



# SELECTION MANUAL

Tools and reflections for the South-North Volunteer Programme



weltwärts 

mit dem

 welthaus  
bielefeld

# EDITORIAL

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# INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is the result of a process carried out by World House Bielefeld with different actors: returnee volunteers, representatives of partner organisations, mentors, representatives of volunteer placements and host families in Germany. People from nine countries participated at different stages.

The need for a Selection Manual arose for several reasons:

- In the 8 countries where World House Bielefeld sends volunteers, the selection processes have been different.
- Different selection criteria were applied, depending on who participated.
- The experience of the volunteers in Germany was taken into account in some cases more than in others. This experience has not been incorporated into the selection criteria in a systematic way.
- In Germany we have seen "critical" cases. Volunteers who have had social difficulties. These often manifested themselves in the host families or at the volunteer placement, and we wondered whether such experiences could have been avoided with better selection.

The process to devise this Manual and the tools we propose in the annex were as follows:

a. A digital editorial team was set up to structure both the process and the Handbook. The editorial team met from June 2021 to June 2022, at least once a month. The different members of the editorial team represented the different regions (Central America and Mexico; the Andes; South Africa and Germany). In addition, eight Country Coordinators were sought, who were responsible

for sharing experiences from their countries, conducting the seminars described in the next point and the validation seminars.

b. Several workshops were held. On the first day, with recently returned volunteers in Peru, Mexico and El Salvador. In these workshops they reflected on their own experiences and on the qualities that helped them to cope with certain challenges. On the second day, representatives of partner organisations were brought in to learn about this experience and to add their perspective as potential sending organisations. Representatives of partner organisations from Ecuador participated digitally. In Nicaragua, as there were no recently returned volunteers, so two days of workshops were held with organisations and returned volunteers together. In these workshops we tried to find selection criteria.

c. In the countries where no workshops were held, there was a review of experiences and reports of previous meetings.

d. In Germany, there was a digital meeting with host families and a seminar with representatives of volunteer placements and their current volunteers in search of selection criteria.

e. The editorial team systematised the results of the different workshops and all the developed criteria, choosing 20 criteria.

f. These criteria were discussed in a "Digital World Café" in September 2021. It was a pleasant experience because more than 50 people from nine countries participated, including returned volunteers, partner organisations and mentors. The aim was to agree on six basic selection criteria and to reflect on the selection process: what experiences should be kept and what new ideas were there?

At the second meeting of the "Digital World Café", the different criteria were fleshed out. How can we find out whether an applicant meets these criteria or not in the selection process? These meetings were conducted in three different languages at the same time.

g. Based on the results of the meetings in the "Digital World Café", three working groups were formed among the editorial staff and country coordinators, who proposed: an interview guide, an activity table, an individual and a collective evaluation sheet.

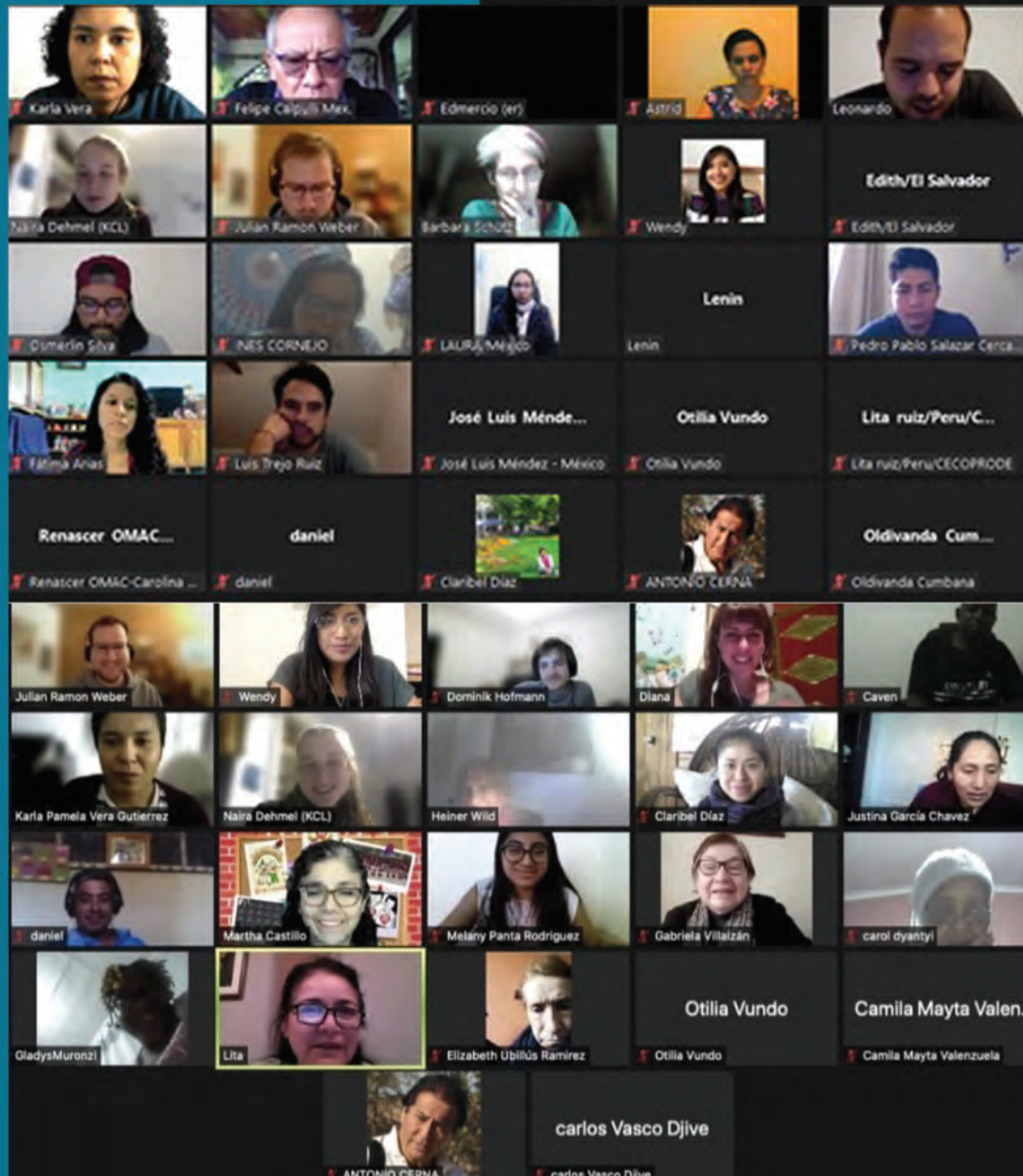
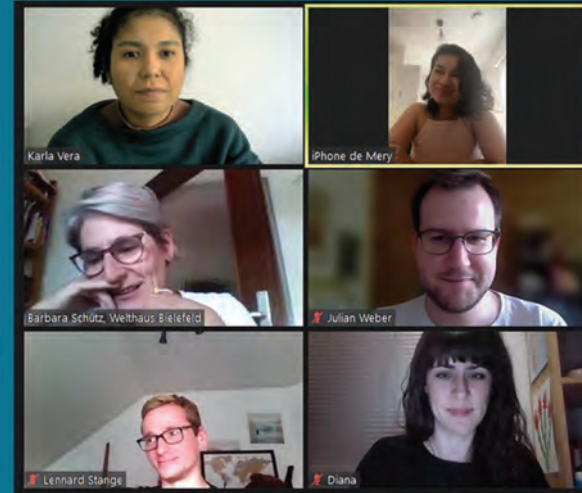
h. These instruments were discussed with the editorial team and in January 2022 were presented to the country coordinators in a digital meeting.

i. Between February and April 2022, eight "validation seminars" were held. Country Coordinators formed Selection Committees or Commissions, trained their members on the new tools and carried out the selection.

j. A digital meeting was held with the Country Coordinators to evaluate the seminars, review reports and conduct a survey with all participants in the eight countries.

k. The comments and reflections led to some modifications of the tools and the need to better explain the instruments in the text of the Handbook.

This Selection Handbook consists of six chapters. The first chapter refers to what is the South-North Programme and what is it not? In order to answer this, different perspectives were brought together to attest to the meaning of the Programme. We believe it is important that all members of the selection process know what it is, so that nobody is selected on the basis of personal beliefs.



The second chapter presents experiences in different countries. Although as an editorial team we favour the "Commission" model, it has been shown that depending on the context of each country, there are models that have worked. Each has advantages and disadvantages. The Commission has the advantage of bringing together different perspectives, but it is a laborious and time-consuming process.

The third chapter deals with what makes a good volunteer. Here the different perspectives of actors are shared, such as those of volunteers, sending organisations, World House Bielefeld, volunteer placements in Germany and host families. Although qualities are described that help to carry out the voluntary work, it is not about finding the perfect person. We know that there are knowledge, attitudes and skills that can be acquired along the way.

The fourth chapter describes the six criteria that have been selected as basic criteria and again explains the path. You could say it is a summary of chapter three. Reducing a person to certain qualities and concepts is not the purpose of this exercise, as in any selection process we must look at the whole person, with their qualities, history and context. However, agreeing on six basic criteria allows us to have an objective outline so that we see the different candidates from the same perspective. We believe it is important that the Commissions understand what the selection criteria are about and that they can define their own additional criteria.

The fifth chapter is the heart of this Handbook, in the sense that it describes the new instruments, the selection process and gives advice on how to carry it out. It is essential that the person coordinating the selection process reads it carefully. Elements of this chapter can be used to train the Selection Committee as a whole.

The sixth chapter briefly describes what happens after the selection. We think it is important that everyone involved has an idea of what happens next. However, there are so many elements, which could be written in another Handbook.

In the annexes we present the interview guide, the activity table, the evaluation sheets. These documents can also be requested from World House Bielefeld in other formats so that they can be filled in or modified

We present the Selection Manual as follows: There are the main texts and at the end of each chapter a summary and reflection questions. This is because it is possible that not all members of the Commission will be able to read the whole Manual, not only because of time constraints, but also because in some countries we have found that there are different ways of acquiring knowledge, often orally.

We recommend setting up the Commissions in good time, distributing this Handbook in advance and using the chapters as a basis for common reflection. One of the chapters can be left as a task to be read and reflected upon, or different members read different chapters and summarise the content for the rest.

The aim of the Selection Manual is to homogenise processes and to invite reflection. Selection cannot be carried out only in a schematic way, it has to be the result of a dialogue. Reflection can lead to the adaptation of different elements to different contexts, it can lead to finding new mechanisms.

We would like to invite you to this dialogue. A dialogue between different actors, different countries, from different experiences and contexts.

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**WHAT IS  
WELTWÄRTS  
SOUTH-NORTH?  
(AND WHAT  
IS IT NOT?)**



## Omar Peña



Volunteer from Ecuador  
in Bielefeld from 2015 - 2016

For me, South-North volunteering is a learning opportunity that undoubtedly changes different aspects of your life. It is not only about sharing all the knowledge you bring from your home country with the German society or with those you come in contact with, but also about learning every day from these people. It is mutual learning between the sending organisation and the society where you live. I think that when a person uses this programme to leave their country and completely forgets about the reciprocity with the sending organisation, it would not be volunteering.

It is not necessary to have a university degree or higher education to participate in the programme. Not having one does not mean that your intellectual capacity is below that of a person who has one.

After my voluntary service, I have taken part in workshops that casa del mundo runs in Ecuador, participated in the selection of new volunteers, helped in the training stage and with the visa procedures for their travel, as well as providing moral support through telephone communication with the volunteers living in Germany. In addition, I have shared my experience with the organisations receiving volunteers in Ecuador, organised events and actively communicated with people in my organisation, in my parish and with my close circle in order to pass on what I learned in Germany.

## The weltwärts programme

was developed in 2007 by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as a programme for people between 18 and 28 years of age residing in Germany who want to do a voluntary service in the Global South. It sees itself as a development policy learning programme. The focus is on non-formal learning through mutual exchange and the strengthening of international part-

nerships. The BMZ itself does not send volunteers, but provides up to 75% of the financial resources. Engagement Global administers the programme for the BMZ. The programme is implemented by about 180 organisations in Germany. Welthaus Bielefeld is one of them and has been involved from the very beginning.

A lot has happened since then:

- Civil society organisations have asserted their participation in decision-making, so that today the programme is further developed by a Programme Steering Committee (PSA), in which civil society organisations and former volunteers are represented alongside state actors. Partner organisations from the Global South are consulted on the topics of the PSA.

- The quality in the programme is constantly monitored and has been redefined in 2020. Quality development plays an important role.

- Inclusion in the weltwärts programme is to be made possible by specifically addressing people who were previously underrepresented, but also through additional support for language courses and special needs,

- AND: In 2013, the South-North component of the programme was launched after partner organisations, former volunteers and civil society actors called for it from the very beginning.

In order to be able to implement the South-North component, the BMZ has entered into cooperation with the Federal Office for Family and Civil Society Commitment (BAFzA), which organises and administers the Federal Volunteer Service (BFD). The BFD is a voluntary service in German institutions that serve the common good. The Federal Volunteer Service Act states that people who do not reside in Germany can also do the service.

The cooperation with the BAFzA allows for a legal basis for the South-North component of the weltwärts programme, which lays the ground for volunteers to get a visa for Germany. On the other hand, there are strict regulations regarding who can be an assignment site and the voluntary service itself is also formally regulated (contracts, working hours, holidays, social security obligation, etc.). Economically operating enterprises, e.g. an organic farm, cannot be an assignment site.

Ultimately, however, it is the first draft of the pilot project of the South-North component that regulates its special features and states why weltwärts South-North is not a normal Federal Volunteer Service. This draft is still valid at the time of publication of this handbook, even though a joint funding line for the North-South and South-North components is currently being worked on, which will then replace the existing concept.

The South-North component is implemented in partnership between German sending organisations (such as Welthaus Bielefeld) and organisations in the Global South. According to the concept, the sending organisations are to do the public relations for the programme, to guide the volunteers towards the service, prepare them for the service, follow up afterwards and assist them with administrative tasks, e.g. with the visa application.

