

Development of International Youth Voluntary Service in the EU

Comparison of programme and policy development in Germany, Italy, France, Czech Republic and Poland

First Results elaborated by Regine Schröer, AVSO

Coordinator

Association of Voluntary Service Organisations
Regine Schröer

Affiliated with

Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany
Holger Backhaus-Maul
and Dr. Gisela Jakobs, Institute for Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Germany

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Partners

Prof. Pierluigi Consorti, in collaboration with Arci Servizio Civile
Valérie Becquet (PhD), in collaboration with Comité de Coordination pour le Service Civil (CCSC)
Wolfgang Schur, Ost-West Institut für Sozialmanagement e.V.

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1.1.....	1
1.INTRODUCTION	3
2. RESEARCH AIMS.....	4
2.....	5

3.	3. METHODOLOGY	5
3.1.	Methodological approach.....	5
3.2.	Limitations	6
3.3.	.....	6
3.4.	Terminology.....	6
4.	4. NATIONAL REPORTS	7
4.1.	.....	7
4.2.	Overview.....	7
4.3.	France.....	7
4.4.	.....	8
4.5.	Italy	8
4.6.	.....	8
4.7.	Germany.....	8
4.8.	Poland	10
4.9.	Voluntary service at European level	10
5.	.....	12
6.	5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.....	12
6.1.	5. 1. Understanding voluntary service	12
6.2.	5.2. Implementation of voluntary service schemes.....	15
7.	6. RECOMMENDATIONS	20
8.	7. FURTHER RESEARCH	23
9.	.....	24
10.	8. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	25
11.	.....	29
12.	9. ANNEXES	29

1 INTRODUCTION

National and international voluntary service programmes provides a wealth of evidence confirming the contribution of voluntary service to society and the young people themselves. But until now, international voluntary service in the EU has been restricted to a small number of young people. The European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme of the European Commission is by far the largest source of financial support. In 2003, 3,500 young people performed a voluntary service in a European country other than their own for periods of between 3-12 months. Under the current YOUTH programme (2000-2006) there is little prospect of any significant increase in the participants' numbers. The number of privately funded programmes¹ does not at all satisfy the demands of young people.

This research study has been carried out at a time when several European countries are in transition from compulsory military service to a professional army. In this context, they are in the process of establishing legal frameworks which set the conditions in which volunteers and organisations can receive state support. All frameworks foresee opportunities for youth voluntary service abroad and some offer the possibility of receiving foreign volunteers.

Interest in the development of civic service is growing – youth voluntary service being one of several forms – not only in Europe, but also worldwide.² Civic service is considered a means of active citizenship and non-formal education.

This article presents only first the results of the research study as it is not yet completed. The final study is expected to be published in the autumn of 2004.

¹ Foundations, international voluntary service organisations

² UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/57/106 adopted 26 November 2002, Follow up to the International Year of Volunteers; Global Service Institute(2003): The Forms and Nature on Civic Service: A global assessment; Innovations in Civic Participation(2004): Worldwide Youth Service Policy Scan

2 RESEARCH AIMS

The study aims to understand the legal, financial and administrative frameworks for youth voluntary and civil service that is being developed in France, Germany, and Italy. The reports on Poland and the Czech Republic illustrate the situation in two new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe in the enlarged European Union. The study compares the national developments and programmes in order to identify the major incompatibilities regarding international youth voluntary service.

The development of programmes and policies at European level is also explored in addition to the comparative approach of the different youth and civil service programmes at national level,. The special status created for the EVS programme in most countries and its impact on national youth policy development is an example of the interaction between both levels.

The parallel analysis of the national and European frameworks, as well as research into how the different levels interact, aims to identify the incompatibilities and how they can be overcome. Despite bilateral declarations to develop international volunteer exchange programmes³, the legal frameworks for civil voluntary service in the countries are very different and present many practical and administrative obstacles to their implementation. This study aims to identify the challenges and possibilities to significantly increase the number of international voluntary service opportunities for young people in Europe.

³ like 'Déclaration sur le volontariat civil' during the summit on 10th November 2001 between France and Germany

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Methodological approach*

The research began in May 2003 and will be completed in July 2004.

The methodological approach was developed and continually reviewed in three meetings by a research team composed of practitioners from the voluntary service sector and academics from the social and political sciences. The study was coordinated by the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO), an umbrella for organisations involved in managing full-time, long-term voluntary service programmes.

The three countries: Italy, France and Germany were originally four together with Spain⁴. They were selected because all of them had either recently ended the compulsory military service for young men, or were discussing its end. Each country had established new, or amended existing frameworks for national voluntary service for young men and women. It was also suggested that the development of civil voluntary service programmes in three large EU Member States would be relevant to the possible development of international programmes at European level. The research in each of the three countries was carried out by the national research partner (and member of the research team) and supported through national funding.

In view of the EU enlargement, the team agreed to explore developments in two countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Poland and the Czech Republic were selected as both countries had adopted legal frameworks to promote volunteerism in 2003. The research was carried out by the study co-ordinator.

