



ALLIANCE REPRESENTATION PLAN

Introduction:

The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations is an International Non-Governmental Youth Organisation. It represents national voluntary service organisations which promote intercultural education, understanding and peace through voluntary service. The Alliance, founded in 1982, is presently made up of 44 members from 27 countries in Europe, Asia and America. Each member organisation runs an annual programme of International Volunteer Projects in their own country and exchanges volunteers with each other to create an international group of volunteer workers on each project.

Alliance Representation Plan (ARP) is aimed at being used for external representation of the Alliance and its mission. The paper gives an overview of Alliance's values, activities and working fields, The ARP consists of 5 chapters: volunteering, participation, mobility, social inclusion and non-formal education.

Volunteering is the main feature of Alliance as far as it is a European network of voluntary service organizations.

Participation is a basic element in the Alliance and is considered as a tool to make individuals to become actively involved in its activities and projects.

Mobility within the Alliance not only ensures the possibility for everybody to travel, but also to change the point of view by meeting different cultures, learning and understanding them.

Social inclusion is being currently promoted with the most of the Alliance projects; furthermore, Alliance has its own accessibility Campaign.

Non-formal education is a way to enable personal growth and social development of the participants and an integral part of what the Alliance does; it is a part of all of the activities as far as its methods are used in participative and evaluative practices.

ARP is based on official Alliance documents. The ARP as an Alliance position paper has been developed by the Alliance External Relations Committee with the consultation and assistance of the Working Groups concerned, like the Accessibility WG, the Training Needs WG, as well as the Alliance Development Committee and the Executive Committee.

Each chapter includes the meaning for the Alliance, the history and experiences in this field, tools and methods of work as well as perspectives and future plans in the frame of the concrete topic.

Volunteering:

The Alliance is a **European network of voluntary service organizations**. Volunteering is the key characteristic of its activities and projects, as well as the way the network is run.

The whole concept of the Alliance, including the management, is based on **voluntary work**.

The term voluntary work refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal, full-time or part-time, at home or abroad. It is undertaken of a person's own free-will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. It benefits the individual volunteer, communities and society as a whole. It is also a vehicle for individuals and associations to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns. Formal voluntary activities add value, but do not replace professional, paid employees. (Definition of volunteering (Association of Voluntary Service Organisations))

The Alliance promotes **international volunteering**, involving volunteers from different countries and aiming at promoting intercultural education, understanding, peace, active citizenship and democratic participation in societies.

Since 1982, the founding year of the network, it is base for exchanging **25000** volunteers within **3000** voluntary projects each year.

The most common form of voluntary service within Alliance is the **workcamp**, which brings together people from different backgrounds and countries to work on projects that benefit to local communities. Workcamps is a way for an international group to work and live together, to interact with the local community and experience cross-cultural understanding.

Other voluntary activities of the Alliance members are **medium and long-term volunteering projects**. These projects provide volunteers with the unique chance to express their personal commitment and solidarity for projects lasting from 2 to 12 months benefiting the local communities.

The Alliance **organizes** a number of **specialized events** on the topic of volunteering, such as the Alliance Study Session “Voluntary service in conflict areas: International workcamps as an instrument of conflict resolution and peace building” (France, 2006); The Alliance Study Session “International Voluntary youth projects as an educational tool to promote peace and understanding: exploring methods and concrete activities for applying concepts of Intercultural Learning in daily practice through workcamps” (France, 2007); Alliance post-camp event “Towards a united strategy: from international volunteering to democratic participation” (Greece, 2009), etc..

Furthermore, the Alliance **was represented** on **different occasions** aiming to develop and promote the concept of volunteering such as “The Symposium on Volunteering” (YFJ, 2008), General Assembly of the European Youth Forum (Netherlands, 2008), Youth Event of the Spanish Presidency (Spain, 2010) etc.

The Alliance provides individuals with a chance to exercise volunteering regardless to nationality, gender, age, economical, social and physical conditions. The Alliance believes that volunteering is **a service, a duty, opportunity and right for everyone**. The Alliance is a cooperative network providing member organizations with facilities to gather, exchange programmes and practices, produce common tools, experiment with new projects following the standards laid down in the Alliance Quality Charter.

Participation

Participation is a process through which members gain influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them. Participation improves the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of projects and strengthen membership.

In the network of European Voluntary Organizations Participation is a basic element. Within the Alliance participation means:

- *Participating volunteers* (volunteers are actors of the project) in work camps, long term voluntary services and in internal meeting
- Voluntary work as a tool **to improve active citizenship** and democratic, political participation. The Alliance management was build up through active membership. Members voluntarily take responsibilities for relevant tasks, working groups and can be elected to executive positions
- The third way participation is handled within the Alliance is as a specific topic to build up or **improve skills to encourage participation** on political or organizational level

Since the foundation of the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organizations in 1982, the network developed from a technical platform of volunteer exchange towards a **cooperative network**.