The partner organisations of Welthaus Bielefeld are usually local non-governmental organisations or institutions of the church or municipal administrations. They do not see themselves as voluntary service organisations and pursue their own goals, which focus on improving the living conditions of

the populations they work with. In most partner countries, there are a large number of partner organisations, so it is not feasible for one of the organisations to take on the exclusive role of sending organisation. Furthermore, in most partner countries there are now former volunteers who have an interest in playing a role in organising the voluntary service. Therefore, different aspects have been developed to fulfill the tasks of a sending organisation. Different actors play a role in this:

- All partner organisations address potential candidates and disseminate the call for applications.
- A committee of partner organisations and former volunteers form a selection committee. Generally, those partner organisations that do not postulate volunteers themselves are represented.
- In some countries - especially where former volunteers are not so active - a mentor takes over the organisation of the selection and the coordination with the different partner organisations.
- Sending partner organisations and individual mentors (often former volunteers) provide individual guidance and support in preparing for the voluntary service and the return.
- The preparation and follow-up work is usually done by former volunteers or mentors in coordination between different countries.

While in the North-South component young people usually decide individually to do voluntary service abroad and have to set their expectations in relation to the goals formulated in the programme, the starting position for South-North volunteers is often even more complex:

In addition to their own expectations and ideas, there are also expectations from the partner organisations that proposed the volunteers (e.g. the desire for professional training or to make contact with new organisations in Germany, or to bring projects or funds with them), from parents, family and environment (e.g. financial support for the family; we have also encountered parents who hoped that the volunteer would find a life partner



Picture: gathering of volunteers and host families

in Germany and thus secure the family's livelihood in the long term). In addition, the high expectations formulated in the service's concept, such as contributing to the strengthening of the civil societies in their countries and the domestic development work in Germany, are to be considered.

Important stakeholders in Germany, such as host families, also have expectations of volunteers, and these often relate to the volunteer's individual development (to make something of one's time here in Germany, to find friends and pursue activities). The host organisations in Germany, on the other hand, accept volunteers because they see an enrichment in the fact that young committed people from other countries bring new ideas. In general they therefore have fewer expectations of a volunteer's professionalism, but appreciate that they bring time with them for tasks that would otherwise sometimes be left undone. Certainly, the South-North relationship and notion of "development" also play a role. While volunteers from Germany initially want to go to the Global South to "help", there are high expectations for volunteers that come to Germany to "learn" something that they can bring back with them. These expectations come from the volunteers themselves, but also from the partner organisations and the volunteers' environment. It is expected that many things work better in Germany and that knowledge can be transferred back.

#### HOWEVER, WELT WÄRTS IS NOT A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERVICE

This is what the service cannot and does not want. The volunteer does not receive any formal training in the voluntary service.

For the second time we have a South-North volunteer at the Martin-Niemöller Comprehensive School. According to their competences, they are employed as an "Assistance Teacher" in English, sports and music. At times, they also provide targeted support to individual young people who have particular difficulties learning English. They are also a "resource person" in upper school courses when topics of global learning are on the curriculum and thus bring the southern perspective into the lessons. They represent our sister school Nkululeko at public school events such as the 50th anniversary celebration. And of course they are an important member of the partnership group. Here they can influence the content and report authentically about the living situation in Zimbabwe and Nkululeko as well as support the practical and public relations work.

The biggest challenge for the young volunteer is the language. It takes them several months to master the German language to some extent. The young people in the classes, however, are not bothered by this, they communicate in broken English. The challenge for the school is financing the position. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile for the school. The partnership is on the radar of more young people. For many young people it is a chance to talk to a Zimbabwean and become more open to the problems at our partner school.

### Heidi Hesse

responsible for a voluntary work placement in the framework of a twinning between a school in Bielefeld and a school in Zimbabwe.

Often, volunteers even come with a higher level of professionalism and are not quite able to apply it.

In the experience of Welthaus Bielefeld and the experience of many volunteers, especially at the beginning, but often throughout the first year, the language barrier is so high that only simple activities can be carried out. Following a work meeting is often exhausting and from this experience, the communication of background information about the workplace, pedagogical concepts, etc. is also lacking in some places. However, through regular visits of Welthaus Bielefeld to the assignment sites, through meetings with assignment sites and volunteers and through translations, an attempt is made to shine some light on the backgrounds of the different workplaces.

### WELTWÄRTS IS ENCOUNTER

Perhaps the most important aspect of the programme is encounter: encounter with the host family, with colleagues, with the target groups at work, with other volunteers, with society in general. This also means that host families are usually more than a hotel; they like to have joint activities or encounters in everyday life, e.g. eating together. This is why the openness and curiosity of the volunteers is so important.

### WELTWÄRTS IS SOUTH-SOUTH EXCHANGE AND TRANSCULTURAL EXPERIENCE

In the Welthaus, the South-North group is diverse: volunteers come from different social backgrounds and classes, with the majority from humble origins. They come from big cities or from the countryside, they belong to the dominant population in their country or to minorities. They come from a total of eight different countries from Latin America and Southern Africa, which often means that they not only speak the national language (Spanish, English and Portuguese), but are also fluent in indigenous languages. And they have one thing in common: they are doing voluntary service in Germany. This creates such a great common base that the whole group or certain group members often become the most important point of reference for each other during the voluntary service. With the great diversity and power relations in the group in terms of gender, language and nationality, much is being negotiated and learned here. In recent years, for example, it was usually the case that the English-speaking Southern African minority felt excluded by the Spanish-speaking majority, especially when Spanish was often spoken during shared moments. These group processes are addressed with the pedagogical accompaniment. Learning from each other, also from the different social and political backgrounds, therefore plays a very important role.

### WELTWÄRTS IS NOT REMUNERATED

The volunteers receive social insurance in Germany, free accommodation in a host family and pocket money. The money is enough to pursue certain activities or to go

on small trips from time to time. However, some volunteers send part of this money home and then have less access to social life in Germany. Cinema, gym, courses or even the occasional beer or coffee are then hardly possible. In some countries, volunteers are confronted with the expectation of bringing back money from "rich" Germany when they return home. The wish of sending organisations for volunteers to establish contacts with financial donors is also usually impossible to fulfill. The German donor landscape is complex and not easy to navigate, and contacts are often lacking.

### WELTWÄRTS IS NOT A MIGRATION PROGRAMME

Even though former volunteers often tried to find an apprenticeship, the objective of the weltwärts programme assumes that volunteers go back to their home countries and take on work for civil society organisations there again. This aspect is also very important to most of the partner organisations of Welthaus Bielefeld. While it is true that there is a shortage of skilled workers in Germany and also a shortage of trainees in certain professions, volunteers who want to stay here will not have an easy path. The formal and linguistic requirements to get an apprenticeship are often very high and are becoming more and more difficult. It is often almost impossible to get a training or study programme from abroad recognised as equivalent to one in Germany. This means that if volunteers stay here, they often start all over again, often below their qualifications, and it may be that they only have a chance in socially less recognised professions or professions that are highly stressful.



Margret Jacoby

Frank Gerber

In 2021 Margret and Frank have received the fourth volunteer since 2015 at their home

The most important thing for us are the encounters that result from participating in the South-North project. First and foremost, of course, is living together with our guest. But meeting other volunteers and other host parents is also enriching. We get to know interesting people and gain new perspectives through conversations. What we think we know about the volunteers' home countries, we always have to put into perspective. This is mainly because we no longer have to only rely

on generally available information, but we get to know the lives and experiences of individuals and also those of their families first hand. This concerns living and working conditions in general, but especially the work that volunteers do in their sending organisations. We are always impressed by how the volunteers advocate for human rights, the protection of the environment, environmental education (especially for children and young people) or social matters and what they achieve.

## Edmércio Quiteria



Volunteer from Mozambique  
2017-2018

Volunteering through Welthaus Bielefeld as part of the weltwärts programme has been a very enriching work for me.

My expectations when I came to Germany were very high: I wanted to get to know the country, the weather, the culture and live together with people from a completely different continent. I was also excited about the challenge of learning the language and communicating with the local people. Lastly, I didn't know what the people there expected of me. But my voluntary service was all the more exciting because it brought me into contact with people and I tried to get many people to change their perspective and change their point of view. I had various discussions about this and I was able to see the image of the rich Europe that I had in my mind differently. I was also able to convey my experiences to a lot to the people I met because I now know the reality of both countries. That fulfilled me and still does.

There were always difficulties: a new country, completely different eating habits, the lousy weather and not to forget racism. Those were the biggest challenges to fight, but with the Welthaus and the host family as support, it was manageable. In relation to the issue of racism, I volunteered and participated in many empowerment workshops with the AWO youth organisation and had many discussions. That has strengthened me a lot.

At the same time, this issue is so difficult because of the fact that not all volunteers have a good job perspective when they return to their country, and even sending organisations often cannot offer a position. Volunteers have sometimes already volunteered for several years before their voluntary service in Germany and now want to see real professional development for themselves.

### DOES WELTWÄRTS MAKE SENSE THEN?

First and foremost, that question should be answered by former volunteers and other stakeholders (see testimonials on these pages). We do however consider that weltwärts makes sense because it provides very transformational experiences that lead to a change of perspective. We often see that volunteers struggle with an identity crisis during their stay: Especially in the first months, they tend to ask themselves "what can I achieve here?" as they often see their tasks and their possible contribution, both professionally and in terms of social change as much more effective in their own context.

### WELTWÄRTS IS GLOBAL LEARNING AND CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT POLICY

As described earlier, much learning also takes place within the group of volunteers. Through reflection and sharing, one's own experiences, but also social and political realities and potential for change in the Global South, can be reflected upon. The volunteers usually present the topics they are working on to each other, compare them with what they have experienced in Germany and work together on development issues. This turns into presentations for the public, e.g. as part of the event series "Global South in focus", in schools or at meetings with North-South volunteers.

### WELTWÄRTS IS PERSONAL GROWTH

For most people weltwärts is a year or eighteen months in which they get a chance to get to know

themselves in depth. Volunteers are confronted with many challenges, e.g. one's own limits in terms of communication skills and processing many new experiences. The break from the traditional, as well as the volunteer status, where they do not have to worry about their economic existence, help volunteers to redefine themselves and to grow.

### THE PRICE OF WELTWÄRTS

Weltwärts is not a good experience for everyone and for some it can come at a high price:

### VOLUNTEERS WITH CHILD

When volunteers with a child participate in weltwärts and leave the child(ren) in the care of the family or partner(s) during this time, they may indirectly be doing good for the child ("if I do well, then my child will do well too, if I develop, I do it with the child in mind"); however, this should only happen in exceptional situations and any potential gains should definitely be weighed against the price of the impact on the parent-child bond.



Picture: applicant during the selection process in Mozambique

## DIFFICULTIES ON RETURN

Returning is difficult for all volunteers. Usually there is no one in the immediate environment who has had a similar experience, often changes are not acknowledged, but volunteers are expected by family or even the sending organisation to continue where they were before. ("You've been away long enough, now we need you again"). There is a lack of opportunities to integrate the experience gained in Germany. For some people, the experience can be even more difficult if there is a lack of a supportive environment or little willingness to perceive the person's change. For them, the return can have a destabilising effect.

## THE RIGHT MOMENT?

People who go abroad assume that it will always be good. But it is quite possible that someone who has just gained economic stability, or someone who is in the middle of their studies and does not know whether they will be able to continue after returning, or someone who is responsible for other family members or has already gained independence, will suddenly be confronted with many limitations. In these and other cases, one must carefully consider whether it is the right time to volunteer.



Iris y el Team de la Kita

## Iris Wünscher

Manager of the day care centre Die Schatzinseln, is currently hosting a volunteer for the third time.

## DROP-OUT

Overall, we have not had many drop-outs in the weltwärts South-North programme so far. With many volunteers we see an iron discipline: if I have decided to do something, then I have to see it through, no matter what. Dropping out would be a failure.

From our point of view, it is not a failure. If a person finds that the experience is not what they expected after all and cannot adapt to the situation or finds that the moment was not right or their place is at home, that is also an important learning experience and not a failure.

## POEM BY MECHTHILD SCHMIDT

What a miracle  
In life not  
even thought of each other

and yet we did it  
got involved with each other  
started to exchange ourselves  
and we need it,  
to leave the questioning  
and to get involved in something new  
so that personalities develop  
to learn to understand without words.  
To let everything be questioned,  
I can hardly believe  
That such a different life  
Far away from me  
lets a new image of the world grow  
to end up as if reborn  
to walk, laugh, cry, be with each other,  
Like a miracle.  
What a miracle.

Spenge, 1.9. 2021



Foto: Marilyn Rivera en el trabajo con adultos mayores

The day care centre "Die Schatzinseln e.V." has been participating in the weltwärts programme since 2016. It is important to us that our daycare children experience people from different cultural backgrounds. In this way, we encourage the children to interact with diversity in an unbiased way. It is always fascinating to see how quickly the children make contact and relate to the newcomers despite language barriers. The children play an important role in the integration of the volunteers because they approach them with curiosity and with great openness and empathy.

We got to know the volunteers as people who gave us a lot of impulses with their joy of lear-

ning and energy, and after overcoming the language barrier, the exchange about our respective cultural backgrounds deepened.

Diversity is visible in many ways in the pedagogical practice: for example, children and adults learn about the typical foods and spices when cooking together and experience how different countries can "taste". Or we exchange ideas about what a typical child's everyday life looks like and discover differences and similarities. The volunteers' stories are especially interesting because they are so beautifully foreign. We adults, daycare staff and parents, are also reminded again and again of the privileges we have simply because we were born in Germany.

A thoroughly successful programme!

# SUMMARY

## WHO INFLUENCES THE VOLUNTEER?

Not only the person who applies for the programme brings expectations, but all the people involved in the voluntary service:

### WHAT IS WELTWÄRTS SOUTH-NORTH, AND WHAT IS IT NOT?

Weltwärts is a development programme of the German state that promotes non-formal learning through exchange. It is aimed at people between 18 and 29 years of age, who perform voluntary service in German institutions that serve the common good.

#### COUNTRY OF DISPATCH:

#### GERMANY:

SENDING ORGANISATIONS

HOST FAMILIES

FAMILIES

WORK PLACEMENTS



EXPECTATIONS



#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- - 
  - 
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  - 
  -
- For selection committee members:
- Do I know the basics of the programme?
  - Have I really thought about what volunteers can expect in Germany?
  - Have I discussed this with former volunteers?
  - Have I been willing to listen to their experiences?
- For former volunteers:
- Can I summarise the importance of voluntary service?
  - Can I pass this on?

## WELTWÄRTS

### IS:

- is personal growth
- it is a formative experience and a change of perspective
- provides social security, accommodation and pocket money.
- is global learning and contribution to development.
- is an encounter with Germany as well as with other volunteers from the Global South.

