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**“YOUTH FOR EUROPE”
AND
“EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE”**

EVALUATION REPORT

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GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

The third phase of the “Youth for Europe” Programme and the Community Action Programme “European Voluntary Service” established respectively by the European Parliament and Council Decisions of 14 March 1995 and 20 July 1998, concluded on 31 December 1999.

Almost 405 000 young people took part in these Programmes which are based on the development of non-formal education within the framework of the policy of co-operation in the youth field.

Evaluations were carried out in 2000 and 2001 following the Programmes’ conclusion.

This report is based on the results of these two evaluations.

1 “YOUTH FOR EUROPE”

1.1 Structure of the evaluation

1.1.1 The “Youth for Europe” Programme

Decision n° 818/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995¹ based on Article 126 of the Treaty (presently Article 149), established the third phase of the “Youth for Europe” Programme covering 1 January 1995 to 31 December 1999.

This third phase made it possible to involve the various actions previously developed within the framework of the first two phases of “Youth for Europe”, the priority Actions in the youth field and, to some extent, the Petra (Youth Initiative projects) and Tempus (Youth Activities) Programmes.

In 2000, the “Youth for Europe” Programme was incorporated into the YOUTH Community Action Programme which was the subject of Decision n° 1031/2000/EC² of the European Parliament and of the Council.

¹ O.J. L087 of 20.04.95 : Decision n° 818/95/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995 adopting third phase of “Youth for Europe”

² O.J. L 117 of 18.05.00 : Council Decision n° 1031/2000/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 drawing up the “YOUTH” Community Action Programme

The main objective of the “Youth for Europe” Programme is to contribute to the education of young people by encouraging their active participation and their integration in society, in particular, through their involvement in exchanges within the Community and with third countries.

“Youth for Europe” is addressed mainly to young people aged between 15 and 25 who are residents of one of the Member States of the E.U., or of one of the EFTA countries part of the EEA Agreement. The Programme is also open to participation by the Central and Eastern European countries as well as Cyprus and Malta.

The Programme consists of five Actions:

- Action A: Intra-Community activities directly involving young people

- Action A I: Youth exchanges and mobility

- Action A II: Young people's spirit of initiative, creativity and solidarity

- Action B: Youth workers

- Action C: Co-operation between Member States' structures

- Action D: Third country exchanges

- Action E: Information for young people and youth research

“Youth for Europe” received a total of ECU 126 million for the period 1995-1999.

1.1.2 Objectives of “Youth for Europe”

The “Youth for Europe” Programme aims to encourage the active participation and integration of young people in society. In particular, it aims to stimulate creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of young people, raise awareness of cultural diversity, the importance of ensuring equality between men and women and of the dangers connected with exclusion, including racism and xenophobia. The Programme is based on the direct involvement of young people and builds on the structures already established through community work in general.

It seeks to encourage the participation of young people at disadvantage. The nature of the Actions as well as the methodology envisaged by the Programme is specifically designed to reach this objective. Article 4(2) of the Decision establishing the Programme stipulates that at least one third of funds allocated under Action A have to be used to benefit young people at disadvantage.

The Programme encourages the creation of reinforced partnerships on all levels: between the Commission and the Member States, the National Agencies responsible for the implementation of the Programme and the groups of young people who elaborate and carry out the projects.

1.1.3 The evaluation

The “Youth for Europe” Programme was the subject of an intermediate evaluation report adopted by the Commission covering its first two years of implementation (COM (98) 52 final of 6.2.98), in accordance with Article 9 of Decision n° 818/95/EC of 14 March 1995.

The present evaluation was carried out with a view to identifying the results of the Programme, its success in achieving its objectives, drawing up recommendations for the future in order to be considered in the framework of the YOUTH Programme and in making recommendations on evaluation methods.

It took place between March 2000 and February 2001, by *Fondo Formacion* and *Servicios Omicron SA* following a call for tender³ and mainly covers Actions A I, A II 1, B I and D⁴.

The evaluation is based on a three-tiered analysis:

- The first concerns the implementation of the Programme by the Commission and National Agencies;
- The second concerns the projects carried out by the project promoters, partners and advisers;
- Finally, the third level concerns the young people and youth workers participating in the projects.

The evaluation was based on discussions with the National Agencies, questionnaires addressed to the promoters of and participants in the projects, and working groups composed of project participants on specific themes. On the whole more than 550 people were consulted.

³ Public n° service DG XXII/16/99 contract

⁴ A I: Youth Exchanges

A II 1: Youth Initiatives

B I: Support for Action A (search for partners/co-operation and training of the youth workers)

D: Exchanges with third countries

A group made up of representatives of the Committee of the Programme, the National Agencies, the European Youth Forum and the Commission monitored the evaluation work.

1.2 Evaluation results

1.2.1 Data

Exchange projects (Actions A I and D) account for 81% of all the projects and 87% of the total participants in the Programme.

From 1995 to 1999, the Programme involved 398 450 young people participating in 14 534 projects. There was an equal distribution of male and female participants, and 345 000 young people took part in mobility activities.

Approximately 65% of projects submitted for all the actions were supported.

The evaluation revealed that the participation rate across the Programme countries amounted to 7.2 young people per thousand between the age of 15 and 25, that is, 7 young people out of one thousand took part in projects benefiting from the Programme. This figure varies significantly from one country to another - more than 20 participants per one thousand in Denmark and Finland to less than 5 per one thousand in Germany, France and Italy.

In relation to the age of the participants, the evaluators found that the young people who participated in exchanges within the E.U. were younger than those who participated in other exchanges.

It is apparent that across all the Actions, most of the participants came from the United Kingdom (15%), Spain (13%), Germany (12%) and France (10%).

1.2.2 Impact of the Programme

1.2.2.1 The participants in the projects

For a number of young people, a "Youth for Europe" project was their first multicultural experience with which they were satisfied and which often sparked a desire to benefit from the Programme again. This tendency is confirmed by the fact that many project participants later contributed to the elaboration of new projects, thus illustrating their incorporation of the European dimension.

