beyond experimentation. For all the reasons listed above (Section 5.2), the networks have created the right environment to provide the necessary support and quality assurance for transnational volunteer exchanges with this target group.

Networks are limited in the number of young people they can engage

One criticism of networks is that they are limited in size and therefore unable to meet the real potential for meeting the demand of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In the discussions, the partners agreed that networks should be limited in size, because of the need to ensure direct contact between partners and to control quality standards.

The network participants did not all agree on the extent to which networks should be dynamic (regular change of partners) or static (partners remain the same over time). These differences

reflect the different histories and evolution of each network. Creative Cooperations for example has found that maintaining more or less the same composition of the network over time helps to build stronger understanding and co-operation. New partners join the network after having been involved over a period of time in communication and cooperation within other fields of activity and are subsequently invited to meetings. The strong underlying philosophy of the network and theme orientation has made this a very successful approach. Both ENVOL and Step-by-Step, on the other hand, have had a fairly fluid network composition. The involvement of new members has helped to revitalise the networks, to bring in new ideas and to offer more opportunities for young people.

Added cost of networks

It is clear that there is an additional cost to networks. Effective co-ordination requires resources. Within the bi-lateral system, co-ordination costs are covered within the operation of the National Agencies. Meetings, seminars, training etc. are all covered through separate contracts either under Action 5 or by events organised by the NAs or SALTO network.

It is therefore difficult to compare the actual cost per volunteer/month provided through a network or provided through the bi-lateral system. However, there are many the additional benefits beyond the actual volunteer exchange itself that can more than justify this additional cost. These include:-

- training and support for organisations;
- ability for the organisations to concentrate on the content of the work rather than the administrative burden;
- more continuity in the involvement of organisations;
- greater success in the engagement of young people that can really be considered to have 'less opportunities';
- ability to take more risks with the types of young people that are recruited;
- development of a repository of experience and knowledge;
- wider support network for the volunteers and for the organisations;
- efficient management of resources (small co-ordination units relative to the workload involved);
- development of different models of volunteering programmes - allowing for continued innovation and creativity;
- internal pressure for quality control.

SECTION 7: THE OPERATIONAL COST OF A NETWORK

The consultation with National Agencies revealed a lack of information about the actual tasks and costs of coordinating a network. This section therefore elaborates on the actual activities of the coordination unit and the real cost implications of running a network.

7.1 The Co-ordination Tasks

The role, size and tasks (and cost) of the co-ordination unit are not the same in all networks. It depends on the number of partners involved, the continuity of membership, and the involvement of the coordination in other activities such as volunteer mentoring, training, support, information dissemination etc..

To varying degrees in each of the networks, the co-ordination unit is responsible for the following:-

- **Financial coordination:** legal responsibility for grant management towards the European Commission; management and distribution of finances to the various partners as well as assistance with completing and collecting the necessary paperwork. If the networks have also been managing 'exceptional costs', this requires the collection of financial justification from the individual partners.
- **Technical coordination:** tracking each volunteer as they follow their individual path, which includes collecting all the written forms and reports for the volunteers such as application forms, insurance policies, contracts, certificates, and official reports. Assistance to organisations in completing the forms and collection on project descriptions.
- **Event organisation:** whether the events are for volunteers (preparation and/or evaluation seminars, peer education training) or for project partners (preparation and/or evaluation encounters, training workshops, 'core group' meetings), usually the coordination unit has a role to play in the technical organisation, fund-raising, report writing and justification of these.
- **Enabling and assisting the active participation of members:** this requires an active communication system of informing partners about where and how they can be actively involved - and usually a lot of persuasion skills!
- **Maintaining a dynamic network:** communication with and between existing sending & hosting organisations, recruitment if necessary of new partners in order to attract more volunteers or provide a greater diversity of host projects. Project visits are often necessary in order to assess potential projects before their full participation.

- **Maintenance of a 'democratic core'**: these groups have had a very important role to play in the smooth running of each of the networks. As hosting and sending projects themselves they bring insights into the problems or frustrations of the network and support the coordination office in matters of direction, communication, facilitating active participation of others, and in mediation in case of problems.
- **Documentation production and dissemination**: including, for example, charters, administrative documents, agendas and reports of meetings, intermediate reports, catalogues of projects or checklists, training techniques used in seminars etc. for information and facilitation of the exchange between partners. Final reports are usually also coordinated centrally within the networks.
- **Translation**: documentation may need to be produced in at least 2 languages - depending on the needs of partners. In Step-by-Step, most key documents are, for example, automatically produced in both French and English.
- **Mediation**: acting as the point of liaison between the sending project, the volunteer and the hosting project throughout the project cycle. This requires in-depth knowledge of both the host projects and the volunteers - and a neutral position within the network.
- **Follow-up of volunteers**: as we have highlighted many times, tracking volunteers is very important and sometimes a need has been identified at transnational level to complement the local follow-up which sending projects are responsible for and collect information about what has happened to volunteers afterwards.