The research comprises four components:

- 1) *National reports for five countries* with an analysis of the political background and the current system of youth voluntary and civil service programmes according to a common structure.
- 2) *Validation through case studies in Italy, France and Germany* with experiences of international voluntary service from the perspective of different national stakeholders from a government body and from NGOs using a common questionnaire.
- 3) *Analysis of EU policy, legislation and programming* with a focus on European political or legislative instruments and the impact on the development of national political and legal frameworks for volunteers.
- 4) *Comparative analysis and recommendations* explaining differences in the countries. Recommendations aim to give practical suggestions on how cooperation between the stakeholders at national and at European level can be facilitated.

⁴ Unfortunately, the analysis of the Spanish situation needed to be withdrawn due to a lack of support at national level. The initiative of the Spanish government for the creation of a future Voluntary Civil Service Law in Spain encountered strong opposition from the civil sector (Trade Unions, Youth Councils and NGOs) and was withdrawn. This makes it unlikely that voluntary service will be officially recognised and supported by the Spanish government in the near future.

3.2 Limitations

The study is broad. The limited time and resources did not allow for an in-depth investigation of all the issues that could affect the development of youth service in the five countries. The study on Poland and the Czech Republic relies only on English and German documents, and on interviews with several stakeholders due to the language limitations of the author.

Other limitations are the lack of comparative quantitative data as well as the dynamic situation in each one of the countries. The five countries involved are all in a policy transition period regarding youth voluntary service. The impact of recent legal changes in the countries is examined until early 2004⁵.

The research project is considered to be a starting point for the development of comparative research in a new field. Hopefully, it will stimulate similar research on the subject in other countries.

3.3 Terminology

At its first meeting, the research team agreed to change the term of “transnational” into “international”. According to the typology developed by the Global Service Institute “transnational” programmes are defined as “cooperative programme between two or more countries, where the servers are expected to spend service in a host country as well as their country of origin” (GSI, 2003, p.9) while “international” service programmes send people from their home country to another country.

The group agreed to focus on full-time “voluntary and civil service” programmes according to the following criteria:

- that they involve young people aged 16-28 years, who are
- carrying out a full-time voluntary/civic or civil service for at least 6 months.

The age range of the young people recognised in the national policies in the five countries differs slightly in regard to the minimum and the maximum ages: 18-28 (Italy), 16-27 (Germany) and 16-26 (France), 18-26 (Czech Republic) and 15-25 (Poland).

⁵ The national reports cover the Italian development until March 2004 and the development in the four other countries and at European level until April 2004.

4 NATIONAL REPORTS

4.1 Overview

The following section provides a summary of the different national reports on youth voluntary and civil service. They briefly introduce the legal basis for youth voluntary service and other programmes that operate outside the framework of the specific legal framework.

4.2 France

The tradition of full-time voluntary service in France focused on sending people abroad through organisations officially recognised by the Ministry of Co-operation and Development⁶. Full-time voluntary service on French territory was, due to the high rate of unemployment, always viewed with ambivalence and the fear of introducing low paid jobs.

A 'new' National Service was adopted in France in 1997 together with the transition to a professional army. National service has been replaced by voluntary military and civil service.

The recent adoption of the law on Voluntary Civil Service 'Volontariat Civil'⁷ further complicates the legal framework. It allows young French, or citizens from another EU country (18-28 years old), to perform a full-time service in areas of civil defence and security, social cohesion and solidarity, international co-operation, development and humanitarian aid, for a period of 6 to 24 months. The service is regulated by a public-law contract. 'Civil volunteers' are under the responsibility of French ministries. They receive pocket money (exempt from taxes and social security contributions) and basic healthcare insurance. Their period of service is taken into account for their pension and may contribute to certain diplomas of further education or professional titles. The law also foresees a possibility for a service abroad although this programme is highly selective⁸.

On 28th July 2003, the French Government published the long awaited *Circular DIES Nor 2003-001* in order to implement the "volontariat" for social cohesion and solidarity, which was closest to the idea of a national youth voluntary service. Although originally foreseen, this legal framework does not offer the possibility of performing voluntary service abroad⁹. To date, the government has made no financial commitment to the programme, so its uptake by organisations and volunteers has been slow to develop.

⁶ These volunteers benefit from social insurance by the "Caisse des Français à l'étranger", comprising retirement benefits, civil liability insurance, a lump sum for reinsertion in France plus monthly allowances.

⁷ LOI no 2000-242 du 14 mars 2000 relative aux volontariats civils institués par l'article L. 111-2 du code du service national et à diverses mesures relatives à la réforme du service national

⁸ These 'volontariats civils' in the field of economic, social and cultural co-operation in French Embassies, Consulates, Alliance Française or commercial enterprises, are strongly promoted as 'professional international experience'.

⁹ The law mentioned EVS and the voluntary civil service as possible combination for young EU citizens doing a service in France. No legal provision has been set up by decree or circular so far to integrate EVS in this context.

4.3 Italy

Until 2001, full-time voluntary service only existed in the field of international cooperation and development work and foresaw services of up to 24 months outside of Italy (Law No49/1987).

