Transnational senior volunteers exchanges need a solid structure. In order to describe them, we could not imagine anything more structured that a theatre play with many actors and an intriguing plot. We hope you will enjoy the reading of this text as much as we did in composing it, and that afterwards you will be curious to launch yourself in such an experience whatever your role is, either a volunteer or a responsible of an organisation from the civil society. This publication is the result of the work and the contributions of all the partners listed below. Almost every chapter is written by a different partner and comes solely by the experience and a huge work of exchanging ideas, opinions and, why not, corrections of mistakes. SEVEN members are:

Co-ordinating body
Lunaria (Roma IT) www.lunaria.org

International network
Alliance of the European Voluntary Service Organisations www.alliance-network.org
AVSO – Association of Voluntary Service Organisations www.avso.org

Public Institutions
District Offenbach (DE) www.kreis-offenbach.de
Municipality of Ferrara (IT) www.comune.fe.it
Municipality of Lleida (ES) www.palma.es
Municipality of Roma (IT) www.comune.roma.it
SeniorenBuero Graz (AT) www.graz.at
Seniorenrat of Raeren (BE) www.raeren.be

Formal Education Institutions
University of Lancaster – Department of Continuing Education (Lancaster UK) www.lancs.ac.uk/depts/conted/index.htm
ZAWW – Zentrum für Allgemeine Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung der Universität Ulm (Ulm DE) www.zawww.de

Research Institutions
ISIS – Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur (Frankfurt/Main DE) www.isis-sozialforschung.de

Non Governmental Organisations
Bulgarian Red Cross – (Sofia BG) www.redcross.bg
Concordia – (Paris FR) www.concordia-association.org
CSV-RSVP Retired Senior Volunteers Programme Scotland (Edinburgh – UK) www.csv-rsvpscotland.org.uk
Diaconia Year Estonia (Tallinn EE)
Estyes – (Tallinn EE) www.estyes.ee
Evangelische Akademie Wien (Wien AT) www.evangel-akademie.at
Evangelische Freiwilligendienste für junge Menschen FSJ (Hannover DE) www.fdja.de
SIC – Senior Initiatives Centre (Kaunas LT)
FCEI Federazione Chiese Evangeliche in Italia (Roma IT) www.fcei.it
GSM Youth Centre Service – (Ankara TR) www.gms-youth.org
IBG Internationale Begegnung in Gemeinschaftsdiensten e.V. (Stuttgart – DE) www.ibg-workcamps.de
Legambiente – (Roma IT) www.legambiente.com
Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz – (Wien AT) www.roteskreuz.at
SEEDS SEE beyonD borderS (Reykjavik IS) www.seedsiceland.org
Teatro Nucleo Ferrara – (Ferrara IT) www.teatronucleo.org
UNAREC Etudes et Chantier – (Clermont Ferrand – FR) www.unarec.org
Wiener Hilfswerk – (Wien AT) www.nachbarschaftszentren.at

This booklet is co-funded by the Grundtvig Adult education programme of the European Commission and reflect solely the views and opinions of their authors. The European Commission cannot thus be considered responsible of any of its content.
INDEX

Prologue 3
I. Introduction to Senior Volunteer European Exchanges 3
   I.1 The background 3
   I.2 Past projects: a pathway from transnational voluntary service to lifelong learning 4
II. Presentation of the Actors and their Role 8
   II.1 The actors on stage: a winning model 8
   II.2 Hosting organization: who are they and what is expected from them 8
   II.3 Sending side: what does it mean and why it is important 9
   II.4 International Senior volunteers 10
   II.5 The involvement of Local Governments 11
   II.6 Finding a partner organisation in Europe 11

Act 1 Preparing a Project 12
1.1 Hosting side: arranging the tasks for the volunteers: 12
1.2 Contact person and team work 13
1.3 Hosting side framework conditions: arranging the hospitality, food, accommodation, local transport 14
1.4 Insurance 16

Act 2 Find And Prepare Your Volunteers 16
2.1 Sending side: recruiting volunteers, professional and linguistic skills 16
2.2 Sending side: preparing your volunteers 17

Act 3 Senior Volunteers in Action 19
3.1 Considering to take part: skills assessment and self evaluation 19
3.2 Learning opportunities 20
3.3 The framework conditions: few considerations (hopefully) useful to volunteers 21
3.4 Verbal and body language: communication or information? 24
3.5 Use of Internet based communication tools… 26
3.6 Obstacles... and difficult moments 28
3.7 Tips from a Senior for successful volunteering in Europe 29

Epilogue Evaluating The Project And The Experience 31
Evaluation

AFTER THE PLAY 33

I Also want to do it! What is possible to concretely do? 33
A. Members of an organization in Europe? Join The Senior Volunteering Program 33
B. Only few weeks free? Spend your time in a workcamp 34
C. Few months to offer? Learn about Long Term Voluntary Service 35
They have done it…. Witnesses from volunteers

APPENDIX 40
ANNEX 1 Ten Golden Rules for a Fruitful Relationship Between Organisations and Volunteers 40
ANNEX 2 The Charter of the Volunteer 41
ANNEX 3 Card for Expression Of Interest for Hosting Volunteers 43
ANNEX 4 Questionnaire for Senior Volunteers who Participated in a Trans-National Exchange 44
ANNEX 5 Communication From The European Commission: “It is Never Too Late to Learn” 47
ANNEX 6 Some Internet Addresses For Total Beginners: a General Orientation for not Getting Lost 48
DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering: is undertaken of a person’s own free-will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. In the context of transnational senior exchanges the term “volunteering” will refer to all forms of experimentation with voluntary activity which has a clear dimension of informal learning and sharing of knowledge and competence. 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, and is often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative. Thus voluntary activities add value to society, but do not replace professional, paid employees.

Volunteer: A volunteer is someone who performs or offers to perform service out of his or her own free will, without payment, usually in support of a non-profit organization, mission-based initiative or community.

Source: AVSO - Association of Voluntary Service Organizations.
PROLOGUE

I. Introduction to Senior Volunteer European Exchanges

I.1 The Background

Take advantage from the demographic changes

The experiment of exchanging senior volunteers between different countries came up after some broad and almost obvious considerations. The first and more striking one regards the current demographic features: in the past years Europe saw a dramatic change of demographic trends and an important ageing of its population. People are living longer throughout Europe as a result of improved public health provision, medical progress, improved diet and housing. The expectation of a longer life caused a deep change in lifestyles and needs of seniors. The Charter of Rights of the European Union recognises these changes stating that “the European Union acknowledges and respect the right of seniors to have an independent and respectable life and to take part to social and cultural life” (art. 25).

In Europe, the majority of seniors lives in better conditions than in the past but there is still a certain degree of risk of permanent social exclusion due to ageing. We believe that the creation of a European society active at all ages needs a strategy that allows seniors to take part in social life also after their exit from the labour market. Seniors represent a richness not enough enhanced in terms of experiences and acquired skills; specific actions at European level devoted to seniors, should develop schemes of social inclusion and active participation in order to change seniors from passive beneficiaries of social protection to active citizens in the construction of Europe.

Volunteering and lifelong learning; senior citizens as trainers

Racism, xenophobia, fear of differences, the break-through of the new technologies, the management of a fast-changing world are elements that puzzle in a bigger measure the older generations, who are (whether they realise it or not) mentors and tutors for the younger generations: do they have the tools to deal with this situation, or do they need some further learning in the intercultural and intergenerational areas? This was another important consideration that led us to insist on this idea of senior exchanges. It is getting more and more clear that the concept of lifelong learning is a winning one. So we have tried to shape this experience in this perspective that at first may seem rather unconventional: volunteering abroad is considered as a full learning experience not only for the volunteers but also for the whole community that hosts them. So the concept of volunteering is widened from the usual “helping the others” to a more daring “I learn and teach through my activity”.

A strategy to enhance active citizenship

The great success of the European Youth programme and more specifically of its Action named “European Voluntary Service” showed how residential international voluntary service can represent an extraordinary experience of non formal learn-
ing for young people. Thus, International voluntary service can give also an important contribution to the promotion of active citizenship among seniors thanks to its social and cultural features of participation and solidarity. Senior citizens must be considered as potential volunteers in all the State Members of the European Union. In fact they have always been the backbone of traditional civic organizations, running churches and voluntary organizations, charitable fund-raising activities etc. **Getting extra life from extra years implies the idea of active citizenship also after retirement.** Seniors have a capacity and an appetite for being active which tends to be insufficiently recognized. Engaging in mentally stimulating activities is important for the development and preservation of capacities in later life. Such possibilities need to be greatly expanded. Preparing for longer; more active and better lives, and seizing opportunities for active contributions after retirement are important ways to secure a maximum degree of self-reliance and self-determination in old age. Indeed, seniors are already very active in non-governmental organizations. Involving a larger number of able seniors in voluntary work could be a major tool in active ageing strategies.

The educational features: Intergenerational and intercultural learning

Volunteering abroad, including its preparatory and follow-up stages, represents a complete non-formal educational experience. A wide, and varied, literature has been published on volunteering in different cultural contexts and on the intercultural impact on participants, but it almost exclusively deals with young people. Based on the pilot projects carried out so far, we believe that such exposure to another culture is important also for senior citizens because they can contribute, with their life experience, to socially useful initiatives and they are recognized as fully active and still able to contribute to society. The intercultural learning experience is a two-way process: not only is the volunteer introduced to another culture, but the hosts encounter different points of view, different ways to perform activities and deal directly with someone from another culture with less interferences caused by prejudices and stereotypes. The best experiences have seen senior and young volunteers working together and sharing daily life from the work to the meals and sometimes the same accommodation. Specific research would be needed in order to map the learning flows but it is clear that the process of mutual enrichment is there and it works well breaking down barriers between people of different generations and coming from different cultures.

II. Past projects – a pathway from transnational voluntary service to lifelong learning

We invite you to follow us in the description of the various projects that led us to the construction of a network that advised the European Commission during the process of building up a senior volunteers exchange programme. Each project has built on the previous one, enlarging every time the partnership that eventually gathered in a formal network, but it also widened the range of themes and the kind of activities carried out. Rather than a series of projects, what is described below could be regarded as a single process determined to merge the idea of transnational voluntary service and lifelong learning.
2001 - 2003 The early experiences: volunteers regarded as teachers and learners

In 2001 two mobility pilot projects in favour of older persons have been granted by the European Commission. They were both based on the principles of transnational voluntary service, active citizenship, intercultural education and cross-generation dialogue.

In the year 2001, the first project of exchange of senior volunteers in the field of international voluntary service took place as a pilot project granted by the DG Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission. This project named “European Exchange Programme of Older Volunteers” involved 8 European countries and managed to move 137 volunteers between 50 and 80 years old.

The other project was granted in the year 2001 in the framework of Socrates - Grundtvig. The project named “Mobility 55” included, a survey on the attitude toward performing voluntary service activities by over 55 years old citizens and a test phase where 30 senior volunteers from 5 different countries performed a period of 1 to 2 months voluntary service in community based projects abroad. During the test phase and its evaluation, we acknowledged that these activities were highly appreciated both by the volunteers and by the hosting organizations. Volunteers felt themselves needed, useful and active and learnt from the intercultural environment. At the same time hosting organizations not only benefited from their voluntary work but in many cases, they started a true mutual learning process. At the same time we also raised up curiosity first and interest later among several local governments that saw these innovative and somehow unusual initiatives of exchange happening in the areas they manage.

2003 – 2004 “Still Active!” Training of volunteers and organizations as a key feature

At this point it was realized that in order to ensure for volunteers and organizations an effective learning process, we should have tackled the issue of preparation and training of volunteers and organization. So we designed another project that has been running since 2003, named “Still Active!” again supported by the Socrates Programme – Action Grundtvig, that was engaged in drafting training modules for potential senior volunteers who would like to take part projects abroad, and for community based hosting organizations of civil society interested in having volunteers from abroad involved in their activities on a short term basis. In 2007, this project was also awarded by the European Commission the title of best Socrates project 2000-2006 in the category of Grundtvig – Adult learning.