### IT IS NOT:

- is not a professional learning service
- it is not a possibility to attract projects or financial support on return
- is unpaid.
- is not a migration programme

### YOU HAVE TO THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT...

- there may be difficulties on your return, e.g. finding a job.
- in case of mothers/fathers: you will be separated from your children for a long period of time...
- is this the right time?
- it is possible to leave the programme earlier, although this is rare.

# EXPERIENCES

## ACTORS/ SELECTION EXPERIENCES FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

The weltwärts South-North programme is present through Welthaus Bielefeld in different countries and continents, currently in Latin America and Africa. Each country has managed its own selection process, which has been very diverse in each case.

The selection process has varied depending on the context, which we believe is important as the process is adapted to the place where it takes place, however, we also noted that there are few common elements in each of the selection processes and that the criteria for selecting or rejecting an applicant were not entirely clear.

We continue to believe that it is of the utmost importance that each country adapts its selection process to its own context, and at the same time, through this handbook, we would like to provide some common ground to enrich the process.

In this chapter we will look at some examples of the different ways in which the selection process has been carried out depending on each country. Initially, the selection process was carried out by the mentors in each country or by the partner organisations, however, after the first generations of the South-North programme, former returnees became more involved.

### EXPERIENCE FROM ECUADOR AND PERU

In Ecuador and Peru, the volunteers for the South-North programme were determined through assemblies in the first years. The selection process was coordinated and implemented by the partner organisations. Representatives

of Welthaus Bielefeld and/or North-South volunteers were present. While in Peru the selection was always done through democratic voting after getting to know the applicants in rounds of presentations and questions, Ecuador tried selection through the allocation of points in addition to direct voting.

After a few years, the partner organisations in Peru and Ecuador decided to form a committee, whose members would be primarily responsible for the selection. The intention was to involve the returned South-North volunteers in the selection process and to ensure that it would not be left to the partner organisations alone. Initially, the Commission in Ecuador was composed of:

- A representative of Ecuador towards Welthaus Bielefeld
- A former volunteer
- A North-South volunteer
- A partner organisation without an applicant.

At the end, each member of the Committee gives a score and those with the highest number of points are approved.

In 2022, the same scheme was followed, but the new tools developed in this process of the Selection Manual were used. The Selection Manual and the methodology to be used were introduced to the members of the Committee, as well as the commitment to the activity. The members of the Committee were able to listen to the applicants and express their opinions about them in a respectful and sincere manner.

The year 2022 is the first year that Peru started its selection of South-North

volunteers through a Committee, which could not be composed of those selected in 2020. The Committee in Peru was composed of:

- Two representatives of returned South-North volunteers
- Two representatives of partner organisations
- The person responsible for the coordination Peru South-North

Within one week the selection day was organised, despite the inconveniences that arose in reorganising the new 2022 Committee. The commitment and interest they had in participating and learning about the tools suggested in the Manual, in spite of the short time used to discuss them, was remarkable. The appropriate selection of applicants by the sending organisations should be highlighted, as all six of them fulfilled the requested criteria; therefore, this year additional criteria had to be used for the selection of the applicants.

### LEARNINGS

- The continued support and participation of returnee volunteers since they have knowledge and experience of life in Germany.
- The importance of being able to communicate to the partner organisations about the changes regarding the new formation of a committee, about the dynamics of work on the selection day, as well as to present the applicants. All this in order to show transparency in the process.
- It is important that the person in charge of coordination shows firmness and confidence when requesting the use of certain tools, as well as when leading the final plenary.



- Coordinate the preparation meetings with sufficient time so that the reflection discussions among the members of the Commission are not affected by time.

#### THINGS TO CONSIDER

- How can organisations remain motivated to submit applicants?

- It is suggested that the partner organisation submitting an applicant should not have family ties (this is not an exclusion criterion) with the applicants.

- The punctuality of various actors, as this helps to be able to start the programmed activities on time. The lack of punctuality has been due to various factors, such as: not being able to find the location easily, the late arrival of some applicants coming from the province.

- Greater communication and follow-up regarding applications to the South-North programme, as well as being able to share the criteria with partner organisations before they submit their applications.

- More time to share the Selection Manual with the members of the Committee.

- Regarding the formation of the Committee, the members should vary each year in order to maintain impartiality, objectivity and the opportunity for all partner organisations to be able to participate.

- It is suggested that representatives of the organisations that have been selected to send their volunteers to Germany to participate in the last year should be invited to attend.

#### COMMUNITY OF GUARJILA

The selection processes in South-North volunteering are not the same in all sending organisations. Members of the Guarjila community in El Salvador tell us how they organise themselves to carry out the various stages of the process.

#### PUBLICATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Once the call for applications is made public to all partner organisations of the Weltwärts Sur-Norte programme, the committee is in charge of making posters to share on community and personal Facebook profiles, as well as on WhatsApp statuses. The dissemination is done through these social networks because it is inten-

ded that interested people who do not belong to a community group can also participate. For the youth groups that are part of the community, some posters are distributed and a PowerPoint presentation is made, in which the programme is explained in detail. The use of networks may have had an impact on the calls for applications, as the number of applicants has increased considerably in recent years. For the 2022 call, eight applications were received. With these people, it was decided to create a WhatsApp group in order to have more direct contact, send general information and coordinate upcoming meetings.

#### THE SELECTION COMMITTEE

The selection committee is made up of one member of the Community Development Association (ADESCO), one member of the Twinning Committee and four returned volunteers, but this has not always been the case. The first participation of the Guarjila community in the Weltwärts South-North programme was in 2014-2015, when there were two people interested in volunteering and ADESCO and the Twinning Committee carried out the entire selection process.

Picture: Activity during the selection in El Salvador, shown are an applicant, communal



## SOME EXPERIENCES OF RETURNED VOLUNTEERS

The profiles of the people who have taken part in the programme are very varied: high school graduates, professionals, under or over 20 years of age. According to the committee members, the volunteer experiences so far have been positive and each person has tried in one way or another to incorporate what they learned in Germany into the community. For example, those who have worked with children and young people in Germany have been part of early childhood projects such as Jóvenes Emprendedores Creando futuro (Young Entrepreneurs Creating a Future), funded by the German government through the group Viva Guarjila, Bielefeld, Atención al Desarrollo Infantil Temprano (Attention to Early Childhood Development), funded by GOES (Government of El Salvador) or working at the nursery at the school of Cantón Guarjila. A returned volunteer who worked with older adults undertook the project Tejiendo Amistades (Weaving Friendships) with the aim of creating spaces and recreational activities for this group. While those who worked with environmental issues in their volunteering have carried out projects on beekeeping, bird house construction and tourism. Some of these people also continued their university studies or joined foundations. It is worth mentioning that although there is active participation of some members of the community in the projects carried out there, employment options are limited.

Since the call for applications in 2016, the returning volunteers have played a central role in the selection process, not only because they share their experiences of volunteering with the future applicants, but also because in the interviews they can perceive qualities in the applicants, perhaps not so visible to the other members of the committee, which can be important when it comes to carrying out a voluntary service in Germany.

### THE SELECTION

Selecting a person to volunteer is undoubtedly a big challenge for the Guarjila community because they know both the candidates and their families and, although this could be an advantage, it is always difficult for the committee members to make an impartial decision and especially to deal with some comments that suggest that there is a preference for certain applicants. One of the former volunteers who is part of the coordinating team points out that part of the challenge is that they know how the applicants behave in the community, but not what they will be like when they arrive in Germany.

In the last two application processes, interviews have been conducted in which the applicants answer a series of questions related to their motivation to do voluntary service in Germany, the difficulties that might arise, the opinions of their close circle, the willingness to learn about German culture, etc. In addition, the returned volunteers share some of their experiences in Germany so that they can reflect a little on what their life there might be like. While these testimonies may give an account of various situations they may face, it is worth remembering that each person experiences volunteering

differently and therefore such experiences should not be generalised.

After the individual interviews, the selection committee draws up a table with the following basic criteria to evaluate each applicant: work experience, independence, commitment to sharing upon return, willingness to learn and serve, honesty and sincerity, links to organisations, capacity for self-reflection and analysis, language skills, personal characteristics, willingness to confront something new, and observations. On the basis of this information, the selection committee puts in the first place those who meet the criteria and could best represent the community in the volunteer programme in Germany. In case the views of the committee members differ significantly, the information about the candidates is sent to two members of Welthaus Bielefeld for their opinion.

### EL CASO DE SUDÁFRICA

In South Africa, the selection process for candidates for the Welthaus South-North volunteer programme has generally been conducted by a team of two members, with a varying composition. Some years the selection team has been composed by a Welthaus coordinator from Germany and the local Welthaus volunteer mentor, while other years, it has been done by the local Welthaus volunteer mentor together with a former volunteer. The application process usually includes the following two main steps for the candidates:

- 1) Submission of a written application including a CV, personal motivation letter, reference letter by the associated organization and completed questionnaire
- 2) Completion of a one-hour face-to-face interview with the selection team, guided by a set of interview questions



Picture: Sheba Chanda drawing her life's journey

The outcomes of the written submission and the personal interview are subsequently discussed and evaluated by the selection team for each candidate and a list of three candidates is presented to Welthaus Bielefeld.

Overall, this selection method has worked relatively well because it offers candidates the opportunity to prepare application documents as well as present themselves in person. The advantage of having a small and independent selection team is that relatively little administrative and organizational effort is required for the interview process. In addition, it has allowed for a very straightforward analysis and comparison between the different candidates and has ensured an independent evaluation that has not been influenced to any extent by the interests of the different partner organisations.

The disadvantages of this selection process have been the lack of direct involvement of the different partner organisations and their experiences, particularly in the interview process, as well as

the lack of space for personal and group interactions of the candidates, which would provide a more indirect and deeper insight into their personalities and behaviour.

In 2021, the interview process was held digitally for the first time. This made it possible to comply with Covid-19 regulations and reduce travel efforts for candidates. However, it had some disadvantages such as sometimes unstable internet connections and an increased difficulty of language barrier for some participants.

### THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SELECTION COMMITTEE IN THE MEXICAN CASE

In Mexico, to have a selection committee was chosen from the start. The process was carried out by the mentor of the Sur-Norte programme, who invited representatives of partner organisations that had no member applying for volunteering. In Mexico there are partner organisations in four states (Mexico City, Hidalgo, Chiapas and Oaxaca), so it was decided to carry out the selection in two of the regions with the greatest presence of organisations,

Chiapas and Oaxaca, and the candidates from the other states travelled to these cities to carry out the selection process.

It was in 2018 that the process passed into the hands of returned volunteers, who were able to incorporate their own experience in Germany and chose to carry out the selection together. One of the first questions for the selection process was to define the location, as the applicants mainly came from Oaxaca and Chiapas. The distance between the two locations is 12 hours.

One option was to carry out the selection separately, however, it was preferred to carry out the selection in one place, so that the Commission could meet each of the applicants and have the full picture. Previously, the selection was done separately in each state, with mentors organising the interview process, but it was not possible to meet all applicants in the same way.

## PREPARATION

In 2018, it was decided to carry out the selection in Oaxaca, with all applicants in person. Initially we had intended to carry out the selection only through interviews, however, we wondered whether it was worthwhile to carry out other activities to take advantage of the day and long journey they would be making, so that we could get to know them a little better. So, when we convened as a Committee, we drew up a plan of activities with timetables, content and those responsible for each moment.

Beforehand, we also prepared a folder with the documentation of the applicants so that we could review them before the face-to-face meeting and the interviews.

The Commission was made up of:

- 1 Mentor
- 1 North-South Volunteer
- 2 returned volunteers
- 1 recently returned volunteer
- 2 people from organisations which had not sent candidates.

## SELECTION PROCESS

During the selection process, group activities were carried out in order to get to know and observe the participation of the applicants. We also gave a presentation on what the South-North volunteer programme is and a former volunteer shared her experience. During the individual interviews, we showed a film and set up an information point for the others where the applicants could consult the

of former volunteers as well as information about volunteering.

The interview instrument we used was inspired by an interview sheet provided by The Third World House in Esteli, Nicaragua. We adapted this interview sheet for Mexico. During the implementation of the interview, it happened that some members of the commission knew some of the applicants, so we decided that it was better to rotate among the members of the commission to conduct the interviews, also because it could be very invasive to have 7 people interviewing one person. There were two people who stayed outside, one was permanently in

charge of the activities, the other person could support him or her or be at the information point.

At the end of the day, the applicants left and we in the Selection Committee decided to stay to deliberate the outcome. During 2019, 2020 and 2022, the process has been very similar, but we believe it has improved. The interview instrument was better adapted to the context in Mexico. We tried to learn a bit more about the expectations of the applicants and to clarify what volunteering is about, so that not think of it as a job or academic they do raining, as has sometimes been the case.

Picture: Miriam Cortés during the preparation of the selection



## COMMITTEE DELIBERATION

At the end of the day we met as a Committee to make the decision. In 2018 we discussed our perspectives among the members. There were stark differences between the people representing the sending organisations and the experience of the former volunteers. So the space also became a place to exchange experiences of volunteering and to find out how the organisations were experiencing it and how the returned volunteers were experiencing it. We used an evaluation instrument, which we filled in together. Based on it we deliberated and numbered those who we considered most suitable.

From the 2022 experience, one aspect that helped us to make a first filter was the weighting of scores. In this way we focused on those applicants that we saw as possible candidates, but with certain reservations or that some committee members saw as suitable and other members did not. After taking the scores into account, we conducted rounds of comments and perspectives on what we had observed and heard from each of them, in the different moments: interview, dynamics and documentation. In this second round we decided to modify our scores and again make comments, taking into account the main evaluation criteria.

In the end, there were three rounds of listening, which were very useful in deciding on the people we considered suitable.



### ADVANTAGES:

We consider that the selection in committee was a good way to carry out the process, because different actors involved in the Welwärts programme with Casa del Mundo Bielefeld are involved, this allows for complementing the different perspectives.



### DISADVANTAGES:

With more than 4 or 5 people participating in the process, it can be more time consuming and complicated to reach an agreement. Therefore, it is important to agree on rules of respect, listening and timing for the committee's deliberation process beforehand.



### TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT:

It is possible that the easiest way to make the decision is voting, however, this could impede the mutual listening and exchange of perspectives, which is the part that most enriches decision-making through a Committee.