Through short medium and long term voluntary service activities Alliance Members participate in the **development and improvement of local communities** by strongly cooperating with them at every stages of the activity (from designing the project to the evaluation).

The way the Alliance consider participation is reflected in the management the Alliance adopted. The Alliance's concept of "**light management**" that organizes the internal communication and cooperation of 44 member organizations without a permanent office is unique. Executive positions are elected for 2 years duration. This is reflected in the structure, which is aimed at coordinating, monitoring and facilitating initiatives **from members** and primarily managed and executed *by members* (through working groups).

Latest events with thematic structure:

- Post Camp Event (PCE): "How to improve and to support the active participation of young people with less opportunities in international projects" (CiA, Greece, 2007)
- Training for Trainers (TfT): "Exploring Dimensions of Understanding and Participation" (EstYES, Estonia 2007)
- Alliance Study Session: "Participation through Preparation" (European Youth Centre Budapest, 2008)

Aside for the offer to participate in voluntary services (like work camps, MTV, LTV, TfT, PCE, GC), the Alliance focuses on active membership and the structure the network is build on.

The current working groups are presented to the participants, where they can deepen their knowledge and extent their individual work on the topic.

Since the Management Committee, consisting of EC and working group coordinators, was established as a new operational method in 2005, the importance of active membership was extended. Through that development the constitutional structure reacted on the immense growth of the network.

Furthermore Alliance considers that participation is also about taking part in **decision making bodies**, this is why the Alliance is represented (and actively take part in) at the Advisory Council of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe and at the Youth Forum Jeunesse and Alliance representatives attend several european or international event throughout the year. And wish In future to expand it political participation on the European level to advocate youth work and voluntary services.

Mobility

Alliance understands mobility in a wide sense **as** possibility for everybody to travel and visit other places. Mobility allows to change the point of view and promotes tolerance and understanding that can be achieved by meeting other cultures, learning and understanding them. We believe **mobility** of each kind causes **social change**.

Mobility helps people to understand their personal identity and to get enriched by differences. Mobility can be divided into two basic areas. It is mobility of volunteers in various voluntary projects such as workcamps and mobility provided by large number of events, such as seminars, trainings, meetings, debates which are organized by Alliance members and partners.

Alliance developed and is developing a wide range of activities to help volunteers achieve international mobility.

Being part of the Alliance and its members organizations is also an opportunity of being part of democratic structures where people can improve their abilities. This is also a mobility possibility.

Since 1982, Alliance members exchange a large number of volunteers from within the Alliance and also in cooperation with partner networks thus providing volunteers' opportunity to travel and learn in non-traditional way. Since a few years, there is growing attention to ensure mobility for groups of people with less opportunities and offer them possibilities to participate in such activities. In the past Alliance has participated in various projects¹ aimed on including described groups into voluntary activities.

The Alliance promotes mobility of volunteers by running different types of projects:

- Short term projects : Workcamps, Youth exchanges, EVS
- Medium-term, Long-term volunteering, EVS (European Voluntary Service)
- Various projects of non-formal education, Social inclusion, intercultural learning
- Others projects : Ze BIG weekend, Alliance Card

In order to make these projects more accessible, the Alliance has an active working group called **Access 4 All** which is continuously working on developing this issue.

Nowadays the Alliance is expanding offering more opportunities to get involved and participate in volunteering regardless of age, social background or country. One of the main aim of the Alliance is to lobby for Volunteer Visa and also reduce other mobility obstacles like financial or language difficulties.

1 For example: - 3Nets for Inclusion Seminar in Clermont-Ferrand, France in 2006
- Still active project participation in years **2003** – 2005, EVS Rainbow project
- Alliance workgroup Access 4 all focusing to provide access to volunteering for everybody

Social Inclusion

The Alliance's Accessing principle is to offer a complete educational process that includes preparation, tools, projects, follow up.

This principle would find a first concrete and common implementation with opening 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 and mental barriers to their participation.

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

Through this long experience of accessing workcamps Alliance has developed:

- 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, etc. ...)
- Flexibility to use inclusion programmes on national, European (Youth in action, Grundtvig, European Social Fund) or international level. Even without support, Alliance members have succeeded to develop Access 4 All (A4All) exchanges.
- Capacity to implement this project through a very flexible coordination scheme (A4A working group).

