

Alliance's accessing policy

Introduction

Since 1998 the Alliance has developed an accessing policy aiming to facilitate access to international voluntary service for all young people or adults facing exclusion.

Over 300 people have benefited from this action so far, some within the European educational programmes (5 EVS workcamps contracts) and some without an institutional framework.

As we are often restricted by program conditions such as criteria, placement techniques, changes of staff and representatives within workcamp organisations, we felt the need to have a political document that states clearly the aims and the principles of the Alliance's accessing policy.

This paper is referring to the educational framework and the background of the Alliance's accessing policy.

It is dedicated to all Alliance's members and partners who participate in this action.

A very basic principle: accessing for all workcamps!

With more than 3.000 workcamps around the world, Alliance's member organisations offer over 25.000 volunteering opportunities. All workcamps are open to anyone and often provide a first volunteering experience abroad. Workcamps are gender balanced, with even more female participants, a unique situation regarding construction work or environmental activities. Without implementing a heavily centralised programme, Alliance's network offers a chance to young people or adults facing exclusion to experiment a first mobility action.

The Alliance's Accessing principle is to open one or two places in as many international workcamps as possible, to participants with fewer opportunities, who, for any reason, face social, cultural, economical, physical barriers to their participation.

1. History

Alliance, SCI, YAP were invited in 1998 by the European Commission to a pilot centralised EVS project in order to offer disadvantaged young people the opportunity to experiment voluntary service through international workcamps.

Since then, Alliance succeeded five more approved inclusion projects (under the EU youth programme) with the European Commission, in which 200 young volunteers with fewer opportunities participated.

In 2004, Alliance decided to launch a permanent accessing workcamp campaign on international level (not only European).

2. Alliance achievements!

Through this long experience of accessing workcamps Alliance has developed:

- A cooperative network of more than 80 organisations worldwide with a vast experience in placing volunteers facing exclusion
- An education framework based on volunteer's special needs, supported by sending partner in close cooperation with local community workers

- Accessing tools in order to facilitate exchanges and support the pedagogical dimension of this experience (mentorship, preparation of leaders ...)
- Flexibility to use (or not) inclusion programmes on national, European (Youth in action, Grundtvig, ESF) or international level. Even without support, Alliance members have succeeded to develop A4A exchanges.
- Capacity to implement this project through a very flexible coordination scheme (A4A working group)

3. The policy

Through two General Assemblies (2002 & 2004), Alliance decided to have a permanent inclusion policy based on five main priorities:

- To open one or two places in every workcamp for young people with fewer opportunities
- To launch an annual "**accessing campaign**" open to any volunteer with fewer opportunities
- To plan collective events: volunteer post camps, leader study sessions, advanced planning visits etc
- To develop supportive Accessing Tools
- To request funds to local bodies, European Commission or Council of Europe whenever it is possible in order to support exchanges or events
- To search for resources in order to support the coordination of this action, keep coherency, provide support and evaluate the results and the outcomes.

4. Implementation

This policy is implemented by a permanent Access for all Working Group (A4AWG) monitored by the Executive Committee.

In order to implement the Alliance Accessing Policy, the most prominent way in the Alliance is to launch an annual accessing campaign. The campaign is meant to raise awareness, enforce members to participate and give visibility towards our international partners. Participating at the campaign is optional for all organisations. The action is open to partner organisations, too. Since 2005 15 to 20 organisations were actively involved every year.

The campaign is launched every year (usually during the GA) and organisations are invited to join. In December, the organisations sign in the project mentioning their objectives and capacities. In February, they provide their concrete programme. In March, an overview accessing programme is compiled during the Technical Meeting (Alliance's day). From April to October, workcamps and exchanges are organised. In November, the year's accessing project is evaluated.

5. Policy framework

International workcamps apart from being an intercultural and citizenship action are as well a valuable learning experience! For many young people, but even adults as well as seniors, who need to gain confidence and intercultural practice, workcamps can be a first personal inclusion step.

Accessing workcamp can be considered as well as a life long learning or as vocational training process. Alliance's members aim to support any disadvantaged volunteer to access voluntary service by different means:

- opening their international workcamps to everyone
- promoting different international voluntary service experience (short, medium and long term)

- developing European or international programs whenever possible (e.g. decentralised EVS)
- influencing national volunteering, civil, civic or community service

5.1 Active support to volunteers

Through this first workcamp experience abroad, we support the volunteer to:

- Succeed in his/her mobility experience in another country
- Join an international group of volunteers and become active part of it
- Acknowledge his/her progress and success
- Apply to one longer term volunteering project (EVS in Europe or other LT projects in the world)

This support is provided through common tools and in close cooperation between sending and hosting organisations.

5.2 Individual support

The support offered is personalised as both mentor and workcamp leader are cooperating in order to develop:

- Assessment on abilities and skills of the volunteer
- Estimation of the restraints and barriers to participation
- Final evaluation and definition of future step to be undertaken
- Support in finding the next project

5.3 Support methods

2 main evaluation frames are proposed for each project:

- Monitoring: one workcamp book (travel journal) for volunteers
- Mentorship: one evaluation process for mentors and leaders

5.4 Global Educational Team

Every project involves:

- One sending "mentor"
- One Workcamp "leader" or local coordinator
- Assistance from ALLIANCE (working group, steering group, project assistant...)

5.5 Basic requirements for the A4A workcamps

The main pedagogical aim of an accessing workcamp is to provide the participants with new skills and to facilitate their active involvement, as citizen, in community life.

This means that by the end of the accessing workcamp the volunteers should be:

- Self confident: able to leave his/her community, travel and live in another country
- Motivated: able to involve him/herself in the project preparation and implementation
- Flexible: able to adapt to the needs of a project and the local conditions

For the assessment of this process there have been identified 4 success criteria:

- Integration: being active member of the group and the local project
- Contributions: fulfil the task/mission agreed on
- Initiative: Improve the project by new ideas or actions

- Follow up: complete the project and plan his/her future steps*

***Note: Even if the volunteer does not go for another voluntary service experience, accessing workcamp has provided him/her with new skills.**

6. Future challenges

Accessing workcamps should be seen as an important educational activity, with a huge potential. So far we have experienced that we are able to implement them easily but within limited numbers. When EU programme was launched (EVS), we were able to incorporate our accessing action in it, but we were trapped in the programme's technical procedures.

The current international crisis would bring deep changes on economical and social level and our role is (could be) really central in order to support peoples' mobility, active participation and citizenship, especially of those facing social exclusion.

The main challenges to be faced are:

- With so many opportunities, why do we keep limited number of accessing exchanges?
- How can we improve the accessing process in order to bring the more excluded populations, to longer term international voluntary service?
- Why our results are not visible?

7. Conclusion

To answer to these challenges, Alliance should focus on:

- Supporting the organisations to step in and to improve their accessing skills.
- Reinforcing Alliance's monitoring and capitalisation capacities in order to develop new actions, initiatives, tools, approaches.
- Organising a collective validation system to give better impact to this experience (EQF, Europass, Youthpass ...) and consequently better recognition.
- Cooperating with other networks or programmes.