7.2 The cost implications of networks

It is clear a co-ordination unit can perform many and varied tasks. The cost must reflect the actual tasks performed and cannot be standardised for all networks, nor should the real investment required be underestimated. The three networks involved in this project have performed a parallel role to the National Agencies in relation to monitoring and supporting the projects and volunteers. It is argued here that in fact these types of support services are better placed within intermediary organisations such as those co-ordinating bodies of the 3 networks rather than the National Agencies because:-

- it allows for closer contact with the projects and the volunteers;
- it ensures that the expertise and experience remains within the sector itself;
- it is more efficient from the point of view of the partners, because the networks can process volunteer applications much faster with fewer layers of bureaucracy;
- it lessens the administrative burden on the individual projects.

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	ENVOL	Step-by-Step	Creative Cooperations
Coordination Costs	<p>Full-time coordinator</p> <p>Part-time administrator</p> <p>Travel costs coordination</p> <p>Overhead costs (include office rent & administration costs)</p> <p>Partner meetings</p> <p>External evaluation consultant</p>	<p>Full-time coordinator</p> <p>Full-time administrator</p> <p>Steering Group</p> <p>Office rent</p> <p>Administration costs</p> <p>Steering group meetings</p>	<p>Part-time coordinator</p> <p>Part-time administrator</p> <p>Office rent</p> <p>Administration costs</p>
Network structure	<p>Centralised coordination for all aspects of administrative and technical support, monitoring, lobbying and programme development. Placements of volunteers are agreed bi-laterally – the coordination validates the applications. The core group play a role in planning and programme development. The consultant is responsible for quality control.</p> <p>Dynamic membership</p>	<p>Centralised coordination including involvement in matchmaking and placement process of volunteers. The elected steering group members play a role in planning and quality control.</p> <p>Dynamic membership.</p>	<p>‘Flat’ structure where the coordinator is a project ‘partner’ with additional responsibilities of quality control administration, external liaison, project development and planning.</p> <p>Static membership.</p>
Network Emphasis*	<p>Individual approach of partners. Shared vision and know-how.</p> <p>On-going evaluation by an external evaluator – enables quality control and continual reflection and development of the network.</p> <p>Focus on transferable tools about the network experiences.</p>	<p>‘Family’ approach which enables internal quality control, support, training and transfer of experiences. Strong focus on ‘ownership’ and active participation of members in the life of the Network.</p>	<p>Strong thematic content linking all the partners. Consistency in the network partners also facilitates accumulation of experience and continuity.</p>

* The tasks listed in 7.1 are all performed, to a lesser or greater degree, by the coordination units of each Network. This table aims to distinguish between the networks in relation to the distinctive characteristics of each Network.

SECTION 8: VISION FOR MULTIPLYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

This section introduces the key recommendations from the networks concerning the multiplication of opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It acknowledges that the resources for large-scale, centrally managed projects are limited and that more young people from this target group can and should be integrated within the European Voluntary Service Programme. Nonetheless the networks are sceptical that the quality criteria identified in Section 4 can be met within the framework of the current bi-lateral system.

8.1 Training fields

It is clear there is a need for training among all the partners concerned to ensure that all the quality criteria are met.

In many respects networks have facilitated 'training on the job' because new partners benefit from the collective experience of the partners and/or the co-ordination unit. In a bi-lateral exchange this level of support from experienced organisations is not always available. For all the reasons identified above it is necessary that organisations enter into an exchange with a thorough understanding of the responsibilities, commitment and challenges ahead. Inadequate preparation and training can be, at worst, devastating for themselves and the volunteer and, at best, discouraging for the future involvement of any one of the parties in volunteer exchanges.

The questions remain of **who to target** and **what preparation and training are needed**. The networks consider that there is still a large information and knowledge gap among those organisations working at a local level with this particular target group (youth or social centres) and those organisations that work in the fields of international mobility and/or volunteering. All three types of organisation have the potential to offer volunteer exchanges for this target group, but they need to have appropriate levels of training and support to fill their gaps in experience and knowledge. Another potential target group are existing European networks not currently involved within the framework of EVS. The partners within these networks have the advantage that they already know and trust one another, and the exchange of young volunteers may help to consolidate or further develop their network.