Picture: Former volunteers preparing the selection

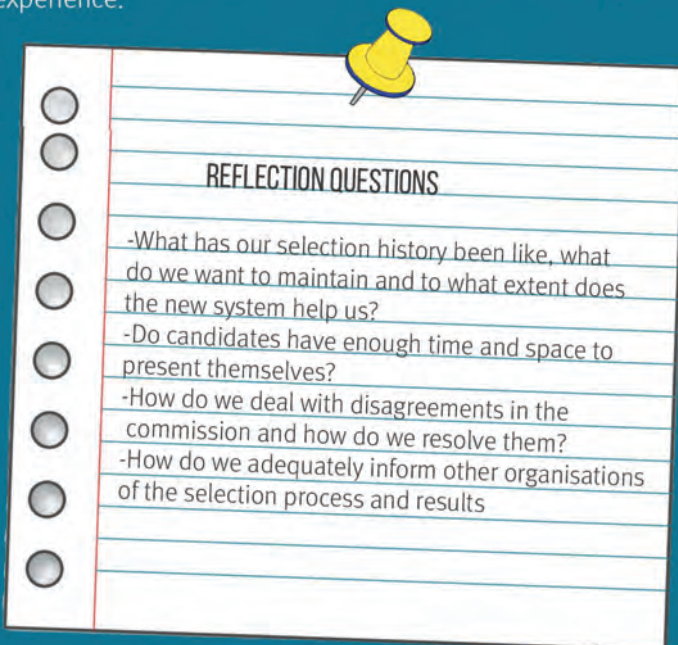


# SUMMARY

There have been different approaches to volunteer selection in various countries. How should the selection process be designed to fit the specific country's context, be feasible and allow for good and fair selection?

How has the selection process been carried out?

- Diverse committee: include partner organisations, mentors, volunteers North South / South North.
- Integration of returned volunteers to include their knowledge of Germany and volunteering.
- Selection by voting, scoring or discussion.
- Various criteria: from motivation, commitment and problem-solving skills to representation of the organisation, work experience.



**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What has our selection history been like, what do we want to maintain and to what extent does the new system help us?
- Do candidates have enough time and space to present themselves?
- How do we deal with disagreements in the commission and how do we resolve them?
- How do we adequately inform other organisations of the selection process and results



## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SELECTION BY ASSEMBLY OR COMMITTEE?

|           | ADVANTAGE  | DISADVANTAGE   |
|-----------|--|--|
| ASSEMBLY  | All organisations feel that they are part of the process, the motivation to propose candidates can be higher, there is great transparency. | For "shy" candidates it can be more difficult to present themselves in the Assembly. You can't get to know the candidates as well. |
| COMMITTEE | Candidates can be better known, less funding is needed. The committee is equitable because it is made up of several actors.                | There is a need for more communication to organisations not present, so that they remain part of the programme.                    |

# **WHAT MAKES GOOD VOLUNTEERS?**

We have called this chapter "What makes a good volunteer?" Of course there is no such thing as an ideal person - but the multiple perspectives of the different actors give us clues as to what qualities help a person to make it a fruitful experience for him or her and the other actors involved. Hopefully, the reading will give clues to the different selection commissions, to approach what volunteering is and what it takes to have a good time.

## 3.1 PERSPECTIVE OF THE SENDING ORGANISATIONS

This section brings together the various perspectives of the sending organisations, gathered from direct interviews and joint seminars. During volunteering there are at least three stages that involve different actors, including the sending organisation::

- Before: application
- During: volunteering
- After: return

### APPLICATION

The organisations agree that these aspects are important to take into account with regard to the person who will be volunteering:

- Relationship with the organisation:

In the seminars it has been commented that the person who applies must have a direct relationship with the organisation. It can be someone who collaborates directly in the permanent team, but also someone who is volunteering or someone who is a beneficiary of the organisation. In that sense, the organisations also considered that the person should have seniority within the organisation, so that he/she knows well what the organisation does, its perspective, its objectives and its context.

- Responsible in their work:

The reference from the sending organisation is a good background to consider that they are sending a responsible person, who has been committed to their work in the organisation, who has initiative in carrying out tasks and activities. Also important is the background they already have from having worked in the organisation for a certain period of time.

- Personality and psychological stability:

Organisations agree that personality and stability is one of the priority aspects. The volunteer must have a stable psychological profile, as well as the maturity to take on this experience of exchange and encounter with another culture. A perspective shared with us from Chiapas, Mexico, was the methodology that takes into account: Heart, Thought and Action. Looking at the person's feeling-thinking and feeling-acting. The perspective focuses on the qualities of the person, their capacity for reflection, action and the passion that drives them to act every day.

- Cultural and local relationship:

It is considered important that the person who applies is sure of his or her cultural, ethnic or regional identity, this is directly related to the local rootedness in his or her place of origin. The volunteer should have a basic knowledge of the socio-political situation in his/her country, as it is essential to know one's own culture in order to connect with a different one.

- Openness to the fact that they will encounter a different culture:

The person applying should be willing to learn about the context and culture in Germany, as well as learn aspects of the basic language before leaving so that he/she can have some references before arriving there.

"To be aware of the reality and be clear about the responsibility that one is going to carry out, is to be perseverant, to be open to change, to work in various social activities respecting and enhancing the values and capabilities of others. A good volunteer should always maintain an active, proactive, proactive, committed, empathetic, supportive and competitive attitude and dialogue, so that this leads to giving and seeking solutions and working as a team".



Maikely Hudiel,  
Nicaragua,  
volunteer 2015 - 2017



## VOLUNTEERING

It is very important to create mutual agreements between the sending organisation and the volunteer, so that the expectations of both parties can be openly discussed and no implicit expectations are created that result in disappointment or frustration.

- **Aim of volunteering:** Organisations ask volunteers to be clear and honest about what they want or seek from this South-North volunteering. It is also essential that the sending organisation is clear about its objective or main motivation to encourage the participation of the volunteer applicant and communicate this to him/her. Some organisations recommended that the objectives and agreements be set out in a document that formalises the commitments of both parties and the co-responsibility. This document can be flexible. In this document, the expectations related to the return of the volunteer could also be previously stated: his/her responsibilities and commitments, as well as the sending organisation's commitment to the returnee.

It is also important to take into account the objectives of the voluntary service as stated by the Weltwärts programme and Welthaus Bielefeld. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this programme focuses on development policy learning, which is mainly non-formal, but through mutual exchange and the strengthening of international partnerships. The programme primarily involves personal growth, not professional learning. We recommend reading chapter 1 carefully, in order to be clear about the objectives and expectations of the programme.

- **Communication agreements:** to avoid misunderstandings between sending organisations and volunteers, it will

be important before leaving the country of origin and in the first months of volunteering to discuss communication agreements between the volunteer and the organisations.

There are people who prefer to feel accompanied by their organisation in this process, mainly in the initial or final period, when the return is near. There are other cases in which volunteers prefer to take more time to get involved with the context in which they arrive and do not require as much accompaniment from their organisations.

In the case of the organisations, some of them do not have enough time to dedicate to the accompaniment of the volunteers, in addition to the fact that they are dealing with day-to-day activities and in this sense there is no possibility of maintaining communication with the volunteer. In other cases, the organisations are very willing to maintain communication.

In this sense, it is important to consider the time difference between one country and another, which could make communication difficult. Another important aspect is that the volunteer needs to take time to integrate into the new culture once he/she arrives in Germany.

The reports written by the volunteers have often been useful for the organisations to know what the volunteers are experiencing in Germany.

## RETURN

The sending organisations have a high expectation of the return of the volunteers, which is why it is considered that a good volunteer is the one who returns and shares what he or she has learned during the voluntary service.

The volunteer develops personally from this experience, but also contributes to the development of the organisation and the community.

The return is a process that can be difficult for volunteers coming back to their sending organisation and country. Organisations ask volunteers to consider how they can apply innovations to the local context, taking into account different contexts and social circumstances. It is desirable that the returnee takes responsibility for ensuring the initial preparation of the new volunteer.

"For me a good volunteer is someone who has characteristics that make them someone who can be counted on for any situation, does not measure efforts to do what they set out to do even if it is not a standard or expected experience for their kind of work"



Aida, Chitsumba,  
Mosambique,  
volunteer 2015-2016

Picture: Kevin Carabantes and Lupita Penados during their return seminar



## 3.2 PERSPECTIVE OF ITS PROTAGONISTS

*"... for a more diverse, noble and compassionate world" Claribel*

The following is a synthesis of thoughts and feelings of former volunteers about the meaning and value they find in being a good volunteer. The answers are subjective, based on the life experience of each one.

Perspectives from diverse backgrounds were incorporated, discovering similarities and complements between them. Some focused more on the importance of attitude towards various situations that may arise, while others highlighted the value of motivation and values during the volunteer stay in Germany that can be shared.

Choosing to volunteer starts from a personal decision, and all participants are clear about this. The volunteer knows the obligations and

responsibilities involved, often even before the selection process. During the process of preparation and immersion in Germany, the volunteer must be aware that they are a constant learner, must qualify themselves, learn to organise themselves and to refine or improve their social skills in order to be able to deal with situations that may arise with maturity.

A good volunteer should be open-minded, communicative, proactive, respectful, independent and authentic. They should be aware of the new culture and its norms in order to be able to integrate. Just as they are willing to learn from Germany, they

should also be willing and interested in sharing their own culture, to share a bit about their life, country, society, ways of thinking, and even to some extent to break stereotypes. A good volunteer should be curious to learn new things, in order to keep growing as a person.

Adequate mental health is necessary for a good performance of the activities to be carried out, so a good volunteer should not hesitate to ask for help when needed. They should recognise their strengths and difficulties and have the necessary resilience to face the uncomfortable. They do not need to change their essence to fit in, it is important that they are themselves;

moreover, they get to know themselves along the way. In their home country they should go for medical check-ups and not forget to take the necessary medication with them to avoid any inconveniences.

As far as the working environment in Germany is concerned, a good volunteer should strive to do his or her work as well as possible, even if it is monotonous or tedious work. They should know and/or learn to express themselves assertively when something is not to their liking, when they do not know something or when they are afraid of something, because often, due to the difficulty of the language, there may not be good communication and this can lead to misunderstandings. A good volunteer should seek support from someone they trust so that they can intervene in related issues.

A good volunteer, knows their national reality, should see themselves as an agent of change, a leader, empathetic, supportive. They should carry out advocacy activities on social issues of interest. They should remember the reasons why they decided to go through this kind of experience, as it can serve as motivation when spirits are not high.

Not least, a good volunteer should be able to handle a complicated family situation as well as possible, as this can be a reason for demotivation, discouragement and a desire to drop out of the programme.



Picture: Claribel Díaz at the seminar about selection criteria

"In order to be able to develop the different activities for which you are responsible, you need to learn to organise yourself. This country is very different compared to Latin American countries, that is why order is essential for a good performance. In our countries, we are used to improvisation and there are almost always inconveniences that we have to adapt to. Our capacity for adaptability is enormous, but so must be our ability to fulfil our commitments.

We must also learn to ask for help or to know when our body needs a break. Some weeks will be hard, in others we will have longer breaks. Mental health is necessary for good performance of our activities."



Mélany Panta,  
Peru, volunteer  
2019 - 2020

## 3.3 PERSPECTIVE

### OF THE VOLUNTEER WORKPLACES

This summary is based on descriptions from the day care centre "Villa Kunterbunt", Profil e.V. Verein zur Förderung von jungen Arbeitslosen and the Drogenhilfenzentrum, Abteilung der Drogenberatung Bielefeld e.V. as well as minutes of meetings with the placement sites.

In principle, the places of assignment do not require any specific technical knowledge. All work can be learned in the course of the activity. Therefore, it is important that volunteers are interested in the work at the place of assignment and its target groups. Those who work in a day-care centre should have a desire to work with children, play with them and also show interest in learning about the pedagogical concepts behind the work. Those who work in horticulture should have an interest in manual work and a desire to learn something in the "green" area, but also be open to the unemployed young people or people with disabilities who also work there. Those who work in the drug help centre should be interested in dealing with the topic of "drug abuse and addiction" and its effects and in getting in touch with the clients. All in all, the places of assignment want the volunteers not only to do their daily work but also to be interested in learning more about the background and concepts. Even though specific expertise is not a prerequisite, previous knowledge and experience in the field of work are always welcome.

In all places of assignment, volunteers will work in a German-speaking team and come into contact with a specific target group, depending on the place of assignment: children, people with physical or mental disabilities, people with mental

illnesses, people who do not behave in a socially compliant manner, or old people. In order to get in contact with colleagues and target groups, volunteers need to have a friendly demeanour, be willing to work in a team and should bring a sense of humour and preferably a laugh to the work. Since working with the target groups will not always be easy, patience and empathy are also important.

A big topic in the meetings with the place of assignment is always the German language. The places of assignment would like the volunteers to have a basic knowledge of the German language when they start their work. Communication is important in order to be able to explain how the centre works, to understand work instructions, to ask questions and to get in touch with the target groups. Especially children, people with disabilities or old people do not speak English, let alone Spanish or Portuguese, and cannot necessarily understand that they have to speak slowly and clearly. The places of assignment expect the volunteers to improve their German language skills in the course of the voluntary service in order to be able to take on more complex tasks.

Since communication in German will be difficult, especially at the beginning, the places of assignment repeatedly emphasise that they would like the volunteers to

dare to say openly when they have not understood something. If something is explained to the volunteers and they always say "yes", the supervisors think they have understood everything. But maybe the volunteer only said "yes" because he or she did not



Mery López at her volunteer placement

dare to ask a third or fourth time. They would like the volunteers to let them know if something is not going well, because otherwise it can happen in the often stressful everyday life that the volunteers "get lost". The places of assignment explicitly want the volunteers to give them feedback and criticism. You can talk about everything and find a solution if you communicate the problems.

In the course of the volunteer service, there will also be phases when things don't go so well. Especially at the beginning, when everything is new and communication is still difficult, the work can be very stressful. Conversely, there may be phases with little work, for example because there is little to do in horticulture in winter or because the volunteer can only take on simple tasks due to the language barrier. When working outdoors, e.g. in the forest kindergarten or in horticulture, there may be days, especially in winter, when it is uncomfortable because it is cold, rainy and windy, despite wearing protective clothing. Volunteers should be able to go through these unpleasant phases as well or be flexible to work in another area during these times.

