

Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations

Policy Paper on Sustainability



of European
Voluntary Service
Organisations

About this paper

International Voluntary Service (IVS) substantially contributes to intercultural understanding and exchange, and the global movement for peace. As such, it also bears great potential to further sustainability and improve the resilience of communities and ecosystems all around the world. This idea has been present in the **Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations** (Alliance) for a long time, mirrored in its actions and way of working.

This Policy Paper was created by the Environmental Sustainability Working Group (ESWG) of the Alliance in 2017, and is the updated version of a first paper published in 2015. Its purpose is to provide a framework for sustainable development and specifying the role of Alliance members towards it. It is not a final document but shall be revised and developed further as the network as well as academia, science or politics move on.



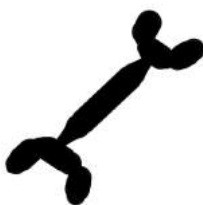
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1. The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations



The **Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations** is a European non-governmental youth organisation, a cooperative network of independent national organisations working together on the quality and development of IVS. Its major goal is to enable young people to meet and understand different cultures whilst carrying out community projects of public benefit. Traditionally, these are short-term voluntary workcamps, but they may as well be mid- or long-term volunteering projects.

The Alliance in a nutshell:

Founded in 1982
 Today more than 45 members
 In more than 25 countries
 worldwide

technical placement procedures
 development of social skills
 policy development quality management
 trainings **sustainability**
 external relations volunteering trends research
 social inclusion and participation

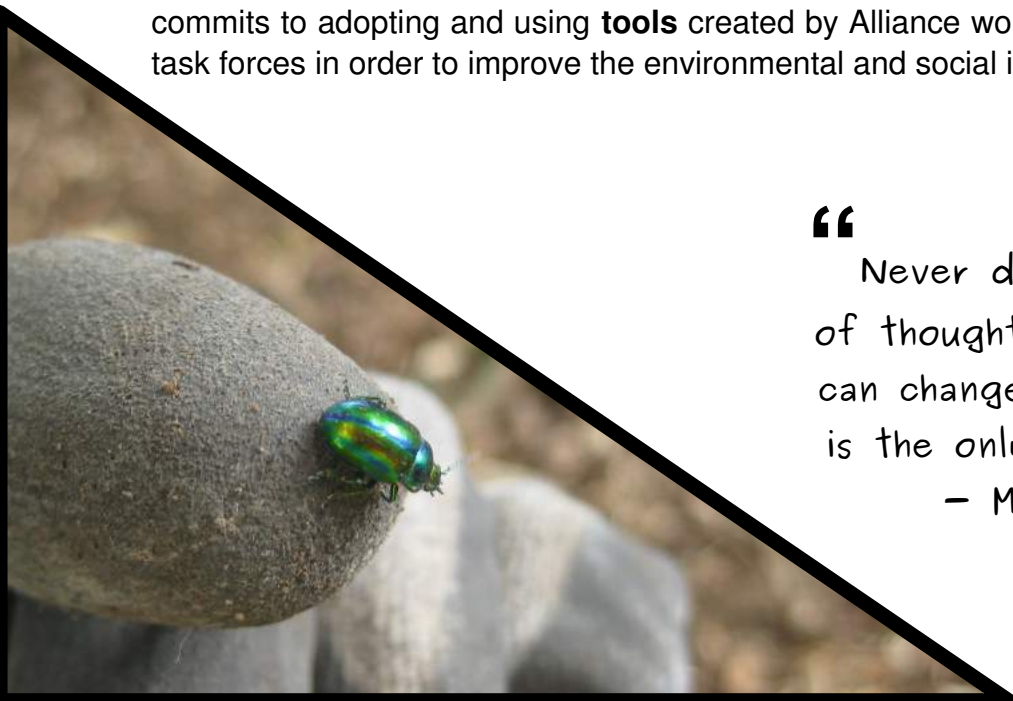
To **support** its members, the Alliance provides a range of capacity-building measures, many of them concerning the functionality of the network as a platform for the exchange of international volunteers.