2004-2005 Teaming Up! The involvement of local governments

We wanted to dig in the idea of involving local governments in the transnational senior exchanges in an active way as promoters of exchange project in their areas and test their attitude to networking with citizens and organizations from the civil society. That’s why in the year 2004, another project was carried out co-granted by the European Commission (DG Employment and Social Affairs) named “Teaming up!”. It forecast the exchange of 120 volunteers among 6 European countries that in groups of 5 persons performed transnational voluntary service for a period of three weeks. The project was based on bilateral partnership between local governments who were also co-funders of the project.
2005-2006 Fifty, Fifty! The intergenerational concept
It is possible to see junior and senior volunteers working together and share the same project with the same goals and objectives? We started with this question when we designed Fifty – Fifty!, a project, co-funded by the Active Citizenship programme of the European Commission, aimed at promoting intergenerational cooperation and learning as a medium to enhance active European citizenship and international volunteering. We trained small teams of volunteers, composed by seniors and juniors, previously involved in the activities of the national partnership. These mixed age teams took part in different volunteering activities and helped in disseminate them in meetings organised by four Italian Local Governments. Not so easy as it may seem, but definitely possible and worthwhile when looking at the results.

A European Conference to discuss the future of senior exchange projects
It was time to gather all the experiences and to optimise them in order not to waste all the work done and build on it. The ECLOS conference (a SOCRATES Accompanying Measure) took place in Tallinn, Estonia, in December 2006, in order to bring together the experiences of actors from the previous pilot projects. A broad spectrum of representatives of civil society organisations attended, including institutions for adult education with trans-national work approaches, local and regional governments, local initiatives, NGOs, international voluntary service associations and individual senior volunteers. As a result, a handbook was elaborated that focused on four themes which have proven to be decisive for a successful transnational exchange. Selection and preparation of volunteers and host organisations, foreign language skills, work contents and other framework conditions such as accommodation, meals and leisure time. Additionally, guidelines for senior volunteers were developed by senior volunteers and guidelines for host organisations by host organisations. From this conference the idea of the SEVEN network was born.

Time for networking and the Senior Volunteering Programme
SEVEN is an international network of 29 organisations promoting senior volunteer exchanges financed by the Grundtvig programme. SEVEN’s member organisations include NGOs, local governments, universities and research centers with at least 5 years’ experience in the co-ordination and management of senior volunteer programs. SEVEN gathered the experiences of all the partners who took part in the previous project. The network worked as a consultant for the European Commission for the setting up of the new Grundtvig actions, namely the one on Senior Volunteering that was launched at the end of 2008. Other achievements are a website full of information, a research on the impact of volunteering activities on individuals and organisations, the production of this booklet and of a training course. The Network represents a good platform for organisations to meet and set up common projects and further activities.

2009-2010 ACTIVE – Active Training Initiative for Volunteers in Europe
A training Scheme for organizations of the Civil Society
In order to share the expertise of the SEVEN network, we organized two editions of a training course aimed at staff and volunteers of adult learning institutions, vol-
untary service organizations and local governments dealing with social issues who were curious and wanted to learn how setting up and managing transnational senior volunteers exchanges throughout Europe. The course was based on the daily practical experience of the organizations belonging to the SEVEN network and all the trainers belonged to it. The training course are supported by the European Commission - Grundtvig program on adult learning.

**Twin and Go! A good practice to empower senior citizens and enhance their cooperation with their local governments**

One of the aims of the SEVEN network is to act as a platform of discussion in order to discuss further piloting actions in the field of senior exchanges. The preparation phase of exchange projects is crucial and require thorough attention: who would be the best project-organisers than the senior volunteers themselves? In an empowerment perspective, a bilateral exchange of senior volunteers between twinned towns in Hessen and Emilia Romagna was piloted in 2009 within the scope of the “Twin and Go!” pilot project, funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme. In the participating municipalities, groups of three to five experienced senior volunteers were formed to develop the basics for a regular exchange of senior volunteers. This included mutual visits in order to get to know the volunteering opportunities in the twinned town, outline the work to be performed by the volunteers, as well as the skills sought (including language requirements) and regulate the conditions for a stay, in terms of accommodation, lodging, exchange of experiences, leisure time, costs, etc.

The potential placements were published on internet, and impressions gained from the work and further information are documented in videos, organisational tools and handbooks.

---

**Where this proposal comes from**

You might be curious now to know where the idea of volunteering abroad is actually coming from. Indeed it has quite old roots. We have to go back to the end of World War I. We need to focus our attention to a small village named Verdun at the border between France and Germany. Something totally amazing and incredible happened there: a group of international volunteers organized by a Swiss Conscious Objector named Pierre Ceresole went to this village to help in the reconstruction of some destroyed houses. The group of international volunteers included also some German volunteers. Can you believe it? French and German were fighting at each other since then and now they were working together for a common goal. This was so incredible that the French authorities became suspicious, voices were started that they probably were spies, so after 6 weeks the experience was closed. But it was kept this idea of international voluntary service that witness solidarity and helps people from different nationalities, background and lifestyle to get closer working on a common goal and learn from each other. This is as well the foundation year of the organization “Service Civil International”, mother and root of many similar national organizations and worldwide networks.
PRESENTATION OF THE ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

II.1 The actors on stage: a winning model

At first glance, the performance may seem easy to be put on stage: you have one or more senior volunteers, fit, sensitive to social problems, with some free time, willing to learn from another culture and to teach about their own, who are volunteering for a certain period in a social oriented organisation in another country. They learn from another culture, the local community learns from them. Everyone is happy, or presumably so, curtain down, applause. Indeed that was only the last act of a play that involved several actors and has different stages to perform: all the preparations phases are parts of the learning experience that cannot be reduced to the few weeks spent by the volunteers abroad and by the organisation looking after them. But let’s proceed with order.

A senior volunteer program as conceived so far usually forecasts at least 3 main actors: an exchange project is actually the result of their close partnership and cooperation.

These actors are
1) A Hosting Organisation mainly working at local level
2) A Sending Organisation mainly oriented to international relations (in bilateral exchanges, the same organisation can have the double role of hosting and sending).
3) The Senior-Volunteer(s)
4) (optional) Local Governments working as hosting and/or sending

It is important to make each role clear and share them properly. The roles range from program designing to planning of financial resources. Local Governments can substitute or work alongside with hosting and/or sending organizations

II.11 Hosting organizations: who are they and what is expected from them

With the term of “hosting organization” we refer to any organization or institution that runs social activities on a permanent or at least on a long term basis. Several institutions and organizations of the civil society have already been involved in including senior volunteers in their daily activities: these range from care centers for people with disabilities to associations for the protection of the environment, from orphanages to cultural centers, from associations that give assistance to older people in need, to hospitals and many other different institutions working with persons of all ages.

Firstly a hosting organization must be willing to host volunteers from abroad and in order to do this must strongly believe in the intercultural learning value of this experience. This is fundamental in order to avoid disappointments: volunteers from abroad may need extra time of your staff, may not understand properly (or at all) your language, may have different opinions on how to do things, in other words they are – as a matter of facts – more expensive. But, even if from a cost/benefit ratio point of view, this experience may result not-convenient, you may want to consider all the above not as a burden but as an enrichment for your organization, for your staff and for your local community; you may want to offer your people a learning opportunity simply setting up a series of activities that can be performed by seniors from abroad, possibly in cooperation with your usual domestic volunteers. Intercultural learning, intergenerational learning, development of social and
personal skills. As simple as that. If you, as a responsible person of an organization want to profit of these advantages, than you are ready and what will follow in the below to-do-list will not hopefully seem so heavy and difficult. Apart from these basic issues, the organisation should have defined places and tasks for the senior volunteer from another country, including an “identity” for the volunteer. This means that volunteers should be offered a defined status, defined activities as well as some visibility. It is also important that the volunteer is informed about the philosophy behind the project. In this connection it is seen as being very helpful for an organisation to have experience in dealing with volunteers. The organisation is expected to outline explicitly which skills and experience they need in a foreign volunteer. Finally, organisations should inform all those concerned about the visit of foreign volunteers beforehand. Information should be given about the tasks the foreign volunteers will undertake, how to liaise with them as well as any planned joint activities. This is crucial in order to make sure that the contact between the organisations’ paid staff, permanent volunteers on the one hand and the foreign volunteers on the other hand is optimised and that negative competition between these groups will not occur.

II.III Sending side: what does it mean and why it is important

If volunteers are received by someone is quite likely to think that they are somehow sent by someone else. Cases of self-sending, so to speak, could always be possible as in theory volunteers could go and find the projects by themselves without any intermediary, but our experience showed us that when volunteers have behind themselves a sending structure, that is a guarantee for both the volunteers and the hosting organisation in another country. In our early projects, a “sending organisation” worked as a placement agency of senior volunteers in the range of all the possible projects offered by a network of hosting organisations in different countries. Lately, especially with the success of the reciprocal bilateral model, a sending organisation is the same body that hosts volunteers from abroad. In order to explain why we believe that the sending side should be rep-

---

Basic To Do List for a sending organisation

- Recruit and train the volunteers
- Look for information to pass to volunteers
- Select and place the volunteers according to their skills and interests in the most suitable project
- Introduce past volunteers to new ones
- Make pooling of past volunteers and ask them to help with new ones joining the same project
- Evaluate the project
- Take care of the volunteer during and after the project, ensuring contacts with the hosting organization while they are abroad in the project.
- Have responsibility after sending volunteers
- Visa support (if needed)
- Provide information about arrival date, time
- Provide emergency contact persons for family of volunteers
resented by an organisation, we display in the box at page 9, a basic to do list that a sending organisation should perform.

II.IV International Senior volunteers

And we arrive to the protagonists: the volunteers. In this context we identify a senior volunteer as being at least 50 years old and interested to work for a period abroad on a social project. You can think to host or send senior volunteers on an individual or a group basis. Apparently a group can be more tiring, but experiences showed that seniors abroad in a group tend to support each other very carefully and to find common solutions to problems. Even for the language it can be an advantage because it is easier to find in a group someone speaking some language spoken also by the responsible persons of the hosting organizations. Whereas individuals alone in a project may risk to feel isolated and their need to share their experience might be unsatisfied. This must be clear: if you need or look for permanent staff in your organization, you’d better forget to substitute them with international senior volunteers. They stay for short periods and they request a lot of your attention, to say nothing on the fact that volunteers are not there as cheap labor-force. But they represent an important resource in terms of intercultural learning and human support that your organization may need. We do not want to underestimate the practical work that they can perform to help you which is great, we just underline that they can’t and won’t substitute any paid staff.

A prerequisite that a volunteer should have in order to participate in an exchange programme is the actual motivation to work in another country. Apart from that, openness and curiosity concerning new experiences as well as the flexibility to adapt to new situations can be regarded as extremely important. Additionally, a volunteer participating in an exchange programme must know his or her limits and should be able to articulate them. In the best case a volunteer can assess beforehand whether certain conditions, situations or tasks are suitable, bearable and manageable for him or her – or is at least capable of noticing or communicating a perceived problem. Also, it needs to be clear to the senior volunteer that voluntary service is not a holiday, meaning that those with the expectation of merely having good time without investing work and expertise are not suitable.

What it is expected from volunteers

- Keep the motivation during the program
- Follow all agreements
- Respect the local culture
- Be responsible to their own belongings and themselves
- Keep and respect the different roles
- Be involved in the local community
- Give a written account of their experience
- Help new volunteers in returning to home country
- Have evaluation with local member
- Self management of free time
for participating in an exchange programme. Finally, volunteers should have some knowledge of the field and the regional characteristics and circumstances they will be working in. They should be willing to find out something about the country, the region and the organisation.

II.V The involvement of Local Governments

The results of the projects so far carried out were of especial interest to local and regional governments, as they are the bodies primarily concerned about the ageing of their populations. Some more inspired progressive local and regional governments have already promoted bilateral partnerships, but it is increasingly important that more local authorities start to recognize senior citizens as a resource and not only as a burden or a group of the population basically needing care.

We recommend that this inspiring model be adopted by local and regional governments willing to implement senior volunteer exchanges in other countries. Further impetus to adopt such a model could be instigated by senior volunteer organizations, as these have already in place the requisite skills and structures for setting up exchanges. Senior volunteer organizations can work both as hosting or sending organizations, or in both capacities, as in general they work in local networks linking many social organizations at the grass-root level.