Another big point is that the places of assignment want the volunteers to be proactive. The places of assignment have a routine procedure and the volunteer is a new person who still has to find a place in this system. He or she should not just wait to be assigned a place, but should be actively involved, e.g. approaching the children in the day care centre and playing with them. The places of assignment want the volunteers to think about what to do next and to act independently. They should also take on routine tasks that they already know after a short time without being asked. One place of assignment described this expectation by saying that volunteers should also "see work", i.e. independently see where help is needed and take the initiative. They also want the volunteers to complete their tasks reliably.

Even if it sounds as if the volunteers often have to adapt, the places of assignment want the volunteers to "be themselves". They are happy when the volunteers bring in their own ideas and experiences and, for example, propose and implement their own small projects. This could be a leisure activity that they plan and implement or a ritual that is introduced in the day care centre. Also, the organisations would not participate in the weltwärts programme if they were not interested in the experiences and culture of the volunteers. They are happy when the volunteers share aspects of their own work and culture with their colleagues and the target group, be it singing a song in Portuguese with the children, teaching the people of the target group a few words in English or Spanish, giving a talk about the sending organisation, or..., or..., or... The volunteers bring a breath of fresh air into the places of assignment and this is a chance for everyone to try out new things, to question points of view and to engage in exchange.



Picture: Siphon Mabaso at his work placement



Guadalupe Penagos,  
Mexico,  
volunteer 2017 - 2018

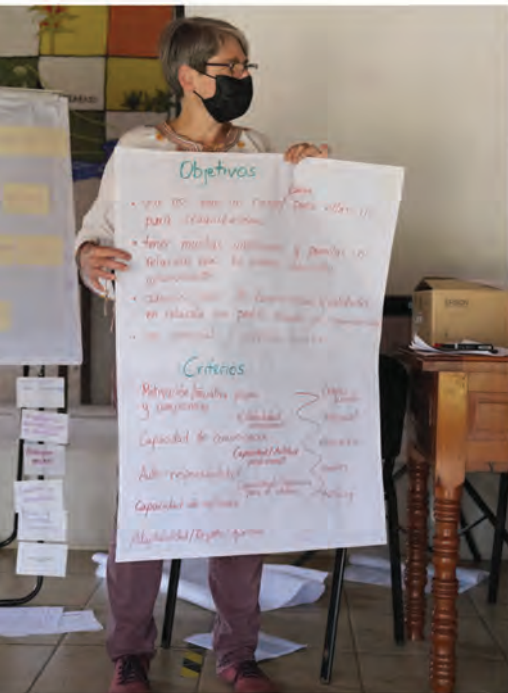
"Being able to participate in volunteering has been one of the most wonderful experiences. Within this experience one is immersed in the learning of a new language, culture, people and ways of life different from the ones you knew. It meant a before and after in my life. Being part of a work team in which, day by day, the work relationships evolved into people who gave me their friendship and affection. Almost 6 years have passed since I started volunteering and I can still enjoy having a host mother on the other side of the world, who will soon make her second trip to Mexico to be together again and who shows me her affection and closeness at every moment despite the distance".



## 3.4 PERSPECTIVE OF welthaus bielefeld

What makes a good volunteer from the perspective of Welthaus Bielefeld? In the following, the two people who are most involved with volunteers on the Welthaus side present their views:

### **BARBARA SCHÜTZ, COORDINATOR OF THE PROGRAMME:**



Picture: Barbara Schütz, selection criteria

This is a difficult question, because at the end of the day, everyone is who they are and everyone has something to contribute to the programme. Nevertheless, I think it is important to ask the question, because it should be avoided that the consequences of the voluntary service lead to a burden for the volunteer or for their environment, and it should also be possible for the volunteer to integrate well into the host family and the workplace.

Sometimes volunteers ask me: Oh dear, - we are making so much work for you! The work is not the problem, on the contrary, I enjoy accompanying volunteers, seeing them grow, seeing them ask themselves questions and want to move forward, with everything that goes with it, including setbacks, doubts, questions, problems

For me, this results in various important qualities:

#### **Ability and willingness to learn**

When you come into a new context, previous knowledge can sometimes be of no help. Being aware of this, taking time and giving yourself time to grasp the new environment, perhaps by observing a lot or asking questions, is important in the beginning. In the next step, the volunteer can then reflect what from their previous knowledge might fit and can be applied.

#### **Willingness to question oneself**

I think it is very important reflect upon one's biography - to be aware of what has made you who you are. This also includes a confrontation with what the volunteer has learned about gender/race, about their own sexism and racism. Ideally, it is also possible to share this so that those around them, e.g. the host families, can understand why they might behave in this or that way. Questioning things and biographical examination can also mean that one becomes aware that behaviour made sense in a certain context, but another context sometimes allows different behaviour.

"Before going to Germany, my goal was to volunteer. However, during the experience, many unexpected things came up: the stress in communication because of the language, the habituality of everyday life, the position at work, the climate, the personal presentation, etc. I could not identify myself in Germany. The first reason for leaving the programme was my family that I had left and then health problems that affected me several times, even though beforehand I was in good medical conditions. In the end I realised that all these situations stressed me more and more. So I would recommend to people who are interested, first of all, to make sure their families don't interfere too much in the volunteering and secondly, to check their health and take the necessary medicines with them to avoid any inconvenience".



Francisco Covela,  
Mozambique, volunteer 2017

### **Willingness to see the other person**

This probably seems self-evident; all letters of motivation mention it: "I want to get to know the German culture, I want to learn from the people". In practice, however, I have the impression that many volunteers are preoccupied with themselves. To a certain extent I consider it positive, it means knowing one's own limits, knowing what I need when I'm not feeling well. However, I often have the feeling that curiosity about other people is missing, and I also often find the exploration of German society very superficial. For me, that means, for example, asking host families questions, collecting information about Germany and showing interest in these topics. Unfortunately, media consumption sometimes gets in the way of really getting involved in their environment.

### **Being critical and group composition**

All volunteers will never be critical, and thus it is not a basic criterion. For me, being critical means not believing everything you see - and thereby also questioning the development discourse, not believing that everything is better or worse in Germany, but getting a differentiated picture without giving up your own. Critical people are also important for the group in order to be able to question group norms, how majorities deal with minorities and exclusionary behaviour.

"A good volunteer does not need to change their essence to fit in, it is important to be oneself, but that entails a greater responsibility being in another country and surrounded by people who live in other social and cultural contexts, with different ways of being and thinking. And being aware that these things may clash at some point, which implies working on the ability to accept and understand the situation without generating conflicts and not taking certain things personally.

Broadly speaking, I think that a good volunteer is someone who leaves a good memory. Someone who makes an effort to do well at work, even if it was monotonous or tedious work, and that this work, no matter how small, needs to be done in order for the organisation to move forward. Someone who makes an effort to communicate with their surroundings, even if it is only in basic or minimal German. Someone who manages to connect with society, be it through family or friends. Someone who learns from their stay in Germany and at the same time manages to share a bit of their life, their country, their society, their way of thinking, and to some extent break stereotypes. Someone who accepts a new reality and makes it their own".



Laura Hernández,  
Mexico, volunteer 2015-2016



Picture: Laura Hernández with her work colleague



Picture: Nalaia Vaca and Cátia Gento at a seminar

"From cultural differences and language barriers to life experience and living situations you need to welcome the differences. For this you need the resilience to be able to deal with climates and conditions that you might not be used to dealing with at home. It is important to be willing to learn about the volunteer work and culture of the organisation and realize that the volunteer is also gaining from experience; not just giving.

Organisation need volunteers who step up, act and get things done. You need to consider what you bring to the organisation, what are some skills and experiences you can share, and how you can help in the best way."



Mpho Veronica Mphahlele,  
Southafrica: volunteer 2019-2020

"The disposition is of great importance for this experience. If you are not willing to live it, to learn, to contribute, to enable yourself, being a volunteer will become an empty experience."



Inés Cornejo,  
Peru: volunteer 2014-2015



**HEINER WILD,  
CONTACT PERSON FOR  
THE VOLUNTEER WORKPLACES**



The volunteers we got to know in these six years were very different in many respects: in temperament, in their previous level of education, in their ability to learn the German language and much more. But what does it depend on how well they learn to orient themselves in the diverse contexts of life in Germany, while at the same time convey an idea of their culture of origin?

I think, first and foremost, on their self-awareness, in the sense of consciously coming to terms with their own history and

identity. It may be that this identity means complete conformity with the culture of origin, but more likely it may arise from processing self-doubt, conflicts and crises. Self-awareness is particularly developed in individual volunteers who have lived as border crossers between cultures (e.g. between indigenous communities and the majority society or between a small farming family of origin and a big-city academic professional environment).

The greater the awareness of one's own, the greater the chance of recognising what is different about the new environment as well as what is common.

The willingness to get to know the new, to understand it, to engage with the other behaviour, habits and norms is expressed in observing, listening, questioning and comparing. It is also expressed in the desire to learn and use the new language. It is usually accompanied by an interest in communicating something about the country of origin, about one's own experiences of life there.

For some volunteers, this kind of self-awareness is not or only barely developed. On the one hand, there are those who are still very firmly attached to their familiar surroundings. The new appears so overwhelmingly different to them that it does not inspire comparisons and questions, but simply remains alien, possibly appears threatening, causes fear and the longing for the familiar prevails.

Or volunteers have a difficult biography - with experiences of crises, possibly traumas, but without having dealt with them. They are therefore insecure, disoriented and necessarily more concerned with themselves than with the new.

Volunteers who tend to fit one of these two descriptions can still become good volunteers over the course of their time volunteering. But they have a harder time and need more help to be able to use their self-confidence as a basis to face the new. Barbara's seminars, which encourage self-reflection as well as the perception of social conditions, can help with this.

The greatest difficulties in finding the openness to learn are experienced by those who bring with them a kind of "self-awareness" that is so entrenched, not to say paralysed, that it only ever confirms itself. But it does not allow for any eagerness to be curious nor does it permit questions, since they can always mean questioning oneself.

However, self-confidence as a positive quality does not contradict the questioning of one's own ideas and behaviour, and is more compatible with an attitude of modesty and helpfulness than with dominance. Out of an inner strength it enables external flexibility and readiness to adapt.

Social skills are central to the work of volunteers: empathy and caring towards the vulnerable target groups of their placement sites, towards children, people with disabilities or in precarious living situations and the elderly; a joy of learning, creativity and a willingness to take responsibility in carrying out tasks. Communication skills, including non-verbal ones, help volunteers not only in dealing with the people entrusted to them, but also in the work team, in the host family and not least among themselves in the volunteer group.

All these competences, on the one hand, are desirable qualities of volunteers in themselves, but on the other hand, they can be seen as virtues that thrive best in the soil of self-confidence.



Picture: Simbarashe Chadini with his host father

## 3.5 PERSPECTIVE OF HOST FAMILIES

This summary is based on interviews and comments from host families who have had good and bad experiences with volunteers.

Host families are a very important element of the South-North programme. They are not only the first direct contact with society and everyday life in Germany, but also an important part of the volunteering experience due to the volunteers and host families living together so closely for an extended time period.

In this context, host families often mean that volunteers move in with one or two people whose children are grown up and usually no longer live at home.

Many of the host parents who offer to host volunteers have had previous contact with exchange programmes or longer stays abroad. They may have had their own experiences in the past or their children may have volunteered abroad. Some host families have been hosting volunteers for years, for others it is the first time they are hosting someone. The reasons for hosting volunteers are many and varied; there is always a great interest in the cultures and people coming to Germany.

The curiosity to get to know a new part of the world or to deepen existing relationships with certain regions. After their own children have left home, there is sometimes also a desire to continue family life. In general, there is an expectation of give and take, of reciprocity from which everyone benefits and from which one learns with and from others.

The experiences of the host families with the volunteers are different each time, and the “family life” is always lived in a different way. Despite these very individual experiences, some characteristics and behavioural patterns of the volunteers can be identified which, from the point of view of the host parents, make life in the families easier or more difficult. The most important characteristics are sincerity, interest and motivation. They are considered essential for learning the language, culture and life in Germany, but are just as important in everyday personal encounters. The host families explicitly see themselves as a family for the volunteers, i.e. participation and interest in each other's lives are important to them. They may want to have a meal together once a day or do activities together on a regular basis.

On the one hand, shared moments are important, but on the other hand, the host parents are also happy when the volunteers have the courage and curiosity to seek out new experiences on their own and are not centered on the host parents when they want to get to know more about Germany.

The qualities that make living together difficult are often the opposite of the desired behaviour. Lack of independence, a high degree of seclusion or disinterest cause the desired family life to cool down. The host parents find it very unfortunate if the volunteers focus on their relationships in their homeland and disconnect from the host family and life in Germany. If there is a lack of interest, a lack of curiosity for new things, the all-important communication between volunteers and host families can suffer. Openness and honesty are very important for the families, because they want to address uncertainties or misunderstandings head-on, because they want to offer the volunteers a home where they feel comfortable and understood. For example, spontaneous changes in arrangements or small accidents in the home should be communicated openly, simply so that the host parents are aware and a solution can be sought together.

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Communication is often the key point that determines whether the relationship between host parents and volunteers works well or not. Open communication based on mutual trust is necessary to prevent or resolve conflicts. An obvious challenge seems to be the lack of German language skills, especially at the beginning of the voluntary service. However, most conflicts are not due to the language barrier, but to non-compliance with agreements, misunderstandings and misbehaviour. Since both parties approach living together with different impressions and expectations, misunderstandings can and will occur. This may mean establishing rules of behaviour or communicating one another's limits in order to make good coexistence possible. These problems, which may be due to miscommunication, are usually addressed first by the host parents. However, there is always an explicit wish that volunteers also address the problems openly.

Ultimately, however, the host families want the volunteers to be themselves and to be able to be themselves. Also for the host parents, the time spent together is an intense experience. The personal and cultural exchange is perceived as very enriching. The host families enjoy discovering and learning new things as much as the volunteers, and they welcome them with this in mind. The exchange of experiences, the shared experiences, the discovery of Germany, the knowledge of their home countries and much more motivate the families to host the volunteers and to accompany them during their stay.



Picture: Evelyn Henríquez cooking with her host mother



Picture: Isaac Quispe with his host family and Barbara Schütz



Picture: Marco Palacios with his host family and a representative of his sending organisation

# SUMMARY

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD VOLUNTEER?