Sustainability is of particular interest as well: The Alliance aims to **internalise the principles of sustainability** in the organisational structures of the network, and to **share** them with the member organisations, volunteers and local partners. Besides, the network strives for the **exchange** with authorities, decision-makers and other key-stakeholders and seeks to strengthen its **lobbying role for sustainability**. Last but not least, the Alliance commits to adopting and using **tools** created by Alliance working groups, committees and task forces in order to improve the environmental and social impacts of our actions.

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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

– Margaret Mead –



2. Sustainability and the Alliance



Global interconnectedness is increasingly shaping people's way of living and thinking. The Alliance, too, believes in one world – this view is the base and core of the network's activities. But whereas globalisation is frequently linked to phenomena like data processing and skimming, war and suppression, or production of raw materials and global trade, the Alliance envisions and strives for intercultural communication and understanding, for equality and peace, and for a sustainable development of both society and planet.

Since a couple of decades, sustainability and sustainable development are highly discussed topics. Some relevant milestones in the debate that shaped the Alliance's understanding of sustainability are the following:

1987 One of the most famous definitions of sustainable development is coined, the **Brundtland definition**: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development *Our Common Future*). This definition stresses the claim for **intergenerational as well as intragenerational justice**.

1992 The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as Earth Summit, takes place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. One important result of this conference is Agenda 21, a non-binding **action plan of the UN outlining sustainable development** in the 21st century. It addresses stakeholders on global, national as well as local level.

2000 Following the Millennium Summit of the UN, the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** are established: Eight goals on poverty, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnerships for development that UN member states and other actors aspire to reach till 2015.

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Your future depends on what
you do today.
– Mahatma Gandhi –



2010 Facing challenges in the world of volunteering, the Alliance takes the opportunity to discuss the topic of sustainability at the Alliance Conference in Ankara. For many years, members of the Alliance have discussed possibilities to raise awareness for environmental issues, finally leading to the launch of the **International Campaign for Sustainability in International Voluntary Service**. 22 organisations and three networks joined the campaign, showing that the topic was present and acknowledged by quite some IVS organisations.

2012 The **Environmental Sustainability Working Group (ESWG)** of the Alliance is created with the aim of giving support and raising awareness for sustainability within the Alliance IVS organisations, in their projects and among volunteers. The group bases its work on three main methodologies: **education** – giving workshops and providing information and training material – **action** – engaging members and volunteers by means of awareness raising events and activities – and **networking** – connecting and collaborating with other organisations, institutions and networks in order to join forces for sustainability.

2015 The **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN** are adopted by world leaders. They are the successor of the Millennium Development Goals but are more ambitious in aiming to end all forms of poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all over the next 15 years. Although the SDGs are not legally binding, they call on everybody to take ownership and help towards achieving sustainability – may it be governments, organisations, companies, or individuals.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Source: United Nations



IVS contributions to sustainability and the SDGs

IVS is about the active citizenship of individuals, intercultural collaboration, and the contact and exchange with people from all around the world. IVS projects build on a range of approaches to sustainability – environmental work, reconstruction, peace-building, social work etc. – and aim for the development of resilient local communities with strong relationships to surrounding environments. Thus, IVS bears great potential to contribute to sustainable development on a larger scale, both globally and locally.

The Alliance tries at its best to support members and partners to assume responsibility and live up to that potential. Sustainability is considered as a key element of the strategic approach and plan of action of the network. With its work, commitments and internal policies, the Alliance contributes to the UN SDGs, especially in the following ways and goal areas:



... providing **capacity-building measures and support** to IVS organisations, volunteers and local partners to enable sustainable behaviour and action, and promoting **intercultural exchange and life-long learning**



... being enriched by the work of a **Gender Equality Working Groups**, taking into consideration volunteering activities as well as official Alliance documents



... offering activities and tools for **non-formal education**. Projects to measure the impact of IVS, e.g. the EU-funded I'VE show that youth participating in voluntary activities gain **new skills and competences**, the most important of which are teamwork and relationship competencies, openness and tolerance, intercultural competences, global understanding and understanding of diversity, communication competences, skills in a foreign language, and cultural awareness



... recognising that volunteers **benefit from diverse groups**, and aiming to make volunteering **available** for a wide range of people of various ethnicities, abilities, age etc. The Alliance **Access 4 All Working Group** provides additional support to make IVS accessible for everyone



... having a large number of volunteering projects organised by its members, all of which are run in **collaboration with local partners** and aim to **benefit local communities**. They involve, for instance, environmental work, construction and renovation, or social and cultural work.