This collaborative, symbiotic approach is advantageous in that the provision of valuable in kind service by local governments offers greatly enhanced benefits that direct funding per se cannot provide; volunteer organisations link in with established local government infrastructure and services, and in turn, local governments benefit from the grass-root networks and “labour” provided by the senior volunteers organizations; in this way it is possible to meet all the challenges of exchange programmes in the most efficient and cost effective way.

II.VI Finding a partner organisation in Europe

As in the main international voluntary service programmes such as the European Voluntary Service for young people launched by the European Commission, or the Medium and Long Term Volunteering programme held by the main International Voluntary Service Organisations, we have seen that a volunteer is basically recruited, prepared and sent by a Sending Organisation and received, fed and cared by a Hosting Organisation. One of the most serious problem that an organisation at local level may face is to find a partner in another country. Not only you may want a likeminded body, that work in your same area, but you want it affordable, sensitive, sharing your same principles and possibly with nice staff to deal with. That is not so different from finding a partner to share a bit (or more than it) of your personal life with the additional difficulty that you may not share the same mother tongue. Put it like this, it may seem too difficult and actually smaller organisations give up the idea even before starting to think seriously about it. But in this case we need to be stubborn if we want to build a Europe united not only by the currency (against which of course we have absolutely nothing), but also by the meeting and cooperation of people.

As a network we asked ourselves how we could help organisations in finding a partner abroad. So we have arranged a card with that may help you to outline a possible project for volunteers of another country. This card can also be used as a checklist of all the elements that you need to put in place in order to offer
a suitable project to senior volunteers. These cards are regularly uploaded on the SEVEN website, so everybody can have a look at the different projects and choose a likeminded partner or else use this service in a “passive” way and upload your own cards for everyone to see. A model of this card is displayed in ANNEX 3 of this booklet.

We also want to remind you that the Lifelong Learning Programme supports study visits and feasibility visits: so we invite you to contact the National Agency of your country to discover deadlines and eligibility conditions in order to receive a grant. Also the programme Europe for Citizens may be suitable when looking for resources: if you are responsible for a local government, the actions for twinned town may give the possibility to your senior citizens to deepen relationship with citizens of another country and agree together exchanges. (please see chapter III, description of project Twin and Go”).

As it can be easily imagined, for the benefit of a volunteer and the whole project a high degree of co-ordination between these two bodies is needed. In fact there is quite a lot of work to do before the volunteers arrive on a project, by both parts as we will see below. A good and continuous communication flow between hosting and sending must be performed. You may discover that this represents also one of the most important learning outcomes of the process.

Now, it is time to start the play!

1.1 Hosting side: arranging the tasks for the volunteers

When considering senior volunteers exchanges we immediately need to sort two points out: (a) which activities volunteers will be engaging in and (b) under what conditions these activities will take place. Due to the fact that actually the limit to designing a senior exchange is only represented by our fantasy, it is not possible to outline certain fields of activities or even specific conditions. People can volunteer in a wide variety of different areas and senior citizens can volunteer in any of these as long as it suits their individual needs and qualifications. We want to stress how important individual needs and prerequisites are, as well as the specific context under which the respective exchange takes place. However, we can list several general characteristics which are in line with the aims of an exchange programme for senior volunteers as described above. For obvious that may seem, the work needs to be useful, real work, allowing the senior volunteer to carry out meaningful tasks that are feasible and achievable. On the one hand, it might be helpful for an organisation and also for a volunteer
to work in an area he or she has previous experience in. On the other hand, a senior volunteer should also get the opportunity to work in completely new areas, to be able to use further skills or acquire new ones. The ideal type of work might differ for the volunteer and for the organisation. It is important that the placement of volunteers happens in a way which assures added value for both parties. Whatever qualification a senior volunteer may have or the characteristics of the work and the organisation are, it is important that these two sides match. This is a crucial aspect which has to be in place to ensure a successful exchange programme. Firstly, the volunteer and the organisation need be honest. Most importantly the volunteer should not overestimate his or her abilities and experience. Both need to define their offers and their limitations precisely and frankly. The type and the area of work and the actual tasks need to be set by the host organisation and the volunteers should choose what suit their needs and interests.

Taking into account that we are all humans, for how well you can prepare your exchange, circumstances can be such that the match between the volunteer, the work proposed and/or the hosting organisation is not adequate. In these cases all those involved should be flexible. If problems arise it is important to be prepared to change the tasks, the working conditions or the organisation should always be ready to provide a Plan B as a fallback option. Two key issues with respect to working conditions are the overall length of the voluntary work placement and the expected number of working hours per day and/or per week. Work and free time should be well balanced. The right equilibrium also depends on the needs of the organisation and the stamina and capabilities of the volunteers. It is hard to identify a minimum and a maximum working time. While the overall financing structure of an exchange programme will need to define a minimum working time (probably about 20 hours a week), no maximum should be defined per se. However, it is very important to agree on and fix the amount and type of time allocation for each individual placement. So while it is hard to give abstract time recommendations, on the level of the individual placement, fixed agreements with preceding negotiations – that take into account both parties’ needs - are necessary.

Concerning the length of placement for senior volunteers, it is also difficult to define an ideal or preferred duration. It is generally agreed that the average senior person will not be prepared to spend as much time abroad as a younger person might be willing (or able) to spend. Anything between two and four weeks may be considered feasible but someone may prefer a longer stay; some volunteers may feel that two weeks are too short, especially from the point of view of how useful the volunteer’s placement is for the organisation.

1.2 Contact person and team work
One of the main principles of a successful volunteer work placement is that the volunteer is not left alone. Good communication and caring for the needs of the foreign volunteer are fundamental for a good placement. At least one responsible contact person is crucial. There are several possibilities
and examples of how this can be sorted out. In many cases the responsible contact person is a paid staff member, who is responsible for coordinating volunteers within the organisation. It can be helpful to have a local volunteer as a “local friend” or mentor. A “hotline” or phone number in case of emergency or dire need should be in place.

In general, opportunities for regular communication and reflection of the voluntary work arrangement should be provided. Such regular meetings should enable working conditions to be adapted if necessary.

For most senior volunteers it is rewarding and important to feel that they are part of a team. The organisation should support this. Of course, there will always be occasions where the volunteer would prefer to work alone or it is necessary for him/her to do so. This needs to be clarified at the beginning of a placement.

Of course, apart from this “safety network”, all the other personal contacts should not be forced or preordained in a systematic way, but the organisation should create opportunities that support volunteers in establishing personal contacts with other international volunteers as well as with local ones.

1.3 Hosting side Framework conditions: arranging the hospitality: food, accommodation, local transport

The arrangement of suitable practical conditions for the reception of volunteers is the task of the hosting organisations. We will go through different possible arrangements and solutions to host senior volunteers: the best thing would be providing them with a single room with private bathroom. It is understandable that this is not always possible. So a twin room could do, especially if it is assigned to two friends. But we discourage any arrangement in a dormitory or in a multibed room.

Believe it or not, the bed is generally a serious concern for the volunteer: if you think that one third of their service will be spent in it, it is more easy to understand why, to say nothing about backbone aches that more easily affect all of us at a certain age.

Among the others, we have experimented with the following accommodation facilities.

Staying with a local family

This represents a very good opportunity for volunteers to know about local life, culture and customs and also for the host family an interesting learning chance. Volunteers do not need to worry about their food everyday and focus on other elements of the programme. Of course the relationship between host family and volunteers is very important and should be monitored by representatives of the hosting organizations.

Having a room with independent (or not) facilities

A room with facilities where the volunteer is working (like a guest house in a school or a room of an orphanage, etc) is also a good solution. This is ideal for better communication with the host organisation, and they do not need to worry about transportation. On the
other hand, the time of volunteers might tend to become repetitive and boring in this case. So they certainly need additional arrangements (cultural, social) outside the institution for refreshment.

**Sharing a vacant house or apartment with other volunteers**

Living alone and independently is a good way. Volunteers can have private time. On the other hand the volunteer may easily feel to be isolated from local community.

**Being accommodated in a Hostel or Bed & Breakfast**

If you can afford it, this would be a solution that would make the most of the volunteers very happy, even if it may encourage the feeling that they are on vacation. Of course there is nothing wrong in being on holidays, but the risk is that the volunteers are perceived by the local community as special tourists, and the volunteers may feel the same way towards the hosting environment. If the project forecast is a good integration between volunteers and local community, it might not represent a problem at all, again it is a matter of monitoring how this relationship develops.

**Food**

Believe it or not, as anybody else, a senior volunteer eats three times per day. And the host organization needs to provide these meals. In case of home stay, the hosting family will take care of the meals. If it is not possible to share meals in the project, a reasonable amount of money will be given to the volunteers to arrange the meals by themselves. Please remember to ask (via their sending organization) if volunteers have special dietary requirements and ensure beforehand that those can be met. Otherwise it is very important to inform the volunteers that it is not possible. Most of the volunteers (like all of us) have their own eating habits, so it is important that the sending organization advise the volunteers to be flexible about the food explaining them that this is also an interesting and valuable part of the intercultural learning process of their experience.

**Local transportation**

If the volunteers are accommodated far from the service placement, it is the task of the host organization to make arrangements for the local transportation. In this case you need to explain to the volunteers the way to get to the working place from their accommodation by walking or using public transport. In latter case, hosting organisation should provide tickets or monthly bus card. Do not forget to supply volunteer with the city map, where most of important points will be mentioned - accommodation place, working place, shops in the area, main sights, etc. This arrangement will depend from the situation, only do not forget that the distance between work place and accommodation is to be seriously taken into account when organizing an exchange.
1.4 Insurance

Another important practical arrangement required to protect both the volunteer and the host project is insurance. Needless to say that the host organisations or the volunteers themselves could encounter extreme financial problems if volunteers are not covered by insurance. The sending organisation should make sure that the volunteers have adequate insurance cover. Several commercial companies cover travellers against anything happening during their trips - excluding any accident that is related to a work situation. This could be a solution, but this option should be used with great caution because volunteers’ claims may well be deemed invalid. The problem resides in the fact that volunteers do not have a recognised status; they are somewhere in between a tourist and a worker without properly belonging to any of the two categories.

A good solution could be to apply to the insurance scheme run by some international voluntary service organisations. As an example we quote Service Civil International (SCI). They exchange more than 10,000 volunteers each year from one country to another and they have a collective contract with a major insurance company that covers all their volunteers and to which other organisations can apply upon request. It is possible either to apply to SCI or to enquire of other international voluntary service organisations about similar arrangements.

Another possibility is to check at local level whether insurance companies are willing to ensure senior volunteers abroad and under which conditions. And it is important to remember that in all EU countries, citizens have the rights to access health assistance as in their own country. So before volunteers leave, they should not forget their Health Insurance Card that certifies that they have this right in their countries.

ACT 2
FIND AND PREPARE YOUR VOLUNTEERS

2.1 Sending side: recruiting volunteers, professional and linguistic skills

While from one side, in some country, a project is being prepared for foreign volunteers from abroad, on the other some organisation is likely looking and preparing some volunteers to send.

In fact the recruitment and preparation of volunteers in our “play” is a task of the sending organisation as defined previously. In many cases the volunteers themselves look in their countries for an organisation that can help them to find a suitable project abroad. Should you be an organisation with good and established contacts in other countries, you may think to propose yourself as sending organisation, draft agreements and gather information on projects abroad to propose to your volunteers. Of course if you are an organisation working with volunteers,
it may be interesting for you to send them volunteering to another country in order to widen up their horizons and give them the chance to learn and do something new, stimulating and rewarding.

Being this a learning experience, one of the main features of these projects as we have organising them since the beginning, was that every volunteer should have been able to perform any project in order to give the chance to all to access this intercultural experience abroad. Many volunteers came to us with the idea of “helping” in the co-operation projects like those carried out in the South of the world. These projects require qualified volunteers with specific skills: of course they are fundamental and deserve all of our respect and admiration but it is not what we want to propose. The focus of our proposal is an educational one, it is based on the exchange and on the mutual intercultural learning among people coming from different backgrounds, either national, cultural and social. This is why we talk about “recruitment” more than “selection”. In fact under this perspective, in principle, everyone is suitable to perform a period of voluntary service abroad, regardless their skills, because every person will surely have something to learn and to teach at the same time. Every skill may turn out to be useful, not only those related to the practical work to be performed in the project.