To answer this question comprehensively, this chapter has presented and summarised the perspectives of the following parties involved: Sending organisations, former volunteers, volunteer workplaces, Welthaus Bielefeld and host families. The perspectives show that there are different expectations of volunteers at different times. For a better mutual understanding, it is helpful for all involved to openly communicate these explicit and implicit expectations in the selection process and also to give applicants the opportunity to present their expectations..

From the perspective of the sending organisations:

- ...has a direct relationship with the sending organisation and knows it well.
- ...is responsible in his/her work.
- ...has a stable psychological profile and is mature enough for an intercultural exchange.
- ...is secure in his/her cultural, ethnic or regional identity and knows the socio-cultural situation in his/her country.
- ...is open to the German context and culture.
- ...is transparent and honest about his/her motivation and intentions.
- ...agrees with his/her organisation on how and to what extent communication should take place during the voluntary service.
- ...returns after volunteering and shares what he/she has learned within the organisation and the social context.
- ...participates in the preparation of the new volunteer.

From the perspective of former volunteers:

- ...is aware of what it means to do a voluntary service and shows a great willingness to take on this challenge independently.
- ...is open to the new culture and willing to be a good representative of his/her own culture.
- ...is willing to learn and get to know the language, the work, the culture and himself/herself in all situations.
- ...shows a lot of initiative and is able to put his/her own ideas into practice.
- ...strives to integrate without losing his/her own authenticity.
- ...takes his/her responsibilities and tasks seriously and carries them out to the best of his/her ability.

From the perspective of the host families:

- ...openly addresses problems and misunderstandings and communicates honestly with the host family.
- ...is interested in living together and helps to build a relationship of trust.
- ...voluntarily tells and teaches about himself/herself and his/her place of origin.
- ...feels free and self-confident to be himself/herself.

From the perspective of volunteer workplaces:

- ...is interested in the work and the subject of the workplace.
- ...has a friendly demeanour and is a team player.
- ...has a basic knowledge of the German language.
- ...is willing to go through unpleasant phases.
- ...shows initiative.
- ...contributes his/her own ideas and experiences.

From the perspective of the Welthaus:

- ...has a high willingness to learn.
- ...consciously deals with his/her biography and critically questions himself/herself and what he/she has already learned.
- ...shows interest in German culture and society by actively observing, listening and questioning.
- ...is self-aware enough to engage with new things.
- ...brings with him/her social skills which are of central importance for the respective job.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- After reading the different perspectives: What is a good volunteer for us? Do we have some expectations that we consider essential?
- How can we communicate the different perspectives already in the selection process?
- How can we ensure that all perspectives are taken into account in the selection process?

# CRITERIA



Picture: former Mexican volunteers discussing selection criteria with representatives of organisations

## WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES THAT HELP TO CARRY OUT VOLUNTEERING?

Starting from this main question, we have done extensive and participatory work in the search for common criteria, in order to fulfil the objective of the handbook, which is to homogenise the selection processes.

In this chapter, we present 6 common criteria, which are the result of a process that took into account the experience of the different actors involved.

### 4.1 WHAT HAS THIS PROCESS BEEN LIKE?

#### Discussions in the different countries

Depending on the country and the situation there, we used different ways of including the experience of ex-volunteers and sending organisations:

1. In Mexico, El Salvador and Peru, together with Ecuador, in presence seminars were organised with the participation of ex-volunteers and some sending organisations.
2. In Nicaragua, the seminar was held digitally.

3. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, sending organisations were consulted.

4. In Mozambique, previous reports on the same topic were reviewed.

Naturally, in all these meetings there were debates and differences between countries and actors. The issue of social commitment, for example, was seen as an important aspect for the organisations. In Mexico, they added the component of cultural roots to the understanding, while in other countries, social commitment was evident by the ties to the sending organisation.

In these discussions, it was possible, among other things, to distinguish between skills that can be acquired along the way and capabilities that should be in place from the beginning. Everyone agreed, for example, that German language skills are important once in Germany, but what significance should German have for the selection process? Would knowledge of another language, e.g. English for Spanish speakers, be an advantage? In the end, the agreement was that volunteers should demonstrate a willingness to learn the language.

In Zimbabwe, criteria beyond the control of the volunteer were considered. In 2021, a volunteer from Zimbabwe was refused a visa, the explanation being: "She did not show willingness to return to the country" and this was justified by the fact that she did not have a professional career or financial resources. The fact that she had a strong link with the sending organisation and that it was willing to hire her after her voluntary service was not enough. So, in Zimbabwe, the chances of getting a visa ended up being a criterion.

In Mozambique there was a separate criterion. Organisations did not want applicants to have any family ties to an employee in a sending organisation.

#### VOLUNTEER PLACEMENTS AND HOST FAMILIES

A workshop was held with representatives of volunteer placements and current volunteers during their first months in Germany. The criterion most frequently mentioned by the volunteers was patience, the balance between observing and willingness to act being important. For the workplace representatives, responsibility and reliability were the most important criteria.

A virtual meeting was held with the host families. Many criteria similar to those reported in the other spaces were mentioned, with the criterion of honesty being a prominent one, as some families mentioned that volunteers should demonstrate a frank and honest attitude. This led to a debate that took into account that in different cultures the issue of communication is handled differently, including honesty.

## IDEA BUNDLING AND DIGITAL WORLD CAFÉS

The review of the results of the different meetings led to the formulation of 20 basic criteria. These criteria were discussed by inviting all former volunteers and sending organisations to participate in two virtual meetings, called "Digital World Cafés".

In the first meeting via Zoom we met with representatives from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Nicaragua and El Salvador. In small groups,

the criteria were arranged on a digital whiteboard without being applied. Each group had to choose 5 criteria that they thought were the main ones. When synthesising the work of the different groups, some criteria were left out because they were already included in other concepts. This is how we arrived at the 6 criteria presented in this chapter.

For the second Digital World Café, some of the participants of the first meeting were present, and representatives from South Africa joined. The aim of this meeting was to come up with a definition of the criteria already established, to give them specific content in the context of volunteering, as it was noted that a term does not mean or is understood in the same way for everyone. It was discussed how the criteria can be measured or recognised in the different stages of the selection process (interviews, dynamics, other activities). This will be discussed in the next chapter.

## WHAT CRITERIA ARE PRIORITISED?

A person shows responsibility, but their social commitment cannot be assessed, this person may be committed to their organisation or the cause, but probably lacks emotional stability. What counts more, what is prioritised? This issue of weighting, defining which is the most important criterion, has not been defined in these meetings. It was generally agreed that all volunteers should have something of each criterion. If on a scale of 1 to 5, someone has 2 or less, they could be considered unfit.

The members of the Selection Committee will be in charge and responsible for discussing and reflecting on the overall weighting of the criteria, as well as how the applicants' personalities are perceived (see also: Evaluation in chapter five).

It was noted that different actors have different priorities, so it is important that different actors are present in the selection process.

Picture: Representatives of volunteer placements discussing selection criteria



## 4.2 THE CRITERIA

### **Social commitment and cultural rootedness:**

social awareness, interest in social issues, vocation for service, desire to give and receive, attention to surrounding events, sense of belonging and cultural appropriation. Giving back to the sending organisation or to civil society communities. Willingness to establish links with others.

**Motivation:** clarity about the reasons for volunteering. Willingness to be part of an intercultural exchange. Willingness to share what they have learnt in their home town or sending organisation. Willingness to continue learning, interest in life in Germany including life in a host family. Self-initiative in your volunteer placement, willingness and initiative (ideas) for learning German.

**Emotional stability:** ability and willingness to deal with new, different experiences and difficult situations. Maturity, self-awareness, especially self-awareness of vulnerabilities, thoughts and emotions. Ability to ask for help, willingness to establish or maintain support networks, clarity about where you are in your life in relation to volunteering. Should not be in crisis at the

moment and preferably have gone through a process of psychotherapeutic support in case of major difficulties and/or vulnerabilities.

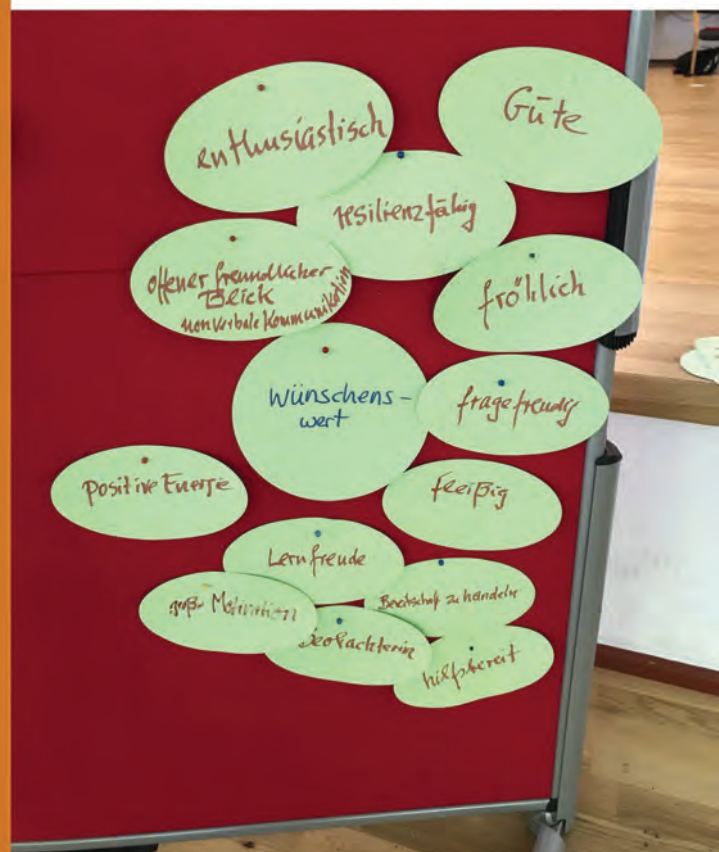
**Responsibility:** care and attention to one's own actions, commitment and determination to the assigned activities. Respect for oneself and others. Compliance with established rules, good behaviour, responsible use of resources, organisational skills.

**Communication skills:** willingness to engage in conversation with people from other cultures. Assertiveness, empathy, ability to listen and express their ways of thinking and feeling. Use of different types of communication to make oneself understood. Self-confidence. Experience in learning another language, aware of limitations in the pursued language, ability to cope with linguistic errors. Support among volunteers, openness to share life experiences, contact with actors before, during and after volunteering.

**Adaptability:** ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations, openness to new experiences, willingness to step out of the comfort zone and face new challenges, willingness to observe and listen to other ways of life and ways of thinking. Curiosity.



Picture: Wishes for volunteers from work placements



Picture: Wishes for volunteers from work placements





Picture: applicants doing group exercises during selection in Mozambique

### 4.3 VOLUNTEERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, INCLUSION IN THE PROGRAMME

The programme aims to be inclusive, which means that people with special needs can have the opportunity to do Weltwärts. By special needs, we mean people who have a chronic illness, disability or physical or mental disorder that is under control or in treatment. Also, situations where potential applicants are mothers or fathers who wish to volunteer with their children.

We are guided by the motto: "There are no disabled people, it is society that puts barriers in their way". We know that it is not easy to remove barriers, but in the case of potential applicants with special needs, it should be assessed beforehand whether it is possible to reduce the barriers in the specific case, taking into account the criteria mentioned under 4.2.

In the case of such applications, some examples are given below:

1. For a blind or hearing impaired person, working at one of the current volunteering sites is not possible. However, a special school for the visually impaired or hearing impaired could be consulted to see if they would be interested in receiving a volunteer. Also the search for a host family can be more difficult, as it would be important to find a family where there are not many barriers and where the volunteer can communicate.

2. In the Weltwärts programme, there has been participation of parents who had to leave their children with their respective families in their home country. On two occasions, it was mentioned that they would have liked to have had the opportunity to volunteer with their children in Germany. These cases are being treated as a matter of inclusion. It may be that the applicant was not able to continue their life project due to early parenthood, therefore we believe that they have the right to be able to orientate themselves again and to be able to have an intercultural experience. Of course, this situation brings with it

challenges, both in terms of financing as well as education and care for the child, which must be ensured. It is necessary to find a family that is willing to host the volunteer and their child or a flat where this small family can have its own space.

Therefore, applicants and sending organisations interested in submitting such cases are asked to communicate it prior to the selection process so that Weltwärts Bielefeld and the Programme can evaluate if they can offer the general conditions that would make volunteering possible. The role of the Selection Committee is, as in the case of other volunteers, to assess whether the person meets the criteria. The Selection Committee can also ask special questions in order to be able to assess whether the person has the capacity to face the specific challenges of their situation. We ask for direct communication, even though we do not know the person, in order to be able to identify possible challenges in Germany.

# SUMMARY:



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE SELECTION COMMITTEE BEFORE SEEING THE CANDIDATES:

- When reading the criteria and their definition: Do we all have the same understanding of these criteria, is there a definition that we would like to add to any criteria that corresponds to our context or our experience?
- If we have specific criteria, in case it is important, agree on them among all participants, for example: In case there are several people who meet the criteria. Do we give priority to people who are nominated by organisations that have not yet sent volunteers? What role do they play? Social criteria? Do we value the participation in a partnership as an additional and specific criterion?

## SUMMARY:

- Different actors may prioritise different criteria.
- In a participatory process, between partner organisations in 8 countries, former volunteers, volunteer projects and host families we have come up with 6 basic criteria: Social Commitment and Cultural Rootedness, Motivation, Emotional Stability, Responsibility, Communication Skills and Adaptability.
- All selected persons must meet the above criteria, although some characteristics may be more pronounced than others. The selection committee evaluates and reflects together on the weighting of the different characteristics, taking all of them into account.
- Special needs are not an exclusion criterion, on the contrary, Weltwärts aims to be inclusive. If there are candidates with special needs, we ask to be informed prior to selection.

# THE SELECTION PROCESS

How can the selection seminar be organised? What tools are available? In this chapter we present the different elements, related tools and possible models for conducting the selection seminar. It is easier if one person or a group of people take responsibility for carrying it out.

## 5.1. LOGISTICAL PREPARATION

In the preparation of the selection seminar, the following points should be taken into account:

### 1. Analysis:

How many applicants are there, from which organisations?