... raising **awareness for sustainable choices** in member organisations' offices, their IVS projects and among volunteers and local partners. Special foci are travel choices, food choices, waste reduction and resource efficiency



... acknowledging the global sustainability challenge and the urgency to act against climate change. The Environmental Sustainability Working Group aspires to help IVS organisations generate **positive impacts** on both environment and society, and thereby **improve the environmental footprint** of IVS.



... being a **European network** of IVS organisations, and **collaborating** with other actors, networks and institutions on various levels. The **joint Campaign IVS for Climate Justice** manifests the shared commitment of several youth networks to combat climate change and promote sustainability

3. Methodologies



To foster sustainability within the network, its member organisations and partners all around the world, the Alliance focuses on 3 main methodologies to spread our message:

ACTION

Transform
behaviour and encourage
more sustainable ways
Of living

We encourage IVS volunteers to join different **actions and events on sustainability**, such as the yearly Alliance common action. Besides that, we provide a range of **capacity-building measures and tools** to empower both Alliance members and volunteers to take action for sustainability

We provide support for IVS organisation all through the **preparation** of camp leaders in national camp leader trainings, the **implementation** of sustainable practices in workcamps, and the **follow-up** of sustainable activities conducted by organisations and workcamps.

EDUCATION

Spreading knowledge
And competences
for sustainability

NETWORKING

Building partnerships with
youth organisations,
other networks
and various local actors

Networking makes us strong and ensures powerful and longlasting action for sustainability. Our aim is to foster and enlarge our **collaboration** with other networks and organisations such as CCIVS, NVDA, SCI, SEEYN and ICYE.

4. The Environmental Sustainability Toolkit



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

To this date, the toolkit consists of the following documents:



Green office info sheet – a practical one-page info sheet on sustainability in the office that can be printed and kept on the wall as a daily reminder.



Training workshop for camp leaders – a workshop proposal to be implemented during camp leader seminars conducted by IVS organisations. It is meant to help organisations inform and encourage their camp leaders to make use of sustainable practices in their camps.



Environmental Sustainability Handbook – a collection of recommendations on good ecological practices to be implemented during workcamps and all events, to be sent to local project partners and camp leaders and used by organisations when organising events.



Sustainable transport info sheet – a list of low-impact travel options in several countries to be sent to volunteers and used by organisations when organising events.



Sustainable food info sheet – a collection of information on the correlation between food and environment, containing several recipes, to be sent to camp leaders and used by organisations when organising events.



Booklet “Seed up and regrow!” – a collection of tips and instructions on how to regrow plants from kitchen leftovers, make compost or seed bombs at home, in the garden, on the balcony or even in the office.



Sustainability games – a collection of games addressing and interlinking various topics such as sustainability, development and environment, to be shared with camp leaders and used by organisations in their trainings.

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It always seems impossible
until it's done.

– Nelson Mandela –



References

Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations: <http://www.alliance-network.eu/>

Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service: <http://www.ccivs.org/>

International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE): <http://www.icye.org/>

IVS for Climate Justice: <https://ivsforclimatejustice.wordpress.com/>

Network for Voluntary Development in Asia: <http://nvda-asia.org/>

Service Civil International: <http://www.sci.ngo/>

South East European Youth Network (SEEYN): <http://www.seeyn.org/>

United Nations – Brundtland Report: <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development:
<http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html/>

United Nations – Millennium Development Goals: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

United Nations – Sustainable Development Goals:
<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

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