The evaluation report reveals that mutual understanding and a better appraisal of European diversity are objectives, which were largely achieved through the exchange projects.

Equally, it appears that creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit of young people were stimulated through the Youth Initiative projects (Action A II 1 – projects elaborated and managed by the young people themselves, based in a local community and directly connected with their needs) which, for the most part, could not have been carried out without Community support.

It seems that the strongest points of the Programme are that the participants develop greater self-confidence and a will to play a more active part in social life.

Plurality, solidarity, social integration and the fight against xenophobia are amongst the many topics which were considered and to which young people attached particular importance.

The majority of projects involved culture and the environment.

Young people at disadvantage

The participation of young people at disadvantage proved difficult to measure, particularly due to the various approaches taken by the participating countries towards this concept. The evaluation reveals that approximately 70% of projects (action A) involved young people at disadvantage - 20% of these projects exclusively involved this target group. In the vast majority of cases, the young people involved were at a socio-economic disadvantage.

However, the groups of young people at social disadvantage not part of existing structures seemed to have encountered more difficulties than others in benefiting from the Programme.

Furthermore, Action A II 1's objective aimed at the strengthening of personnel initiative appears only to have been reached partially with regard to these groups of young people.

The evaluation reveals an increase in the number of initiatives aimed at enhancing the participation of young people at disadvantage, specifically young people coming from isolated geographical areas and the disabled.

1.2.2.2 Participating organisations

The involvement of young people in the Programme stimulated the creation of new local organisations, which developed exchanges at European level both within and outside the framework of the Programme. This illustrates the multiplier effect of the Programme on this level.

Thus, the number of organisations participating in the Programme has increased and the type of organisation has become more varied.

In spite of this, the majority of organisations are those traditionally participating in social projects at national and regional level.

Furthermore, the evaluation showed that the Programme encouraged the creation of contact networks for the transnational exchanges.

1.2.2.3 The local level

An impact of the projects developed within the framework of the Programme at local level was evident with the increasing participation of local authorities and populations.

The evaluation also identifies certain multiplier effects at this level in particular in terms of incorporating the European dimension.

Overall, the projects have mainly involved large cities (national and regional capitals) and their surroundings, while the rural, insular, cross-border and mountainous regions appear to have participated to a lesser extent.

1.2.3 Financial aspects

The total sum allocated to the "Youth for Europe" Programme for the period 1995-1999 amounts to ECU 126 million.

The centralised actions represent 12 % of all the projects developed between 1995 and 1999 and mainly integrate the activities undertaken by European NGOs, Youth Initiatives and third country exchanges.

For the whole programme trilateral and multilateral exchanges represented 8.5% and 16.5% respectively of the total number of projects. It should be noted that for the period 1995-1999 the share of multilateral projects increased app. 40% in view of multilateral project only and 33% in view of the total number of projects.

The average grant, all actions included, was found to be 8.750 ecu per project and 315 ecu per participant.

A financial contribution from public sector authorities at national and/or regional and local levels was triggered as a result of the Community contribution, even though this contribution was limited.

Financial contributions made by the participants and their families should also be taken on board as well as the financial support

received from the organisations involved. This evaluation highlights the difficulties that some organisations and participants coming from disadvantaged backgrounds have faced.

1.3 Management and Procedures

1.3.1 Responsibilities

The Commission is responsible for the overall implementation of the Programme. In this capacity, it fixes priorities and works out guidelines, elaborates application forms and information materials.

It is also responsible for the co-ordination of the National Agencies set up by the National authorities.

The National Agencies – linked to the Commission by an annual contract based on a Work Plan – are responsible for the implementation of the Programme at national level. They are responsible for the dissemination of information, encouraging partnerships, evaluating the projects, concluding project agreements, financing the projects and ensuring their follow-up.

The results of the evaluation reveal that contacts between the National Agencies and the Commission increased and improved continuously throughout the implementation of the Programme, thus ensuring a co-ordinated approach.

The evaluators note, on the other hand, a certain lack of co-ordination between the National Agencies themselves, specifically in the area of exchange projects and Youth Initiatives. They also highlight regional disparities that exist within each country in terms of support, monitoring projects and of the promotion of the Programme, recognising nevertheless the general improvement of its management and follow-up.

Decentralisation

The principle of decentralisation, i.e. the implementation of certain actions of the Programme (Actions A I and B I which represented 88 % of the projects) by the National Agencies, is a major element of "Youth for Europe". This decentralisation facilitated better contacts with the project sponsors and increased support, on a more local level, thus improving the quality and outcome of the projects.

The evaluation confirms the success of this form of management and recommends its wider application to third country exchanges.

1.3.2 Implementation procedures

"Youth for Europe" promotes decentralised and flexible management where a large part of the selection and follow-up of projects is carried out at national level.

Nevertheless, the results of the evaluation suggest that project promoters which are not part of existing structures find the tools and procedures applied in the Programme (application forms, reports, payment methods) complex and can be discouraged from participation.

The Programme aims to encourage the adoption of tri- and multilateral exchanges designed to reinforce the European dimension. Nevertheless, bilateral exchanges remain dominant. This is a result of the increased complexity of implementing multilateral activities, both at an organisational level (difficulties connected with the search for several foreign partners) and a financial one.

1.4 Recommendations of the evaluators

The recommendations are based on three main principles:

- Increased decentralisation of the implementation of the Actions;
- Increased resources allocated to the Programme primarily for information related activities;
- Enhanced monitoring and evaluation of the Actions.

1.4.1 Increased decentralisation

Decentralising further, by action on a more local level, mainly aims to increase the participation of young people at disadvantage not part of existing structures and those coming from areas that have not yet benefited from the Programme, as well as encouraging the launch of innovative initiatives developing multilateral and third country exchanges.

- The action recommended in favour of young people at disadvantage as a result of the evaluation mainly includes increasing the amount of information destined to this target group, covering the total cost of their participation in the Programme and the simplification of application procedures (guides, forms, deadlines for application and decisions) and project implementation (payment methods).