### 2. Communication:

Write to applicants, let them know the selection date and logistical matters. If necessary, write them again if there is new information after meeting with the Commission. Depending on the situation, use the communication channels most accessible to the applicants (email, Whatsapp, call, etc.).

### 3. Venue:

Where should the selection seminar take place, which region makes the most sense?

### 4. Framework and Costs:

The selection should include three parts: (1) A pre-meeting of the Selection Committee, (2) the actual Selection, (3) an evaluation meeting of the Selection.

5. Discuss: If all applicants and Commission members come from the same place: Is accommodation necessary? Is it possible to conduct pre- and post-selection meetings digitally? Which venue is suitable? Is there space for group activities and interviews?

Depending on the needs observed, draw up a budget and communicate it with World House Bielefeld.

### 6. The Commission:

Before the selection seminar, the commission has to be set up. A few points can be considered here:

- Ensure that there is a balance between new and experienced members. At least one person should have attended a selection seminar.

- The participation of returned volunteers is also recommended. Try to include new people (those who have just returned).

- Which representatives of organisations do you want to invite? Give preference to those who have not already nominated a candidate. You can do this individually or write an email to all organisations that have not applied and/or ask for the support of the North-South mentor or the person responsible for your country at the World House Bielefeld.

- Are there German volunteers in the region? One of them could be invited as a representative, even if the North-South mentor wants to participate.

- Make an effort to have a gender balance in the commission.

- Commission members cannot be asked to give up two or three full days for the selection, but it is recommended that they can be present at all times. Take into account the availability of individuals, but make it clear that commitment is necessary.



Picture: Selection in Simbabwe

## 5.2. THE PREPARATION OF THE SELECTION PANEL

The Selection Manual should be a preparation document for the Commission. The idea is to send the pdf to all members of the selection in advance. If it is not possible to study it in full, the end of each chapter can be read, where summaries can be found. Each member of the Commission could be given the task to read one chapter and discuss it at the preparation meeting.

The objectives of the preparation are:

- To get to know each other
- To start from the same basis
- To get to know the criteria and see if there is a common understanding of them
- Clarify special issues and additional criteria
- To get to know the selection tools (interview guide, selection instrument, etc.)
- Agree on the role of each member of the Commission
- Logistical preparation

As mentioned above: This preparation can be done digitally, however, it is recommended that the members of the Commission can meet a little before the arrival of the applicants.

It is highly recommended to send the selection committee the applicants' documents: motivation letter, application form, CV and previous documentation they have shared. It is possible for each member of the commission to take on the review of a specific profile and then share it with the other members, so that the commission knows the previous profile of the applicants and has some references before meeting in person. It will also be useful to have these documents available on the day of the selection.

We strongly suggest that on the day of the selection you have printed materials for the

commission members, especially that each member has the timetable and roles for each moment, an interview guide and a format of the individual selection instrument.

We recommend that you keep in mind chapter 4, which details the selection criteria.

## 5.3. THE SELECTION

The selection seminar may consist of the following elements:

- A. Common start
- B. Interactive activities/dynamics
- C. The interview

- D. Informal activities and spaces
- E. Other elements (optional)

Depending on the time available, the number of applicants and the context, it has to be decided how these elements will be distributed in the seminar. In 2022, in most cases, a two-day seminar was held, where participants mentioned that this time was necessary and could even be short when including preparation and evaluation. The time with the applicants can be reduced to one day. Generally enough observations can be made in one day to arrive at a assumptions. Possible models for the day could be:

Picture: Candidates in Ecuador



More than six applicants:

|                  | Space 1           | Space 2          | Space 3                                     |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------|---|
| <b>Morning</b>   | Common start      |                  |   |
|                  | Interview Group 1 | Dynamics Group 2 | Informal space, while waiting for interview |
| <b>Noon</b>      | Lunch             |                  |   |
| <b>Afternoon</b> | Interview Group 2 | Dynamics Group 1 | Informal space, while waiting for interview |
|                  | Common conclusion |                  |   |

Less than six applicants:

|                  | Space 1           | Space 2                                     |
|------------------|-------------------|---|
| <b>Morning</b>   | Common start      |   |
|                  | Dynamic I         |   |
|                  | Interviews        | Informal space, while waiting for interview |
| <b>Noon</b>      | Lunch             |   |
| <b>Afternoon</b> | Dynamic II        |   |
|                  | Interviews        | Informal space, while waiting for interview |
|                  | Common conclusion |   |

In case there is not enough time to interview all applicants, two interview teams can be set up. In this way it can also be avoided that a member of the Commission interviews an applicant they know. In the following (possible) model we started late in order to avoid accommodation and to ensure that everyone was present at the beginning:

|               |              |             |  |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|--|
| 11:00 – 11:30 | Common start |             |  |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | Dynamics     |             |  |
| 13:00 – 14:00 | Lunch        |             |  |
| 14:00 – 15:00 | Interview 1  | Interview 2 | An ex-volunteer is available for questions to volunteers who are not being interviewed |
| 15:00 – 16:00 | Interview 3  | Interview 4 | An ex-volunteer is available for questions to volunteers who are not being interviewed |
| 16:00 – 17:00 | Interview 5  | Interview 6 | An ex-volunteer is available for questions to volunteers who are not being interviewed |

In the following, we elaborate on the different elements and explain the corresponding tools. Analysis and evaluation are dealt with in section 5.3.

## AJ COMMON START

The seminar starts with a common beginning. Here the basis for an honest and trusting relationship must be created: The applicants must be clear that they can be themselves and perceive the seminar as an option where both parties can see if this programme is really the right one. The common start should include the following:

- Introduction of all members of the committee and the candidates by means of a dynamic or in a round of discussions.

- Information about the volunteer programme. A prepared presentation by World House Bielefeld can be used for this purpose.

- Space and opportunity for the applicants to ask questions.

- Information about how the day/seminar will be run, what the selection criteria are and when applicants will be informed about the results.

- If desired, a dynamic to relax a bit and create a relaxed atmosphere.

## BJ INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES/DYNAMICS

In addition to the interview, interactive exercises are an important part of the

selection seminar. The aim of these exercises is to be able to observe the candidates in a different dynamic from the interview.

In the appendix there are many suggestions and explanations of possible dynamics arranged according to situation and function.

In preparation, you can choose the dynamics that best suit the situation and agree beforehand who will facilitate these activities and who will observe. Notes can be taken (let the applicants know). As for the notes, it is recommended at the beginning just to write down your observations: What does the person do, how do they speak, what words do they use? Then you can interpret.

The exercises have specific functions depending on the situation. It is recommended to carry out no more than four activities on a selection day: (1) an opening exercise to break the ice, (2) two activities in which different criteria can be observed in the candidates (e.g. one focused on discussion/discourse and one focused on interaction/collaboration) and (3) a final exercise for the closing.

It is important to include in the dynamics the reflection of each activity. It may happen that someone is not very participative, but shows competence in reflection: "I did not participate because I did not see a place for me in the group, but I observed".

### C) THE INTERVIEW

The interview is a key opportunity to get to know the candidate better and is therefore at the heart of the selection process. We recommend that sufficient time be devoted to individual interviews, 45 to 60 minutes each. If time is limited on the day of the selection, it is recommended to shorten the other activities or to conduct them in parallel (see sample time schedules in 5.2.). There should be at least 15-20 minutes between the interviews to allow time to record observations and fill in the evaluation grid.

The interview guide in the appendix should be used for the interview. We have designed it in such a way that as many of the jointly developed criteria as possible (see chapter 4) are reflected in the questions. Of course, this guide is only for guidance and reference: you can and should depart from it if the need arises; for example, if questions arise after reading the application or if a topic needs to be explored in more depth during the interview. Similarly, questions can be skipped if an aspect has already been answered by a previous question.

It is recommended that one person asks the questions and the others take notes. This can be done in turns. But others can also ask questions if something is not clear to them or they need additional information.

Here are some general tips on communication:

- Keep questions short. The applicant should talk more than the interviewers.
- Do not ask for several contents at once with one question.
- Start with the general and move on to the specific.
- Make a pleasant start in order to have a good atmosphere for all participants. You can offer some sweets for the nerves.
- Don't change the topic abruptly, let the participants know when there is a new topic so that they don't feel insecure.
- Pauses and moments of silence give the person time to think and respond.
- Closed questions that are answered with a "yes" or "no" are useful to clarify facts, but do not contribute to getting to know the person better.
- If you have doubts, for example, about mental stability or health problems, ask directly: "Have you ever had psychological problems or psychological support in your life? We do not ask this question because it is a reason for exclusion, but because stressful situations can occur and it is important to know what resources are available.
- Questions about life in Germany may not say much about the person, as it does not depend on their personality whether they have had access to information and knowledge. It is easier to get to know them in their own context.

### Large activity

If sufficient time has been allocated for the selection seminar or if all candidates come from the same community, a larger activity can also be planned in the preparation, e.g. one that takes up a whole morning.

FOR EXAMPLE: Candidates have the task (individually or in pairs) to develop an activity for one (or their) partner organisation(s). The activities are then presented and, if possible, carried out with the group.

In El Salvador, these activities were carried out with a Community group. See what is possible for you.



Picture: former volunteers from El Salvador at a reflexion seminar



Picture: interview during the selection in Mozambique



It is also important to keep psychological traps in mind. Here are some of them

| Effect             | Description   | Example  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Halo effect        | The halo effect describes a person being judged on the basis of a single salient characteristic that overshadows all others. This characteristic can be positive or negative.   | A person who is perceived as particularly beautiful is often also described as intelligent.  |
| First impression   | Applicants who impress with good statements at the beginning and then deteriorate markedly are considered more suitable than applicants who start with poor performance and then improve markedly.  |  |
| Last impression    | Experience has shown that interviewers remember the end of an interview more intensely and that it has a disproportionate influence on the evaluation.  |  |
| The sequence       | The sequence of candidates, e.g. in an individual interview, can influence the assessment. The order determines the "height of the bar".  | If a very good candidate is presented first and then a mediocre one, the latter is usually rated worse than if the order had been reversed.          |
| Contrast effect    | Interviewer's/Observer's characteristics and preferences play an important role. It is important that raters take into account their own score on the judgment dimension and how this might influence the assessment, so that they do not see themselves as the "standard of normal".   | A calm recruiter is more likely to judge a lively candidate as overexcited.  |
| Effect of sympathy | The sympathy effect is the other side of the contrast effect. People are often unconsciously evaluated as sympathetic because they are similar to one's own ego.  | It may be a common hobby, for example, but this hobby does not say much about the applicant's suitability.   |
| Cause and effect   | People tend to interpret and not just observe. Usually, we immediately have a hypothesis at hand that explains why the other person has behaved in a certain way. But especially when assessing candidates, it is important to first observe and then interpret in a differentiated way. Observers/Interviewers should always bear in mind how they have arrived at their assessment and on what they base their impressions. | In group discussions, a candidate may behave shyly because the others are too dominant and do not let her have her say or because she is really shy. |

Source: Selection Manual, Experiment

## Too little time?

In the best case, there are enough informal spaces and the possibility for all members of the selection committee to participate in all interviews and dynamics. This gives them the opportunity to meet all candidates in all situations.

However, depending on the situation and the country, it may not be possible to create such a framework. For example, there is only one day available, so what compromises can be made and how can the time be organised?

One possibility is to let the dynamics and the interviews take place simultaneously. The commission members divide up and collect their assessments and evaluations in the joint evaluation round at the end.

We recommend fixed roles that do not change during the day. In this way, all candidates can be properly compared in relation to each other in at least one element (dynamic or interview).



Picture: group exercise during selection in Peru

## D) INFORMAL ACTIVITIES AND SPACES

During the selection seminar, there may be various forms of informal activities, both planned and unplanned. These include, for example, shared meals, joint trips to the selection site, questions and discussions outside the activities, or planned and joint walks. Not everything can always take place. Therefore, also assess what is possible and what is not, in relation to the context.

These informal activities and spaces have an important function: they help to create a relationship of trust between all participants and an atmosphere of confidence for the applicants in which they feel safe enough to show their full potential during the regular activities.

Therefore, the observations of the informal activities should not have the same importance as the other activities, but in case of doubt they can provide further information after the interview or the dynamics.

## E) OTHER ELEMENTS

Depending on the context, it may be useful to include other elements in the selection:

*Support from a psychologist:*

In Nicaragua, they were supported by a psychologist who would help to assess the emotional stability of the person. If you want to involve a psychologist, keep in mind that they are in the same situation as you are: they only know the person for a short period of time and cannot get to know everything during that time. If you decide to do so, try to find a psychologist from an organisation that can participate on a voluntary basis.

If there are doubts about emotional stability, you can also ask for psychological support afterwards, after the applicant has given permission: "You have told us that you have been in therapy for a long time, - since we have

only been seeing you for a short time, would you allow us to talk to your therapist to see how they assess this change/this big step for you?"

*The request:*

Often the application does not give a true picture of the person, but sometimes we rely only on lived experience and leave out the application. Criteria such as motivation, (written) communication skills and social commitment are evident in the application. Therefore, we consider that they are an element that should be included in the evaluation of the criteria.

*Talk to the applicant organisation:*

In general, reference letters are very positive about the person, but sometimes you can see possible weaknesses between the lines. If in doubt, ask. The organisation knows the person better than you do - even if you know more than you expect from the person - seek the conversation if you have any doubts.

## 5.4. THE EVALUATION

After the seminar, the Commission meets in a joint round, discusses and selects the most suitable candidates on the basis of the observations. This can take place directly after the seminar or, if necessary, at a later time. If there is little time left on the same day, it is better to do the evaluation on another day. If necessary, also digitally. It is recommended to set aside enough time for the evaluation, at least two hours. Discuss the possibilities with the members of the Commission beforehand.

Two documents are available for documentation in the annex: the INDIVIDUAL selection tool and the JOINT selection tool. In the following, under B) Documentation, the use is explained.



Picture: Moisés Jiménez and Miriam Cortés at a return seminar

## A) WEIGHTING

How should the observations be weighted and what about the additional criteria?

The six criteria (see Chapter 4) are prioritised in the assessment. They were jointly elaborated in a participatory process and should be the basis for the selection. The criteria themselves have no hierarchy, but as a basic rule: If an applicant does not meet a criterion, they are not eligible.

Depending on the context, other criteria and priorities may be important. It is important that the commission discusses and clearly establishes these criteria in advance. However, these additional criteria should not go beyond the criteria already established. This distinction between established criteria and additional priorities is important for a homogenous and fair selection process.

