

# Introduction



“International voluntary service is not an aim in itself but a tool”

Ever since the beginning of the movement, volunteers have been driven by the wish to contribute positively to today's societies, working towards peaceful and just living conditions through a common effort. Peace and international understanding, friendship and co-operation form part of the overall aims of voluntary service. These are pursued through a common commitment based on a free personal decision and through the coming together of individuals and groups of different backgrounds. At the same time the volunteers contribute to concrete projects in need.

But not only society or concrete projects benefit from volunteering. These international voluntary service (IVS) projects also have an educational impact, both on the participants in such projects as well as on the communities in which they act. Through working and living together, volunteers and local people exchange their views, learn new skills from each other and hopefully adopt an open and constructive attitude towards (cultural, religious, sexual, organisational and other) difference. The international dimension allows them to learn from and with people from another background than their own.

These aims and objectives are at the centre of IVS. However, not all of them are self-explanatory, nor do they become automatically apparent to everyone involved in an IVS project. A lot of the learning processes outlined above need to be facilitated; otherwise a project intended to foster intercultural learning could well turn into an experience of cultural frustration, if, for example, the volunteers are not properly prepared for the experience abroad. Even though an IVS project is based on voluntary and unpaid contributions by individuals, the organisation of such a project needs to be carefully planned and requires adequate preparation and follow-up and considerable human and financial resources.

This T-Kit has been developed as a tool for youth workers to support the process of organising an IVS project. It was revised and updated in 2011, the European Year of Volunteering and the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteering. The T-Kit describes a number of framework conditions that contribute to a successful voluntary service project. The text outlines some of the traps to avoid and offers ways of introducing both the volunteers and the organisations to the voluntary service adventure. At the same time it can be used as inspiration for trainers in the field of IVS activities.

IVS relates closely to the objectives of the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, within which this T-Kit was developed. The two partner institutions attach a high importance to the issue of volunteering, in particular that of young people. The Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth supports the development, quality and recognition of youth work in Europe and one of the priority topics is indeed volunteering. Given this framework and the limited number of pages, we decided to focus on a European audience, even though most of the described principles also apply in national or intercontinental projects. We will focus on youth projects, but you can use or adapt the tools for all ages. And for the sake of accessibility to IVS programmes, we will specifically address projects with non-specialised volunteers (see also Chapter 1.2 “Different dimensions of voluntary service”). So it is up to you to pick and adapt those elements from this T-Kit that you feel appropriate for the kind of project you are organising.

## **The T-Kit is divided into five chapters and three appendices**

Chapter 1 goes more deeply into the concept of IVS, explaining the meaning of some words (1.1), the dimensions of voluntary service (1.2) and the socio-historical framework (1.3). It reflects on the reasons why people volunteer (1.4) and gives some examples of possible fields of work (1.5) for inspiration.

How to implement an IVS project is discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 addresses issues related to planning the project, describing who the actors are and their responsibilities (2.1). It gives an overview of the project cycle of an international voluntary service project (2.2). Last but not least it gives some attention to where you can find money and how to manage it (2.3).

Chapters 3 to 5 give a chronological overview of the IVS and the actions to be taken. First of all Chapter 3 describes how to get ready for the departure of the volunteers, addressing topics such as partner finding (3.1), recruitment (3.2) and the preparation of all actors involved (3.3). Chapter 4 tackles the tasks that would ideally be carried out during the IVS: induction and on-arrival training (4.1), keeping volunteers and also staff motivated (4.2), providing the necessary support for the volunteers (4.3) and dealing with conflicts (4.4) or crisis situations if they arise (4.5). Chapter 5 gives suggestions on how to use the end of an IVS as the beginning for something new: evaluation and taking stock is an important element in this process (5.1) but there are also ideas for follow-up arising from the voluntary service abroad (5.2). And increasingly on the agenda of different institutions is the recognition and certification of such non-formal learning experiences (5.3).

In the appendices you can find additional resources. Appendix 1 gives you the definitions of some key words that the authors of this T-Kit use. Appendix 2 gives an overview of different organisations and their IVS programmes, and their contact details of course. Last but not least Appendix 3 provides you with suggestions for further reading if this T-Kit has given you the taste for more ...

Get inspired!