The 'Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri' (DPCM) of 10 August 2001 created a voluntary civil service and the volunteer status in Italy, preparing the way for the end of the military service in 2004¹⁰. The transition is legislated in Article 5 of the Law for National Civil Service. Only women and men who are exempt from military service for medical reasons can apply for voluntary service. The programme will be open to all women and men between 18-28 years after the end of the draft. Volunteers can be placed in civic service projects in Italy or abroad, either in Europe or in developing countries. EVS remains outside the law. After the service, it counts for the calculation of the pension as equivalent to one year's work in a state or governmental office. In 2003, 22,390 young volunteers used the possibility to perform national civic service in Italy and 539 abroad.

4.4 Germany

Germany is one of the few countries in the EU that has developed the concept of full-time voluntary service within youth policy.

Both laws on voluntary service¹¹ were amended in 2002¹². The law offers greater flexibility in the length of the service (varying between 6-18 months, in general 12 months)¹³ and extends the programme to include conscientious objectors who can perform a 12-month voluntary service in Germany or abroad instead of their civil service (10 months). The FSJ can be performed worldwide, but organisations abroad have to fulfil the same criteria as those at national level. Around 15,100 volunteers were involved in 2003 in the FSJ/FÖJ programme as well as 3200 conscientious objectors. Nearly 200 volunteers were sent abroad as well as 600 conscientious objectors.

Two international programmes exist in Germany for full-time volunteers abroad outside the framework of these two laws: EVS and 'Learning Services Abroad'. The latter is organised by churches, social welfare and voluntary service organisations and offers placements of 6-24 months to people over 18 years to develop international exchange and understanding, solidarity, peace and reconciliation. Organisations are not required to contribute to unemployment or pension costs as in the case of the FSJ programme. The parents of the volunteers do not receive any family or child allowance.

¹⁰ The Italian government decided to accelerate the process (see law No 77 of 6th April 2002). The draft of compulsory military service will end in December 2004.

¹¹ Voluntary social year ("Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr" - FSJ) adopted in 1964 and the voluntary ecological year ("Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr"- FÖJ) adopted in 1993.

¹² Law to amend the law promoting the voluntary social year and other laws (Gesetz zur Änderung des Gesetzes zur Förderung eines Freiwilligen sozialen Jahres und anderer Gesetze) came into force on 1st June 2002

¹³ Completion of the education is required instead of minimum age, enlargement of the range of activities to the cultural and sports fields, enlarging of the programme worldwide.

The Commission on “*Impulses for the civic society – perspectives for volunteer and civilian services in Germany*” launched by the Minister for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in May 2003 put the future development of both services high on the agenda and involved all the major stakeholders in the area of voluntary and compulsory civil service. The report asked for state support in the case of the end of the compulsory military service. The abolishment of 92,000 compulsory civil service placements could be partially compensated by new volunteer programmes involving men and women of all age groups with flexible service periods, new activity fields and the involvement of new organisations. Pilot programmes will test the new concepts.

4.5 Czech Republic

The image of volunteerism in Czech society is still tainted by former experiences of the so-called ‘volunteering’ under the Communist regime. The Czech Act on Volunteer Services (zákon o dobrovolnické službě) effective from 1st January 2003 is unique among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe¹⁴. Influenced by the design of EVS, the act introduces new terms (volunteer, voluntary services, sending organisations, receiving organisations), which have no historical roots in the Czech legal system. The law is not conceived as a comprehensive framework law for volunteerism. Other forms of voluntary activity may take place outside the law.

The law requires written contracts between the volunteers and the sending organisations. Specific requirements are compulsory for long-term service or short-term service abroad¹⁵. Volunteers must have insurance coverage for health, accident and civil liability. Contracts may stipulate provisions for the pension insurance of the volunteer paid by the sending organisations at the minimal basis, if the service exceeds 20 hours per week.

Thirty-six projects coming from 23 organisations were accredited by 4th May 2004¹⁶. Only one project focuses on international voluntary service in the field of development aid.

Volunteer Programmes at national level are mostly part-time in the social field tackling social exclusion, but also run in the area of environment and cultural heritage. The “Volunteering of Unemployed People” programme is the only programme at national level involving young unemployed people for 4 days/week in an NGO. The focus of the programme is less on the development of civic society than to find a job in the labour market.

The end of military and civilian service announced for December 2004 may strongly influence the development of full-time voluntary service in the country, as organisations need to look for alternative solutions to replace 48,000 conscientious objectors.

¹⁴ Act No 198 of 24 April 2002 on volunteer services amending certain regulations (volunteer services act)

¹⁵ with regard to nature, location and duration of service, preparatory training, specification of food and accommodation conditions for the volunteer, reimbursement of costs linked to preparation, international and local transport costs, payment of pocket money etc

¹⁶ see Czech Ministry of Interior: [www/mcv.cz/Akreditované dobrovolnické organizace.htm](http://www/mcv.cz/Akreditované_dobrovolnické_organizace.htm) of 4th May 2004

4.6 Poland

In the context of the struggle for recognition of NGOs by the state and by society, the adoption of the Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism in April 2003 is very important for the future development of the third sector. The law provides the procedural framework for co-operation between local governments and NGOs, and ensures the protection of volunteers working with accredited organisations regarding health and social security. Volunteers are entitled to receive reimbursement of expenditure for costs like travel and training, as well as a daily allowance exempt from taxes.

