

EVS History – How it all began

In the mid-90s, following an initiative of the European Commission and a strong demand from civil society, the European Union recognised the need to establish European Voluntary Service for young people. As early as 1994 the Council of Ministers had generally stressed this need.¹ In 1995, the European Parliament had demanded that specific measures should be taken in order to promote a European Voluntary Service and dedicated a budget line for this purpose.² Some experimental voluntary activities of young people were introduced on a modest scale in 1995 in the Youth for Europe Programme. Based on a working document "Towards a European Voluntary Service for Young People" of January 1996, the Commission then introduced European Voluntary Service as a pilot action in 1996-1997. It aimed at young people aged between 18 and 25 and allowed young people to spend a period of voluntary service in another Member State, Norway or Iceland or, on an experimental basis, also in a third country. The launching of EVS gave a rise to considerable interest and hopes among young people, associations, local authorities and voluntary organisations. The first EVS volunteers started their projects in November 1996.

In parallel, an ex-ante evaluation was carried out in 1996³, which prepared the ground for the future Community Action Programme "European Voluntary Service". The evaluation showed that there was a widespread support within the Member States for the idea of voluntary service and voluntary action as an important component of youth and social policy. In the course of interviews and discussions with government officials, youth organisations and youth workers, NGO staff and other experts, voluntary service was regarded as a relevant policy response to challenges to increase European mobility and foster active citizenship, to problems of social cohesion, youth transition towards adulthood, marginalisation and social exclusion, social deviance and delinquency, intolerance, xenophobia and racism. It also was regarded as a means to promote social cohesion and solidarity within and outside the European Union.

¹ OJ C 348, 9.12.94 p.2: Conclusions of the Council and the Ministers of youth meeting within the Council of 30 November 1994 on the promotion of voluntary service periods for young people

² European Parliament Resolution of 22 September 1995. B4-1127/95 (PE 193.734)

³ The ex-ante evaluation of the Multiannual European Voluntary Service Programme for Young People – Report prepared by the Tavistock Institute, UK, October 1996



Still in 1996, the Commission established a high level advisory group under the chairmanship of Mr Hans Koschnick, former EU administrator of Mostar (Bosnia-Herzegovina), which brought together some personalities from the European Parliament, NGOs and other stakeholders to develop the initiative further and raise its profile. Furthermore, the Commission set up an inter-service group on EVS in order to monitor the implementation of the pilot action, to consider ways of gradually extending EVS to actions with third countries, discuss legal and administrative obstacles, and to prepare the multiannual EVS programme.

At the end of 1996, the Commission then proposed the European Voluntary Service Community Action Programme⁴, which was implemented in 1998-1999⁵. It was geared toward the active integration of young people in society through international voluntary activities that are of benefit to the community. In order to achieve its objectives, the proposed programme contained 5 sections:

- Intra community long-term and short term activities
- Long-term and short-term activities in third countries
- Innovative networks
- Developing a sense of initiative and enterprise
- Complementary measures

Short-term projects between 3 weeks and 3 months were meant specifically to facilitate the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. The funding system was simplified by introducing flat rates and fixed amounts.

⁴ Proposal for a European Parliament and Council decision establishing the Community action programme "European voluntary service for young people", 23 December 1996

⁵ Decision No 168/98/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 July 1998 establishing the Community Action Programme "European Voluntary Service for Young People".



10 YEARS OF SOLIDARITY
AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP
European Voluntary Service, 1996–2006

26–27 November 2006
Brussels

Balance of the first years

Altogether, ECU 73,98 million were allocated to the EVS Pilot Action and the EVS Programme between 1996-1999⁶, which were divided into:

EVS Pilot Action:	ECU 25,91 million
EVS Programme:	ECU 45,24 million
Projects with third countries:	ECU 2,83 million

7.100 young people participated in EVS between 1996-1999, almost 5.000 of them in the EVS Programme. On top of that, approx. 30.000 young volunteers have participated in EVS under the YOUTH Programme 2000-2006.

⁶ Commission staff working paper "Youth for Europe" and "European Voluntary Service" – evaluation report, Brussels, 9 October 2001, SEC (2001)1621.



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