The language is one of the factors that exclude the most of the volunteers. Indeed we should be honest on this: a volunteer in a foreign country who does not speak a word of the hosting country nor some English or other of the most known languages run the serious risk to feel isolated in a project. In this case they should not be sent alone, but at least with some mates who can translate for them. Or they could be encouraged to learn at least the basics of the language of the hosting countries: this may be sufficient but the volunteers should assess whether they have enough extra-verbal communication skills – such as body language for example. At the same time it must be said that even if volunteers can speak all the official languages of the European Union, but they don’t like to talk (or better to communicate) to other people, again they should assess whether this is an experience they really want to do. This proposal is quite specific so it is understandable that not everybody will like it or will need it. We just need to make things clear both for organisation and volunteers.

2.2 Sending side: preparing your volunteers

One of the main responsibilities of a sending organisation is the preparation of the volunteers. The training tool kit, which is prepared alongside this handbook, will give an idea of some possible scheme in order to develop the preparation of the volunteers; here we would like to underline the reasons why we believe it is important. What we suggest is to organise a seminar one or two days long, gathering all the volunteers who are leaving soon even if in different projects. We already said and we will insist later that not everybody may like the proposal of this experience, so it is important to clarify few things:

1. Volunteers are not useful in the sense of solving situations that otherwise would collapse without them. Plenty of local volunteers can do it in the same way avoiding long trips and with an easier management. But they are important because they represent a different culture, from a different background and with a different lifestyle.
What they are doing is basically an educational experience: they are learners and teachers at the same time. In many cases they will be in contact with young people and maybe working with them, but they will surely have to do with different ways to do things, different kind of people that probably they have never met before. In this sense they should leave with an open mind and being responsive to everything they see and to all persons they meet.

As a consequence, volunteers do not have to necessarily be involved in projects enhancing their technical skills. Of course these skills can be appreciated in a project, but if an organisation need a hydraulic or a doctor, they will find them locally. A volunteer who can “do nothing” but of course ready and willing to learn – if such a person exists – would be eligible for this programme as well.

These features make this programme uninteresting for some people and we believe it is important to make them clear before departure, so if volunteers misunderstood the whole experience they have their chance to withdraw or maybe simply changing their mind: they could say, they will try but at least they have the awareness of what the whole thing is all about. The hosting organisation will be highly grateful to you, if you could manage to prepare your volunteers in this way.
3.1 Considering taking part: skills assessment and self evaluation

There are a variety of issues to consider when making the decision whether to take part in an exchange programme or not. One of the main rationales for running exchange programmes is the idea that these provide a unique learning experience for individuals as well as organisations and thus also a teaching experience for both parties. So, one main issue is to be clear with yourself about what you would like to get out of participating in an exchange programme and what you can offer the host organisation and their members.

In this context it can be helpful to review your life skills, qualification and knowledge and think about which skills you would like to develop further. This should help you to decide whether you feel that participating in an exchange programme is for you or not. You might decide that looking for a volunteer opportunity in your vicinity suits you most or that an activity offering a paid outcome would be more adequate. However, in the end you might also decide that, yes, participating

Some questions that you should ask yourself are:

- What would I like to learn? How could I profit from this experience?
- What could I offer? How the others could profit from my skills and availability?
- What do I think I need, in order to volunteering abroad? Do I have these things? Where could I find them?

in an exchange programme may suit your needs and aspirations or more modestly and likely that you are curious enough to launch yourself and get this opportunity. In this case we invite you to continue the reading, otherwise, well, it was nice to have made your acquaintance.

The most important prerequisite you should have in order to participate in an exchange programme is the motivation to volunteer and be willing to do it in another country. Also you should have a certain amount of openness and curiosity concerning new experiences as well as the flexibility to adapt to new situations. As a volunteer who participates in an exchange programme you should also be able to know where your limits are and be able to communicate this to others. In this framework it is important to reflect beforehand whether there are certain conditions, situations or tasks that are not suitable, bearable or man-
ageable for you and choose your volunteer placement accordingly. You should have an interest or at least be willing to find out something about the country, region or organisation you will be working in. Previous experience in volunteering is not necessarily a must but can be helpful to enhance the benefits of an exchange programme. Also, you need to understand very clearly that voluntary service is not a holiday, meaning that if you expect to merely have a good time without investing work and expertise you should not participate in an exchange programme but rather approach your local travel agent who will have better solutions for you.

When you decide that an exchange programme is for you, you should reflect on what you can get out of it and what you may offer. It helps to become aware of your skills and experiences. You might be unsure about what valuable competences you have to offer or generally not be aware of all your skills. You may never have had an opportunity to analyze your own skills before and may not actually realize all those you have. You may also only think about skills in terms of formal qualifications but they also cover competences, knowledge, and those acquired informally over your life course. The capacity to listen to other people, to relate with them, to manage conflicts, for example, are valuable and important skills in such context.

You might be offered training / workshop to help you become clearer about the abilities you possess. This self analysis may then also help you identify the type of volunteer work that you wish to do. Otherwise, you might want to reflect on these issues yourself. An integral part of an exchange programme is to evaluate its success and assess volunteers’ personal development and learning experience. This aspect is crucial to draw the effectiveness of an exchange programme. In this connection it will also be important to assess your personal ‘journey’. One way is to compare your skills and personal qualities that you have at the start of the experience with those that you have at the end. This can be done using a range of methods but one very simple, but effective, method is to keep a diary — written, video or audio — of your experiences from the beginning of training to the end of your exchange.

3.2 Learning opportunities

So, which conditions outside the voluntary work placement are likely to enhance the learning opportunities for senior volunteers? This is an important question to answer if we want to improve the overall learning experiences and opportunities for senior volunteers.

The volunteers themselves stress the impact of the exchange on their personal lives, caused by this new experience. What they mentioned first and foremost is that they developed continuing friendship with other volunteers, NGO representatives or other acquaintances that they made in the foreign country. As for intergenerational projects, this can also include younger people, and if placed in teams, deep personal relations with colleagues from one’s own town or country can also be built up. As a matter of fact, the best experiences have been seen when senior and young volunteers worked together and shared their daily life from the work to the meals and sometimes even to the same accommodation. It is actually impossible to state, who is learning from whom but it is clear that the process of mutual enrichment is there and works.
Former senior volunteers pointed out that for them the main learning opportunities were ensured by deep intercultural experiences obtained through meeting local people and integrating themselves into the local community. Therefore, the following leisure time possibilities were emphasised by the volunteers as enhancing the learning opportunities:

- Meeting local people
- Visiting families
- Visiting other project
- Becoming acquainted with local heritage

Host organisations are advised to facilitate the above mentioned for the senior volunteers they host, keeping in mind that they benefit from the following conditions:

- Volunteers are given the opportunity to explore the wider community
- Host organisations give some freedom to their volunteers so that they can take over some responsibility for themselves (e.g. single travelling, cooking a meal for themselves – perhaps the first time, coping with foreign languages, dealing with unusual circumstances, etc.)
- Host organisations allow volunteers the opportunity to discover and experience unfamiliar situations or habits (e.g. staying with people of other cultures and backgrounds, coping with foreign languages, discovering different ways/ rules/ traditions, etc.)
- Volunteers are given the opportunity to compare work with that they normally do in their own country
- Volunteers are introduced to fresh approaches, thoughts, new ideas
- Opportunities for networking are given.

well destroying all possible prejudices and stereotypes people have towards those of a different generation.

Volunteering abroad starts a learning process not only for the seniors who go abroad and learn from the new environment. It is also a learning process for their hosts who have to deal with experienced people from different countries and backgrounds bringing in new and different ways of working and more generally conceive life. This mutual exchange fosters the dialogue between people from different generations and different countries, becoming a step towards a greater understanding in the entire European Community.

### 3.3 The framework conditions: few considerations (hopefully) useful to volunteers

The intercultural value of the experience we were talking about, doesn't change if we perform our service in a big town, in a small village or in the middle of the forest. We might have some preferences, maybe we already know one place and we would like to visit it not as tourist, or maybe someone recommended us some other places because people are open and friendly or reserved but welcoming and so on. We advise you to follow your desires and inclinations when choosing a destination. When we talk about intercultural experience we also want to refer to one of the most effective feature of this programme: check our prejudices. Wherever you go be careful of stereotypes and be receptive with your ears and eyes; you will be pleasantly surprised.

In order to focus on the learning aspects of the experience, volunteers are not necessarily required to have specific skills to take part in international voluntary
service activities: what is needed is a good motivation and a spirit of flexibility. Indeed this is one of the key-points of this programme: every volunteer can take part in any project if they like it. If you spent your life designing high fashion clothing but you cannot handle a hoe, you could take part in an organic agriculture project if you wish. Having ironed shirts for all of your life will not prevent you from taking part in an animation project with children and at the same time a professional boxer might like to help in opening a new pathway in the mountains.

Got it? Let’s face now two typical objections to all this:

1. How can I “help” doing something if I am not skilled and have to learn everything?

   Fundamental rule of international voluntary service: volunteers do not steal jobs of local working labour. What would you think if you were a social worker, operating with children and you were fired because lovely volunteers came from abroad substituting you for good? This is unfair competition (if not incitement to xenophobia) and we are not interested in it. Let’s clarify the issue of “helping”. If an organisation needs relevant work in its office, they will hire skilled technicians who will do the job. A volunteer from abroad represents more an important resource for a project in terms of intercultural learning. It is important what they can do at a practical level in the everyday activities, but their presence and “diversity” represent a value in itself. An adult volunteer has many experiences to pass on even if they are not relevant with the actual work they perform. This is even more important when young people are involved in the project: the inter-generation exchange is one of the aims of this programme. Skills we are looking for are more related with human than manual capacities: relationship building, ability to listen to others and to share our experiences.

2. Why should I go abroad to take care, say, of children? Don’t they have their local volunteers?

   Logically speaking this question definitely makes sense. In most European countries, there are a lot of volunteers active at local level. To cut the grass in a garden or hammering a nail in a youth centre or telling a story to a disabled child, no one is waiting from us from far away. Hopefully, we must refer again to the concept of “helping” and “being useful” as outlined above. At the beginning the presence of foreign volunteers in a project might also represent a burden from the host organisation’s point of view: the main focus is then on the inter-exchange, from our perspective. If you don’t believe that the meeting of different cultures is an advantage both for you and your host and that the building of a less uncivil society necessarily needs to be confronted with diversity, you will be probably not interested in this programme. If instead all this stimulated your curiosity, it might be worthwhile to continue reading more information on this programme.
**We are what we eat: food related issues.**

What you can expect about the accommodation is already described at chapter 1.3. We suggest to you that if you have specific requirements about the place where you will be spending some weeks of your life, you make it clear in advance with your host. In this section we would like to spend few words on the food. One of the aims of this programme is to have new experiences and this applies to food as to everything else. In several cases – especially in situations of community life – someone else will cook for you: not everyone is a good cook nor is the right person always at the right place. You may leave from your country with your suitcase full of the food you are used to, but to take on board the risk of a drastic change in your diet is also part of the experience; and it doesn’t necessarily mean that you will have a so bad experience. Be prepared to experiment with different types of food and perhaps you may also like to cook for your host organisation to introduce them to the cuisine of your country.

The most common arrangement on food:

Simple recommendations worked out by a group of former senior volunteers and host organisations concerning food arrangements on host projects prove the points below.

- In case of a home stay the host family takes care of the guest meals.
- Meals can be provided on the project, which is easily achieved if it is a residential project, e.g. an orphanage.
- Volunteers may arrange meals themselves, in which case a certain amount of money should be available.
- In certain cases, volunteers may even have to contribute to the costs of the meals but have to be aware of it before joining the placement.
- If a volunteer has to follow a special diet, the host organisation must be informed so that his/ her dietary requirements can be met. If it turns out to be impossible, the volunteer is advised to search for another project.
- Adequate food arrangements must be considered and agreed in advance between the volunteers and host organisation.
- Dietary needs must be clearly mentioned by the volunteers well in advance.
- The host should not forget their role of being hosts – show your hospitality!