The law does not distinguish between part-time and full-time volunteering. The application of this law is very wide and foresees volunteer activities in all the areas of public benefit.

The law contains provisions for international voluntary services programmes sending Poles abroad and/or receiving foreign volunteers from other countries. Volunteers are entitled to benefits and reimbursements of their costs 'generally acknowledged for the situation' (for example, board and lodging).

Besides the 'First Job' programme, no official programme specifically promotes full-time voluntary service in Poland. Most organisations work with part-time volunteers who are active in a wide range of fields: youth unemployment, social inclusion, civic society development and lifelong learning.

The possible abolition of compulsory military service expected for the years 2006-2008 will not have a strong impact on the development of full-time voluntary service in Poland due to the small numbers of conscientious objectors.

4.7 Voluntary service at European level

Alongside these national developments, several activities are currently on-going at European level that are related to youth participation in society and the role of voluntary service.

In the follow up to the *White Paper on Youth Policy*¹⁷, the Youth Unit of the European Commission send out a questionnaire on "voluntary activity" as one of its priority areas for the Open Method of Co-ordination¹⁸. The answers of the governments of each member state¹⁹ were compiled in a synthesis report²⁰ and the European Commission proposed common objectives for national and EU-co-operation in this field in a communication²¹ to the Council in April 2004.

¹⁷ Commission of the European Communities (2001), COM(2001) 681final, A new impetus for European youth, European Commission White Paper, November 2001

¹⁸ The Open Method of Co-ordination was introduced by the Lisbon European Council 2000 in order to develop a European Union action plan for combating poverty and social exclusion. It offers a means of benchmarking national initiatives, in order to develop a coherent EU approach while respecting the principal of subsidiarity.

¹⁹ The candidate countries could also participate on a voluntarily basis.

²⁰ Commission of the European Communities (2004), SEC (2004)628, Commission Staff Working Paper, Brussels

²¹ Commission of the European Communities (2004), COM (2004)337final, Communication from the Commission to the Council, Brussels

The report asks all member states to apply the EU-*Recommendation on Mobility* of July 2001²² with regard to volunteers in order to remove obstacles to the freedom of movement in educational and vocational training programmes with an European dimension.

The conclusions²³ of the first intergovernmental conference on Civic Service and Youth on 28-29th November 2003 in Rome highlighted the need for the systematic and regular exchange of information and good practice for strengthened co-operation between civic services and youth policy, as well as enhanced co-operation among the member states, the acceding countries and the EC in the field of civic service for young people.

In March 2004, the Commission published two communications outlining its general ideas for the future programmes. EVS will be part of the future Youth Programme. Major changes foresee the extension of the target group (13-30 years) as well as the simplification and strong decentralisation of the programme. EVS will target 10,000 volunteers per year - compared to 3,500 currently – a total of 70,000 for the duration of the programme.

The European Commission is currently discussing how the EVS programme could be linked to a voluntary humanitarian aid corps as declared in the draft constitution. The consultation of all member states in the above mentioned survey on voluntary activity with regard to this perspective resulted in the general interest of most countries, while several stressed the importance to maintain the educational value of the EVS programme.

²² Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers Official Journal L 215, 09.08.2001

²³ see: [www....](#)

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis is based on the findings of the national reports of the five countries, the analysis of policy and programmes related to youth voluntary service at European level as well as the experience expressed by stakeholders in the interviews in Italy, France and Germany.

The comparative analysis has two parts.

The first section focuses on the different motivations behind the development of international youth voluntary service in each of the countries concerned, highlighting the political context for the creation of programmes and the understanding behind voluntary service.

The second section focuses on comparing the practical implementation of the programmes in each of the countries.

5.1. *Understanding voluntary service*

5.1.1 **Voluntary service, the abolition of obligatory military service and conscientious objection**

The development of the legal basis for youth voluntary service programmes in France, Italy and Germany is inextricably linked to the suspension of compulsory military service. The fact that national legal frameworks for youth voluntary service are so closely tied to the phasing out of civilian service performed by COs, has enormous impact on the nature of the voluntary service programmes. In both Germany and Italy, the public sector and well-established social welfare organisations are still responsible for hosting the bulk of volunteers. In France, associations are more active in the solidarity and social cohesion programme. However, the actual number of young people involved is much lower.

Although both the Czech Republic and Poland are considering to phase out compulsory military service, their recent laws on voluntary service are not an attempt to replace the activities of conscientious objectors. The laws are more closely linked to the development of civic society (see below).

5.1.2 **Voluntary service and the provision of social welfare services**

As mentioned above, the countries with large numbers of conscientious objectors (Italy, Germany and to a lesser extent the Czech Republic) face a significant loss of manpower in the social welfare sector when military service is no longer obligatory. The promotion of youth voluntary service in these countries is therefore partly motivated by the need to retain young people in the social welfare sector.