- The evaluators recommend the provision of increased support in the framework of Youth Initiatives, which will enhance the innovative element of the projects.

- The evaluators recommend the development of a database on youth exchanges and Youth Initiatives in order to facilitate, on the one hand, search for partners, and on the other hand, the generation of ideas and the joint elaboration of projects.

1.4.2 Further information

The evaluators recommend increasing the visibility of the Programme and its Actions, by:

- Establishing information points in programme countries;
- Involving local multipliers;
- Using specific terminology and the media such as television, radio, music festivals, especially targeting youth at disadvantage;
- Highlighting high quality projects and developing handbooks of good practices based on these projects.

These main principles should be implemented through an overall strategy developed jointly by the National Agencies and the Commission.

1.4.3 Monitoring and evaluation

The evaluators recommend an improvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the projects through enhanced support to the project sponsors and setting up of a Youth Observatory responsible for the collection and processing of data (in particular, from the final reports completed by the beneficiaries) thus allowing a continuous evaluation.

A majority of these recommendations are already currently implemented in the framework of the YOUTH programme, as mentioned in Part 4 of this report.

1.5 Conclusions

A significant number of young people participated in the “Youth for Europe” Programme even if, in relative terms, it affected only a small percentage of youth. The programme had a multiplying effect which ensured a global impact considerably wider than the number of young people actually involved in projects. This impact is particularly visible at two levels:

- on one hand through former participants which got involved in new projects brought other young people with them who had not been involved before
- on the other hand, through taking into consideration the impact the projects had on the local community and its inhabitants

It played a crucial role for young people by developing their personal and social skills and opened up European opportunities for the participating organisations.

Its largely decentralised implementation encouraged action on a more local level while enhancing co-operation between the Commission and the Member States on the one hand and amongst the Member States on the other.

In spite of this success, the desirable improvements to the Programme identified above particularly in relation to the participation of young people at disadvantage not part of existing structures, the implementation of multilateral projects and the overall visibility of the programme, should not be overlooked.

The experience gained through the implementation of “Youth for Europe” can be used as a learning tool for the YOUTH Programme. Its ability to make young people key players of their own projects constitutes one of the major elements of the future strategy in the field of youth.

2 “ EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE”

2.1 Structure of the evaluation

2.1.1 The European Voluntary Service (EVS)

In 1995 European Voluntary Service activities for young people in a European context were introduced in the Youth for Europe Programme, however on a modest scale. As early as 1994 the Council of Ministers stressed the need to establish a voluntary service for young people⁵ and the year after the European Parliament demanded that specific measures should be taken in order to promote a European Voluntary Service and dedicated a budget line for this purpose⁶. In 1996 the *Pilot Action European Voluntary Service* started and in 1998 the decision to establish the *Community Action Programme European Voluntary Service*⁷ was taken based upon article 126 of the Treaty (presently Article 149). The European Voluntary Service has been part of the YOUTH Programme, Action 2⁸ since May 2000.

The European Voluntary Service is open to young people between 18 and 25 years old who want to do voluntary service activities in another Member State, Norway or Iceland for 6 to 12 months. Liechtenstein did not participate.

A total of ECU 73.98 million was allocated to the European Voluntary Service for the period 1996-1999, of which ECU 25.91 million was allocated to the Pilot Action and ECU 45.24 million for the Programme phase. Projects with third countries were allocated ECU 2.83 million for the Pilot Action and the Programme.

⁵ 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

⁶ European Parliament Resolution of 22 September 1995

⁷ 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".

⁸ Decision No 1031/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 establishing the "Youth" Community Action Programme

2.1.2 Objectives of the European Voluntary Service

The objectives of the European Voluntary Service are:

- to encourage a spirit of initiative, creativity and solidarity among young people so as to enable them to become actively integrated into society and to contribute to achieving the objectives of the Programme;
- to step up the participation of young people legally resident in a Member State in long-term or short-term transnational activities of benefit to the community within the Community or in third countries, in particular those with which the Community has concluded co-operation agreements. Those activities must not restrict or be a substitute for potential or existing paid employment;
- to promote recognition of the value of non-formal educational experience acquired in a European context;
- to facilitate access to the Programme for all young people.

2.1.3 The evaluation

The 1998 Decision establishing the European Voluntary Service Programme states that the European Commission should take the necessary measures to ensure that the Programme is monitored and continuously evaluated. ECOTEC Research carried out the present evaluation between February 2000 and February 2001 *and Consultation limited*, following a call for tender⁹.

The main objective of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the European Voluntary Service achieved its objectives for the implementation period 1996 -1999 with focus on strengths and weaknesses, key obstacles in achieving objectives and ways to overcome them as well as good practice aspects.

The assessment was done in both quantitative and qualitative terms and three different modules were applied:

- overall assessment of the European Voluntary Service and its impact relative to its objectives;
- assessment of the institutional, political and legislative impact of the European Voluntary Service;
- assessment of programme management structures and procedures.

⁹ Call for tender No DGXXII/17/99

It should be noted that the implementation of the European Voluntary Service in third countries is not included in the evaluation.

During the evaluation phase ECOTEC co-operated actively with, and had feed back from, the National Agencies for the European Voluntary Service through interviews and visits to midterm evaluations. ECOTEC had access to all the relevant documentation regarding the European Voluntary Service and to existing monitoring materials including monitoring reports from project visits mainly provided by the Structure for Operational Support for the European Voluntary Service (SOS), impact studies and other evaluations already carried out at national and European level.

The evaluators used *questionnaires* addressed to the National Agencies in order to conduct the quantitative analysis and the members of the Programme Committee for the European Voluntary Service for the survey regarding impact on policy. *Assessment forms* were used for case studies, final reports and project visits to provide surveys. Finally *interviews* were conducted with the SOS and Commission officials

A steering group with representatives of the Programme Committee for the European Voluntary Service Programme, the National Agencies for the European Voluntary Service Programme, the Youth Forum and of the Commission met on four occasions to discuss the terms of reference and the framework for the evaluation, the draft interim report and the draft final report.

