

**Alliance Policy Paper**  
**On Sustainability**



of European  
Voluntary Service  
Organisations

**„We're never going to scare people into living more sustainably! We have to be able to demonstrate just how dynamic and aspirational such a world could be“**

-- *'The World We Made'* by Jonathon Porritt --

The idea of sustainability had been present in the organizations and actions of Alliance long before the International Campaign for Sustainability in International Voluntary Service (IVS) was created and launched for the first time in 2010. For many years, members of the network have discussed about how to raise awareness for certain environmental issues. The first launch of the Campaign, with as many as 22 organizations and 3 networks joining the Campaign, showed just how much environmental sustainability had already been acknowledged by 2010. Since then the idea has been developed further in particular but not exclusively by the Environmental Sustainability Working Group (ESWG).

This Policy Paper aims at providing a framework regarding environmental sustainability. It gives a short overview on what sustainability means, how it can and should be placed in the context of IVS and Alliance as well as what possibilities the network offers and what standards we are setting for our events, projects and offices. The paper is not a final document: it should be considered work in progress. As much as the discussion about the topic is dynamic, this paper, too, should be developed further as the network as well as scientific, academic and political conditions change. We therefore ask future members of the ESGW to adjust the document accordingly.

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# Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organization

## - who we are -

The **Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organizations** is a European based International Non-Governmental Youth Organization of like-minded organizations not aligned to other international structures. It is a cooperative network of independent and active national organizations, working together on the quality and development of International Voluntary Service.

**The Alliance has 50 members in 29 countries.** Member organizations act to **encourage and support voluntary service programs**, international workcamps and other long-term activities, enabling young people to meet and understand different cultures, whilst carrying out community projects of public benefit: EVS, short term projects, medium term voluntary service, youth leaders exchanges & trainings, inclusion, environmental, cultural & local development projects.

**The Alliance provides capacity building for its members** from IVS technical placement procedures to training and social skills development, external relations, social inclusion/participation, environmental and general sustainability in IVS projects and networking events, quality management, volunteering trends research and policy development on various issues representing the network.

For us, **becoming an active citizen starts with participating in International Voluntary Service (IVS) short term projects (workcamps)**, which involve local communities working with volunteers from different national/cultural/social backgrounds.

Another important aspect **is cooperation with institutions/networks/other European organizations in the youth field.** We are actively involved in YFJ, CoE's co-management system (Advisory Council and Programming Committee), with like-minded organizations also, to shape European youth policy, strategies on inclusion, environmental awareness and general sustainability and youth participation so to improve the situation of youth in Europe.

Alliance has a clearly set **social inclusion strategy**, supported by its Accessing Campaign. It facilitates and encourages the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities (YPWFO) by ensuring places for them in most of activities hosted by member organizations as well as in Alliance events.

Alliance also has a **Training and Education Policy Paper** that provides a guideline to support the network itself as well as its member organisations in terms of running a project as well as training multipliers and facilitators for basic and specific topics and actions. The **Alliance Pool of Trainers** (A-PoT) and the **Alliance Long-term Training Course** (LTTC) provide a sustainable source for educational activities by developing and development of well qualified trainers.

Alliance furthermore supports the **International Campaign for a Sustainable Voluntary Service.** The campaign includes 4 principles which can be followed to put IVS projects on a path towards sustainability. The ESG was established in 2012 to support the network's activities in this field. This policy paper is part of the ESG's efforts to outline and, thus, clarify the principles and opportunities at hand regarding environmental sustainability in Alliance.

## The Environmental Sustainability Working Group

The ESWG was created in 2012 with the aim of promoting the principles of the Sustainability Campaign carried out by the Alliance as well as to support the associations in the enhancement of environmental sustainability in workcamps and in their activities.

The organizations of the ESWG share, with all Alliance associations, the will to transform our communities. They strive for a fairer world, one that is sustainable, possesses a more balanced use of resources, and enacts social justice, all of which will lead toward the development of people, communities, their happiness and solidarity. As Alliance projects and events promote active citizenship, cultural and social exchange, cooperation and peace between different cultures and people, they also suggest alternative models of economic, environmental and civil development. Thus, they help building a conscious relationship between communities and the surrounding environment and nature.

The ESWG is working towards the realization of the network's commitment, i.e. raising environmental sustainability standards in all Alliance events and projects, especially workcamps, as well as in Alliance member organizations' offices. Part of this realization process was the Ecological training course realized in accordance with the TNWG.