Nonetheless, even where the involvement of conscientious objectors in the social welfare system has been less important, voluntary service is increasingly seen as a means of improving the delivery of services in the face of growing economic pressure and demographic changes. There is a trend in all countries towards giving greater flexibility and autonomy to NGOs in the delivery of social welfare services, and supporting the increased involvement of volunteers. This vision of voluntary service is a strong motivating factor behind the new laws in Poland and the Czech

Republic where the legal framework offers a means of facilitating greater cooperation between the government and NGOs.

5.1.3 Voluntary service and youth unemployment

The unemployment rate among young people is more than double the national average in all countries except Germany. In Poland, over 41% of young people under 25 are without work. Governments in all five countries consider the integration of young people into the labour market as a major political priority. Volunteering has been loosely interpreted as a means of providing professional experience and training in the social or non-profit sector. Germany launched the 'voluntary social training year' – targeted at young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Poland initiated the 'first job' programme in which voluntary engagement is one of several options. The Czech government supports a specific programme for young unemployed people work four days/week as volunteers in an NGO or a public institution.

The main motivation behind each of these programmes is the professional integration of young people. Training options may be referred to as 'volunteering' because they are within the non-profit sector. The traditional model of voluntary service may be lost with this interpretation.

5.1.4 Voluntary service and social inclusion

The national frameworks for youth voluntary service are open to all young people. In two countries participation is limited - only to EU-citizens in France to young Italians in Italy. None of the programmes require that the young person make a financial contribution, so as to avoid excluding young people on economic grounds. However, in all countries the majority of participants in the national as well as in the international programmes are well-educated young people. In the case of Germany and Italy, the demand for the placements exceeds supply so organisations can select candidates with the effect of excluding less academic candidates.

EVS is the only programme so far with an explicit inclusion policy with regard to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the percentage of these young people in the programme remains low for a number of reasons²⁴. The German law was amended in 2002 to attract new target groups like young people with a migrant background or with low education. The minimum age was lowered and new activities were introduced (like the voluntary social year in sports associations).

5.1.5 Voluntary service and young people

International voluntary service is an attractive option for many young people because it combines individual development (language, international and professional experience) with the feeling of 'making a contribution'.

²⁴ Complex administrative procedures at national level, delay of approvals, lack of knowledge of sending and hosting organisations how to deal with these youngsters and insufficient financial support of organisations for preparation, subversion and follow up, see: Schröer, R.(2003), Voluntary Service: Opening doors to the future, AVSO, Brussels, and AVSO, EIP, Envol and Creative Cooperations (2003), Recommendations to work with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, AVSO, Brussels

Demand for EVS placements has increased steadily since the launch of the YOUTH programme in 2000. Many National Agencies now have to reject applications. Demand is also high for international placements in the frame of the German voluntary social and ecological year and many candidates are rejected. Even the programmes outside the legal framework, which imply a participation fee and the loss of certain financial benefits (eg. Family allowance) are heavily oversubscribed.

Both French programmes, especially the 'volunteers in enterprises' have a high number of well-qualified candidates²⁵ (15,000 since 1st of January and 130 on average every day). While the programme is increasing (2001: 984 volunteers, 2002: 1790 including 194 extensions), available places cannot meet the demand. Organisations in Poland and the Czech Republic are still in the phase of accreditation and the focus of implementation is within the country. Only one Czech organisation, the focal point of UNV volunteers, has so far been accredited with an international programme focusing on development aid. While demands increase among Italian organisations and volunteer candidates to develop the civil service abroad, the numbers are so far limited due to administrative procedures.

5.1.6 Voluntary service and international solidarity

All five countries have developed programmes with a focus on cooperation with third countries but they have different approaches. Italy as well France have set up international voluntary service programmes with the exclusive focus on sending young people abroad. The programmes in the three other countries - Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland - have set up international voluntary service exchanges worldwide: sending young people abroad and hosting volunteers from other countries.

The older age range in all five countries than in the EVS programme allows young people with professional skills and greater maturity to also participate.

The French international volunteering in enterprises focuses on the international development of French interests. The programme shows the limited vision of the French government on the economic benefits of the social capital. The other programmes may be used by NGOs to develop mutual exchanges with a broader focus on the development of human and social capital through the support of social networks at local community, national and international level.

5.1.7 Voluntary service and European citizenship

It is striking that - with the exception of France - none of the five countries has integrated EVS into their national volunteer frameworks, all of which, however, promote international voluntary service. Only France identifies EVS as compatible in the law on civil service. At least, the hosting part of the EVS programme in France could be integrated in the programme for social cohesion and solidarity as the activities and projects are similar. The implementation is at stake as no legal provision has been yet set up in France to allow associations to combine the two programmes for the hosting of volunteers coming from another EU Member states.

²⁵ 56 % have spent five years or more in higher education, 28% have 3 or 4 years, 10% have 2 years and 6% have no 18+ education (see: Becquet (2004): Page 18)

Only young Italians aged 18-26²⁶ can participate in the Italian voluntary service programme. The access to the French voluntary service programmes is limited to EU citizens. The restrictive access to both programmes does not allow the participation of third country citizens legally living in the two countries. The three other countries (Czech Republic, Poland and Germany) do not limit participation in their programmes with regard to nationality.