The present report summarises the main results of the evaluation carried out by ECOTEC. After an introduction to the Pilot Action/Programme logic, it describes the characteristics and impact of the three main actors, the volunteers, the sending and host organisations; the impact of the Programme on policy level and legislation and its financial aspects. The report concludes by focusing on the management of the European Voluntary Service.

2.2 Evaluation results

The European Voluntary Service is based on a triangular partnership between a volunteer aged from 18 to 25 years old, a sending organisation and a host organisation. This model was chosen in order to not only give the volunteer an adequate non-formal learning experience but also to establish partnerships between organisations, local authorities and other initiatives and to bring a European dimension into their activities.

Since many of the actors involved in the European Voluntary Service did not have experience in working with international activities the importance of training has been recognised from the start of the European voluntary service. A common training framework for the volunteers including pre-

departure training, on-arrival training and midterm evaluation was established in 1996.

An important priority has been to involve young people at disadvantage and for that purpose a short term strand was introduced in 1998 to allow young people who for different reasons could not stay abroad for six months to do a shorter voluntary service during three weeks to three months. Another new action, which started in 1998, was Future Capital where volunteers could apply for grants for projects of benefit to the local community and/or other young people or for activities related to their professional integration or personal development.

The EVS includes a mixture of local organisations without contacts at international level together with others more experienced at international level. The main part of the European Voluntary Service has been implemented on the decentralised level and the projects have been selected and monitored by National Agencies appointed by the Member States, Norway and Iceland. Liechtenstein did not participate. The European Commission has managed a number of so called flagship projects and multilateral projects of a more experimental and innovative nature carried out by European Youth organisations and European networks.

2.2.1 The volunteers

About 7100 volunteers participated in the European Voluntary Service between 1996 and 1999 (2217 for the Pilot Action and 4915 for the Programme) and have in all done 170 000 weeks of voluntary service. The majority of those volunteers (5450) participated in the decentralised strand.

2.2.1.1 Profile of the volunteers

It is notable that 75% of the volunteers were women. The main reasons for the low participation of males was believed to be their obligation to do military or civil service and the fact that many projects were within fields which tended to be less attractive to males such as childcare and projects within the social sector. In countries with a strong tradition of voluntary service for example Ireland and the United Kingdom the distribution was more balanced whilst in the Northern European countries the participation of female volunteers was particularly high.

Regarding the educational background of the volunteers, the data collected by the evaluators showed that a majority of them (51% for female and 60% for male) had completed secondary education. Furthermore one third of the participants declared that they had higher education qualifications.

Even though no systematic recording has been done regarding early returnees, i.e. volunteers leaving their host organisation before the end of the project, different indicators show that the drop-out rate had decreased since the Pilot Action to the Programme where it was estimated to have been 8% which was considered to be a low drop-out rate. The situation regarding young people at disadvantage is dealt with under point 3.2.1.3.

2.2.1.2 Impact of EVS on the volunteers

The evaluation clearly states that the European Voluntary Service had a significant, positive impact on the young people participating in terms of raising their inter-cultural awareness, enabling them to acquire skills and improving their self-confidence and their capacity for initiative and creativity. A number of factors influenced the positive impact, namely, a balanced approach between personal development and community benefit, preparation and training, language and communication skills, development of a work programme and the quality of support and mentoring provided during the service. Even though evidence of positive impact was not systematically collected or assessed, feedback mechanisms for the volunteers when it comes to the positive impact were available.

The main impact on the volunteers was related to *inter-cultural learning*. Even if many volunteers stated that they experienced a culture shock upon arrival, the support framework put in place seems to have fulfilled its purpose as well as efforts made by National Agencies and host organisations

Language training was offered to the volunteers by the host organisations and most volunteers did to some extent learn the language of the host country. The case studies carried out also proved that *training related to the activities* carried out in the host organisations was significant even if the extent and methods varied. The training was connected to more technical issues but was also of a general nature and more related to personal development.

People in close contact with the volunteers noticed that the young people went through a significant *personal development* and increased their self-confidence, becoming more independent and ready to take on responsibility. The possibility for the volunteers to develop their sense of initiative and creativity mainly depended on the emphasis given to personal development by the host organisation.

Among factors influencing positive impact, the *preparation phase* was of great importance. When the expectations of the volunteer did not coincide with the actual situation in the host organisation, due to a lack of communication and misunderstandings, problems occurred. Also the quality of the *training* provided was essential for the future success of the project as well as the capacity of host organisations to be flexible when it came to *language training* and the overcoming of immediate *communication* problems. The volunteers should have a clear *programme of activities* outlining the tasks, which ideally has been developed in co-operation with him/her.

The volunteers need *support* and *monitoring* during their stay in the host country. The practices to provide this varied but it is emphasised in the evaluation report that a real partnership between sending and host organisations with good communication and a host organisation, which was ready to give support, were important elements for the success of the project. The role of the mentor was regarded by the host organisations to be demanding and a need to clarify this role was expressed.

Crises were bound to happen in a programme where thousands of young people spend several months abroad. The National Agencies in co-operation with the Structure did the crisis management for Operational Support but also here a clearer definition of responsibilities would be of useful.

An Action plan which defines the responsibilities of each actor regarding crisis management and risk prevention has recently been developed and presented to the National Agencies.

2.2.1.3 Participation of young people at disadvantage

The definition of “young people at disadvantage” varied between the countries. For the European Voluntary Service the Commission used the definition “young people from less privileged cultural, geographical or socio-economic backgrounds and young people with disabilities” and each country had the possibility to make a definition (approved by the Commission) adapted to the national contexts.

From the start in 1996 efforts were made to involve young people at disadvantage in the European Voluntary Service, but the Commission has been aware of the difficulties. In the Pilot Action and the Programme a number of flagship, multilateral projects and work camps specifically targeting

young people at disadvantage were supported, achieving good results.