The Alliance developed a document that states clearly the aims and the principles of the *Alliance's accessing policy*. This policy is implemented by a permanent **Access for all Working Group** (A4AWG) monitored by the Executive Committee.

One of the most prominent way to implement this policy in the Alliance is to launch an **annual accessing campaign**. The campaign is meant to raise awareness, encourage and support members to participate and give visibility towards our international partners.

Participating in 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.

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

- Offering suitable conditions in Workcamps, depending on the individual needs of disadvantaged/special need participants
- Organizing and promoting different international voluntary service experience (short, medium and long term)
- Reinforcing mentorship including preparation, participation during the project and follow-up according to the needs of the volunteers
- Developing European or international programs whenever possible (e.g. decentralised EVS)
- Influencing national volunteering, civil, civic or community service.

In order 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 and approaches.
- Organising a collective validation system to give better impact to this experience

(European Qualification Framework, Europass, Youthpass ...) and consequently better recognition.

- Cooperating with other networks or programmes.

Non-Formal Education

In general, non-formal education refers to the learning which takes place outside formal educational curriculum. Non-formal education activities involve people on a voluntary basis and are carefully planned, to foster the participants' personal and social development.

The Alliance considers non-formal education (NFE) and intercultural learning as a way to enable personal growth and social development of all participants

NFE is an integral part of what Alliance does and this influences all of our activities, as methods from NFE are used toward their volunteers and staff in many places, such as participative and evaluative practices.

The Alliance considers workcamps as a possible non-formal educational tool through learning by doing approach and learning from each other. Through all its activities, the Alliance aims to empower young people to accompany them in their intercultural process to develop among them relevant learning opportunities, to contribute to organisational and youth policy development.

Since 1987 and the first General Conference, Alliance runs educational activities towards many target groups acting on every level of the network.

The Alliance organizes regularly events based on non-formal education like :

- **Study Sessions** : It's an educational support to go deeper into a topic. During this session, participants exchange and share experiences in order to come back to their organisation to experiment results and products from the study session. Participants are the experts, trainers are facilitators.
- **General Conference** (since 1987) : provides opportunities for the staff and volunteers of member organizations to evaluate, work, and exchange ideas and experiences about subjects of common and current interest for the Alliance (Topic examples : educational aspects of International Youth Exchange, voluntary service for teenagers, a multipurpose tool for non-formal education to solidarity, environmental awareness, conflict resolution...)
- **Training for Trainers** (since 2000) : the main objective is to train the trainers of member organizations, creating common methods and tools
- **Post Camp Event** (since 1990) : themed meeting dedicated to active volunteers and camp leaders of member organizations

Besides regular events, regarding to the needs of members and current trends in voluntary world, Alliance organizes **various educational activities, trainings and seminars**. (Europe-Asia training for trainers, 2008, Seminar: Developing skills on exchanges involving teenagers, 2007, Staff training, 2009...)

Non-formal education is also present in the **management of the network** through Executive Committee, General Assembly and working groups functioning (active and voluntary involvement) and mandating members to represent the Alliance on various events.

In all non-formal educational activities, the Alliance uses large range of methods : active participation, exchanging of good practices in groups, workshops, discussions in plenary, presentation of studies involving stakeholders and intercultural learning of volunteers.

Alliance has produced a unique tool “The Alliance Guidebook” as an educational tool for organizations and staff (“how to...”) that is used in our work together with many other tools for trainers and leaders dedicated to different topics (evaluation toolkit, training booklet).

What does the Alliance want to plan in the next years on that topic / future plans on NFE topic?

- to organize more trainings that answer the needs of members
- to recognized workcamps as a tool to be used in NFE
- to have a training policy

to highlight the importance of non-formal education within networks activities as well as within society (some form of recognition of non-formal education experiences – from workcamp experiences as well as from trainings)

Conclusion:

The Alliance provides individuals with a chance to exercise volunteering regardless to nationality, gender, age, economical, social and physical conditions. Through active participation on voluntary projects, volunteers get acquainted with various social, environmental and political issues and gain knowledge and develop skills to become active citizens (through informal learning and non-formal educational tools). The Alliance is continuously trying to improve its projects in terms of quality, quantity and accessibility.

The highest priority of the Alliance in future is to become commonly/generally known as dynamic and reliable network of NGOs. Matter of great importance is also acquisition of new members and partners as well as spreading awareness on its work. The Alliance stresses the importance of volunteering on international level. Volunteer actions bring deeper sense and another dimension to the work of the movement it also opens a door for people from different cultures to meet, break down barriers and become friends. Through all what is described in this paper the Alliance wants to help build a more peaceful world - for now and the future. Thanks to its dedicated volunteers the Alliance is steadily progressing to its goals.