



**AVE in a professional perspective:
Assessing voluntary experiences**

Report 2 for Austria



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1 Introduction and short information on the consultation

In this report we present the findings of a survey conducted by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in the framework of the Leonardo-project "Assessing Voluntary Experiences". The aim of this project is to look at how voluntary experiences are assessed within organisations as well as to develop a tool/method to assess voluntary experience that can be used all over Europe.

This survey was conducted in the second stage of the project and its aim was to look at how organisations in Austria assess their volunteers experiences and which tools they have to achieve this.

The distribution of the questionnaires in Austria was facilitated by previous work at the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research. This consisted in collecting information on app. 500 organisations and associations in all of Austria that worked with volunteers. Information on these associations was made available on the Austrian Social Ministry's homepage for volunteers (www.freiwilligenweb.at). In the framework of the AVE project, the Austrian Social Ministry was contacted and it was agreed that they would support the project by distributing the questionnaire. One page was added to the questionnaire, including questions that the Ministry needed for another purpose but on the same topic.

The questionnaire was distributed to all the organisations included in the "Freiwilligenweb" (www.freiwilligenweb.at) as well as to the main youth organisations. The questionnaire was sent out as a pdf file attached to an e-mail. The filled in questionnaire could be returned by e-mail, fax or mail. The questionnaires were distributed by the end of July, deadline for returns was 10 September 2004. All together, 494 organisations from all kinds of fields were contacted and 66 of them responded.

2 What kinds of organisations responded to the survey?

Of the 66 organisations/associations that sent in the questionnaire, 41 (62%) were a part of a larger organisation and 20 (30,3%) were a self-contained association.

Main areas of activity

Most organisations questioned had several domains of activities they were involved in. This was also reflected in the questionnaire that allowed for multiple answers.

Table 1

Domains of organisations' activities

	number	percent
Culture	17	25,8
Sport and leisure	16	24,2
Health	32	48,5
Social Services	42	63,6
International Solidarity	18	27,3
Environment	10	15,2
Education, training, employment	30	45,5
Religious or philosophical Association	13	19,7
other	18	27,3

Organisations working in social services and health were highly represented in this sample while sports and leisure and culture were represented less than among voluntary organisations in Austria. Almost half of all organisations participating in the survey were also involved in education, training and employment.

How long had the organisations been established?

Two thirds of the organisations have existed since before 1970. 34,8% were founded before 1850 and 24,2% between 1950 and 1070. 10% were founded between 1971 and 1990 and 27,3% were founded after 1991.

Geographic level

While only 6,1% of the organisations in the survey worked on an international level, 18,2% were operating nationally. The largest part of organisations are working regionally (51,5%), departmentally (7,6%) or locally (12,1%).

Size of organisations and budget

50% of the surveyed organisations had over 500 members while 19,7% had between 100 and 500 members. 22,7% of all organisations had less than 99 members.

Correspondingly 36,4% of the organisations had a yearly budget of over 405.000 Euro, 16,7% between 135.000 and 405.000, and 30,4 had a yearly budget under 135.000.

Paid staff employed by the organisations

42,4% of the organisations participating in the survey employed between 1 and 9 paid staff members, while 7,6% were only working with volunteers. 28,7% of the organisations employed between 10 and 99 paid staff members and 16,7% had over 100 paid employees.

3 Volunteers in the organisations

53% of the surveyed organisations have over 100 volunteers, while 22,7% have between 10 and 49 volunteers. All in all, it becomes clear that the organisations involved have a large volume of volunteers. Two thirds of the organisations have either none or less than 30% of young people under 30 as volunteers. Concerning the proportion of women, most organisations have at least 30% women as volunteers.

Table 2

Composition of volunteers within organisations (in percent)

Proportion of youngsters (< 30 years)	None 13,6	-30% 53,0	30-60% 18,2	Over 60% 9,1
Proportion of women	None 0,0	-30% 9,1	30-60% 40,9	Over 60% 43,9
Proportion of retired people	None 10,6	-30% 40,9	30-60% 24,2	over 60% 18,2

Table 3

Procedures for selecting volunteers

	number	percent
none	3	4,5
an individual initial interview to know the candidate (previous experiences, expectations)	56	84,8
more than one interview, each after a certain time	39	59,1
fill in an application form	8	12,1
moment of information-orientation on the organisation	44	66,7
other	10	15,2

Most organisations have an initial interview to select volunteers. Over a half of the organisations also have interviews with their volunteers later on to ensure that things are still working out.