**Trip or Trick?**

The trip represents an important part of the experience. You might travel alone or with other persons joining the same project. You will get detailed instructions to arrive to the place where the project is held with all the relevant phone number in case of emergency and you will be expected to reach the final destination of the project on your own. The best way to avoid problems while travelling is staying at home. Nothing can guarantee that going from A to B will happen smoothly and without problems: in a way it is the core of travelling. What we can do is alert you to the most common inconveniences. We selected two of them among the others:

1. **Missing your connection**

Never had the thrilling experience of missing a connection? We don’t think so and it is likely to happen to you again. In this case, first don’t panic and then try to contact one of the emergency numbers especially those of the hosting project to tell them that you will be probably late. It will help especially if someone is waiting for you at the airport or at the train station: they will not get worried first and angry later: a furious host cannot guarantee a nice beginning...
Missing your baggage

According to the statistics at least the 5 percent of the baggage embarked on a plane follows a different destination from its owner. It may happen. This advice might seem superfluous but it wants to be a reminder: bring a change of clothes in your hand baggage, urgent medicines and whatever else you might need during the first two days. But most of all: don’t panic!

All the airports are equipped with a specific department able to give you the necessary assistance normally in some language that you can understand. Be as co-operative as you can and your luggage will reach you within 48 hours. Someone probably will come to pick you up at the airport or at the train station. It may happen as well that nobody can come: don’t take it as a personal discourtesy, try instead to understand how the local transport system works. Try to gather the relevant information before your departure: in many cases you can find relevant information on the internet.

Leisure time

Leisure time is a very important element of the voluntary service abroad. It is the time when a great deal of intercultural learning takes place. Previous experiences show that some host organisations underestimate or disregard the importance of leisure time as a learning possibility. But also the volunteers may not be conscious of it. Could learning opportunities be enhanced by host organisations through leisure time arrangements? Or is leisure time simply the volunteers’ free time and as such, should be left to their disposal and left untouched by the host projects?

Before answering these questions let us first have a look at various possibilities for leisure time activities. Depending on the location and the nature of the host project these could be:

- Local sightseeing
- Cultural visits
- Family visits
- Visits to other host projects in the area
- Meetings with other volunteers and local people
- Recreation, and finally
- Free time – as volunteers certainly sometimes need to be on their own.

It is important to understand that all the above is optional – it could or should be offered to the volunteer, but one cannot insist on a volunteer’s participation. Often volunteers like to organise their leisure time themselves. However, such self organisation may require certain language skills, the lack of which may easily become an obstacle. This should be taken into account by host organisations. Moreover, hosts taking good care of volunteers should provide detailed information about leisure time possibilities in the area and help them access it.

3.4 Verbal and body language: communication or information?

The language of your country is not spoken in most other countries. This simple consideration leads to the self-exclusion of many possible volunteers. To express
oneself in a different language is not always easy. If we have never done it, we might feel like the actors of “Mission Impossible”. It is an advantage if you have a basic knowledge of English or the language spoken in your hosting country, that’s an advantage. During the pre-departure phase, it can be a good idea to attend that language course you have always put off or to phone the nice couple of foreigners you met at the beach last summer. It is fair to add that if you fluently speak five languages but you are not interested in communicating with other people there is a serious problem just the same.

As stated above, the idea of this programme is to give the chance to all to have an experience of voluntary service abroad: at the same time we don’t think it is a good idea to venture with no knowledge of the hosting country language or at least of the English language that many people can more or less manage. If you don’t speak any foreign language at all and you don’t want to – or cannot – learn one, we invite you to consider performing a period of voluntary service in your country (maybe in a different town from where you live) as a starter and then if you like the idea prepare yourself linguistically for the next year abroad.

When we travel to another country to volunteer, being willing and able to use the language of those around you shows a degree of respect for, and interest in, your host organisation and their culture. Like anywhere else in the world, languages in Europe carry a great weight of social, political, and cultural significance: it is not merely a question of communication. It is important that we remember this when we travel.

Being able to understand instructions and suggestions easily is helpful for a successful project. Without an ability to speak the language, volunteers are limited in the type of projects they can be involved with. It will be difficult to work with the very young or the very old or the very ill if one cannot communicate with them properly.

We don’t believe we should exclude a volunteer because of their language capabilities (if we did it is likely that we would, almost by definition, be excluding certain socio-economic groups).

How is it possible to communicate with people whose spoken language we don’t know? For thousands of years humankind communicated successfully without speaking. Anthropologists teach us that the languages we use today for speaking are less than 10,000 years old. This means that we have inbuilt knowledge of non-verbal communication, as little children teach us. It is a language that we already know and just need to be strongly refreshed.

Scientific research demonstrates that only 22% of communication is verbal. This means that 78% is non-verbal! This is a strong paradox, because we are used to privileging verbal communication, to think that only words are meaningful. When we think about communication we should remember the original meaning of this word: it comes from the Latin and signifies to put in common, this means then that communication is something both parts do together by putting in common different elements. It happens that we confuse communication and information thinking that they are synonyms, which is incorrect. To inform, means that I give to you signs that shape an idea I want to illuminate in your mind. It is unilateral and does not implies feedback: I’m not interested in your reaction. To communicate means more or less the opposite: it means that you and I together create a meaning that we both wish and need.

Thus we want to invite you to a final reflection. As communication is much more
related to the emotional register; directed through gestures and movements, it turns out quite interesting for us to recognise the way emotions influence communication. And finally: “non verbal” doesn’t mean voiceless, on the contrary a lot of attention should be focused on the voice and the “way” we say things.

3.5 Use of Internet based communication tools...

New technologies - especially tools offered on the Internet - are very helpful to prepare an exchange and they can also assist us while it is carried out and to review it. We may use the Internet to communicate and to gather information on the web but you may also deliver information on the Internet about the experiences you made. If you are a cybernaut you probably already know how to use the internet and its potentialities, in case you are not have a look at these suggestions that we have collected for you. Let’s proceed with order:

The search for an institution which offers adequate exchange opportunities according to your own interests could be done either by a look on the website of the SEVEN network or by using a search engine like Google, Yahoo, or alternative ones like Ecosia. You could look for example for your special interests, subjects, countries where institutions are located, conditions and so on. The whole thing is quite easy; just go on the homepage of these search engines put some key words and in few seconds you will get a list of the major items on the internet that has that specific words. At the point you can have a lot of fun to explore what you have just found.

If you have found an institution or even more which should be compared you can get in contact with them by using e-mail. A lot of free email services are offered on the web, a well-known international one is Googlemail, but there are also a lot of national offers like GMX in German speaking countries. You may ask for everything you are interested in as regards being a senior volunteer in this organization. After your decision for one institution you may send your application form as well by email as an attachment to the persons in charge.

Another use of emails is to get in contact with other volunteers. Ask the institutions for their addresses and get to know them before meeting during your stay abroad. Or even meet them virtually before you start your exchange and use a tool like Doodle to find a date which fits to everybody who should take part in such a meeting. So you may get more acquainted with the exchange situations and the persons who are involved.

An additional use of the Internet is the preparation of an exchange by accessing an E-learning platform. If institutions offer learning modules e.g. on an E-learning platform like Moodle or ILIAS you could take part in a course. Its content could for example be specific information about the host country, the host institution, the tasks which will await you or language exercises.

The Internet is also very helpful to prepare different aspects of the journey to the host country. Wikipedia – a virtual encyclopedia updated by the users themselves - could give you information about the country. It offers time tables of rail-
way enterprises or air carriers, the opportunity to buy online train or plane tickets. If you want to translate texts, online dictionaries like LEO are good assistants for single words or expressions. Google offers a translation tool for whole texts or websites. You also could take part in language courses like for Italian of the broadcasting station Rai internazionale or the BBC. If you want to prepare possibilities for your leisure time you again could use the mentioned search engines or additional tools like Google Maps or Google Earth for virtual tours in the cities and places you are interested in.

During an exchange, you may have the need to get in contact with people who are at home. Of course you could call them on the phone. But wouldn’t you like to see the persons as well? In this case you additionally could use besides mobile phones a tool called Skype. It offers cheap telephone calls via Internet (Voice over IP) but as well video broadcasting for free. Only the regular Internet charge is to be paid.

You may also share your experiences with your relatives at home but as well for future volunteers by writing an online diary. They are called weblog or shortly only blog. They can be easily set up by Internet offers like Wordpress. You may write texts, they may get comments on them if you like. You also may release pictures. And if you want to remember your exchange after having finished it you may also always look at your blog and blogs of other senior volunteers. Certainly a nice memory.

After the exchange a review is recommended to reflect the experiences you made. You also may be interested in staying in contact with the organising and host institutions and with other volunteers. Of course you may use communication and information tools which are mentioned above. But there are additional ones. A chat room is worth to visit for a conversation with some participants who are at the same time in front of their computers. The statements are usually not very long, so you don’t need too much time to read them and you can reply quickly. If you own a headset and a webcam – both also useful for Skype – you could also take part in an online video conference, there are also some easy to use tools which are free of charge. If you want to discuss experiences in a more distinctive and asynchronous manner you could use an internet discussion forum. Statements may be longer than in chats, of course answers, too.

Maybe you also would like to share the pictures you made. There are some picture communities which support you in this purpose like Flickr or Picasa. If you even have made some small movies YouTube could be the right place to publish them.

If you use the Internet you will experience that its tools are helpful to inform oneself, to communicate with others, to learn and to share experiences and memories. Enjoy it and be curious. Some tools are presented and explained on the SEVEN website in the section “Internet tools”. But also let yourself surprise by new tools which will enrich the Internet in future. There certainly will be some which are also worth to be used in senior volunteer exchange situations.
3.6 Obstacles...and difficult moments

Life can have its difficulties. The time spent on voluntary service abroad will not be any different.

A period away and “home sweet home”

When we started working on our pilot projects, we wanted to propose to future adult volunteers periods of voluntary service ranging from 3 to 6 months. The reality suggested to us something different: most of the volunteers had too many engagements with their families and in general did not feel comfortable to stay away for such a long period. The proposal had to be reviewed in order to meet these needs: this is why we fixed a period ranging between 2 and 8 weeks. Less than this we believe it would not have been worthwhile. Before leaving try not to spread too much unhappiness behind you: water your plants, leave food for your cat and explain to your families exactly what you are going to do and why and that you will phone or contact them frequently (and then please do it). We have just seen that technology can assist us.

International voluntary service and the “Foreign Legion”

This is important: do not take this experience as a period in the “Foreign Legion”. If something really bad happened to you recently or if you are trying to escape from some very difficult situation by taking part in a project of voluntary service abroad, you can be sure that it simply won’t work: your problems will follow you wherever you go. Please consider that hosting projects normally have enough troubles without yours and if they don’t you can be sure that they won’t miss it. Be honest and clear with yourself about it otherwise it could lead to a bad experience.

Interrupting a project

We all make mistakes. We all can make wrong choices and at the same time we can be unlucky. Sometimes we expect something different from what we find or we realise that we were not interested in something only when we are inside a certain situation. This guidebook is meant to limit these problems as much as possible but it is unrealistic to predict all the situations that may happen - and maybe not so interesting. Taking for granted the good faith of the hosting organisation and the hosted volunteer; there might be a lot of different reasons why a volunteer decides to interrupt a project. Try not to view it as a failure nor to blame someone else. In the most of the cases the decision of a volunteer to leave a project early springs from an accumulated series of things that went wrong. Every time you have a problem you should talk to your tutor or if you prefer with your sending organisation in order to find possible solutions. If you tried everything without success you might decide to leave; please agree that with your hosting and sending organisations don’t just leave. It is very important to understand and discuss the motivations of this choice in order to avoid misunderstandings, not to repeat the same mistakes in the future and to help the organisations to see where they might change the way they work with volunteers.
3.7 Tips and opinions from Dietmar, a Senior for successful volunteering in Europe

■ ABOUT MY VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPE
After retirement in 2004, I was 61 years old and I said to myself: “Take the advantage of this phase of life and look for a new field of interest to explore.” Therefore, I looked for volunteering activities in order to stay active and adventurous and to juice-up on new energies and broaden my horizons. One has to take advantage of this chance - not to wither away in retirement. Because it is true, if you rust, you rust as we say in Germany. I discovered that performing volunteer work in your own city or country was not the only option. I could do something in Europe. Volunteering abroad may imply some inconveniences: a long journey, sometimes troublesome, different habits in another new country where the mentality is different, to say nothing about the food. And what about the different climate? Too hot, too cold or too many other things. Nevertheless, the attraction of volunteering in Europe is to meet foreign people and gain a new understanding because of the intercultural atmosphere. It is a fact: Europe needs the seniors. From my experiences of six placements in Germany, Italy, France and Ukraine I would like to share with future volunteers some useful tips.