Training should build as much as possible on the experiences of the 3 networks and other organisations that have sent or hosted several volunteers from this target group. It is always easier to relate to real-life examples of the 'best' and 'worst' scenarios. It is essential that partners understand the potential pitfalls of working with this target group and that they do not enter into an exchange lightly. On the other hand positive case histories are the most important source of inspiration for newcomers to volunteer exchanges.

Any training should build on the existing knowledge and experience of the organisations being trained. Just as it is important to consider a young person's pathway before a volunteer experience, so it is that an organisation must consider its own profile, past experience and future strategy before choosing to get involved. A volunteer exchange should not be a one-off

experience. It should contribute to the long-term strategy of the organisation, either in the context of offering new opportunities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds or of developing international partnerships and intercultural understanding.

Before taking on the responsibility, an organisation must think carefully about the resources it has to offer, their expectations and fears, and the potential contribution of this experience to the overall development of their organisation and individual staff.

A 'one-off' training seminar is not likely to be sufficient to ensure the long-term engagement of organisations in this kind of volunteer exchange. We could envisage a longer-term training programme in which organisations are also given the time and opportunity to reflect on their experience after the exchange - together with representatives from other organisations involved.

8.2 Institutional framework

The current institutional framework for EVS is considered to be too inflexible to allow for significant growth in opportunities for young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, while maintaining quality standards and accessibility to all.

The system focuses exclusively on the volunteer exchange. It disregards the development of the infrastructure that supports the volunteer, which is essential for the quality experience of the volunteer and for the development of this type of activity in the longer term. New measures supported through the YOUTH programme (short-term EVS, contact making seminars, project visits etc.) can help achieve necessary levels of trust and co-operation in the short-term, but do not support the long-term sustainability of the sector. Many of the organisations most directly in touch with young people from this target group do not consider transnational mobility as one of their aims. It is therefore difficult for staff to justify the number of trips abroad necessary to build up the quantity and quality of partnerships, if each one is done on a bi-lateral basis.

A network approach is more far-sighted. While each individual volunteer exchange is an achievement in itself, the experience is part of a larger whole. The sharing and transmission of experience facilitated through a network enables the accumulation of knowledge and the continuation of activities even if individual staff change or organisations drop out. The networks also have ownership of defining the volunteer exchange procedures. This is more empowering to the organisations concerned: they can determine how the programme is implemented rather than being simply consumers of a pre-defined programme.

The institutional framework for decentralised EVS does not, so far, support the existence of a network. They can only exist within the frame of 'Europe-wide projects' supported by the European Commission directly, which can provide a budget for co-ordination and training measures*. The bi-lateral system on the other hand just supports 'one-off' projects for individual volunteers.

* The Users Guide valid from 1st January 2003 indicates a maximum coordination budget allowable for Europe-wide projects of 10,000Euro. This is considered wholly inadequate for managing projects of this kind.

The networks' recommendation to the National Agencies and the European Commission is to establish a framework that could support the development of organisations that act as co-ordinating bodies or support structures for volunteer exchanges with this target group. These organisations should have a background in the sector and international experience so they can support and train newcomers. They would also serve as independent mediators in the event of difficulties or conflict. They should be allowed a certain amount of autonomy in designing the volunteer exchange process and the training elements.

This framework should alleviate pressure on the National Agencies, who will deal with larger contracts with intermediary bodies. It gives greater ownership and autonomy to the sector itself and allows for greater creativity and flexibility.

8.3 Lobby for political and institutional support

The use of transnational voluntary service as a tool for tackling social exclusion is still poorly recognised. There is a need to raise political support at a local, regional, national and European level for this kind of activity. The cost per young person is comparable with the cost of formal education systems. While nobody questions the need for public support for the formal education sector, non-formal education through volunteering remains neglected.

There is a need to place transnational volunteering clearly within national frameworks for youth inclusion and integration. In most Member States of the European Union, professional integration is the main priority. With youth unemployment rates of between 5-30%, this is entirely understandable. Nonetheless, the benefits of volunteering go beyond the immediate need to create jobs and employment. It also offers an opportunity to create more responsible citizens, and to help young people in their first steps towards adulthood and independence.

It is important that politicians and civil servants build on the existing experience of networks and organisations by encouraging their active participation in any future policy or programme development.

8.4 Support for networks

This document has given numerous examples of how networks can contribute to achieving the quality criteria and ensuring sustainability with this particular target group. Still financial support for networks is treated with some scepticism. Networks have been criticised for being closed or for being too costly. However, the evidence from the 3 networks shows that

- they serve as an important reservoir of knowledge and experience;
- they allow for innovation and change;
- they can reach out to new organisations with no experience by offering strong support and training;
- and that they are cost effective.