In 1998 a short-term strand which allowed shorter periods of voluntary service of three weeks to three months was introduced as an answer to requests from organisations working with this target group. 6.8% of the total number of volunteers benefited from this strand. The evaluation report mentions¹⁰ that progress has been rather slow but given that the short-term strand was introduced in July 1998 it might be too early to fully see the effects.

The lack of data on the backgrounds of the volunteers participating in the long-term strand made it difficult to estimate the total percentage of the participation of volunteers at disadvantage. Data from other studies implied that the percentage might have risen to 16%.

The case studies showed that special approaches and methods were needed when working with young people at disadvantage as well as more effort and resources when it comes to preparation, monitoring and integration into the local community. Preferably the partners should know each other before and extensive communication was needed all throughout the project.

The positive impact that the voluntary service had on young people at disadvantage participating in flagship and multilateral projects monitored on a European level has been achieved through careful targeting of volunteers. The preparations have been extensive and all the projects had a strong emphasis on support. It also seems that those projects concentrated more on the personal development than on project output.

2.2.2 Sending and host organisations

The partnership between the host and the sending organisations is a cornerstone of the European Voluntary Service. Time, energy and resources have to be invested in the partnership in order to ensure a good experience for the volunteer. When the communication between the partners was weak and misunderstandings occurred, this accordingly affected the preparation of the project, which had severe consequences for the volunteer.

¹⁰ See chapter 3.2.2.1

2.2.2.1 Profile of participating organisations

The successful implementation of the European Voluntary Service required that a large number of organisations and local authorities were willing to host young people and 1114 different host organisations participated in the European Voluntary Service Pilot Action and Programme. It can be noted that the United Kingdom, Italy and France hosted the highest numbers of volunteers and more than 3000 volunteers came from Germany, France and Spain.

In the Programme 587 sending organisations are recorded to have participated. In accordance with the Programme logic most of the organisations benefiting from European Voluntary Service were active at local level.

The host organisations involved in the European Voluntary Service have contributed to a wide range of themes. 20% of the projects focus on youth and children, 12% on social exclusion and 10% on leisure and sport. The short-term projects on the other hand tended to focus more on environment and rural development.

2.2.2.2 Impact on sending and host communities

The impact on the local communities involved in European Voluntary Service was less recorded and assessed compared to the impact on the volunteers. Still it can be said that the European Voluntary Service had a positive impact on the local host community in particular when it came to the international dimension. The volunteer brought new ideas, practices and inspiration to the local host community and through his/her presence the inter-cultural awareness and the awareness of the European Union was increased.

On the sending side the impact was more difficult to identify. This could mean that the follow-up once the volunteer has returned to the sending country is not systematic. What can be noted however, is that the volunteers upon their return communicated their inter-cultural experience to other young people and encouraged to other international activities for example youth exchanges.

The European Voluntary Service has also given the opportunity for small local organisations to get involved in European activities and more experienced organisations have slowly opened up to new methods and partners. In countries where the tradition of voluntary service activities were less developed the European Voluntary Service provided an opportunity to introduce new activities. The case studies showed that almost all volunteers were

involved in activities that would not have taken place otherwise due to lack of resources.

The balance between the personal development of the volunteers and the community benefit has been under discussion since the beginning of the pilot action. It is clear that some organisations traditionally give higher importance to the community benefit whilst the European Voluntary Service stressed the learning experience for the volunteer. However, there was an awareness in this respect and organisations improved their methods and approaches.

2.2.3 Impact on policy and legislation

The evaluation questioned whether the European Voluntary Service had an impact on governmental and non-governmental structures in the field of voluntary service, on youth policy or on legislation in the field of youth regarding the introduction of new concepts of approach and methods of work. The evaluators conclude that it is difficult to prove that the European Voluntary Service caused the changes which took place in governmental structures or organisations during 1996-1999.

The programme has integrated well into already existing broader trends. In Germany the European Voluntary Service was considered to offer an additional form of non-formal education and this was integrated into policy for young people at disadvantage. In Italy the European Voluntary Service was an important factor in providing an "identity" for youth as a distinct policy issue.

The impact on national legislation has been relatively low even though the number of obstacles related to the lack of a status for volunteers could have led to changes. The results should be seen in the light of the limited scale of the European Voluntary Service and the relatively recent start.

Even if the impact at national level was limited, local and regional public administrations did increase their knowledge of international volunteering and youth related issues through the European Voluntary Service and in some case funds have been allocated to provide co-financing for projects.

Regarding non-governmental organisations the impact was more significant. New methods of work and new concepts of for example long-term voluntary work and a strong focus on

personal development for the volunteers have been introduced and partnerships have been developed or reinforced. It can be noted that the European Voluntary Service has introduced new methods of work and youth volunteering has been considered as a new or alternative method of working with young people especially with young people at disadvantage. In some cases the philosophy of the European Voluntary Service caused conflicts between existing practices of organisations for example regarding strict selection criteria.

The European Voluntary Service is based on the development of non-formal education and accordingly it is important that its value is promoted. In some countries, overall policy gives recognition to non-formal education in general and thus includes the European Voluntary Service, whereas in other countries there is still a long way to go. The European Voluntary Service has not contributed to any major changes in this regard but the Programme has often been used as an example to illustrate the need of a policy change.

Related to the recognition of non-formal education is the certificate that has been issued to the volunteers since the start of the European Voluntary Service. Among the National Agencies there was a broad consensus regarding the value to increase the recognition of this certificate for future access to the formal educational system and some lobbying existed but no governmental policies supporting this were found and no formal progress had been made. Delays in the issuing of the certificate decreased the usefulness even if measures were taken to speed up the process.

2.2.4 Financial aspects

2.2.4.1 Global budget

ECU 42.205 million (59.3%) out of a total budget of ECU 73.98 million has been invested in the decentralised part of the European Voluntary Service, i.e. bilateral projects managed at the national level. It can be noted that for the pilot action ECU 5.609 million (37%) of the allocated funds were not spend, mainly due to the late start of the pilot action, the building up of structures and the introduction of new concepts and procedures. For the Programme phase however the absorption rate has been high and only ECU 2.8 Million (12.7%) of the allocated budget were not spend, most probably due to the late adoption and start of the Programme in July 1998.