Furthermore, the ESWG assures the distribution of the tools available for carrying out the Sustainability Campaign as well as providing active support to Alliance member organizations.

## Sustainable Development

Since 1972, the year the first United Nations conference on environmental protection took place in Stockholm, there has been a serious debate over the destruction of natural resources and the opportunities to improve the living conditions of humans. The conclusion that development has to be long-term as well as long-lasting while at the same time preserving basic natural resources, itself already manifesting an idea of sustainability, was taken up by the Brundtland Commission, which defined sustainability in its final report as development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition given in *World Commission on Environment and Development: Our common future* in 1987 is regarded as "the essential point of reference," according to the OECD report on sustainable Development. (OECD: Sustainable Development: Critical Issues, 2001) Since then the topic of sustainability has emerged as a very present topic in many organizations and networks.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the term and topic have made the move from a primarily academic field of interest towards **recognition from politicians, international institutions and companies**, for instance, the term Corporate Social Responsibility has made its way into companies. Facing challenges in the Voluntary World, Alliance had taken the opportunity to discuss this topic at the Alliance Conference in Ankara in 2010.

However, the **United Nations** have held a **series of conferences and conventions** and also, rather recently, created the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). With these they have been and still are decisively shaping the future of the sustainable development

discussion and implementation. The SDSN has recently presented a draft for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the successor of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the post-2015 era. However, the most notable among the UN conferences after 1972 are the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro and the 2012 Rio + 20 Conference in Rio de Janeiro. Part of the outcomes of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 was the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) next to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

The further developments of the UNFCCC lead, in 1997, to the approval of the Kyoto Protocol, the first international binding agreement on Climate Change. The Kyoto Protocol contained compulsory limits to Green House Gas emissions of every participating country, for the period from 2008 - 2012. Afterwards, the international community did not manage to reach another binding agreement, which is fundamental in order to mitigate and prevent global warming effects and to support sustainable development.

The basic idea to be considered is that the concept of sustainable development is based on ethical principles such as responsibility and justice. It therefore aims at **providing a better quality of life for everyone**, now and for generations to come while offering a vision of progress that integrates immediate and long-term objectives, local and global action, and regards social, economic and environmental issues as inseparable and interdependent components of human progress.

In this context environmental sustainability strives for a continuous long-term improvement of environmental quality through the **creation of sustainable communities that are able to manage and use resources efficiently**, address and develop the ecological and social innovation potential of the economy, and, eventually, ensure prosperity, environmental protection and social cohesion.

Our current way of living makes huge demands on the planet which has reached its boundaries. During the 20th century, the world increased its use of fossil fuels and extracted 34 times more material resources. Demand for food, animal feed and fibre might increase by 70 % by the year 2050 (European Commission: A healthy and sustainable environment for future generations, 2013).

If we carry on using resources at the current rate, we will need more than two planets to sustain us. It is necessary to adopt a more systematic approach that takes the links between various themes and their global dimension into account. This means **moving from remediation to prevention of environmental degradation**, e.g. strengthening the resilience of our ecosystems, which provide food, fresh water, raw materials and many other benefits and contribute to productivity, economic development, public health and quality of life.

**Sustainable development will not be brought about by governmental policies only:** in addition to large-scale political and economic decisions, **it must be taken up by society** at large as a principle guiding the many choices each citizen makes every day. This requires profound changes in thinking, in economic and social structures and in consumption and production patterns.

There are **several networks active in the field of sustainable development** such as the *International Young Nature Friends (IYNF)*, the *YOUNGO Global Youth Movement on Climate Change* or the *WWF*. The *YOUNGO Movement* has worked with several networks, among them African Youth Initiative on Climate Change, China Youth Climate Action Network, French Youth Coalition for Climate and Social Justice, UK Youth Climate Coalition or SustainUS. The Division

for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has recently stated in its report *Sustainable Development in Action: Special Report on Voluntary Commitment and Partnerships for Sustainable Development* that "what the post-2015 era need[s] is **a new architecture that is inclusive of all stakeholders to participate and commit to concrete actions.**"

It is this larger framework in which the Alliance should be placed. We are part of a larger setting, i.e. regional and international networks that work together, for instance, on combating climate change. And while Alliance is a network working together in the field of voluntary service, promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding, thus, peace, we cannot exclude environmental sustainability as it is a basic component of a peaceful world.

