

Getting into EVS

Accreditation of European Voluntary Service Promoters in Eastern Europe and Caucasus

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A guide for non-profit organisations based in Eastern Europe and Caucasus wishing to become Hosting or Sending Organisation within the European Union's European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme

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All links to documents and web-sites mentioned in text are available in the end of this document, in section "Where to find further information?"

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Introduction

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) strand of the Youth in Action programme (2007-2013) of the European Union aims to support young people's participation in various forms of voluntary non-profit activities abroad. Any organisation in a Programme Country, in a country of South East Europe or in a country of Eastern Europe and Caucasus wishing to send or host EVS volunteers must be accredited.

Accreditation of EVS organisations located in Eastern Europe and Caucasus region has been introduced since 2011. Accreditation is carried out by the SALTO EECA Resource Centre for all organisations located in the Neighbouring Partner Countries of Eastern Europe and Caucasus region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine).

Accreditation of EVS promoters located in Programme countries is carried out by National Agencies for the Youth in Action programme. In South East Europe region it is SALTO SEE Resource Centre responsible for the process.

This guide has been published to support organisations from EECA region in the preparation for EVS accreditation.

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is a communication process in the early stages of the EVS project, connected to the beginning of the preparatory phase. At this stage, project leaders should already make basic decisions for future EVS projects within their organisations. Accreditation serves to gain access to EVS and to ensure that the minimum quality standards of the Programme are met.

Accreditation ensures a coherence of values, principles and objectives. All accredited organisations have demonstrated their overall capacities to implement EVS projects according to the values and procedures of the Youth in Action programme.

What is an *Expression of Interest*?

To be accredited, organisations wishing to become EVS promoters must submit an *Expression of Interest* (EI) describing their general motivation and ideas for EVS activities. EIs must be submitted in English on a valid standardised form, which is available at the website of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc126_en.htm. The same EECA promoter(s) may request sending or hosting accreditation or both within one EI.

The preparation of an EI is a good opportunity to think through the foundations of the future projects ideas, and to put them into words that make sense to people outside the organisation (because parts of EI are openly published in internet).

All promoters wishing to receive EVS accreditation should provide a brief description of their organisation and their motivation for doing EVS as well as specific answers in case of hosting / sending or both roles.

EVS accreditation has been developed as a part of the support provided by the Programme to promoters. It is a communication process that starts with the submission of an *Expression of Interest* and further on involves interviews, on-site visits, e-mail communication and phone calls between the EVS promoter, the accreditors and the SALTO EECA Resource Centre.

In case of hosting organisation, the *Expression of Interest* always refers to the local placement, where the volunteers will be carrying out their service.

Beside abovementioned *Expression of Interest*, every EECA organisation interested in receiving EVS accreditation should provide legal documents:

- statute (charter) of the organisation;
- confirmation of organisation's legal registration in ministry or court;

What other documents EECA organisations are suggested to submit to be accredited?

For stronger quality and opportunity for accreditors to assess EECA organisations potential for EVS involvement and their credibility, SALTO EECA strongly recommends to submit additionally:

- 2-3 references from local partners (organisations or authorities) with their signatures and stamps. As EVS activities are not taking place in vacuum, the EVS organisations should be well established within own local community.

If hosting organisation requires help (for instance with project application and reporting procedure or providing the mentor etc.), then it might ask for aid to other experienced organisation and name it in EI part "contact point for EVS outside the organisation". SALTO EECA strongly suggest that in such case an agreement is signed between hosting organisation and the external contact point.

All abovementioned documents, including EI form should be provided in English language (translations doesn't need to be certified), in electronic form to eeeca@salto-youth.net. Beside English versions, statute and registration should be also submitted electronically in original language. All pages including signatures or stamps should be scanned and add to the e-mail. Original and completed EI form should be signed by the legal representative of the applicant and send in paper version by post to SALTO EECA: Mokotowska str 43, 00-551 Warsaw, Poland. In case of problems with internet, all documents can be sent by post (and added electronically on CD). But then, the accreditation process will start only after receipt of the mail.

When does accreditation happen?

Expressions of Interest can be submitted at any time to the SALTO EECA Resource Centre. However, organisations are strongly advised to submit their EIs at least six weeks

before the Youth in Action deadlines. This is because grant applications can only be approved if all the involved organisations have been accredited at the time when project applications are submitted. Due to the large geographical scope of the Eastern Europe and Caucasus, the period of six weeks can be prolonged in justified cases.

How to receive accreditation?