■ ASSESSING IF YOU CAN DO IT OR NOT
At the beginning, it is important to compare your own abilities with the demand of the task at hand and balance these factors. Identify carefully the technical demand profile of the placement and examine honestly your own capabilities and your own capacity. You should be fit for the job, a team player, respectful of others and willing to cope and to adapt to different placement conditions. If your placement is outside your country, try to learn the language. A basic knowledge of English is very helpful. You must really ask yourself if you meet these requirements. If not, one should decline the work or take the necessary precautions in order not to get undesired surprises and disappointments. During your placement, you may be required to fulfil a variety of activities. Among the others, handicraft work, painting, restoration and renovation of old buildings but also help and cleaning in the kitchen. You could also take care for elderly people for which you should have some special experience. Sometimes it may be hard work: in general pure desk-work is not asked from a Senior. Never forget: volunteering, although enjoyable, is not a holiday.

■ ABOUT PREPARING YOURSELF
It is necessary to get as much information as possible about the placement. The more comprehensive the information, the better you can get prepared and the greater the benefits will be. So search for information about the country and travel arrangements. Learn about the hosting organisation and all the financial and working conditions around it. Ask for a description-sheet of the placement. Even with the best preparation, be aware that problems can occur during the placement - there might be too much or too little work, being often or never alone, not finding enough contact, language problems and finally wrong expectations. Therefore, you must be flexible and able to make compromises.

■ THE BEST LENGTH OF TIME FOR VOLUNTEERING ABROAD
Successful volunteering demands from the Senior a high motivation, a great ability to compromise, to quickly adapt, to be able to improvise and to remain flexible. Volunteering periods should not be shorter than two weeks. The best is three or four weeks to have a win-win-situation for both sides: for the volunteer and for the hosting organisation. The length of volunteering depends also on the personal situation of the senior: it might not be the same if you are married or single. However, it maybe a new chance for couples: when both...
are retired, they can volunteer together. This will bring a new experience in their common life. If you are alone and a bit anxious try to find another senior to come with you. But never go volunteering when you have personal problems and you want to escape them. In this situation it is better to stay at home.

**MEETING YOUNG PEOPLE IN A PROJECT**
Volunteer work should always bridge the generations. To have both junior and senior volunteers working in the same place is an irreplaceable experience. To be together with youngsters should not be a problem for the senior. However, when you are in an intergenerational placement be aware that there might be a few differences between young and old in the working hours and the working activities. The same applies to the accommodation. When young and old are together, there might not be single rooms but dormitory type accommodation. Younger people often prefer this. For them this kind of accommodation is fun, but not necessarily for us seniors, who need a kind of privacy. So if you are in such a situation try to arrange a single bedroom in advance. Remember you will have to clean your room and your space by yourself. The least needs and claims you have, the best for you.

**ABOUT RECORDING THE EXPERIENCE**
While volunteering write a diary to note all the important things like the working times, the special occurrences at work, proposals for improvements and learning outcomes. This will be useful when an evaluation is made of your stay. This is so important for the success of your volunteering. Back home, pass on your experiences to other interested persons by speaking and writing articles in the local press, give a paper or organise a seminar. Cooperate closely with the responsible organisations in order to shape and formulate future concepts for the placement programme.

**IS IT A REWARDING AND WORTHWHILE EXPERIENCE?**
If you look for a volunteering placement by yourself you may be asked to pay some fee and your own travel costs. At the same time you get insurance, lodging and eating for free. I believe these are well spent money as you get in contact with different culture and persons, you practice foreign languages and you will have enough free time for leisure. There is now a European Programme for Senior Volunteers (SVP), but this programme address only organizations, so if you want to use it you need to involve a NGO or your local Government. Volunteering provides a fascinating cultural experience and strengthens ones understanding of different peoples. The rewards will be huge and plenty. You will return home feeling personally enriched and equipped to achieve greater things. This is for me the most worthwhile gift in this new stage of life. You are never too old to learn something new. Do volunteer in Europe as long as you can!
EPILOGUE
EVALUATING THE PROJECT AND THE EXPERIENCE

To reflect upon something that you have done is always an advisable thing. If this “something” involve the efforts of several people who did their best to arrange a work placement it is a due act to assess the experience. If the latter involve the money of European or local taxpayers, this must become an obligation. Since European exchanges of older volunteers are still in an experimental phase and may be in the process of establishing formal structures, evaluation is especially relevant. All projects involving volunteer exchanges should be evaluated. This is also a prerequisite for all projects funded through the SVP – SeniorVolunteering Programme within the European Commission’s GRUNDTVIG programme. Evaluation is necessary in order to ensure that the objectives that funders, organisations and volunteers would like to achieve through funding, organising and participating can actually be reached through these projects. Thus, the evaluation measures the conceptual goals and objectives against their realised outcomes.

Questions to be answered by evaluation concerning these global objectives can be, among the others:

- Has intercultural and/or intergenerational learning taken place?
- Was trans-national knowledge transfer possible?
- Were contacts and cooperation fostered between NGOs and/or local authorities?

Evaluation questions concerning objectives on operational level might be:

- Did the placement suit the interests and capabilities of senior volunteers?
- Did they offer adequate working conditions?
- Did the accommodation respect the needs of senior volunteers?
- Were the regulations concerning food adequate?
- Were insurances against health, accident and third-party-liability risks in place and were they adequate?

An evaluation offers to all persons involved the opportunity to comment on the positive aspects of the exchange that have worked well from the beginning. However, if problems are demonstrated through the evaluation, the necessary changes for the current or for future activities need to be implemented. In most cases evaluation should entail “formative evaluation” or “process oriented evaluation” as well as “summative evaluation” or “outcome oriented evaluation”. Which methods are used in detail depends on the individual context.

Formative or Process Oriented evaluation involves dividing the project design into individual working steps which are then consecutively evaluated through-
out the project. The aim of this form of evaluation is to monitor the process of the project, detect problems at an early stage and encourage improvements to be made during the project itself. If problems are detected through the formative evaluation, it can be decided whether measures should be taken to solve the problems or – if they are due to conceptual errors – the overall design is revised. In applying the formative evaluation approach, a cooperation with specialists is useful. They can either monitor the working process themselves or can develop, together with the staff concerned, materials for self-evaluation which can be applied without external support.

**A Summative or Outcome Oriented evaluation** aims to measure the outcomes of a project when it is finished. Here, the main aim is to assess whether the planned goals were achieved or not, a perspective which can be especially important for funders of projects, but also for organisations and volunteers to decide whether the activity put in place should continue.

The methods used for evaluation will vary according to the size of the project, number of people to be consulted and the resources available for evaluation. A combination of interactive evaluation exercises, individual and/or group interviews and written questionnaires has proved to be quite effective in assessing the process and outcomes of exchange projects for senior volunteers. An evaluation can simply consist in discussing all relevant points in a structured way with all persons involved and taking their recommendations for improvement. Sometimes it can be helpful if older volunteers, paid staff, local government representatives etc. get the opportunity to discuss the process and outcomes of the project in separate groups. This can be helpful since the same outcome can be assessed in a positive and in a negative way, depending on an individual perspective or a particular function.

Personal discussions can be replaced by **written questionnaires**. Also here it can be helpful to offer different questionnaires for different group of actors. The questionnaires must not only reflect all important themes and issues but also be very clear in their wording. If it is done without external support, it should be thoroughly checked as regards potential misunderstandings. A balance must be found between closed answers and the opportunity for open answers. A final box for personal comments should always be included in order to allow for remarks on issues which are important but have been forgotten by the evaluator. Written inquiries are a good way to collect larger numbers of assessments but cannot compensate for in-depths reflections by personal discussions that should always complement the questionnaires. Examples of a written questionnaire can be found in the tools section (Annex 4).
AFTER THE PLAY
I ALSO WANT TO TAKE PART

A. Member of an organization in Europe?
Discover the action for Senior Volunteering launched by the European Commission and get involved

The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) is the tool promoted by the European Commission that aims to offer various educational opportunities to people of all ages, in order to facilitate formal, non-formal or informal learning. In this framework, the adult education sub-programme better known as Grundtvig supports bilateral partnerships and exchanges of senior volunteers between organisations located in two different programme countries, thanks to the running of a specific action on Senior Volunteering. This is increasingly recognised as a valuable informal learning experience for people of all ages, thus able to offer new learning opportunities to senior citizens in Europe, promoting the process of active ageing and emphasising the contribution of seniors to our societies. This action therefore offers a new form of mobility to European senior citizens and will allow them to learn, to share knowledge and experience in a European country other than their own. This form of mobility also fosters collaboration between the organisations which will send and host volunteers. It should allow new types of organisations to develop European oriented experiences and enrich their work through the exchange of good practices.

The action pursues the following interlinked, equally important, objectives

1. To enable senior citizens to volunteer in another European country for any kind of non-profit activity, as a way of informal (and mutual) learning activity.
2. To create lasting cooperation between the host and sending organisations around a specific topic or target group, and thanks to the exchange of volunteers.
3. To enable the local communities involved in the exchange of volunteers to draw on the potential of senior citizens as a source of knowledge, competence and experience.

Volunteers are expected to increase their personal, linguistic, social and intercultural skills and competences, contribute to the development and implementation of non-profit activities, and beyond this, contribute to the community as active citizens and develop and transmit specific task-related skills.

Organisations and local communities in which the volunteers spend their mobility period abroad will get mutual acquisition of experience, knowledge and good practices, a development of European collaboration around a particular theme, and an intensified European outlook.

How it works practically

Projects involve two organisations, i.e. one from each of the two LLP countries participating in the programme. One of these countries must be an EU Member State. Each organisation will be expected to send 2-6 volunteers and to host as many, during a period of two years. Sending and hosting may take place at the same time but not necessarily. The action is open to all...
adult citizens aged 50 or above. The volunteering activity in the other country is
carried out in one continuous period of 3-8 weeks, not including the necessary
preparation and debriefing phases.
Particular emphasis will be given to encouraging the participation of volunteers
from socially disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities, thereby helping to
strengthen their integration in Europe and to combat racism and xenophobia.
Equal participation of both genders is encouraged. It should, be noted that the
activities in which the volunteers will be involved must be non-profit making and
should provide real learning opportunities - whether formal, non-formal or (most
usually) informal - for the volunteers. They should not only observe but also par-
ticipate actively in the partners’ activities. Thus the sending and hosting organisa-
tions who are the project partners are expected to build a lasting cooperation
around a specific theme, through the exchange of volunteers. They should there-
fore have similar or complementary profiles.

Further information
Additional information and documentary resources for project partner organ-
isations and volunteers are available on the National Agencies’ websites, on the
LLP/Grundtvig website on ec.europa.eu and on the SEVEN website
www.seven-network.eu.

B. Only few weeks free? Spend your time in a workcamp

If you only have two or three weeks and you like the idea of being included in
an international group with other 10 to 15 volunteers of different ages you could
consider the participation to an international voluntary workcamp. Since 80 years,
this has been representing a unique form of residential voluntary service. Work-
camps bring together people from different backgrounds to live and work on
projects that will be of benefit to a local community or group. They are designed
to assist and encourage local initiatives that will continue even after the in-
ternational projects end.

A workcamp offers an exciting “experience” to volunteers from different
countries who happen to live and work together for a short period to
carry out a project organized by an association or a local authority. In
such projects the relationship’s quality between the voluntary group and
the hosting local community, whether this is a little village or a big town
quarter or a residential community, is the most important. The group
actually becomes a tool of social animation through a deep human ex-
change.

Another part of the group experience is a commitment to working out
the decisions and problems together; in other words an interesting exercise of
practicing democracy and a way for the individual to be involved in decision mak-
ing processes: all volunteers are supposed to give a contribution to the manage-
ment of the camp and all opinions are respected. In theory this is easy to do but
when you have a group of people with totally different background (in terms of
lifestyles, religious beliefs, visions of the world...), this aspect may turn out to be
the most challenging.