Table 4

Prerequisites for volunteering

	number	percent
none	19	28,8
availability of a minimum weekly commitment of time	9	13,6
gender	4	6,1
lower age limit	15	22,7
upper age limit	3	4,5
high education	1	1,5
religious option	8	12,1
other	32	48,5

While 19 organisations mention there are no prerequisites for volunteering within their organisation, 32 mention other prerequisites like reliability, participation in a preparation course, social competences or interest in the particular area of work.

Table 5

Skills expected of volunteers in the organisation

	number	percent
fluency in national language	25	37,9
a previous or present specific professional experience	11	16,7
ability to collaborate with others	43	65,2
ability and willingness to learn	39	59,1
social competences	49	74,2
agreement to the values of the organisation and coherent style of life	23	34,8
other	14	21,2

Very important skills for volunteers in most many organisations are social competences and specifically the ability to collaborate with others. Also very important are the ability

an willingness to learn. This is quite interesting as it becomes clear that these are desired skills of volunteers in all types of organisations regardless of the specific area they work in. Also, an important aspect is that in a third of the organisations the ability to speak the national language fluently is very important.

Table 6

How are volunteers evaluated within the organisation?

	number	percent
not at all	19	28,8
the individual evaluation is done in an informal way or without particular analysis instruments	25	37,9
it is a duty of the responsible of the project or of the area to follow the progress of each volunteer	15	22,7
through occasional interviews with the volunteer by different persons (e.g. training responsible, director, senior operator)	11	16,7
through interviews by those whose duty is to supervise or support the volunteers	16	24,2
in an indirect way, in the usual meetings where the operative targets are evaluated	6	9,1
in another way	7	10,6

In most organisations we studied, there is no evaluation at all or an evaluation of volunteers only in an informal way. Only one fifth of the organisations conducts regular evaluations through volunteer coordinators.

4 Training for volunteers

Training for volunteers is very common in Austria. Over 70% of the participating organisations mentioned that their volunteers receive training within their organisations and 34,8% replied that training for their volunteers is provided by an external organisations. Only 14 (21,2%) organisations' volunteers do not receive any kind of training.

Table 7

Prevalent topics and contents of training activities in the past two years

	number	percent
none	0	0,0
courses concerning themes of solidarity and active citizenship	6	9,1
knowledge of the mission or objectives of the organisation	24	36,4
deepening of a specific theme (type of user, new service to be opened...)	17	25,8
specific technical- professional knowledge	12	18,2
specific organisational- management knowledge	18	27,3
learning specific social skills	32	48,5
basic instrumental knowledge (use of pc and various technologies, foreign language)	20	30,3
other	23	34,8

Corresponding to the importance of social skills in many organisations, 48,5 %of the organisations name social skills as an important topic of their volunteers' training. A third of the organisations' volunteers have attended training activities linked with learning about the mission and objectives of the organisation and a third have attended courses concerning basic instrumental knowledge like use of personal computers etc. Also, a third of the organisations mentioned other training contents which were usually linked to the objectives of the organisation, such as outdoor training or knowledge about the target group of the organisations (e.g. older people, people with a disability, people with psychological disorders etc). Several organisations mentioned first aid courses or training for ambulance services.

Volunteers have expressed their need for training 63,6% (42) of the organisations, in 34,8% (23), this is not the case.

