

Dear reader,

The year 2001 has been declared the International Year of Volunteers by the United Nations. Our international voluntary service organisations / networks -Alliance, AVSO, CCIVS, ICYE, SCI, and YAP - decided to use this year as an opportunity to jointly work on and discuss several issues concerning international voluntary service activities. We would like to invite YOU, the volunteers, to get involved in our debates and actions.

From **August 6th to 12th** an international **Action week** will be organised in projects all over the world.

How to get involved?

- Form a **Human Chain**, symbolising a global movement, working for mutual understanding and peace and take pictures of it!
- Distribute the **'Volunteer Visa'** informing about and calling for solutions to the obstacles to mobility of volunteers and send stories about your 'visa adventures' that we'll collect in a 'visa blackbook'.
- Take part in real and virtual **Thematic Debates** based on the following topics: "Working for Peace", "Legal Status and Visas", "Inter-regional Exchanges", "Accessibility of Voluntary Service" and "Returning Volunteers".
- Then send us your results, comments and pictures - be as creative as you wish! We will be glad to receive your contributions at :

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1, rue Miollis, 75732 Paris Cedex 15
E-mail: ccivs@unesco.org
or directly to the website forum at:
<http://www.unesco.org/ccivs/ivv-ic>

You find background documents for each issue and action on our webpage.

Your suggestions and comments will be included in a report, which will be presented at a final symposium in

January 2002 in Madrid, Spain. Some of our recommendations will eventually go into the official final report on the IYV of the UN in 2002.

This is the year of volunteers and we, the international organisations/networks of voluntary service, are looking forward to hearing your voice!

Together, through this debate, we will help to improve the world of voluntary service.



Working for Peace

Most international voluntary service organisations started their activities shortly after the first world war, focusing mainly on peace promotion and reconciliation. The initial idea behind this could be described as follows:

Organising voluntary exchanges → participants are confronted with each other, and will see their differences → by working together towards a common objective, they start tolerating "the other" or even respecting the other one in his difference → in the end they will be less eager to fight each other → promotion of peace in society

Nowadays work-camps have a much broader perspective (environment, social projects, artistic activities, etc.), and are mainly organised in so-called regions in peace. Has the link between "peace" and "voluntary service" become irrelevant? We do not think so. What about you?

Let's raise some questions...

- Is a camp a conflict-avoiding activity, or is it rather conflict-provoking?
- How important is it to avoid conflicts?
- Is there a difference between conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution? Do both have the same or different advantages and disadvantages?



Legal Status and Visa Issues

Many people willing to contribute with their skills and powerful motivation to volunteering abroad could never join their programmes because legally, "a volunteer does not exist". They did not get their visa. The authorities of the host country rejected their petition because they were "neither supported by a study programme or a work contract".

- Have you or someone that you know ever been prevented from volunteering, in your own country or abroad, because of any kind of legal or administrative obstacle (rejection of visa, confusing bureaucracy for residence or work permits, loss of social benefits or health insurance, taxes, lack of recognition of your voluntary service)?

- What are the consequences of the lack of a legal status for volunteers?



Inter-regional exchanges between North, South, East and West

An international project bears the potential for intercultural learning, a feeling of knowledge about, empathy with and solidarity between the volunteer/s and the local population as well as a concrete contribution to the work project itself. If the countries of origin of the volunteers among themselves or with the local population are very different from the country where the project takes place (inter-regional or inter-continental), it also bears a number of obstacles and risks on the way to reach its set objectives.

We invite you to discuss the following topic:

The philosophy of international voluntary service between different regions in the world.

- Where do you situate international voluntary service between development, tourism and intercultural learning?
- How do you define the balance between community development and personal growth especially in inter-regional exchanges?



Accessibility of Voluntary Service

The world of voluntary service is not as open as it might seem. It could sound paradoxical, however, there are many obstacles which could discourage people to become volunteers. Do you feel like reacting to the following provocative statements?

- Should volunteers pay to participate in the projects?
- Only people who have a lot of experience can do a voluntary service abroad.
- A person doing voluntary service must have a clear idea of his/her future plans.
- People older than 30 years should not participate in the international voluntary service.
- English should be compulsory to do a voluntary service.
- To do a voluntary service is better than to be unemployed.



Returning Volunteers

Supporting (long-term) volunteers after their voluntary service abroad is as important as providing them with a good preparation and in-service support.

Upon their return, very often LTVs feel just as disoriented and confused as when they first arrived in the host country. They are likely to „suffer“ from a „reverse

cultural shock“ and go through a new intercultural experience - this time feeling strangers at home, misunderstood and out of place in the family, study, work and other familiar environments.

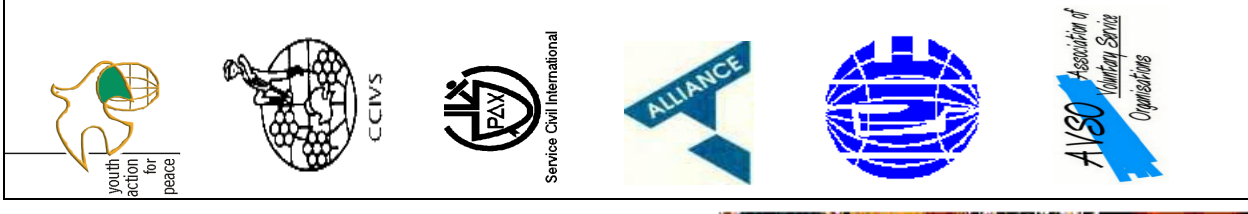
Against this background, sending organisations need to evaluate the necessity and desirability of accompanying, providing support and monitoring LTV's re-adjustment and re-orientation process in the home country. Support and understanding should help returning LTV's to channel positively their desire to feel useful, to build on their past experience, and to find ways to engage with others in action and reflection.

- How could volunteers add value to their communities upon their return?
- How can sending organisations support volunteers to do so?



For more information on all topics please check:

www.unesco.org/ccivs/iyv-ic/



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