5.2. Implementation of voluntary service schemes

5.2.1 Government responsibility

Different ministries are in charge of voluntary service and responsible for the implementation of the laws: the Ministry of Social Affairs in Poland; the Youth Ministry in Germany; the Ministry of Interior in the Czech Republic; the Presidency of the Italian Council of Ministers in Italy. In France, the responsibility for the four different forms of civil voluntary service is distributed according to the competences in the relevant sectors. In the area of social cohesion and solidarity (Ministry of Social Affairs), 12 ministries are concerned with its further implementation. While the variety of areas have a lot of potential for the further development of volunteering, it will be more difficult to ensure the coordination and the development of common visions for society or for example, international youth voluntary service.

All countries have specific legal frameworks for the different forms of voluntary service/activity rather than a general law integrating all forms of voluntary service. Initiatives in Germany and France to set up a more general legal framework have failed so far.

A major challenge will be the development of a common approach, which simplifies administrative procedures but still allows for a diversity of international programmes. Current experience at multilateral or bilateral level is less promising.

The administration of the national programmes reflects the limited vision of all five countries in youth voluntary service. EVS and national programmes are managed by separate administrations and rarely tend to communicate or cooperate.

The Youth Unit of the EC will change the current management²⁷ of the EVS programme²⁸ in order to simplify procedures. Administration costs are too high for 3500 volunteers per year and procedures don't guarantee secure time planning for the organisation of the exchange programme.

The French-German agreement on mutual recognition of youth voluntary service has so far failed to facilitate exchanges between organisations in both countries. As the French law is now enforced, it will be interesting to track if the number of French-German exchanges increases.

²⁶ From 2005: 18-28 years

²⁷ All EVS projects have to be accredited after submission of a host expression of interest. Application for EVS has to be submitted to the two National agencies in the sending and hosting country. A common decision on the application is not certain as National Agencies have set up in each country national priorities for activities, partner countries and are confronted with a limited budget. Organisations are regularly confronted with delays on decision of at least one side and several experienced an approval for one side and a rejection from the other side. The project needs to be approved from both sides to take place.

²⁸ The EC decided to introduce "more collective forms" of EVS - i.e. funding/approval for several volunteers together. From September 2004 on, the approval of one national agency may be sufficient to realise the project.

5.2.2 Programme management: relationship between state and civic society

France is the only country running the volunteer programmes under public law. Every volunteer agreement has to be signed between the state and the associations.²⁹ This involves the state more actively in the organisation and supervision of the French programmes than in the four other countries. Volunteer agreements are based on private contracts signed between the volunteer and depending on the programme of either the sending or the hosting organisation.

In all countries the state accredits organisations either for sending and/or hosting according to specific requirements for the domestic or international voluntary service.

Eligible sending organisations tend to be international NGOs. In addition, French law identifies different beneficiaries for the different programme.

The type of hosting organisations vary from country to country, while all countries recognise the variety of organisations in the non-profit sector (NGOs, municipalities, local authorities, associations etc.). While the majority of countries (and EVS) restrict placements for volunteers in the profit sector, the French understanding sees it as a cooperation partner for the development of international youth voluntary service.

5.2.3 Activity areas of voluntary service

Some countries have specific requirements for international projects. In Italy, projects have to either support foreign countries or Italian communities abroad. The international frames of the two German programmes focus on reconciliation, international solidarity and understanding. The Czech Act refers to the assistance in the implementation of development programmes and Poland mentions activities for the sake of European integration and development of relations and cooperation among nations³⁰. The French programme for international volunteering in enterprises identifies other tasks for young people: the research for and the prospecting of new international markets, the technical or commercial reinforcement of local teams, the search for partners, agents or distributors and the creation or set up of local structures.

5.2.4 Accreditation of organisations

The process of accreditation of sending and/or hosting organisations is different in each country. While the Czech Republic and Italy (for the transition phase until 2005) have central institutions to deal with the applications, the others countries focus on decentralised implementation. The role of the Italian regions and the self-governing provinces will strongly increase in the process after January 2005 with the implementation of the new service. The regions and provinces will have decisive power on the legal and financial aspects of the future programme and the extension of working hours from the current 25 hours/week to possible 30/36 hours/week.

²⁹ If young people from abroad combine the French service with EVS, the European commission signs the contract with the associations.

³⁰ Poland defines in the law 24 areas of public tasks, where volunteers can work. No distinction exists between domestic and international volunteering.

5.2.5 Pedagogical support

All programmes require preparation and pedagogic training for the volunteers. However, the pedagogical standards vary considerably. Italy, Germany and EVS offer financial support for the pedagogical dimension through lump sums per volunteer. The requirements for seminars for German volunteers abroad³¹ represent an obstacle for developing the programme in other countries.

5.2.6 The legal status of volunteers

The emphasis in all the legal frameworks is understandably, on the legal status of the volunteers in the country. However, this leaves a hiatus for those volunteers performing voluntary service abroad.

None of the legal frameworks give legal status to EVS volunteers, which is incompatible with the national systems. The EVS programme covers private insurance to all participants.

