



Euro-Med Contact-making Seminar

“Forging EVS Partnerships in the Euro-Med Region”

(8 – 12 December 2004, Kusadase, Turkey)

Summary

The purpose of the seminar was to create and reinforce partnerships between sending and hosting organisations working within the EVS programme and the international networks. It is one of the continuing efforts of extending partnerships to the Mediterranean countries, by raising awareness about the needs of prospective partners. Fundamentally, the event provided an opportunity for existing and potential hosting and sending organisations to meet and exchange ideas and information about youth work and voluntary service possibilities in their countries and organisations. It also acted as a forum endorsing the role of voluntary action in involving citizens in their societies, in recognition of its economic, social, cultural and intercultural value. More specifically, the seminar enabled direct, personal contact between the staff of organisations serving as, or wanting to serve as EVS hosting and sending projects. It allowed the exchange of ideas and best practices on the management of EVS hosting projects. It also facilitated discussions on the barriers and solutions to creating more opportunities for long-term voluntary service.

The participants in the seminar represented a balanced mix between highly experienced organizations, less experienced ones and total beginners in the field. In this respect, the creation of new partnerships based on personal contact and exchange of experience were extremely important. Experienced organizations imparted their best practices, while less experienced ones got exposure to voluntary service, to EVS and to immediate partners to realize projects with.

Activities implemented

A. Description of activities

The work programme included:

- **Morning group sessions** focused on 3 topics related to the concept and delivery of quality voluntary service projects: (1) What is voluntary service (2) Voluntary service in Europe and the Mediterranean (3) EVS: Meaning, concepts and future, as well as the future of transnational voluntary service. Participants were divided into 4 working groups. Each working group had a balanced representation of countries, EU and Mediterranean, and different levels of experience. In these sessions, the participants were also asked to discuss the practical and administrative issues faced by long-term volunteers hosted or sent by their country.
- **Alternative workshops** where participants were given the choice of attending one of different workshops. These covered the themes of :
 - Intercultural learning;
 - Finding hosting projects;
 - Sources and fundraising;
 - Conflict resolution;
 - EVS basic training;
 - Managing and motivating volunteers;
 - Reality and stereotypes about the Mediterranean;
 - Working with disadvantaged volunteers.
- **Plenary sessions** were held each morning before group sessions and in the afternoon, when participants had the chance to report back on the results of each working group. The event was

officially opened on Thursday morning with an introduction to AVSO, the European Voluntary Service and the expectations for the meeting.

- **The EVS Partnership-building Fair** was where the representatives of the organisations were each given a stand on which to present their activities through pictures, materials and brochures. On the first day of the fair, each organisation was 'interviewed' by a member of the facilitation in a mock television format. During the time for partnership-building parts of the programme, the participants described their organisations and projects, looking for future partners.
- **A pre-event session** was held in the evening of the 7th December where the participants introduced one another informally through introduction games. These served as "ice-breakers" and built the participants' confidence for the upcoming working day.
- **Informal occasions for contact building.** The participants' accommodation was at the same place as the seminar venue. This provided plenty of opportunities for informal networking during the meals, the breaks and in the evening. An intercultural party was held the second evening which met with great success as each participant had brought music, food, drink, clothing, objects, flags, etc. typical of his/her country of origin.

MORNING GROUP SESSIONS

The following section describes in more detail the methodologies and content of each group session, together with a sample of the results from each group.

♦ **Group session 1: What is voluntary service?**

Objectives

The main idea for this workshop was to ensure that all the participants are departing and working from a common understanding of voluntary service. It was the opportunity for participants to have an overview of the seminar and to recall what they are here for. The aim was to get people to think, to see if they share more or less the same idea about voluntary service, to get to know each other by expressing their views about VS.

Methodology

Participants were asked to list all the aspects of voluntary service that can be seen and those that cannot be seen in order for them to discover new elements. The results of this brainstorming were presented by organisation. Then a moving debate took place on the base of several provocative statements which forced participants to take a position and discuss.

♦ **Group session 2: Voluntary service in Europe and the Mediterranean**

Objectives

To develop a vision of the development of voluntary service for the participants' own organisation and country and the role of EVS in developing this. The aim was also to identify the contrasting elements and the touching points between voluntary service concepts in the two regions, and determine how these could interact successfully. The purpose of this workshop was to generate a discussion on the legal and administrative obstacles faced by volunteers engaging in national and transnational voluntary service, the need for an appropriate legal support and the steps that should be taken at national and international level to achieve this.

Methodology

Group reflection on the various country realities, existence of legislative base, national policies towards the sector, how do the different societies view transnational voluntary service, especially the more tradition-based ones.

♦ **Group session 3: EVS: Meaning and concepts. Future of transnational voluntary service**

Objectives

- Share experiences and points of view;
- Obtain information on different national systems regarding trainings in EVS;
- Enhance common requirements and expectations;
- Clarify needs for a better co-operation;
- Make recommendations on future implementation of training within EVS.

Methodology

Brainstorming, general reflection, sharing of the organisation's experience.