The budget for the centralised project was 14.5% of the total budget and was mainly used for innovative multilateral projects and projects presented by European NGOs and big European networks. The allocated amount was higher during the Pilot Action and lower for the Programme. This was in line with the objective to encourage organisations with experience from the pilot action to apply for the decentralised level in the Programme phase.

8% of the Programme funds were allocated to decentralised support activities (courses and training sessions for volunteers and mentors, seminars and conferences). It also implies improvements in management efficiency when the experiences gained in the pilot action were capitalised in the Programme. It should also be noted that the managing costs include costs for the technical assistance office “The Structure for Operational Support” (SOS) established in 1996. The allocations were 2.8% of the total budget for the pilot action and 2.2% of the total budget for the Programme.

2.2.4.2 Average grant

The average EU grant for a six month project (which was the average length of a service) including expenditure for management and support activities, was found to be ECU 6700. This amount does not include co-funding and no precise figures on the elements of co-funding exist. The explanation is that the granting system was changed when the Programme started and a system of lump sums was introduced. The lump sum system made it easier for the applicants to calculate the expected grant beforehand and the exact amount of co-funding did not have to be estimated in the application. Thus the risk of false budgets was reduced. Based upon statistics from the pilot action provided by the National Agencies, the approximate costs were estimated and the lump sums set accordingly implied a 50% co-funding. A comparison has been made with the notional wage cost¹¹, which is estimated to be 225 Euro/week. For an EVS-volunteer the cost is 266 Euro/week. If the learning experience for the volunteer, the intercultural dimension and new skills that a European volunteer brings to a local community are added, the European Voluntary Service must be considered as giving great value to public investments

¹¹ The notional wage is the amount that it would be necessary to pay in the market in order to receive an equivalent service to that provided by the volunteers.

2.3 Management and Procedures

2.3.1 Responsibilities

The *European Commission* had the overall responsibility for the implementation of activities at decentralised level and issued rules, guidelines, application forms and information material. The Commission managed a limited number of networks and multilateral projects at centralised level and gave the final approval of all host expressions of interest from organisations that wanted to host volunteers. Between 1996 and 1999, 9 to 19 staff were involved in the programme management at the European level including the staff at the SOS as described below.

All the participating countries nominated *National Agencies* to manage the European Voluntary Service and to be responsible for identification of host and sending organisations, selections, information, training, support etc. After the first year of the pilot action 18 National Agencies (initially called Structures) for the EVS were established.

Since the beginning of the Pilot Action a technical assistance office called the *Structure for Operational Support* (SOS) was in place to assist the European Commission and the National Agencies with the implementation of the Programme. The tasks were to assess expression of interest for hosting volunteers, manage the database and a special website, make monitoring visits on the field, handle crises, develop information material and conduct a number of studies.

Previous evaluations have mentioned that the division of roles and responsibilities between the Commission, the National Agencies and the SOS was confusing but since guidelines and rules of allocation were changed the situation has been improved. Some National Agencies have expressed that they are under-staffed and lack specialised staff, in particular with regard to IT-skills. A number of National Agencies has expressed the wish to receive training, especially on Programme objectives and inter-cultural aspects.

2.3.2 Implementation procedures

The European Voluntary Service has from the outset been a programme where the main management, assessment and selection of bilateral activities took place at national level according to the legal basis of the Pilot Action and the Programme. More efforts still have to be done in making procedures and criteria more transparent and to shorten the

time between the submission of an application and the final decision.

Selections of centralised projects and assessment of expressions of interest (from host organisations) took place at the European level and the criteria were considered to be clear to the actors involved but the time to process the applications was felt to be too long with delays of up to four months.

Two different systems of funding have been used. During the Pilot Action the sending organisation had to apply for the whole project including the costs incurred by the host project. This led to many misunderstandings between partners and when the Programme started a new system called split funding was introduced where the sending and host organisations respectively applied to their National Agencies. The users positively received it. Delays on payments to the projects occur frequently in the case studies and some host organisations had problems in finding co-financing.

The procedure for matchmaking which is essential for the success of a project had some weaknesses mainly due to lack of communication between the partners, applications that have not been prepared enough and volunteers not being involved in the procedure of finding a host organisation. Efforts were made by the National Agencies in order to promote adequate partner finding for example through contact making seminars.

For small organisations the reporting of the project was felt to be a heavy burden and shorter reports focusing on key issues would be more adequate.

2.3.3 Monitoring and evaluation

The European Voluntary Service has a few clear objectives which are relatively easy to measure but with a number of expected benefits for the participants which are on a long-term basis and difficult to quantify and measure. Various studies have been carried out during the pilot phase and the Programme focusing on the impact of the European Voluntary Service on the volunteer but rarely on the impact on the local community and the non-formal educational experience and never on the impact on young people at disadvantage. It is now time to develop adequate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation for the future and improve the evaluation framework both regarding impact and Programme performance.

2.3.3.1 Existing practices

During the Pilot Action and the Programme there was no common formalised system for monitoring projects but various methods were used by the National Agencies to assess the impact of the European Voluntary Service through questionnaires to, and interviews with, volunteers, sending and host organisations and on site project visits. The SOS conducted a number of studies and monitoring visits and this provided important feedback mechanisms. The available material however also shows that there is a tendency to mix the feelings/judgement of volunteers with the perceived overall impact of the voluntary service on the individuals.

Granta is a database for collection of information related to a European Voluntary Service project and includes details on the volunteers, sending and host organisations and budgets. Granta is a well-developed and adequate administrative tool for monitoring for the Commission and the network of National Agencies which after some modifications and if correctly used would provide necessary information. Unfortunately all National Agencies did not see the benefits of using the common system despite numerous training sessions and the database contains serious inconsistencies. According to the evaluation report the problems have often been related to insufficient IT-skills in the National Agencies.