The networks therefore recommend that the programme encourage the development of new networks on inter-regional and transnational level, by changing the institutional framework. Also that existing thematic networks (ecological, social, cultural) be targeted in awareness campaigns and training seminars to encourage them to include marginalised youth.

8.5 Accreditation of volunteer organisations and voluntary service

Linked to all the above recommendations, there is a need to give greater recognition and support to volunteer organisations that can develop and implement voluntary service programmes. These organisations should be supported in developing local, regional and transnational links so as to ensure greater accessibility of their programmes and activities. They should be particularly encouraged to develop links with authorities or organisations that specifically target young people from disadvantaged backgrounds - such as youth and community centres, outreach centres, community services, citizen advice centres etc.

SECTION 9: CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

This report brings together the collective experience of 3 networks, each with over 6 years experience of involving young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in transnational long-term voluntary service. The main benefits of compiling and disseminating this report can be summarised in the following points.

Firstly, the cooperation between the network coordinators and their project partners has been extremely valuable. In particular it has enabled each network to reflect on their own practice, to learn from each others' experience and to examine their role in the wider picture of promoting long-term voluntary service as a tool for working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Secondly this project set out to disseminate the experience of the networks in order to promote 'good practice' among organisations working with this target group. It is hoped that by documenting the quality criteria, and the practices and approaches developed by each network, this report provides a picture of the personal and organisational investment required to successfully integrate this target group into transnational volunteer exchanges.

Thirdly, this project has opened the way for a more constructive dialogue between the networks and policy-makers at national and European level about the future strategy for inclusion of this target group. In particular the French, German and UK National Agencies have invited representatives from the networks to participate in consultations and there is growing recognition of the need to have a long-term perspectives for networks as a repositories of experience and support for organisations. It is clear that the networks do not have all the answers on how to expand opportunities to young people from this target group on a much wider scale. Nonetheless they provide lessons that must be taken into consideration when developing a longer-term strategy to integrate more young people from this target group while maintaining the necessary quality. Above all, this project hopes to demonstrate the necessity of involving the sector in developing different systems and approaches to this target group rather than imposing a 'top-down' approach that assumes one-size fits all.

Finally, the project proposes a number of concrete follow-up actions that will contribute to the continued expansion of opportunities for this target group within EVS.

Firstly, the exchange of experience and dialogue between the networks themselves and between the networks and policy-makers should be continued. The networks offer a pool of experience and expertise both at the practical and political level. It is hoped that the network participants will continue to work in partnership with the National Agencies to define systems and approaches that offer continuity and build on the experience already accumulated.

Secondly, the project revealed a shortage of data on the young people themselves that are entering the long-term voluntary service. It is necessary to build up a stronger statistical resource on the numbers and background of young people. More information on the results and long-term

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impact of voluntary service would also be extremely valuable in promoting this work more widely.

Thirdly, there is a need to compare and contrast the systems between developed within and between countries concerning the accreditation of voluntary service. The inclusion of voluntary service into national systems of accreditation will undoubtedly play a role in attracting more young people into the programme. Nonetheless this should be balanced with the underlying philosophy of voluntary service as distinct from professional training.

Lastly, it is important that EVS is not seen in isolation from the national systems of voluntary service or other social inclusion programmes and strategies that affect this target group of young people. There is a need to clarify the peculiarities, benefits and potential pitfalls of transnational voluntary service against other options available to the youth sector.

FURTHER RESOURCES

ENVOL

See www.envol.de

ENVOL Companion to the European Voluntary Service Users Guide (available in English, French and German)

ENVOL Leaflet (October 2002)

Intermediate Report ENVOL PLUS (July 2002)

Intermediate Evaluation Report ENVOL PLUS (July 2002)

Final Report ENVOL 2000 (June 2001)

Evaluation Report ENVOL 2000 (March 2001)

Report of the ENVOL 2000 Evaluation Seminar in Pordenone/Italy (October 2000)

Creative Cooperations

See www.schlesische27.de

Step-by-Step

See www.avso.org

Step-by-Step to Long-Term Voluntary Service, February 2002 (Available in English & French)

Step-by-Step Intermediate Report August 2000

The Step-by-Step Charter, May 1999

European Commission

YOUTH Programme Users Guide, latest version - 1 January 2003,

See www.europa.eu.int/comm/youth/

Strategy for Inclusion in the YOUTH programme, Brussels – European Commission YOUTH Unit, Available in English, French and German

SALTO-YOUTH (Support for Advanced Learning & Training)

See www.salto-youth.net

European Commission & Council of Europe

See www.training-youth.net

International Voluntary Service T-Kit (2001)

Social Inclusion T-Kit (2002)