While optimal social protection is desirable for volunteers during their service, this becomes particularly complex and difficult if the provisions for international volunteers (volunteers send abroad/hosted from abroad) with regard to social security differ from country to country.

Differences appear regarding the protection requirements for *volunteers insurance*. While all countries specify requirements for health insurance, accident and civil liability are not required for volunteers in Poland.

While *pocket money* for EVS (140- 220 EUR) is at a similar level in Germany (153 EUR on average³²), the fixed allowances in France (570.86 EUR) and Italy (433,80 EUR and 600 EUR abroad) are significantly higher. While the state pays the allowances in Italy, the situation is completely different for French organisations that are requested to cover the amounts. The law in the Czech Republic does not entitle the volunteer to any remuneration, but to the reimbursement of costs for accommodation, food and travel, if they arise in connection to the voluntary activity. Poland defines the reimbursement of expenditures in the same way, but also grant per diem without specifying the amounts.

While France, Poland and the Czech Republic declare that the payments are exonerated from *taxation*, Germany and Italy ask that volunteers declare their allowances. In both countries, the amounts remain under the threshold.

Other allowances like *child or family* benefits are maintained in some countries while in others they are suspended or lost if young people go abroad³³. The differences apply in similar ways if

³¹ 25 seminar days during 12 months, preparation and evaluation seminars compulsory in Germany during the 12 months, language training in Germany

³² Legislation considers a sum of pocket money appropriate if it does not exceed 6 per cent of the contribution assessment limit valid for the Workers' and Employees' Pension Insurance (§ 159 of the Sixth Book of the Social Code). The contribution limits were fixed in 2002 at a monthly rate of 4,500 (in the Western part of Germany) and 3,750 (in the eastern part of Germany). The amount paid to the volunteers by the host organization/project should not exceed this amount and is generally lower (see W. Schur (2004): Page 23)

³³ While the situation is particularly difficult for young volunteers abroad, the problem is more general: the suspension or loss of benefits occurs also for volunteers in domestic programmes that remain outside the law. In some countries organisations are obliged to remain outside the law because they are not able to pay

the young people participate in the EVS programme. The loss of allowances is often a major disincentive to participate for young people with low financial means. Others who ignored the situation encountered the problem on return after the service. In most countries the allowances are no longer paid because the activity is not considered similar to formal training or education.

The situation regarding contributions to *pensions and unemployment* is also quite problematic and highlights the different status of volunteers in the different countries. While in Germany the volunteers are treated in the same way as workers and vocational trainees, organisations have to cover contributions to the German social security system. Italy and France recognise voluntary service as accountable for the pension schemes and the state covers the costs, although volunteers are not considered as workers or trainees and therefore, no unemployment contributions are requested from the organisations. The Czech state partly refunds the pension payments for volunteers working more than 20 hours/week. While the Act does not require hosting organisations to pay an unemployment contribution, unemployed people involved in accredited volunteer programmes can maintain their unemployment benefits. These volunteers maintain their social status as unemployed because the state considers the activity similar to job seeking.

5.2.7 Validation of experiences

The national as well as the European certificate in the frame of EVS are not sufficiently recognised in the EU. The problem is partly due to the lack of visibility of international volunteers. Employers and institutions don't know the programmes and experiences in the non-formal sector of education and in most countries these do not have the same value as a formal diploma.

5.2.8 Financial Support

While all countries recognise the value of voluntary service for society, the state supports the national programmes financially in different ways. In all countries except Poland the support has increased, but is insufficient. In France the support differs from programme to programme, while reimbursing the cost of social insurance and counting the time of service for an individual's pension entitlement. Social insurance costs are in most countries covered by the state, except in Poland and in Germany. The latter finance social security costs for conscientious objectors but not for "real volunteers" under the social or ecological year.

Only Germany and the Czech Republic and to a lesser extent Italy support the costs for pedagogical preparation and training, while the other countries give low importance to the pedagogical quality of the programmes.

Italy is the only country to finance the monthly allowance for the volunteer as well as the international travel costs, as the EVS programme does. These amounts represent significant support for small organisations, which are already struggling for the support of their proper activities. The Czech Republic is the only country to recognise volunteering as an equal activity to job seeking maintaining unemployment benefits for that period of time.

social security conditions like in Germany or cannot apply like Czech associations membership-based activities of their volunteer members.

State support at this stage is important to stimulate programme development as well as to guarantee quality standards. The general recognition of the value of the programmes needs to be more known and acknowledged in order to allow projects to look for alternative funding resources to state funds since the budget for volunteering will always be limited.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified several challenges and possibilities to significantly increasing the number of international voluntary service opportunities for young people in Europe. Recommendations aim to give practical suggestions on how co-operation between stakeholders at national and at European level can be facilitated:

1) Youth voluntary service as an innovative instrument of civic society policy at national and European level

Youth voluntary service is in all countries connected to the development of the third sector, which has to tackle new needs linked to the enlargement of the European Union. It will be important to develop open frameworks allowing the third sector to offer diverse forms of voluntary service for different youth and meeting different social needs. Therefore, all countries may set up a national civic policy covering all ages.