Table 8

Which courses have volunteers requested to be able to attend?

	number	percent
contents inherent in the group dynamics or within the organisation	18	27,3
specialisation courses aimed at professional specifics	11	16,7
acquisition of specific disciplinary knowledge(juridical, psychological)	8	12,1
acquisition of new specialisation or of new operator profiles	31	47,0
deepening of knowledge on specific themes- aspects of interest of the organisation (social problems, types of needs, pathologies)	19	28,8
knowledge of specific operative or methodic intervention instruments (mediation techniques, planning, evaluation of learning processes)	28	42,4
basic instrumental knowledge (PC and various technologies use , foreign language)	15	22,7
other	4	6,1

Topics of courses requested by volunteers are mainly specialized expert knowledge in the area of volunteering (47%) and special tools to perform their tasks better (42%) such as chairing techniques, team work, project management etc.

Reasons for providing training

The most frequent reasons for providing training were to motivate and award volunteers, to qualify them, to secure basic knowledge necessary to volunteering and to improve and secure the quality of the organisations services.

Selected quotes are:

“Aims of the organisation can only be reached by competent persons. Lifelong learning is a necessity”

“Increasing motivation and quality of volunteering. Thank you for volunteers. Developing a team spirit.”

“Because nowadays one can not permit oneself to stand still!”

Consequences of training

The organisations were also asked if they were of the opinion that volunteers' acquired noticeable new qualifications. Only 3 answered no, 46 (69,7%) answered yes and 17 did not answer this question.

Certifying training

42 organisations that had volunteers participating in training awarded certificates to acknowledge this training, 9 did not award certificates for training. 36 organisations awarded these certificates themselves, in 20 cases the certificates were awarded by external training centres.

5 Recognising the value of volunteering

The main questions that the organisations were asked were:

- Which are the main activities fulfilled by volunteers in the organisation?
- Which are the skills mainly achieved by the volunteers during the experience within the organisation?
- Which are the main skills developed by your volunteers?

Table 9

Which are the main activities fulfilled by your volunteers in your organisation? (in percent)

	High degree	Some degree	Not
Developing the organisation's missions (negotiating with public authorities, public relations, internal organisation)	25,8	42,4	22,7
Organising events, meetings, campaigns, or festivals	43,9	40,9	7,6
Unpaid participation on boards, committees, councils	59,1	24,2	10,6
Advising, counselling or expert's work	21,2	47,0	22,7
Providing information (e.g. posters, flyers working on helplines..)	25,8	47,0	16,7
Office work	10,6	47,0	31,8
Providing a direct service to people, (medical care, therapy, nursing ...)	31,8	21,2	37,9
Providing a non direct service to people (Rescue, protection)	13,6	22,7	51,5
Other	16,7	7,6	9,1

The most common activities over all organisations were organising events, meetings, campaigns or festivals and unpaid participation on boards committees and councils. Elements of public relations work (providing information) were also found in a large part of the organisations. Advising and counselling as well as office work is done by 47% of organisations to some extent and by over 20% to high degree.

A variety of other tasks were also named such as offering tours of museums, working with young people (2x), supporting sportive activities. Two organisations mentioned that their volunteers also recruit new volunteers and coordinate volunteers' activities.

Table 10

Which are the main skills developed by your volunteers ? (in percent)

	High degree	Some degree	Not
Fundraising	12,1	51,5	28,8
Know-how on the field of activity specific to the NGO	59,1	30,3	4,5
Legal issues related to the functioning of the NGO	9,1	31,8	53,0
Image-building of the NGO, promotion, cooperation with the media	25,8	59,1	10,6
NGO finances (accounting, financial management)	10,6	25,8	56,1
Knowledge of foreign languages	7,6	12,1	72,7
Interpersonal skills (communication, negotiations)	60,6	28,8	7,6
Use of modern technologies (including computer use)	9,1	51,5	34,8
Seeking and organising the work of volunteers	33,3	39,4	22,7
Training or any educational skills	19,7	47,0	25,8
Human Resources management (team-building, running meetings, leadership, animation and management of groups)	34,8	40,9	19,7
Management of the NGO's programmes (planning, evaluation)	22,7	43,9	25,8
Specific activity linked to the organisation's activity (sports instructor, environment guide, street educator, ..)	27,3	30,3	39,4
Use of specific techniques and methods (in research : focus group, interviews, in documentation : management of systems for data..)	1,5	31,8	59,1
Other	9,1	0,0	13,6