## **International Voluntary Service and Sustainability**

Volunteering is about action and service; it is about active citizenship, social cohesion, partnership and relationships. The effect of volunteering across many areas of people's lives, and on local, national and global development can be transformational. It may, furthermore, suggest alternative models of economic, environmental and social development.

Every year around 18.000 volunteers participating in over 2000 local development projects are exchanged within the network of Alliance. Additionally, the Alliance meetings organised throughout the year gather around 400 participants from more than 80 national voluntary service organisations, from more than 40 countries. It is our responsibility to make our actions contribute to sustainable development of communities.

Alliance recognizes sustainability as a key element of its strategic approach and plan of action. In this framework, workcamps help building a conscious relationship between communities and the surrounding environment and nature. They are conceived as a chance to raise awareness about sustainable good practices among all the actors involved in our projects: volunteers, local communities and administrative councils. Mobility, lodging and food are three of the main aspects of sustainability in IVS.

Furthermore, members of Alliance agree to adopt a wider and longer vision: our actions inspire and encourage people to engage in shaping, implementing and monitoring a truly sustainable development agenda for the future, one that is characterised by human rights, environmental responsibility, inclusive development, fair and democratic governance, freedom of movement, peace, well-being, and the fight against inequalities.

Volunteerism continues to play a key role in contributing to sustainable development and **Alliance takes up the challenge to enhance and lead this process.** In international platforms where Alliance is partner, like the European Youth Forum, the network will also promote environmental sustainability since the right to live in a healthy environment must be considered and presented as one of the main human rights that lead to peace and democracy.

**The network represents the powerful voices of volunteers.** Thus, in order to be involved in the decisions that shape our lives, Alliance commits - in accordance with network policies, its Plan of Action (PoA) and the Executive Committee (EC) - to:

- strengthen its lobbying role,
- seek the space and opportunity to engage with authorities, decision makers and other key stakeholders
- become an active partner in international cooperation, networks and partnerships such as IYNF, the *YOUNGO Movement* and sister networks.

## **International Campaign for Sustainability in Voluntary Service**

In 2009, several International Voluntary Service organizations agreed on the importance to promote and coordinate common actions for sustainability and created the International Campaign for a Sustainable Voluntary Service. After the approval of the General Assembly (GA) to establish the ESWG in 2012, Alliance has launched, promoted and evaluated the Campaign which has focused more and more on the environmental sustainability aspects of the IVS.

The **objectives** of the Campaign can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ The **short term objective** is to sensitize and empower the organizations and their volunteers through the development of working methodologies. Thus, enable as many organizations as possible to join and adopt the principles of the Campaign.
- ✓ The **medium term objective** is to increase the level of environmental sustainability of IVS projects making the footprint of voluntary service more and more positive. Thus, the impact of voluntary service projects on environment and society may be improved.
- ✓ The **long term objective** is to impulse and feed a social change toward sustainability, to achieve changes in policies and new measures that improve the chances for sustainability in our countries and communities: to get real support to sustainable transport, fair trade, ecological agriculture, etc. The Campaign also aims at giving a message to society that a change towards environmental sustainability is possible and necessary.

**Every year**, organizations and interested networks are invited to **join the Campaign** following these guidelines:

1. **Respect and promote the principles** of the Campaign by involving camp leaders and volunteers.
2. **Use and spread all the tools provided by the ESWG.**
3. **Participate in the international common actions** organized by the working group.



# Methodologies

The Campaign focuses on 3 main methodologies to promote its message: Action, Education and Networking.

## **ACTION: Transform our behavior and lives to be more sustainable**

It is our responsibility not only to promote but also to adopt more sustainable ways to consume, exchange and act as individuals. Part of our action is working for the transformation toward a sustainable way of living through the final products of our projects. A substantial part of this transformation are our daily personal actions and how they affect our world. This refers to the (inter)action in Alliance projects and events. The aim is to show ourselves, our volunteers and society that different living habits are necessary and possible by living the possibilities. We therefore acknowledge that we are part of a global challenge that connects our lives, and that our actions, big and small, matter.

Therefore, the backbone of the Campaign is the use and interplay of 4 principles of action:

- ✓ Reducing consumption as well as pollution.
- ✓ Be aware of consumption patterns and be critical about them.
- ✓ Create and engage in actions to improve the environment.
- ✓ Create and engage in actions of education for sustainability.