All organisations must apply the principles of the *EVS Charter* (www.salto-youth.net/download/1574) at all stages of the project; this is a basis for accreditation. The *EVS Charter* is a part of the Youth in Action Programme Guide http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc/how_to_participate/programme_guide_11/guide_en.pdf

It highlights the roles of each organisation in an EVS project, as well as the main principles and quality standards of EVS. Each EVS actor must adhere to the provisions set out in the *EVS Charter*. Organisations decide jointly - in line with the *EVS Charter* – on how to divide tasks and responsibilities, as well as how to divide the grant within each activity of the EVS project. These divisions are formalised through an *EVS Agreement* once a concrete project has been granted.

When accreditation documents are submitted to the SALTO EECA Resource Centre, the applicant organisation will receive a confirmation of receipt (by e-mail). Two impartial accreditors will be appointed by the Centre. Their roles are to assess and support the applying organisation. Accreditors are the identifiers of quality. At least one accreditor will visit each organisation in order to meet the responsible people and to get to know the organisation and discuss all important EI elements (see more in next chapter: "What is being assessed?").

The second accreditor is informed about findings from the visit. Both accreditors may request further clarifications. Usually that happens via phone or e-mail. The accreditors may suggest improvement and possibly request a revised EI. If minor changes are needed in the EI, the accreditors will communicate this with the applicant and organisation will be able to upgrade their EI before final decision is made. Revised EIs shall be presented to accreditors, who will then add it to own report from accreditation process. Upgraded EIs should be presented in electronic form (signed and stamped). Finally both accreditors have to come to an agreement concerning the *Expression of Interest*. They make a recommendation to the SALTO EECA Resource Centre for the approval or the rejection of the EI.

Usually, the assessment of the EI and the accreditation process are carried out within six weeks after receipt of the EI. After accreditation, applicants are informed by the SALTO EECA Resource Centre about the result of the accreditation. In the case of approval, the SALTO EECA Resource Centre assigns an EI reference number and communicates it to the relevant organisation. This number must be stated in all grant applications relating to EVS projects the organisation is involved in.

It may happen that during accreditation, accreditors could not observe the minimum quality standards. In this case, the organisation will receive information about the reasons for the rejection with suggestions for improvements. They can reapply for EI accreditation when they consider themselves ready. The SALTO EECA Resource Centre may withdraw the accreditation at any time in case of noncompliance with the *EVS Charter*.

In *Expression of Interest*, organisations should state how many volunteers they are able to host or send at the same time. This will be evaluated by accreditors. If this is missing in EI form, accreditors can suggest maximum number of volunteers to organisation.

In justified case of sending accreditation, the SALTO EECA can decide not to start the procedure of on-spot visit and after consultation with accreditor(s) can accept EI out of hand.

Accreditation is valid for the period indicated in the EI. However, the maximum validity period is three years. After the validity period has expired, accreditation can be renewed by submitting a new *Expression of Interest*.

What is being assessed?

Before submitting an *Expression of Interest*, it is strongly recommended to consult valid Youth in Action Programme Guide. Of particular relevance are Part A 1 (objectives, priorities and important features of the Youth in Action Programme) as well as Part B Action 2 (European Voluntary Service). Further, it is useful to take a look at approved EIs in the European database of EVS promoters.

Accreditors take the following aspects into consideration when determining the value of potential EVS organisations:

<p>1. Knowledge of the Youth in Action Programme and compatibility with the aims of the Programme.</p> <p><i>(this aspect is assessed also in case of sending organisations)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of the wider frame of which European Voluntary Service is just one of the components; ▪ Awareness of the Programme's objectives, priorities and principles as well as procedures (deadlines, application process, finances, etc.) ▪ Awareness of the non-formal education basics ▪ A clear link between the objectives of the Youth in Action Programme and regular activities of the organisation ▪ Opportunities of organisation to make the YiA Programme and EVS projects visible for wider public, and possibility of ensuring that project's results will be disseminated and exploited ▪ Understanding of the financial contribution provided by the Programme, knowledge of the total expenses of an EVS project and how co-funding might be obtained
<p>2. Motivation and recruitment of volunteers</p> <p><i>(also in case of sending organisations)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Motivation of organisation to send or host EVS volunteers ▪ Motivation to be involved in international cooperation ▪ Open accessibility to EVS: organisations must ensure that the recruitment will be open to volunteers of any ethnic group, religion, sexual orientation, political opinion, etc.; and organisations should not require from volunteers specific qualifications, competencies or education ▪ Open and transparent process of informing about the EVS opportunities and recruitment accessible to young people of different backgrounds ▪ Diversity of countries of planned volunteers (organisations should be aware that it is much better for learning process of all actors if volunteers are coming from different countries) ▪ Awareness of the specificities of work with young people with fewer opportunities