The main skills developed by volunteers in almost all organisations (89,4% to a high and some degree) is – unsurprisingly- know-how on the field of activity that is specific to the organisations. Apart from that – corresponding to results obtained on training – interpersonal skills, such as communication and negotiation are developed by volunteers in almost all organisations (89,4%). Image-building of the NGO, promotion and cooperation with the media are also quite widely found skills (84,9%). Skills that are less common are legal issues, financing, knowledge of foreign languages and use of specific research and documentation methods. Other skills mentioned are skills concerning the respective area like competences in alpine rescuer services, care for the elderly, dealing with people with mental health problems or people with a disability.

Table 11

Which are the main talents/competences/qualifications developed by your volunteers ? (in percent)

	High degree	Some degree	Not degree
Open-mindedness and readiness for new contacts	84,8	13,6	0,0
Organisational talents	57,6	36,4	4,5
Active listening	71,2	27,3	0,0
Leadership competences	37,9	39,4	19,7
Ability to fit into a working team and cooperate	72,7	24,2	1,5
Ability to communicate	84,8	12,1	1,5
Ability to work in a group and management of a shared responsibility	84,8	13,6	0,0
Ability to criticize in a constructive way	39,4	53,0	4,5
Ability to adapt one's own behaviour according to the situations	63,6	31,8	1,5
Ability to go through conflicts in a constructive way (Ability to manage conflicts , Problem solving)	51,5	43,9	3,0
Creativity and readiness for innovation	50,0	39,4	7,6
Reliability	80,3	18,2	0,0
Self reliance and taking initiative	72,7	25,8	0,0
Public relation and representation skills	28,8	54,5	15,2
Craft skills	9,1	31,8	57,6
Computer skills	10,6	53,0	34,8
Being ready to help	78,8	19,7	0,0
Being loyal	63,6	34,8	0,0
Being personally well-balanced	43,9	48,5	4,5
Being able to work factual and issue centred	53,0	42,4	0,0
Being trustworthy and confident	77,3	19,7	0,0
Being self confident	68,2	28,8	0,0
Other	4,5	1,5	9,1

The main competences that are developed by volunteers in the studied organisations are open-mindedness and readiness for new contacts, the ability to communicate and the ability to work in a group and share responsibility. Apart from that the organisations feel that their volunteers acquire reliability, being ready to help, being trustworthy and

confident as well as the ability to fit into a team and cooperate. Also self-reliance and taking initiative as well as active listening skills are acquired in many organisations over all areas of work. Some skills are acquired depending on which position volunteers are in: For example, almost 80% of all organisations state that volunteers acquire leadership competences to a high degree or to some extent, at the same time 20% say their volunteers do not acquire these skills. Also computer skills as well as manual skills are also specific competences that volunteers only acquire in some organisations.

Table 12

Which of the characteristics of their work do volunteers appreciate most? (in percent)

	High degree	Some degree	Not
the contact with professional personnel	59,1	34,8	4,5
use of modern information and computer technology	9,1	57,6	30,3
clear definition of functions and roles	37,9	53,0	7,6
the duties and the testing of individual and collective activity	47,0	47,0	1,5
the relation capability with users or external referents	50,0	36,4	10,6
the support they receive in psychological and motivational terms	42,4	48,5	4,5
participating in decisions of the organisation	31,8	57,6	9,1
the operative and technical support they receive from specific operators	50,0	40,9	3,0
participating in discussions on the future of the organisation	33,3	50,0	13,6
the variety of tasks and duties that volunteers fulfil	63,6	31,8	1,5
the training occasions	42,4	42,4	13,6
the possibility of acquiring new and specific specialized competence	57,6	33,3	6,1
the possibility work for the benefit of the community	75,8	22,7	0,0
Other	6,1	3,0	6,1

The aspects of their work that volunteers seem to appreciate most in the organisations surveyed are to be able to work for the benefit of the community, the variety of tasks and duties that they are able to fulfil as well as the contact with professionals and the opportunities they have for acquiring new and specialized skills and competences. What seems to be less important are the use of modern information and computer technology, the possibility of participating in decisions and participating in discussions on the future of the organisation. Interestingly, the possibility for participating in training is not appreciated as much as one would expect from the responses on training and

the importance given to training of volunteers in the Austrian political discussions on volunteering.