2.3.3.2 Future framework

International practices from in particular Canada and the USA¹² from programmes similar to the European Voluntary Service could be applied. A number of indicators should be set with the objective to establish a coherent evaluation framework related to the impact and programme performance. In this context the Commission will follow the development of the "Measuring Volunteering Toolkit" which is being developed by the United Nations in the framework of the International Year of Volunteers 2001.

Different methods are proposed for measuring the impact on young people, host and sending communities/organisations, non-formal learning and institutional changes. The

¹² The Evaluation of Learn and Serve America (1997) by Brandeis University, USA; Structuring Student Volunteering Programmes to the benefit of Students and the Community (1998-1999), Ryserson Polytechnic University, Ontario, Canada; Volunteering and Giving Among Teenagers 12 to 17, USA, Gallup Organisation for Independent Sector; The prudential Spirit of Community Youth Survey, USA (1995)

recommendation of the evaluators is to make a European wide co-orientated youth cohort study, which would enable before and after comparisons between those involved in the EVS and with similar groups of non-participants. An alternative (and less expensive) way could be to focus on the behaviour and opinions of the participants before and after the voluntary service project.

2.3.4 IT and information tools

The main tool for partner finding was the database for host expressions of interest, which is available on the Internet. A number of problems were connected to the database and users have complained about the fact that descriptions were not up to date, projects in the database not available, not detailed enough and that the access was limited since not all sending organisations and volunteers had access to the Internet.

The SOS managed a website where most information related to the EVS could be found and although well visited the information does not seem to have reached the actual users of the Programme since a publicity strategy was missing. A communication/information strategy would have ensured a common approach on information activities between the National Agencies. Both National Agencies, volunteers, sending and host organisations desired more information on rules and practical issues from the Commission.

A Users' guide for the EVS was prepared but due to several shortcomings it was not as widely used as foreseen and most National Agencies produced their own information material.

2.4 Recommendations of the evaluators

The European Voluntary Service for young people involved more than 7000 volunteers and 1.600 organisations during the period 1996-1999 and supported activities, which most probably would not have happened without the Community funding. The success of the Programme has been most evident in relation to the impact on young people but also on the host and sending communities, which is in line with the objectives of the Programme.

Weaknesses have been highlighted in relation to the monitoring system and collection of data and the evaluators on possible improvements have given proposals. Also the objective to include young people at disadvantage has not been fully achieved.

The decentralised model applied for the implementation of the European Voluntary Service has worked well. The feedback mechanisms between the actors involved and the National Agencies/Commission have fulfilled its purposes and the procedures have been improved as the Pilot Action and Programme developed even if the information must be more systemised and streamlined.

2.5 Conclusions

In a Europe of knowledge where lifelong learning has been given high importance on the political agenda, the non-formal educational experience provided through the European Voluntary Service is of utmost importance. The Programme has given the volunteers a broad range of skills in an inter-cultural context and contributed to their personal development. This gives a clear answer to the question why the European Community should support voluntary service activities for young people.

The European Voluntary Service has brought a European dimension and new perspectives to many local communities and supported activities, which would not have happened otherwise. The European Voluntary Service has clearly been a new instrument, involving activities which were successfully complementary to similar national activities already existing in the Member States.

The Pilot Action and Programme have stimulated the creation of partnerships and exchanges of good practice and given a different approach to on-going activities. Even if the European Voluntary Service had a stronger emphasis on the learning experience for the volunteer than other similar programmes which tend to focus more on the service aspect there seem to have been an awareness about the importance of keeping the balance. In countries with less tradition in voluntary service the European Voluntary Service has provided a basis for the introduction of new concepts with the help from countries with more experience in the field.

Taken into account the proven and measurable positive impact that the European Voluntary Service had on the young people participating and also on organisations involved, the value for public investments can be regarded as an established fact. Also a comparison in relation to the notional wage cost indicates the same result (see point 2.2.4.2). The fact that the costs for management have steadily decreased shows that both the Commission and the National Agencies have become more efficient in the management of the European Voluntary Service.

The impact of the European Voluntary Service on policy and legislation is as expected low given the moderate scale of the Programme and the rigid

legal systems that would have to be changed. A number of obstacles exist before volunteers can join the European Voluntary Service without problems related to the lack of status for volunteers. The Commission proposed a Recommendation in order to remove some of those obstacles. This Recommendation¹³ was approved by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament in May 2001.

The European Voluntary Service did not contribute to increased recognition of non-formal education even though the Programme has served as a good example.

The logic model established for the European Voluntary Service has overall functioned as planned even though the partnership between volunteer, sending and host organisations in some cases has not been as strong as expected. The role of the sending organisation has not been fully developed and one explanation could be that the volunteers who participated have been capable of doing part of the work that should have been done by the sending organisations. However, in order to increase the inclusion of young people at disadvantage into the YOUTH Programme the role of the sending organisations will have to be strengthened which has already been done in the new YOUTH Programme. The training framework that has been developed over the years is now ready for streamlining and further development.

The educational background of the volunteers is relatively high which reflects the overall need for this type of activity in a Europe where the access to the labour market is limited for young people and where a non-formal learning experience is attractive also to young people with higher education. Instead of "closing" the Programme for those young people, more focus should be on how to open it to all young people. The inclusion of young people at disadvantage is a main priority in the YOUTH Programme, a strategy is being developed and the evaluation shows that there are still measures to be taken. The triangular partnership seem to be even more important when working with young people at disadvantage and it is obvious that the investments of the partners regarding preparations, training and time are considerable.

The decentralised management of the Pilot Action and the Programme has functioned well. During the short period of four years (1996 – 1999) over 7000 volunteers took part in the Programme and the network of National Agencies and their competence in the field made this major achievement possible. During the Pilot Action, considerable work had to be done both at European and national level in setting up the National Agencies, establishing work methods, new procedures and guidelines and in some cases introducing a new concept of voluntary service which accordingly slowed down the implementation but which now is of benefit to the YOUTH Programme. Improvements are to be made when it comes

¹³ Ref. COM (01) 708

to information and communication, both within the network but also towards beneficiaries on the grassroots level.