<p>3. Understanding of, and potential for, intercultural learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Familiarity with the concept of the intercultural learning and defined opportunities for intercultural learning within the future EVS projects, for the volunteer and others involved, especially local community; ▪ Awareness and readiness to involve foreign volunteers of different background in the daily work of the organisation (focus on the potential impact of the EVS project on the staff and the members of the organisation as well as local community) ▪ Awareness of possible different misunderstandings and conflicts between foreign volunteers, organisation and local community ▪ Openness to come over communicational obstacles (lack of language, etc.)
<p>4. Balance between service requirements and learning experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of EVS as a learning process ▪ Clearly identified personal, intercultural and professional learning opportunities for the volunteer (opportunities to gain new skills, knowledge and attitudes) ▪ Opportunities for the volunteer to carry out a well-defined and various set of tasks, allowing flexibility for the volunteer's ideas, creativity and experience to be integrated. (since EVS is full-time volunteering, the hosting organisation is responsible to prepare at least 30 hours of activity for the volunteers per week, and no more than 40). If hosting organisation is not able to provide sufficient number of service hours for volunteer, it should not apply for hosting accreditation. In case of activities where volunteer carries tasks in several organisations, having similar activities (visiting schools or euro-clubs, etc.), only one EI should be prepared by the hosting organisation). ▪ Balanced programme (e.g. a typical weekly agenda) for the volunteer, combining service oriented tasks for the organisation and opportunities for the volunteer to gain new competences ▪ Language learning opportunities aimed to support the volunteer in communicating in the local language and experiencing the culture through the language ▪ Support to volunteers, local community and other actors to understand wider, European frame of EVS activities ▪ Planned regular reflection and evaluation process, including role project coordinator as well as mentor, and youthpass

<p>5. Practical arrangements for the volunteer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accommodation and meals (or a sufficient food allowance, covering also holiday periods) for the volunteer ▪ Available local transport as well as communication means (phone, internet access) for the volunteer ▪ Flexibility in practical arrangements according to local reality and volunteers needs ▪ Regular weekly or monthly pocket money to the volunteer ▪ Volunteers introduction into local / national laws ▪ Understanding of AXA insurance requirements, visa issues, residence permit, taxation, and all other administrative issues that the hosting organisation is responsible for ▪ Understanding of practicalities and importance of the volunteer's participation in the EVS training cycle organised by the SALTO EECA Resource Centre
<p>6. Potential for the volunteer's integration into the host community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integrating opportunities for the volunteer to interact with the local community into the volunteer's overall tasks and activities ▪ Encouraging opportunities for social integration at local level, including possibilities to meet other young people and to participate in various social activities ▪ Opportunities for contact with other EVS volunteers, local volunteers as well as ex-EVS volunteers
<p>7. Availability and suitability of personal support <i>(also in case of sending organisations)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to prepare volunteers well for learning experiences during service ▪ Capacities of the local staff and/or volunteers to provide information about the organisation and its activities and to support the volunteer in carrying out his/her tasks (supervision and guidance) ▪ Capacities of the local staff and/or volunteers to support the volunteer on a personal level, including support for preparing and realising a learning plan (key competences and Youthpass) ▪ Understanding the different roles and responsibilities of the mentor and supervisor ▪ Awareness of possible risks and conflicts ▪ In case of bigger organisations, it is recommended to have 1 EVS hosting coordinator per 10 volunteers and 1 mentor for 3-4 volunteers
<p>8. Awareness of all parties' rights and responsibilities <i>(also in case of sending organisations)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge and understanding of the EVS Charter ▪ Understanding the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved ▪ Awareness of the EVS Agreement

What happens after accreditation?

The SALTO EECA Resource Centre is responsible for publishing the accredited EI (as hosting and/or sending organisation) in the online database of approved EVS promoters on the website of the European Commission. The database contains all accredited EIs (in Programme countries, South East Europe and Eastern Europe and Caucasus region) and targets in particular organisations and young persons who would like to have an international voluntary experience within the framework of EVS and are looking for partners - potential hosting or sending organisations.

Information in the database is published as it is formulated in the EI application. It is therefore crucial that organisations write their EI clearly and understandably, so that it enables outsiders to the organisation to get a good impression of the nature of the organisation and EVS placement.

The database can be consulted at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_en.cfm

Where to find further information?

[Youth in Action Programme](#) and [Youth in Action Programme Guide](#) as well as [EVS Charter](#)

[European database of EVS promoters](#)

[SALTO EECA web-site for regional EVS accreditations](#)

[Website of the European Commission with official forms, including *Expression of Interest*](#)