Are volunteers involved in decision making processes?

Almost 90% (89,4%, 44) of the organisations surveyed report that volunteers are involved in the organisations' decision making process in some way. Only 17 organisations report that this is not at all the case.

Volunteers are mainly involved in planning specific activities (89,4%). 77,3% of the organisations state that their volunteers are involved in evaluating the results of activities, while 71.2% report that volunteers actively participate in assessing the feasibility of activities within the organisation. 66.7% organisations have volunteers that are involved in programming their annual activities while this is not the case in 25,8% of those organisations questioned.

6 Assessing voluntary experiences

Usefulness of volunteer activities for paid work

37 (56,1%) organisations mentioned that they knew cases where volunteers were able to use the competences they acquired while volunteering for paid work. 26 (39,4%) organisations reported that this was not the case.

Those volunteers who could use their volunteer activities for paid work volunteered in many different areas. In 14 organisations volunteers' that could use their competences for paid work had some sort of team leader or management function. Four organisations mentioned organisational and administrative functions. Other than that specific social or medical skills were reported that could be used for paid work later.

Systematic procedures to assess acquired competences of volunteers who are leaving only exist in 15 (22,7%) Organisations, while 49 (74,2%) of the studied organisations do not have such procedures.

10 organisations have interviews, 5 organisations evaluate the competences of the volunteers using the experiences they have had in the cooperation with them. One organisation mentions a portfolio of competences, two mention a certificate for training completed within the volunteer activity and two mention a written description of the volunteers' work.

Documentation of voluntary work

39 organisations provide their volunteers with a written document concerning the volunteers' activities. 24 organisations do not have such a thing.

21 organisations reported that they give volunteers a written document that includes the type of tasks the volunteer fulfilled and how much and how long he or she volunteered. Several organisations also mention the training courses that the volunteers took part in. One organisations mentioned that they write a written report that is the same as a report for paid staff.

28 organisations mention that the document that they provide for their volunteers is recognised outside their organisations, and 6 report that this is not the case.

11 organisations are of the opinion that the documentation is recognised by private firms, 13 think they are recognised by public authorities and 16 report that educational institutions will recognise these documents.

46 organisations would find it useful to have an instrument to assess and evaluate the competences acquired by volunteers in their organisation. 15 do not find it useful and 5 did not answer this question. 57 organisations (86,4%) would be interested in getting to know the tool that will be developed within the AVE project. Only 6 organisations say they are not interested.

7 Conclusions

- The survey process in Austria was facilitated by previous work that had been done by the European Centre for the Austrian Social Ministry: the Austrian Volunteer Web (www.freiwilligen.web.at). All organisations 494 on the website were contacted for this survey.
- A return of 64 was not overwhelming but was deemed as being satisfactory. Among the organisations surveyed, those in the health and social sphere were somewhat over-represented, those in the areas of sports and culture were somewhat under-represented.
- There was a good mix of organisations with respect to size, geographic location, age of organisation and budget. Approximately a half of those organisations participating in the survey were quite large (over 500 members).
- Concerning the volunteers in the organisations, there was also a good mix in terms of age (younger and older people) and gender.
- The evaluation of volunteers seems to be done not at all or on an informal level.
- As has already been known in Austria, training of volunteers is quite common among the organisations and it is also common for organisations to provide certificates for training. Interestingly however, when asked which aspects of volunteering are important for volunteers, the fact that they receive training is not as important as other characteristics of their volunteer activities.
- Volunteers in Austrian organisations are involved in a wide variety of tasks and gain a wide variety of skills and competencies.
- While some general skills (eg. interpersonal, communication, negotiation) are important in all organisations, there is a large amount of specialised skills obtained according to the specific field the volunteers work in.
- Interpersonal skills, communication and team work are a very important part of the competences gained, but also areas in which a lot of training takes place.
- Few organisations have systematic ways of evaluating their volunteers activities before they leave. However, two thirds of the organisations questioned give their volunteers a written document when they leave, mostly including the time and duration of the volunteer activities as well as their nature.
- Over two thirds of the organisations would find an instrument to assess and evaluated the competence acquired by volunteers in their organisation useful and over 85% are interested in getting to know the tool that will be developed within the AVE –project.