The work is important and is not a mere occupational time: all projects are an-
swering a real local need, with strong expectations by the sponsors (local com-
nunities and councils).
A workcamp can be organised around many diverse activities: from environmental protection to social help to disadvantaged, including animation with kids or elders and the promotion of cultural and recreational activities, without forgetting legality's education and the promotion of human rights. A workcamp finally means for youth and adults the chance to do an alternative holiday, and it is a good way to improve their knowledge of a foreign language. The required qualifications to participate are simple - be adaptable and eager to stay together and have the ability of sharing a common aim with people who may come from different cultures.

**How it works practically:**
You have to pay for your trip and for (a reasonable) administrative fee to the organisation that will send you abroad. In the workcamp you will get free food, accommodation and insurance. Contact an organisation of those listed below and access their catalogues with the descriptions of all the projects and check whether there are still free places or not in that particular project you chose. Workcamps are open to all. Most of them hosts between 6 and 20 volunteers. The group is likely made up of people from various nationalities and backgrounds. Some camps are wheelchair accessible or open to families. Usually the group will share the tasks of cooking and cleaning on a rotate basis. Accommodation depends on the local possibilities (many projects are in rural areas): from mattresses in a school hall, to camping, to dormitories in a youth hostel or youth centre. An international workcamp is a locally international experience, which depends on the input of its participants. Animators prepare the project, facilitate the life of the group, lead the work (sometimes with extra support from a specialist) and create links with local communities. They are the heart of the project, and will have a special attention to the individual integration of the volunteers.

**Further information**
Please check the websites of the major European networks dealing with workcamps:
- www.alliance-network.eu
- www.sciint.org
- www.yap.org
- http://ccivs.org/
- www.bouworde.be

**C. Few months to offer? Learn about Long Term Voluntary Service**
In case you have more time to dedicate we suggest to you to check this option. You can consider the voluntary service period abroad as a journey that has different phases, helping you to come to a deep understanding of your host community and yourself. You will receive individual guidance through a mentor in the placement as well as through the sending and hosting organisations. Seminars (gatherings of volunteers) are organised at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of your service. Why this perspective of a journey of 6 months or more? We believe that you get the most thorough insight into another culture and thus the most out of your voluntary service if you stay abroad for an extensive period of time. As a long-term volunteer, you get involved in your respective hosting community and your placements, establish relationships with colleagues,
other volunteers and people in their surrounding and develop a deep understanding of the local living conditions. With your commitment and the perspectives that you bring into the social work, you will start a mutual learning process within your placements as well as in your host community. Moreover, you are exemplifying solidarity with marginalised people in Europe by living and working with them for a longer period of time.

**Who can become a volunteer?**

Voluntary services is open to everybody irrespective of origin, religion, education or profession. What you need to have is flexibility – as you will be confronted with many challenges and unexpected situations during your voluntary service, readiness to deal with new people and living conditions. You will gain a deeper insight into the new culture if you are ready to get involved in the local life and interact with the whole hosting community.

In English, French and German-speaking countries, it is usually necessary to have a basic knowledge of the language. For the other countries you should at least speak English or another language spoken by some of the hosting staff. You should be willing to learn the local language for which you will receive language training.

### Further information

Please check the websites of the major European networks dealing with long term voluntary service:

- [www.edyn.org](http://www.edyn.org)
- [www.avso.org](http://www.avso.org)
- [http://www.iicye.org/](http://www.iicye.org/)
They have done it! Witnesses from volunteers

We report here quick passages taken by the reports of volunteers who have performed voluntary service abroad. Please take into account that the most of these volunteers are not English speakers, so they do not express themselves directly in their language.

Running after Lovely Children

The work with children is going on well. We became so familiar to them that they have decided to ignore our suggestions. I had to stop countless water fights in the toilette, run after them for kilometres along the passages, separate many children fighting...what a stressful time! On the other hand, when they come close to me to hug and kiss me asking me to play in their team, I’m almost touched...

Sun in the Shade

In that little village, where the exchange took place, it was fun for the local community to meet and greet us...we were a novelty! We tried to create a relationship with the local community. Sometimes we were also able to involve the children in our work, because they were interested and curious about our activities, so that they became our enthusiastic assistants. By mutual consent, we also visited a hosting house for people living with AIDS. It was a wonderful moment for everybody. In the beginning, no one knew what to do, but after a while, everyone found a way to interact and communicate...it was a rainy and cloudy day but everyone was talking about sun!

My Romance with the Little Pests

Can you imagine what has happened? In the afternoon, when I told the children that the next week I would have to leave, they clung to me and started to pull my clothes shouting and crying because they wanted me to stay longer with them - I ran to the bathroom because I could not stop crying. Then they did some drawings with many little hearts and one picturing me with my big earrings and themselves while they were greeting me. They wrote everywhere I love you...It was a very harrowing scene! Is it possible to fall in love so much with these little pests?

Understanding the World

I can only say that a voluntary-service experience abroad changes oneself for the better. Feeling useful at social level, being in relationships with different cultures, learning languages and habits, are very important tools both for future working life and, above all, for ourselves, because in this way it is possible to understand how to face the world around us and instead of ignoring problems to face them and propose solutions...
Touch with my Hands

In this experience I learnt many things but over all not to trust commonplaces as you can really know people or a country only when you live there. Your country gave me so much and this beautiful experience will accompany me during all my life.

Hard to Say Goodbye

Some days before the end of the project, Cosimo, a very nice man, took me to see his shoemaking workshop and told me many interesting things about the village. He said, “the worst thing about the volunteers is that you have to go away and we can’t see you again. For this reason I’m very sad.” I am sure that most of the local people thought the same.

Countryside Makes us Jolly

I was very happy to dive into a rural-agricultural experience I’ve never had before. For this reason, I was deeply involved in it, rediscovering the pleasure hidden behind the simplest things. Those are the things that made us happy and still open and curious towards other people.

Pills of Wisdom

During the trip I was wondering to myself, the same way as my daughter did before I left: “why didn’t you choose a classic holiday as all the normal people do?”…but it was too late!

The Grandmother with the Trunk

I could narrate a lot of tragicomic anecdotes about my trip, my baggage, the little airport accidents of an over sixty years old woman…who wants to prove her active role as a citizen who still has a lot of energy but, to be honest, I could have defined myself as an average citizen as “the Girl with the Suitcase” or rather “the Grandmother with the Trunk”.

Seniors Do it Better

The presence of senior volunteers gave a further enrichment to the project, because, with simplicity, discretion and sweetness, they entered in a working relationship with young people, sharing with us work’s heaviness, without drawing back themselves, and free moments, making disappear any difficulty of language and allowing young people to welcome them with pleasantness and respect. Watching them all together and receiving their advice, cares, jokes or lovely nicknames was a great pleasure.

 Harmony is the Key

The volunteers made a good team. Anyway, there were some problems: they didn’t work enough and they drank too much. However, thanks to the help of the persons responsible we did a good job! Our accommodation was not extraordinary, but it was nice and there was everything we needed.
The relationship among the volunteers was beautiful. We were very close, even if we had a disparity of age. We had a good exchange of views, we respected each other; there were no quarrels and everyone was part of the group.

**My 8-months in Great Britain**

From October 2007 until May 2008, I have done a voluntary service in Buxton, England, at the “Good News Family Care” project at “Charis House”. The project was set up in order to support women and children in crisis - caused by domestic violence, sexual abuse and financial struggles - leaving them without adequate housing, often after alcohol and drug misuse.

My tasks as a volunteer have been for example helping in the nursery at “Charis House” with pre-school children aged 3 to 4, visiting former clients in the community, usually together with the social worker, for talks and a cup of tea, for playing games, practical help in the household, …

“Duty Staff” at Charis House, e.g. office duties, cleaning, talking with clients, playing with the children, offering various activities for clients like baking, cooking, crafts, painting with watercolours working on the project’s farm.

My service has been varied, interesting and rewarding. At times, I had to cope with quite some emotional pressure resulting from the experiences with clients in critical psychological situations. However, many positive experiences and developments with clients as well as talking through problems with my supervisor and members of staff helped me to cope with those problems. I have made new friends and widened my experiences, working with lovely and fully committed people in England. I am grateful for having received thanks and appreciation both from members of staff and clients for my involvement into my voluntary work.
ANNEX I

10 Golden Rules for a Fruitful Relationship Between Organisations and Volunteers

1. Hosting senior volunteers demands:
   Human resources and energy,
   Money,
   Time,
   Fantasy,
   Patience,
   Flexibility,
   Motivation,
   Pleasure

2. Senior volunteers should always be welcomed in the local community. They will offer a valuable contribution. However, this might not be necessary for the project to survive. Senior volunteers can represent and add value to an existing project which will continue after they have gone.

3. The senior volunteer must have the curiosity and endeavour to learn some (at least a basic knowledge) of the host country’s language. No language is impossible to learn. Language is a key to understanding local culture; volunteers should try to use it and the host organization must encourage and facilitate its use.

4. Volunteering is a learning opportunity for both the participant and the host community. Role to play every day in exchange: teacher and student, expert and beginner, equal and different.

5. Sending Organisations should support the possible participants and volunteers by giving:
   Information
   Orientation
   Preparation
   Evaluation
   The link between sending and hosting organisations must be kept up once the volunteer is abroad.

6. Monitoring the project: flexibility to adapt the work expected of the volunteer to the limits of his/her abilities and/or to maximise his/her capacities. Every project is a permanent work-in-progress.

7. Hosting a senior volunteer means supporting him/her to get to know the local community. This includes a two-way cultural exchange, reciprocal discovery and acceptance. (An exchange project is a unique opportunity for volunteers to get to know the local community’s culture and at the same time enable representatives of the local community to get to know the volunteers’ culture).

8. Both the volunteer and the organisation should have the right to terminate the placement if it is not going well. (Despite the best preparation and volunteer matching processes, neither side should feel guilty if the placement doesn’t work out. Both parties must have the right to discuss solutions or to terminate the placement).

9. Hosting a group of senior volunteers does not mean that the individualities of the participants should be neglected. (A variation of tasks and free time options should be considered).

10. Don’t look at the age, look at the individual! (Don’t treat seniors like disadvantaged people, but as individuals with resources and needs. Age is a state of mind).
ANNEX 2

Charter of the volunteer

RIGHTS OF A VOLUNTEER in a volunteering project abroad

- Prior to departure
  ✴ Volunteers have the right to choose the project that they would like to participate in.
  ✴ Volunteers have the right to receive information about the possible projects from their sending organisation in order to assess their suitability for the project.
  ✴ Volunteers are entitled to clear information about the host organisation, its activities, living conditions and the tasks that they will be expected to carry out in that organisation.
  ✴ Volunteers have the right to be properly prepared for his/her experience.
  ✴ Each volunteer has the right to be covered by an insurance at least for accidents and third party liability.

- During the Service
  ✴ Volunteers will receive adequate training to enable him/her to carry out the agreed tasks, including at least a basic language training, if needed.
  ✴ Volunteers should have adequate supervision related to their tasks, by the local host organisation in the project.
  ✴ Volunteers must be assigned a tutor/mentor by the local host organisation, and should have frequent contact with him/her.
  ✴ Volunteers have the right that their sending organisations stay in contact with them for the whole duration of the project.
  ✴ Volunteers must not be forced into participating in activities that go against their beliefs or values.
  ✴ All local travel costs related to the performance of the work are covered by the project.
  ✴ Volunteers should be entitled to two consecutive whole days off per week and two days holiday per month of service; their accommodation remains available to them throughout this period. The total amount of working hours should not exceed the 38 per week. Different arrangements must be agreed by all parties involved.
  ✴ It is always possible for volunteers to end their participation to a project for a good reason, after having consulted their host and sending organisation; there should be full consensus from all parties to such an outcome.
  ✴ Volunteers have the right not to participate in activities likely to harm their safety, health or physical, mental, moral or social well-being.
  ✴ When the case applies and upon their request, volunteers will be given an explanation concerning the grant received by the organisation and the use of this grant for the benefit of the volunteer’s project.

- After the Service
  ✴ Volunteers are entitled to receive support from their sending organisation after the completion of their projects, especially when they want to join volunteering activities at local level.
  ✴ Volunteer’s opinions should always be sought and taken into account in order to improve the projects.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A VOLUNTEER

- Prior to departure
  ✴ Volunteers must attend a pre-departure training course when offered.
  ✴ Volunteers must inform their sending and host organisation of the exact travel arrangements.
  ✴ Volunteers have the responsibility to inform their sending organisation of any circumstances that may influence his/her compatibility/suitability for certain projects and provide accurate information about health related issues. These information shall be used for matching the volunteer to a suitable project and to ensure his/her well-being. They will be disseminated to third parties exclusively in the interest of the volunteers when the case may apply.