The evaluation report emphasises that an adequate system for monitoring has not fully been in place and needs to be improved even though the feedback mechanisms of what has been happening on the field has functioned very well. Related to the lack of monitoring is the absence of reliable data. However, the tool is there (Granta) and when correctly and fully used it will serve as a good instrument for data collecting and monitoring.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the results of the “Youth for Europe” and “European Voluntary Service” Programmes, conclusions and recommendations resulting from the evaluations of these two Programmes should be considered in the light of the new YOUTH Programme, established by a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 containing all the actions of the two previous programmes.

Indeed, a major part of these conclusions and recommendations are already being applied in the context of this Programme, for the simplification of procedures, decentralisation, participation of young people at disadvantage or information.

Simplification of procedures

The “Youth for Europe” and “European Voluntary Service” Programmes made it possible to test various methods of implementation of the Actions.

The launch of the YOUTH Programme provided the opportunity to simplify the procedures based on conclusions drawn from previous experience of the past years. These simplifications aim in particular to facilitate access to the Programme, to improve the transparency of financing and to speed up the transfer of payments.

A User's Guide for all the actions of the Programme has been placed at the disposal of the public. It is being modified progressively throughout the implementation of the Programme.

A new financing system has been set up based on more standardised rules (lump sum system), a greater emphasis on the outcome of the projects and a policy of limiting the need for supporting documents to an essential minimum. The application and report forms have also been simplified.

To guarantee a common approach towards the implementation of the Programme, several Working Groups involving the National Agencies were set up concerning, for example the revision of the User's Guide.

Decentralisation

Under the YOUTH Programme, the decentralisation of the implementation of the Actions has been increased. Youth Initiatives (Action All 1 of “Youth for Europe” and Action 3 of YOUTH), for example, are now completely decentralised. The projects involving third countries are subject to a semi-decentralised procedure, which gives the National Agencies the responsibility for the contracts and their financing.

At the time of the launch of the European Voluntary Service (EVS), most of the National Agencies involved in “Youth for Europe” were also made responsible

for EVS. The majority of them then became National Agencies for the YOUTH Programme thus facilitating the fusion of the former two Programmes.

The responsibilities between the Commission, the National authorities and their Agencies are defined in the document entitled "Provisions relating to the responsibilities of the Member States and of the Commission concerning the National Agencies" approved by the Commission on 7 December 2000.

In order to harmonise the decentralised management of the Programme an operational guide intended for the National Agencies is being prepared. It will propose concrete instructions and guidelines regarding most aspects of the implementation of the Programme.

At the same time, specific training for the National Agency members has been set up.

The development of enhanced methods of communication amongst the National Agencies themselves on the one hand and between the National Agencies and the Commission on the other, is foreseen for the year 2002.

Multilateral activities

The evaluation of "Youth for Europe" stressed the weak development of multilateral exchanges, which play a more important role than others in incorporating the European dimension, and the reasons for this situation.

Under the YOUTH Programme, a particular effort is being made with regard to multilateral activities. For instance, a target of at least 30% of decentralised funds allocated to multilateral projects has been set for the first year of implementation.

From the first conclusions of this first year it seems that multilateral operations have developed significantly.

Young people at disadvantage

Under the "Youth for Europe" and "European Voluntary Service" Programmes, a specific effort was made to increase the participation of young people at disadvantage. Despite positive results, the impact of these measures remains difficult to assess in particular due to the lack of integration between the various types of initiatives.

The Commission has therefore proposed the development of an overall inclusion strategy for the YOUTH Programme. This initiative, which is one of the priorities of the 2001 Work Plan, obtained the support of the Programme Committee and of all National Agencies.

This strategy, which is being developed in close cooperation with the Agencies, should be finalised by mid-2001. It will be implemented during the following two years and will be comprised of concrete actions. For example, bilateral exchanges under Action 1 of the Programme will initially focus on projects involving young people at disadvantage; the short-term voluntary service as well

as the support given to Action 3 of the Programme will be developed in a more structured manner; and information actions targeted specifically at groups of young people at disadvantage will be organised.

Visibility of the Programme

The evaluations highlighted a certain lack of visibility of the two Programmes concerned.

At the time of the launch of the YOUTH Programme in 2000, an Action dedicated to information was developed in all participating countries and at European level.

In order to improve the co-ordination of these initiatives, a communication strategy is being developed. The National Agencies are directly involved in this process in order to implement the actions at European, national, regional or local level and to maximise their impact.

In addition to the dissemination of general information about the Programme (booklets, website, etc.), specific actions targeted at groups such as young people at disadvantage are planned as well as the creation of a handbooks on good practices targeted at participating organisations.

The National Agencies and the Eurodesk information networks will play a dominant role in the dissemination of information.

Monitoring and evaluation

A framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the YOUTH Programme is being developed based on some of the recommendations of the evaluators. To this end the Commission is working out a series of regular indicators which will allow, with the assistance of the National Agencies, a more systematic monitoring of the implementation of the Programme.

Thematic studies and/or analysis are foreseen (for example an analyse regarding the gender distribution of the participants in the programme and the factors influencing this distribution). A reflection could also be done regarding the links between youth and culture: in 2000 almost 30% of the supported projects within the framework of the programme had a theme related to culture.

The new Youthlink database, which will integrate the existing systems, should be an appropriate tool responding to the needs of both the National Agencies and the Commission. It will be available before the end of 2001.

Regarding the evaluation of projects and the resulting non-formal education experience, new methods could be explored for example in co-operation with universities.

Contrary to the recommendations made by the evaluators, the Commission does not intend to set up a Youth Observatory. The Commission intends to favour networking.

The interim evaluation foreseen for 30 June 2005 as stated in the legal base of the programme, will include the above mentioned considerations.

The experience gained through the implementation of the “Youth for Europe” and “European voluntary Service “ Programmes made it possible to remedy a number of shortcomings identified previously and highlighted by the two external evaluations.