

Statement by BAG JAW

Inclusion of disadvantaged young people in the European Voluntary Service (EVS)

Introduction

Since the start of the European Voluntary Service in 1995 that enables young people from present and future member states of the European Union to spend time abroad connected to a voluntary activity, it is a declared goal of the European Commission to include disadvantaged young people into these activities. However, until today the target group has not been reached through the regular decentralised voluntary service to a significant extent. The proportion of disadvantaged young people in the EVS amounts to only 5%.

The European Commission therefore defined the goal to significantly increase the proportion of disadvantaged young people in the EVS with the new youth programme starting in 2006. In addition to that a work group shall be created at the beginning of 2004 consisting of representatives of respective NGOs and networks working parallel to the preparations of the new youth programme. Furthermore, and within the framework of the open coordination method the member states shall be asked for their opinion by means of a questionnaire. BAG JAW actively participated in this measure providing a statement.

Particularly disadvantaged young people benefit from a participation in the European Voluntary Service:

- The EVS gives them the possibility to spend time in a foreign country, often for the first time.
- The EVS helps them acquire important key qualifications, such as social competence and foreign language skills.

- Young people lacking formal qualifications who have poor chances on the labour market (apprenticeship or jobs) are given new opportunities.
- Especially disadvantaged young people can experience and learn social participation in the EVS.
- Through the experiences and competences acquired in the EVS their employability is significantly improved.
- Offers of a voluntary (social) activity often offer the only and sometimes the first chance for their individual and social recognition and the encounter with other environments of experience and life.
- Thus, voluntary services are a learning field and offer an environment for experiences, they are an essential opportunity for socialisation in which social values and standards are taught as well as individual ways of dealing with conflicts, public spirit and the ability to fit in a community - and thus also democratic education.

BAG JAW as an expert organisation of youth social work in Germany representing the interests of disadvantaged young people with regard to their inclusion in schools, work and society welcomes the goal of the Council and the European Commission to support and develop the voluntary activities of young people and make voluntary work a priority topic in the future cooperation.

Through the transnational network ENVOL coordinated by BAG JAW from 1998 until September 2003 that made participation of approx. 200 young people in the European Voluntary Service possible, experience and insight were gained that are path-breaking for a stronger inclusion of disadvantaged young people in the regular EVS in the future.

Necessary infrastructure for the inclusion of disadvantaged young people

In order to be able to include more disadvantaged young people in the European Voluntary Service it is necessary to create the respective framework conditions.

The inclusion of this target group requires more effort of the hosting and sending organisations. Hosting disadvantaged young people requires more effort before, during and after their participation than is the case in the regular EVS. Voluntary services require continuity and secure structures especially with regard to the participation of disadvantaged young people. Work for and with these young people does not start with first preparatory talks and seminars but at an earlier stage (basic information, motivation strategies). Access and structures of the EVS must be adapted in such a way that the EVS is accessible and attractive for the target group.

The experience made in the transnational ENVOL network showed that the decentralised EVS managed by national agencies is not suitable to involve the target group, namely disadvantaged

young people, adequately in the EVS. A lack of time for the creation of stable partnerships based on mutual trust between hosting and sending organisation, absolutely necessary with regard to the target group, is but one reason. Furthermore, structural disadvantages and time-consuming administrative procedures often prevent organisations from becoming active in the EVS.

An application procedure of 6 months to one year is not acceptable especially for disadvantaged young people since their plans in life are very short-term-focused. Furthermore, the present structure of the EVS does not meet the needs of the complex acquisition, preparation and re-inclusion processes, requiring as much attention as the EVS itself.

In order to make the EVS function with disadvantaged young people in our opinion the following conditions must be met:

1.) Acquisition of new institutions and access to young people/PR work

The necessary human resources for an adequate support of the participants as well as for the acquisition and consulting of institutions must be provided. On one hand local projects and institutions must have the human resources necessary to meet the individual needs of the participants. On the other hand, projects and institutions for youth must be supported in planning, administration and organisation on a regional level according to their needs with regard to the practical aspects of the EVS.

2.) Transnational network coordination

Work with disadvantaged young people can only function within well-organised networks as the experience of the ENVOL project shows clearly. These networks have to be built, coordinated and maintained and must be continuously supplemented by new institutions (fluctuation). The institutions need consulting, and communication between institutions requires coordination and facilitation.

Knowing the other institutions and the sending and hosting organisations is an absolute necessity when working with disadvantaged young people.

The networks should not be too large, otherwise they would become impersonal. We recommend a number of up to 30 institutions.

A creative and strategic network of organisations from the sector of youth and education work as sending and hosting organisations in connection with broader partnerships for the official place of work, e.g. with old people's care organisations, cultural or ecological activities, requires more efforts for preparation, support and assistance which could not be covered solely by the finances that are connected to the individual "travelling" young person.

3.) Tutoring system

A system with tutors or "godfathers" is necessary to ensure that the young person can always talk to someone. Institutions cannot meet the needs of disadvantaged young people for more support. We recommend involving volunteers (generally adults) who support the tutors especially in the evening and on weekends. The triangle concept voluntary young person/tutor/voluntary adult should be integrated in the planning and promotion procedures.

4.) *Language support*

Disadvantaged young people need more support with regard to foreign languages. They should be supported individually and continuously throughout the whole EVS period.

5.) *Tutor continuity*

Working with disadvantaged young people requires a reliable support within the institution. The institution should assign a tutor and a representative right at the stipulation of the contract. It should be part of the contract that the institution is obliged to provide a tutor.

6.) *Matching and "test stay"*

Particularly in the case of disadvantaged young people it is important that the institution fits and meets their needs. This means that institutions and young people should get to know each other at so-called matching-conferences. After a decision is made a short-term stay of 4 weeks should follow. Only then should a decision for a long-term stay be made.

7.) *Quick decision procedures*

In general, disadvantaged young people do not plan on a long-term basis. If they decide that they want to "take the risk" of participating in the EVS they should not have to wait for months. The current decision procedures are not flexible enough and take too long.

8.) *Claim to social security payments*

A participation in the EVS must not have as a consequence that disadvantaged young people lose their claim to unemployment or housing benefit, or education measures (e.g. vocational preparatory measures etc.) in their home country. National law must be changed accordingly.

9.) *The EVS as interface with the job market*

Apart from personal and social key qualifications the EVS offers the opportunity to acquire a range of job-related competences that are of essential importance for a successful inclusion in the labour market and significantly improve the possibilities for disadvantaged young people in the transition phase between school and labour. These qualifications must be recognised as a part of non-formal education. A strict "formalisation" of educational contents and curricula should be avoided. In spite of recognition educational contents must remain non-formal.

10.) *Create framework conditions for the organisations*

The sending and hosting organisations must obtain the necessary financial means for the choice, preparation, support and re-inclusion of returning participants. Application and administrative procedures must become easier and should be shaped in a way that even small organisations have a chance of participating in the EVS.

The sending of disadvantaged young people into projects of the EVS should depend on the organisation hosting volunteers from other European countries.

Conclusions

Voluntary services involving disadvantaged young people definitely require more human resources and consequently are more expensive than the traditional voluntary service and the general EVS. Experience shows, however, that such voluntary services have a very positive effect on a sustainable positive development of disadvantaged young people, so on the other hand it can be considered a relatively cheap form of support for disadvantaged young people.

In order to reach the goal to increase the participation of disadvantaged young people in the EVS of presently 5% it is necessary to implement the specific framework conditions that are necessary for the inclusion of this particular target group.

In such a way, even disadvantaged young people can experience Europe.

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