- During the Service
  ✴ Volunteers are expected to respect the organisational policy of the host organisation.
  ✴ Volunteers must respect the health and safety regulations of the host organisation/country.
  ✴ Volunteers must not act in any way that could put others or themselves at the risk of being injured.
Volunteers are expected to remain in the project for the agreed duration unless there is a good reason for them to leave the project.

Volunteers are expected to be reliable, including notifying the appropriate persons (tutors/mentors) of their intention to withdraw from the project.

Volunteers are responsible towards the host organisation and should show willingness to adapt to its surroundings and to carry out agreed tasks.

Although volunteers should always be involved in interesting and creative activities, it should be accepted that some of the tasks could be routine but important to the running of the organisation.

Volunteers have the responsibility to seek guidance when necessary. If they have a problem they should discuss it with their tutors / mentors as the host organisation can only act when it is aware of a problem.

Volunteers are expected to meet with his/her tutor/mentor when agreed.

Volunteers must take good care of the accommodation that has been provided for their use.

- After the Service

Volunteers are expected to contact the sending organisation on their return at the end of the project.

Volunteers should respect the agreement with the sending organisation about reporting and returning experience to the sending organisation.

When requested, volunteers should participate to any public meetings to report about their experience to a wider public and in general should be available to give information to whoever should require them.
ANNEX 3

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
POTENTIAL POSITIONS FOR SENIOR VOLUNTEERS IN...

ORGANISATION OR ASSOCIATION

Name:
Address:
Tel/Fax number:
E-mail:
Area of activities
(e.g. education)
Name of project:

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLACEMENT

Location of the project

- big town
- small town
- village
- island
- farm or isolated institution
- remote centre
- other (specify)

Language skills required to the volunteer:

Languages spoken by key-people in the project:

Required skill/experiences, if any

Length of work (e.g. 3/4 weeks):

Work-Hours (e.g. 6 hr x day, 5 days x week)

Work-place

Foreseen activities for the volunteer:

Activities are carried out daily

- as single volunteer plus staff
- with other no. ___ volunteers (please specify):
  - Senior
  - Young
  - Local
  - International

BOARD & LODGING

Location:

- c/o association
- workplace
- in town
- other ____________

Autonomous Mobility will be:

- Easy (frequent buses or metro, short foot-distances, etc.)
- Feasible (buses, taxi, etc.)
- A bit difficult (taxi, medium long foot-distances, etc.)
- Hard (no buses, very long foot-distances, etc.)

Room (e.g. single, small)

No. of volunteers (or other people living in the same premises)

Use of kitchen and/or organised meals (specify)

FREE TIME

Specify programmed events or activities, if any:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please add any additional useful formation

If interested please contact:
ANNEX 4

Questionnaire for senior volunteers who participated in a trans-national exchange

Please tick the appropriate boxes or write down your answers to open questions.

A. DETAILS OF YOUR EUROPEAN EXCHANGE

1. In which country were you placed as a volunteer? ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
2. In which year did your exchange take place? ………
3. In which working area were you placed?
   - ecology
   - social work
   - education
   - development aid
   - sports
   - culture
   - work with children
   - other, namely:
4. How long did you work as a foreign volunteer?
   - 1 week
   - 2 weeks
   - 3 weeks
   - 4 weeks
   - longer
5. Did you have to speak a foreign language during your work abroad?
   - yes
   - no
   If yes, what level of fluency was needed?
   - fluent
   - average
   - basic
6. How were you sent to your placement abroad?
   - individually
   - with a friend or partner
   - in a team
7. Did you cooperate with young volunteers (less than 30 years) during your exchange?
   - yes
   - no
8. Did you cooperate with volunteers from other foreign countries (except the hosting country) during your exchange?
   - yes
   - no
9. What was your accommodation like?
   - in single room
   - sharing with one or two others
   - sharing a room with more than two persons
10. Was there a designated person supervising your work?
    - yes
    - no
11. Was there a designated person you could turn to in case of problems outside work?
    - yes
    - no

B. REASONS AND MOTIVATIONS

Why did you take part in a trans-national exchange of volunteers?

Please choose up to 3 answers and rate their importance indicating 1, (= most important), 2, and 3.

...... Because I was curious.
...... Because I wanted to make new friends and meet new people.
...... Because I wanted to help to make the world a better place.
...... Because I wanted to stay in a country without being a tourist.
...... Because I wanted to do something for myself.
...... Because I could not do it when I was young.
...... Because I wanted to help other people.
...... Because I wanted to transfer my experience to others.
...... Because I finally have the time for volunteering.
...... Because I was contacted and asked to participate.
...... Because I wanted to improve my language skills.
...... Because I needed a new challenge.
...... Because I wanted a change.
...... Because of other people who participated in the exchange.
...... Because of a completely different reason – please tell us about this: …………………...
C. IMPACT OF THE EXPERIENCE ON SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Did the trans-national exchange affect your skills and competencies?
Please rank them between 1 (very low) and 5 (very high) before and after the exchange.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>level before the exchange</th>
<th>level after the exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. IMPACT OF THE EXPERIENCE ON THE HOME COMMUNITY

1. Are you willing to be involved in presentations of your experience to the public?
   - yes
   - no

2. Are you willing to be involved in other activities promoting the trans-national exchange of senior volunteers?
   - yes
   - no

3. Are you willing to be involved in the preparation of new volunteers going abroad?
   - yes
   - no

4. Are you willing to be involved in the monitoring of foreign volunteers sent to your country?
   - yes
   - no

5. If you were a volunteer before the exchange, has your experience abroad increased your motivation to go on with volunteering?
   - yes
   - no
   - does not apply

E. FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS OF THE EXCHANGE

1. How do you assess the quality of the following conditions of your trans-national exchange?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework conditions</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>non</th>
<th>existent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written information about the exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditions</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contact with the hosting organisation prior to the exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-departure training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodging conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feed-back seminar after the exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for follow-up activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Did the following conditions, if occurring, facilitate or hinder the impact of your exchange on your personal development?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework conditions</th>
<th>Positive effects on personal development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>facilitated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written information about the conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contact with the hosting organisation prior to the exchange</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-departure training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodging conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feed-back seminar after the exchange</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for follow-up activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most important was something completely different, namely
for positive impacts: ..............................................................................................................
for negative impacts: ..............................................................................................................

F. PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Which is your year of birth? ..........
2. Which is your gender?  female  male
3. Which is your country of residence! .....................................................
4. How many people live in your hometown?
   - 5.000  5.000 – 25.000  25.000 – 100.000  100.000 – 1.000.000
   more than 1.000.000
5. Is the town you live in situated in a conurbation?
   yes  no
   - 1 person  2 persons  3 persons  4 or more persons
7. What is your current profession or the one which you had before retirement?

8. What is your professional status?
   - employed  self-employed  not employed  pensioner
9. Have you been a volunteer before your European exchange?
   - yes  yes, but more than 5 years ago  no, never before
10. Are you presently working as a volunteer?
     - yes  no

Questionnaire by:
ISIS-Sozialforschung - Kasseler Straße 1a - 60486 Frankfurt am Main - Germany
Info@bbis-sozialforschung.de
You may find interesting to learn about the attitude and the policy of the European institutions on adult learning especially when referring to the relationship between adult learning and senior citizens. This is why we reproduce an extract published last October 2006 by the European Commission that launched a Communication wishing to encourage Member States to ensure the quality of their adult learning systems and their overall skills levels.

**Adult learning: It is never too late to learn**

The assumption is that better adult learning can play a key role in vocational training in Europe and in the social inclusion of groups which are at a disadvantage on the labor market, such as migrants and older people, who are growing in number in Europe. Moreover, improvements in adult learning are a considerable advantage for both individuals and society. Raising overall skills levels helps to improve economic indicators, such as productivity and unemployment, and social indicators, such as civic participation, criminality and healthcare costs.

We include here the part referring to senior and migrant citizens: you can find the whole document at the web address quoted below.

**Investing in the ageing population and migrants**

Investment is needed for the ageing population and migrants.

### Active ageing

- To ensure a longer working life, there is a need for up-skilling and increasing lifelong learning opportunities for older workers. It is widely acknowledged that in order to keep older workers employable, investment is needed throughout the life cycle and should be supported by government, professional bodies and sectors. Special attention should be given to those entering their mid career.
- An expansion of learning provision for retired people is needed (including for instance increasing participation of mature students in higher education), as people are reaching retirement in better physical and mental health, and post-retirement life expectancy is extending. Learning should be an integral part of this new phase in their lives. In its recent Communication on universities the Commission invited universities to “be more open to providing courses for students at a later stage of their life cycle”. Such provisions will have a vital role in keeping, retired people in touch with their social environment. In many countries education systems have not yet started to address the emerging needs of this group of citizens, who also have enormous potential in terms of what they can contribute to the learning of others. Moreover, the growing numbers of retired people in Europe should be regarded as a potential source of educators and trainers for adult learning.

### Migration

As stated before, the challenge for adult learning is to support the integration of migrants in society and the economy, and to make the most of the competences and educational experiences acquired prior to migration. This should involve:
- EU support policies and action through relevant programmes for improving the quality of education and training policies in migrants’ home countries, particularly the European Neighbourhood Countries;  
- speeding up mechanisms for assessment of capacities and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning of arriving migrants;  
- expanding adult learning opportunities in relation to linguistic, social and cultural integration;  
- developing appropriate and effective teaching and promoting more inter-cultural learning.

**Consequent Message**

Member States should ensure sufficient investment in the education and training of older people and migrants, but above all ensure efficiency by designing education and training which matches the needs of the learner. They should also raise awareness of the important role of migrants and older people in society and in the economy.

ANNEX 5

SOME INTERNET ADDRESSES FOR TOTAL BEGINNERS:
A GENERAL ORIENTATION FOR NOT GETTING LOST

The website of SEVEN (Senior European Volunteers Exchange Network) provides useful information for institutions offering exchanges but as well for seniors who are interested in being a volunteer:
- http://www.seven-network.eu

Examples of Internet search engines where you can find webpages by using key-words are Google, Yahoo and an environment-friendly one is Ecosia:
- http://www.google.com
- http://www.yahoo.com
- http://ecosia.org

Examples for email services:
- GMail: http://www.googlemail.com
- GMX: http://www.gmx.net

Find a common date (e.g. for a meeting) or a common opinion by using Doodle:
- Doodle: http://www.doodle.com

Internet based learning platforms:
- Moodle (link to the service network): http://moodle.com
- ILIAS: http://www.ilias.de/docu/?lang=en

The free online encyclopedia Wikipedia is available in different languages and is useful for different purposes in the preparation of a senior volunteer exchange:

LEO is an example of an online dictionary:
- http://www.leo.org

Example for an online language course by Rai internazionale:
- www.italica.ra.it/lingua/lezione/corso.htm

Skype is a software which offers “VoIP” (voice over IP) telephone calls, even with video and audio conferences of several participants:
- http://www.skype.com

Diaries on the Internet are called weblog or shortly blog. Wordpress offers the opportunity to install a blog and to run it:
- http://wordpress.org

Also on the SEVEN website a blog is available:
- http://www.seven-network.eu/site/?q=en/blog

If you want to exchange short text messages with one or more people you may use online chats. Here is an example:
- http://gemeinsamlernen.mainchat.de

Flashmeeting is an example for an easy to use online video conference:
- http://fm.ea-tel.eu

Example of an online discussion forum of the German network of the elderly:
- http://www.seven-network.eu/site/?q=en/forum

Examples of photo communities are Flickr and Picasa:
- http://www.flickr.com
- http://picasaweb.google.com

Prepare journeys and stays by using the tools “Google Maps” (directly available) and “Google Earth” (to be downloaded):
- http://maps.google.com
- Earth: http://earth.google.com/

List of railway companies:

List of airlines:

Don’t forget in case of flights to offset carbon dioxide emissions:
- http://www.atmosfair.com
- http://www.myclimate.org/en