B. Preparation

As soon as the event was approved, we began the recruitment and selection of the participants and through the AVSO members' networks, the National Agencies, the National Coordinators, and other

known networks. A registration form was sent out requesting details of the participants' motivation for attending the seminar and organisation details, as well as feedback on their experience with EVS and interest in the optional workshops. This enabled us to better tailor the event to the participants' needs, and also to ensure that the seminar has maximum impact on the creation of partnerships and the future delivery of EVS exchanges.

Each participant was required to prepare for the event by identifying concrete proposals for future projects, by collecting information on the development of long-term voluntary service in their country and by preparing materials on their organisation and projects.

AVSO was responsible for the logistical arrangements and for maintaining regular contacts with the participants and the partners. A preparation meeting of the project partners took place 8 weeks before the event itself, at the beginning of October 2004. This meeting finalised the details of the event's content programme, the topics to be covered and the methodology to be used. The choice of venue was finalised, as well as the techniques on how to make the programme more interesting and stimulating.

C. Practical organisation

We chose accommodation that was approximately 40 km away from the city of Istanbul in a district that is considered a suburb of the city. We chose from three alternatives, finally settling on this one on the grounds of the following factors: the room-rates were lower than the ones offered in the city, which were beyond our affordable price-range; the facilities in terms of the number and the size of the meeting rooms and plenary halls were ideal given the number of participants and the organisation of the event; equipment such as computer, printer, CD/DVD player, and photocopier were available. We were the only group staying at the hotel at that point in time, which raised the level of attention to detail and the quality of the service on part of our hosts.

The transport concerning the airport transfers was quite challenging since the participants were arriving from a number of various points of departure and respectively, they were arriving at completely different times, including the very late night hours for some. We organised bus transfers that were divided into four pick-ups altogether, grouped in the most convenient way according to the arrival times of the participants.

D. Achievements

The objectives of the project achieved:

- **The creation of new, stronger partnerships for YOUTH projects:** The project provided a forum for the organizations from Europe and the Mediterranean to meet and exchange their ideas, experience and best practice related to voluntary service. The creation of new partnerships have already generated and facilitated concrete volunteer exchange projects. Having concrete exchange projects spring from the seminar was one of the main priorities of the event. The participants had the advantage of the direct, personal contact with their future counterparts, which laid a basis of trust and understanding.
- **The seminar gave way to the free exchange of information on the needs and potential of EVS,** particularly in relation to the barriers and solutions to the participation of new partner countries, and the benefits that EVS can bring to non-EVS volunteering activities. This was achieved not only through the work programme of the seminar, but also by means of the direct contacts that the participants made with one another, and their one-to-one discussions, which continued in the corridors.
- **Another objective was the improved quality of volunteer placements.** It was pursued through the very contents of the programme, which led participants through the entire cycle of the voluntary service project, and of an EVS project in particular. The group workshops examined the roles and responsibilities of the different partners involved. **We believe that the improved quality of YOUTH projects will inevitably be ensured by the very fact that organisations have been in touch with one another, they have exchanged experience and best practice in relation to the management and implementation of EVS volunteer exchanges.** The participants will act as multiplier agents within their organisation, community, environment and will transfer their experience and knowledge to others.
- **The seminar was in itself a promotional event of the YOUTH programme as it** offered an important 'display case' for the programme and its relationship with the Mediterranean basin. It conveyed a message of confidence in the EU's commitment to a social model built on cultural diversity through mobility, exchange and informal learning.
- **The seminar generated new ideas, new methodologies, and new approaches** that motivated participants to develop new and better quality projects in the future both at national and at international level. It also raised awareness of the realities in other countries, and that

was quite revealing especially along the lines of the European practices and those of the Mediterranean.

E. Working methods

In general outlines, the working programme was structured into morning group sessions, plenaries, partnership-building fair and optional workshops. Each session started with a warmer in order to stimulate interest and keep motivation high. For details on the separate programme components, please see point A.

The National Coordinator of Jordan was a special guest at the event. She made a presentation on the application process of EVS that included several problem-case analyses. These were distributed among the groups of participants and they had to provide solutions to them. The results were then discussed in plenary.

We had also invited a Turkish volunteer as a speaker who had just completed a year's service in Germany. He shared various aspects of his experience, stressing both the positive and the negative sides, as well the intercultural difficulties he had had to surmount. This was an occasion to reflect on the cultural and social stereotypes in the different country contexts, and their origins.

F. Beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries of the project were the representatives of each organisation that attended the seminar. However, the participants will act as multipliers within their own organizations and regions. The members of each organization will benefit from their participation through the creation of future projects and activities. In a mid-term and long-term perspective the final beneficiaries of the project are expected to be:

- The young people themselves, by increasing the number and the quality of the opportunities available to them;
- The voluntary sector as a whole through the building of stronger liaisons between organisations, and through the direct exchange of best practice.

The results in the form of materials containing the reflections of the participants in the group sessions were distributed immediately after each session.

G. Follow-up and evaluation

AVSO has created an electronic mail group specifically to facilitate and consolidate the communication between the participants in the seminar. We are also preparing a booklet which will contain the description of all the organisations that took part, and send it out electronically.

For next year, AVSO will be planning a study visit to a EU member-state that would involve partners from the Mediterranean.