Overall this survey gives us a useful overview of the situation concerning our topic in Austria and supports the idea that the AVE project is going in a useful direction.

ANNEX 1

List of responding institutions in Austria

1	Katholische Jugend Kärnten
2	Seniorenbüro der Stadt Graz
3	Volkshilfe Niederösterreich
4	Integrierte Sozial- und Gesundheitsprävention Kapfenberg
5	Aktion Leben Oberösterreich
6	Österr. Rotes Kreuz, Landesverband Oberösterreich
7	Sportunion Kärnten
8	Österr. Zivil-Invalidenverband
9	Sportunion Steiermark
10	Österr. Bergrettungsdienst, Landesleitung Tirol
11	Freiwillige Feuerwehr Krems/Donau
12	Katholische Hochschulgemeinde Linz / Katholische Hochschuljugend
13	Elternkreis Wien
14	Oberösterreichische Jungbauern
15	ASKÖ OÖ (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sport und Körperkultur in Österreich)
16	INTEGRA - Verein für Ausländer/innenintegration
17	Katholisches Bildungswerk Vorarlberg
18	Jugend eine Welt - Don Bosco Aktion Austria
19	Hospizverein Steiermark
20	Österreichischer Behindertensportverband
21	prohumanis Leben.Helfen
22	Rosalie Panther/innen
23	Freiwilligenzentrum Tirol
24	Jugend-Umwelt-Netzwerke JUNE
25	Aids Hilfe Wien
26	Kolping Österreich
27	Naturschutzbund Niederösterreich
28	Autonomes Integrationszentrum für Migrantinnen
29	Österreichische Alpenvereinsjugend

30	Tiroler Hospiz Gemeinschaft
31	Katholisches Bildungswerk
32	Lebenshilfe Tirol Gem.GesmbH
33	Österreichischer Zivil-Invalidenverband, Bezirksgruppe Freistadt
34	Referat Pfarrgemeinderäte Pastoralamt der Diözese Linz
35	Katholische Frauenbewegung in Oberösterreich
36	Projektgruppe Integration von Ausländern
37	IfS-Sachwalterschaft und Patientenanwaltschaft
38	Fairtrade
39	Hilfswerk Oberösterreich
40	Katholische Aktion der Diözese St. Pölten
41	Freiwilliges soziales Jahr
42	Katastrophenhilfe österreichischer Frauen
43	Familienforum Mölltal
44	Telefonseelsorge
45	Ärzte ohne Grenzen
46	Ärzte ohne Grenzen
47	Österreichische Jungarbeiterbewegung
48	Caritas Socialis
49	Kriegsopfer- und Behindertenverband
50	Wiener Jugendrotkreuz
51	Zeit!Raum - Verein zur Förderung soziokultureller Arbeit
52	Ambulanz Austria Landesverband Tirol
53	Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Österreichs Gruppe Ottakring
54	Arbeitsmarktpolitische Einrichtung zur Integration von ZuwanderInnen in den österreichischen Arbeitsmarkt
55	Katholisches Bildungswerk St. Pölten
56	Wiener Hilfswerk
57	Selbsthilfe Tirol
58	Österreichische Bundes-Sportorganisation
59	Pro Mente Wien, Gesellschaft für psychische und soziale Gesundheit
60	Katholische Männerbewegung Österreichs

61	Krankenhaus Lainz, Abteilung für Anästhesie, Station für Palliativmedizin
62	Österreichische Gesellschaft für Muskelkranke
63	Pfadfinder und Pfadfinderinnen Österreich
64	Wiener Rotes Kreuz
65	Österreichischer Gehörlosenbund
66	Salzburger Bildungswerk

ANNEX 2

Austrian Questionnaire (in German)

please see attached document: AVEAustrianreport2ANNEX2