Every year the Sustainability Campaign is represented by one common action implemented simultaneously in the workcamps and events of the Alliance and other networks. This common action aims at increasing awareness among volunteers and communities about our potentialities to impact the environment, our local community or even the world.

## **EDUCATION for sustainability**

It is up to us, as social and educational organizations, to take the first steps to learn, experiment, and instill, so that our volunteers and society understand that different living habits are necessary and possible.

The **camp leaders have a key role as multipliers** of sustainability messages. In order to improve their capacity in transmitting the values of the Sustainability Campaign to the volunteers, **Alliance fosters a medium term learning strategy**. This is based on the seasonal workcamps life-cycle and therefore conceived as a process that lasts all year. The strategy is taking into consideration that the process is divided into three phases:

- ✓ **Preparation** (of camp leaders) through **national Camp Leader Trainings**,
- ✓ **Implementation** (of workcamps) and
- ✓ **Follow-up** through the evaluation (forms) of the Campaign and the Common Action.

Furthermore, in a broader vision aimed at building the capacity of all actors of IVS, Environmental Sustainability is being incorporated in the Alliance training strategy. The focus needs to be on the **continuous upgrading and exchange of information** among associations about the issues relating to the world outside Alliance's life. Raising the level of **information and awareness of the world dynamics** helps the network to **prepare for the upcoming challenges**.

The modification of the way the network (re)acts according to what happens outside regarding issues such as climate change, current conflicts, mistreatment situations, waste management, organic and GMO free food will enable all members to actively participate and feel embedded in a strong system providing support and engaging in action for peace.

### **NETWORKING: Engaging in partnerships with local associations, IVS organizations and platforms**

Our strength is our commitment and our union. The Campaign was born in a wide context of cooperation with other networks such as CCIVS, NVDA and SCI; it is our aim to foster and enlarge this cooperation with other networks and organisations.

The more we are working together for the Campaign, the better and stronger it will be. We can identify and respect common standards of sustainability, share our best practices and learn from the process of interaction with other organisations, networks and communities.

## **Tools**

The ESWG created a set of documents, a toolkit, to support all Alliance organisations in carrying out the principles of the Campaign. The toolkit documents provide **practical instruments and methods** to improve the sustainability in and of volunteering projects, especially workcamps, but also events organized by Alliance and its members.

The toolkit consists of the following documents:

- **Environmental Sustainability Handbook** – recommends a variety of good ecological practices to be implemented during workcamps and all events. It should be sent to local organisers of workcamps, organisations hosting Alliance events and camp leaders (and discussed among volunteers).
- **Food Infosheet** – presents information on the correlation between food and environment as well as several recipes. It should be sent to camp leaders and provides a platform for discussion among volunteers.
- **Sustainable transport Infosheet** – is a collection of information suggesting a low-impact travel choice in several countries. It has to be sent to the volunteers together with or before the infosheet.
- **Evaluation forms** – help us to monitor the effectiveness of the environmental sustainability we are promoting inside the workcamps. The form has to be sent to camp leaders, filled by them soon after the workcamp and then elaborated for an evaluation of the Campaign.
- **Training workshop** – is a **model workshop** aimed at informing and involving the camp leaders about the Sustainability Campaign; it is to be implemented during each organisation's national seminar.

## Responsibilities

The ESWG is responsible for carrying out the Sustainability Campaign:

- Update campaign documents.
- Inform members about the process and ongoing activities.
- Create, develop and monitor actions to raise awareness and increase visibility, e.g. the Energy Free Day.
- Evaluate the achievement of the objectives.
- Support members in their efforts to raise awareness and/or become more sustainable in their actions, i.e. workcamps, events as well as offices.

Alliance members are responsible for:

- The distribution of information (see tools) among their staff and volunteers.
- The training of their staff and volunteers regarding the Campaign.

## Abbreviations

A-Pot	Alliance Pool of Trainers
EC	Executive Committee
ESWG	Environmental Sustainability Working Group
GA	General Assembly
GC	General Conference
IVS	International Voluntary Service
IYNF	International Young Nature Friends
PoA	Plan of Action
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
TM	Technical Meeting
TNWG	Training Needs Working Group
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WWF	World Wildlife Fund