A European civil society with active people and infrastructure needs to be established. International volunteers could contribute to this process by being aware of cultural differences, by speaking foreign languages and sharing common concerns. They will have experienced NGOs of another country, different national structures and methods dealing with the problems of society. They represent an important potential human resource for the exchange of practices and mutual understanding. East –West, East-East and North- South exchanges may contribute through the mutual exchange of volunteers to bridge social capital, to network development and the set up of new partnerships at local, regional, national and European level.

2) Exchange between national and European representatives to develop a common approach

The analysis shows the absolute necessity to extend the exchange of practice and understanding between the EU member states and the European institutions. A common approach may be set up by the clarification of terms and values for the youth voluntary service. A first step could be the publication of the answers to the EU questionnaire on voluntary activity on the websites of the national youth ministries with an English translation in the Czech Republic³⁴.

Another issue at stake is the approach towards the profit sector as a beneficiary of voluntary service. Programmes of this type may be renamed to avoid misunderstandings or a discussion may take place as to in what way the profit sector support other volunteer programmes in exchange of this possibility.

The creation of an independent European observatory, composed of experts from the national and international voluntary activities/service would allow to track the developments in the different countries, identify incompatibilities and to report on the implementation and the impact of programmes.

³⁴ The answers to the questionnaire are published on the website of Hastier, the Czech national volunteer centre see www.volunteer.cz

The development of common standards and procedures is achievable by the common training of civil servants from the national ministries.

3) Remove obstacles to incompatibility by the implementation of existing European instruments in the national context.

The analysis highlights patterns of incompatibility between national laws that hinder transnational volunteering- social security requirements, unavailability of exemption from penalties for the unemployed for job seeking.

The EU-Recommendation for transnational mobility of July 2001 with regards to volunteers has to be taken into account by the Member States. The recommendation was ignored for the amendment of the German law. The recommendation fails to harmonise standards with regards to the right of residence, employment law, social security and taxation, effective elimination of double taxation.

Another suggestion is to sign the European Convention on the promotion of a Trans-National Voluntary Service for young people³⁵ preparing a proper legal status for volunteers in Europe. Set up in 2001, the treaty still lacks the signature of an EU member state to begin its ratification and to come into force for the countries that have signed it. None of the five countries except France has signed the European convention.

4) Equal access to international programmes for all young residents in the European Union

New legal initiatives should set up provisions for residents in their own country to go abroad as well as to have foreign volunteers allowing development in both directions.

Programmes for international youth voluntary service with restricted access should be amended to allow all young people legally resident in the EU to become a volunteer. Programmes combatting social exclusion or developing social solidarity lack coherence if young people from a migrant background, who are more likely to face discrimination or social exclusion, cannot participate in the programme. The German programme should look for ways to avoid disadvantages for young women and men exempt from military service, as state support and recognition is to a larger extent available only for conscientious objectors.

5) Simplification of administration procedures

Alternative administration procedures as established in the EVS programme need to be conceptualised. One example may be the proposal of AVSO for a youth mobility voucher. The concept foresees an entitlement system enabling every young person from 18-25 years with a permanent residence in the EU to go abroad for at least 3 months as a volunteer, student or trainee. Criteria for an effective system will be the significant quantitative participation of young people in transnational mobility schemes, low administrative procedures for young people and organisations.

6) Roles & responsibilities of NGOs

³⁵ European treaty series- No 175 of 11.5.2000

Civil society organisations are delivering the programmes. For programmes with an European dimension, the states should invest in the networking of organisations in order to ensure quality management and control of international partnerships. Experience shows that networks can develop high quality standards for the programmes as well as quality control that are less costly and more efficient than those carried out by the national administrations. National agencies or the state administration should concentrate on quality checks with the accredited coordination organisations and offer trainings for capacity development.

7) Government support

The participation of organisations in the youth voluntary service depends on the personal and administrative capacities as well as on financial means. NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe still need to discover the concept and become aware of its potential for the development of activities. State support will remain essential as no private funding system is yet established. This could change if experiences are better known and formally certified.

Governments should think of the national and European recognition/certification of the programmes. Voluntary service should be counted as a period of intercultural education and be recognised as equal to vocational training, as the training is organised by state-accredited organisations.

7 FURTHER RESEARCH

Research in the sector of voluntary service is just emerging. International terminology of the key notions of volunteering should be established to clarify terms and concepts. Cross-national comparisons especially need to be further developed in order to get a complete picture of developments in the European Union as countries like the UK and the Netherlands are also setting up initiatives.. The development and comparison of voluntary service in the new EU member states is of particular interest for the common development in the enlarged EU. Legal initiatives are also undertaken in Lithuania and Romania. In the Balkans, comparative research started in order to allow the development of legal proposals.

There is a need to set up European criteria for the gaining of quantitative data from the countries allowing comparison. An important issue would be the comparative analysis of the financial costs of voluntary service programmes.

Research on international voluntary service should question the effects on European civic society development, European citizenship and the contribution of voluntary service to bridge social and human capital. A matter of further research will be to define criteria to measure these developments.

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