This means that additional priorities (e.g. that someone from an organisation has already been selected) should only be added after the six established criteria have been evaluated. If there are several suitable candidates who are similar in the evaluation of the set criteria, then the priorities can effectively contribute to the decision.

The Commission should keep in mind that there is knowledge and skills that can be acquired in preparation and along the way. A "good" volunteer is not the one who scores highest in everything, but the one in whom they see a potential and a willingness to develop and grow.

This question about the potential of each person as well as social factors that they want to take into account can guide them further.

## B) DOCUMENTATION

We recommend the use of documentation tools because the use of standardised documentation of participants and observers increases fairness and quality. When referring to the observations made on the criteria we rely less on the general impression of the applicants. The documentation consists of written comments.

The individual selection instrument is available to each member of the committee. The instrument is based on the six criteria. During the seminar, comments on the criteria can be noted here. A column is available for each applicant. Here you can differentiate which remarks were made at which point in the selection process. Please note: Not all criteria can be observed at each station. In the application it is difficult to observe social attitudes,

while in the dynamics little is to be learned about emotional stability. Observations should only be made where they can be noticed.

With this individually filled out instrument, the commission enters the joint selection round. For this round you can use the joint selection instrument. This document is for the final documentation and should be completed by one person only during the discussion. Decide at the beginning who is going to perform this task.

Then the following scheme can be followed:

1. Jointly assess whether you need to talk about each person. If there is a consensus that a candidate is not suitable, it is better to save the time for those who are suitable.
2. One member of the Commission begins to describe their perceptions of a person in relation to the criteria.

3. The other persons only add something if they have other aspects to add or if they differ. No discussion yet.

4. Together they talk about possible challenges for the person and challenges they see (put in the table in the row other remarks).

5. Points 2 to 4 are repeated, it is proposed that another person from the committee starts the discussion. After the observations have been shared, the priority of the candidates has to be decided.

As already mentioned, the focus is now on a) seeing if the committee has established additional criteria (new organisation, gender, etc.) and including them in the assessment and b) taking into account social factors and potential.

A prioritisation is arrived at on the basis of the discussion and the decision and the reasons are documented. In case uncertainties remain (e.g. further assessments are needed), it is decided how to continue the process.

In case the Commission does not reach a consensus, there are different ways to proceed:

For example, the Commission decides that additional assessments or opinions are sought. Or if there is doubt about a specific criterion, another way of testing it may be sought. A larger number of volunteers per country can also be submitted to World House Bielefeld - so that the person can be chosen according to the availability of work places. Ultimately, these instruments should serve to standardise the selection process and make it more transparent and fairer. But, above all, these instruments should give rise to debate and discussion within the selection committee.



Picture: group exercises at the selection in Mozambique

# SUMMARY

● The selection process consists of three parts (1) Preparation, (2) Selection, and (3) Evaluation.

● In the preparation, the framework of the selection seminar is determined, the candidates are informed and the selection committee is formed. The members of the Selection Committee commit themselves to participate.

● The selection seminar/day consists of the following elements: a) Common start, b) Interactive activities/dynamics, c) The interview, d) Informal spaces, e) Other elements. Two tools for the interactive activities/dynamics and the interview can be found in the annex.

● After the seminar the Commission meets in a joint round and discusses and selects the most suitable candidates on the basis of the observations.

In the evaluation the established criteria outweigh the additional priorities.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

-What does our Selection Committee look like, is it balanced and can we guarantee as much neutrality as possible?

-What measures can we take to create the most pleasant environment for candidates?

-Do we have questions that are not in the interview guide but are important to us as a Commission?

**WHAT  
HAPPENS AFTER THE  
SELECTION?**

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE SELECTION?

At World House Bielefeld, the selection process generally takes place one year before the departure, as there are many things to prepare, such as learning basic German.

### 6.1 ASSIGNMENT TO A VOLUNTEER POSITION:

When the next volunteers are selected in their respective countries, a South-North working group (Süd-Nord-AG) meets in the city of Bielefeld. It is a group composed of people related to the South-North programme and involved in its conceptualisation. The profiles of the individual volunteers are evaluated and matched with the available jobs. We are helped in this by the wishes expressed in the application form as well as by the assessments of the selection committees.

In the year 2022 we had to include an additional criterion for the allocation of jobs. Since in certain sectors in Germany, vaccination against COVID 19 is compulsory, we could assign only volunteers inoculated with vaccines recognised in Germany to positions with people with disabilities and senior citizens.

If we have any doubts as to which position might be suitable, or if we do not understand why a person has chosen a certain position, we contact them directly to find out more about their motivation for the particular position. In this way we can clarify doubts that help us to make a better assignment.

As we receive fourteen people in the city of Bielefeld, excluding those who carry out their voluntary service in an established twinning position, we cannot guarantee that the voluntary service will be carried out in the positions chosen as a priority in the application form. In this case, it will be assessed how open the person is for other positions. Sometimes there is a lack of interest in certain areas, for example in the area of ecology. In this case, we approach more locations and ask if they want a volunteer. It can also happen that a country proposes three candidates instead of two, because they did not reach a consensus in the selection committee, then we choose the person according to the available positions.

Once the placement proposal is made, we send the translated applications to the volunteer placements. In some cases we receive a quick response, in others, the process takes longer, as organisations have to evaluate funding issues or have to include their Boards or other committees in the decision. Some workplaces like to meet their potential volunteers by videoconference to make the decision.



If an answer is negative, the application is submitted to another organisation. Usually it takes about two months until this process is finished.

## 6.2 LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

Once we have received the response from the placement, the volunteer receives the final letter of acceptance. In this letter they receive more information and are asked for additional information for the organisation of the volunteer placement, contracts, insurance and flights. We ask for photos and videos, which we use for the host family search.

## 6.3 WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE PREPARATION OF THE NEXT VOLUNTEERS?

### LANGUAGE

In the meantime in the countries of the South, they start learning the German language. So far, we have been using a system of tandems (face-to-face or digital) who work with materials developed by teachers in Germany. Both volunteers and Tandems can turn to these teachers with their questions and doubts. They communicate with each other in social media groups. Those who don't have a passport yet, should start applying for one.

### MENTORS

Each volunteer is assigned an individual mentor. The mentors have the task of answering personal questions, such as questions about the family and the environment in Germany, as well as providing logistical support. They are often former volunteers.

### PREPARATORY SEMINAR

A preparation seminar is organised for all volunteers. If possible, several countries of a region (Central America and Mexico, Andes and South Africa) are covered.

The preparation seminar not only helps to get additional information and to reflect on motivation and expectations, but above all it makes the stay more real, as the co-volunteers get to know each other.

### SENDING ORGANISATIONS

Organisations that have nominated a volunteer become sending organisations. Through a conversation, both the volunteer and the sending organisation should clarify their expectations regarding further commitment and communication during and after the volunteer placement. The organisation can provide support in preparing materials about the organisation and the socio-political context. In the case of volunteers who have not been actively involved in the organisation as workers or target group, they can give internships to the volunteers so that they can better identify with their work.

Preparation is very important, because when talking about what qualities should characterise a volunteer, it has been seen that not all of them meet all requirements or expectations. There is knowledge and attitudes that can be acquired along the way.

### IN GERMANY

In Germany, we prepare the contracts to be signed by the workplaces and the German government. We register the volunteers with the insurance and look for host families. The signed contracts and insurance are the prerequisite for the visa application. Some countries also require a flight ticket. When all documents are in hand, it is time to make an appointment for the visa.

### THE VISA

Most embassies now operate an electronic appointment system, others ask for a

registration and assign an appointment. Beyond the documentation we prepared in Germany, you need a letter of motivation and to be prepared for the interview.

If we have not already done so, we buy the plane tickets, once the visa has been granted.

The pandemic has also taught us that it is possible to meet digitally before the trip to Germany. So there can be meetings with the group or at least with people speaking the same language.

## 6.4 DOUBTS?

If in this whole process a selected person realises that they are not ready for the volunteering experience, we prefer that these doubts are expressed in time and before arriving in Germany. In this way, we can see if we can find a person to replace their participation. This may be another person who was also considered suitable in the selection process. In such cases, a new selection process cannot be carried out as exhaustively. A face-to-face interview is preferred, but digital formats can also be used. The advantage of the digital format is that people from Germany can also be included.

## 6.5 ARRIVAL IN GERMANY

Although the whole process is part of the volunteering process, the adventure begins with setting foot on European soil for the first time for many of them. It is not surprising that new volunteers in their preparation ask volunteers who are already there or who have already been there "What did it feel like when you arrived in Germany?"

The time in Germany is not the subject of this Handbook, that could be written in a second volume, we leave it for the future.



# SUMMARY:



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- As a selection committee, do we believe that the selected volunteer has the time and motivation for this preparation process?
- Are there any factors that prevent them from getting fully involved in the preparation, e.g. family ties, financial or work commitments? It is better to take these into account from the beginning.
- What support does the volunteer need, and what can we as a Selection Committee recommend?

## RESUMEN:

- Being selected is the first step towards volunteering. The process of finding a volunteer placement continues in Germany; at this point there is constant communication with the actors in the country of origin.
- After the selection, a long process of organisational and individual preparation for the stay in Germany follows.
- Mentors, sending organisations and Casa del Mundo Bielefeld, as well as former volunteers as seminar facilitators are involved.
- In this process, new knowledge and attitudes are acquired which are important for volunteering.
- In case of doubts, it is always better to communicate them.

# PERSPECTIVES

You have this Handbook in hand. The Selection Manual is not in itself a guarantee that the organisation of the selection process will function properly. We have seen in this process that the formation of Selection Committees and above all the dialogue within the Committees is also necessary. In this sense, we believe that the Handbook is an invitation. It seeks to be a living tool that invites reflection and wishes to be supportive. Hopefully, it will not stop there, but will allow the development of methods and organisational forms. The Handbook focuses on selection, but also touches on other organisational issues surrounding weltwärts-volunteering in its South-North component.

By presenting the concept as we have presented it, we show our conviction that networking is an essential part of this volunteering. Hopefully, these networks between different actors will also serve other purposes.

## THE RETURN

A topic not touched upon in this Handbook, but which has been addressed in the process of elaboration, in the country seminars and in the World Cafés, is the issue of return. Often, some organisations, especially in Latin America, are expecting the return of volunteers and their subsequent commitment. The return to the country is also a sensitive issue for the volunteers when they are in Germany. Their main concern is not how to share what they have learnt, but what happens next? What career prospects do they have at home? They reflect on the experiences they have gained in Germany through non-formal education, without this securing them any recognition.

Many have worked as volunteers in their sending organisations, have worked as volunteers in Germany and have reached the point of wanting to go further, to find a paid job.

The prospects in their home countries are often difficult, and the option of vocational training is present. Although it was mentioned in the first chapter that weltwärts is not a migration programme, we cannot and do not want to deny that it is an issue that has to be addressed and to which we cannot close our eyes. This is because we work with human beings and not with computers that can be programmed to fulfil a set purpose. We believe that networks between partner organisations and volunteers from the South North could work even better here. If the coordination of organisations perceives itself as a sending organisation, why not circulate the CV of a volunteer before they return, in order to help them to find a job vacancy. Why not open up as a network to listen to the returnees, to their doubts and fears about a future with few prospects?

## THE ROLE OF RETURNEE VOLUNTEERS

At least in the case of Welthaus Bielefeld, and even more so in Latin America, we have seen that returnee volunteers are very much present. They have also played a very important role in the process of making the Handbook, both in the drafting and in the role of country coordinators. In this way, they share a little of what they learned in Germany and continue their contact with the programme. In this sense, their motivation is greater than the motivation of the people from the partner organisations involved in the process. Their input and coordination has been appreciated by the organisations, but we have also seen that they still have to fight for recognition. Particularly in those countries where decisions have previously been taken by the Assembly and where the Assembly is seen as the highest authority as an organisational entity in other contexts, it is difficult for returnee volunteers to feel confident in proposing and leading.

## THE CASE OF COUNTRIES WITH LESS PARTICIPATION

Not in all countries the organisation has worked in the same way. There can be several reasons, there are few returnee volunteers and/or the partner organisations have so many emergency issues in their daily work, that there is no time left for organisational issues beyond their own mission or because their coordination is still starting.

We believe that the model proposed here can still be implemented in 2022. In South Africa, for example, it was a person linked to an organisation who formed her own Selection Committee with people from the community, not linked to World House Bielefeld or weltwärts volunteers. Their feedback was important, and good results were achieved. We hope that in these countries, the Handbook can provide impetus and that organisations can specify to what extent they want to be part of this process. Likewise, in Zimbabwe, it was the first time that representatives of the two partner organisations met with the mentor for the selection process. This meeting helped them to understand more about what volunteering is all about and they said goodbye with the sentence "See you at the next selection". In Mozambique, where in the past organisations have not been part of the selection process, for fear that the representatives might prioritise their own interests, this time an organisation representative was encouraged to look for applicants in his own environment for the next opportunity. Hopefully, as World House Bielefeld, we can in the future strengthen existing networks where they exist and promote and support networks where they are wanted, without this being a forced process.

## FORMALISING THE NETWORKS?

The concept of Sur Norte foresees that there will be a sending organisation, which will take

care of all questions concerning the selection process, the preparation, the application of visas and the follow-up. We have seen in the case of World House Bielefeld that different actors network and coordinate the different tasks. By formalising these networks, it would be possible to have a sending organisation, for example an organisation with a legal personality formed and led by returnee volunteers, coordinating with the partner organisations of World House Bielefeld, in a certain country or open to the membership of organisations interested in integrating themselves more deeply into this experience. This idea first came up in 2018 at a meeting in El Salvador and had a certain resonance. We were going to assess, in the near future, whether we could go a step further in the formation of an organisation. Further formalising the "Country Coordinators" as an actor in this project could be a step towards this formalisation. In a small evaluation meeting with only Country Coordinators from three countries present, one of which took on a leading role, there was no

clear statement in favour. While it is seen that communication is easier when one person is in charge of a process, it can also have the effect that others are less engaged. Experience in recent years has also shown that there are returning volunteers, who after a few years stop their commitment to the programme because they have their own social or political commitments. There are also others who continue for more years and there are newcomers who join. Depending on who is volunteering or in which region there are more candidates, there can be different people every year at different moments of the process. Perhaps this is a strength of the informal networks, which are more flexible. In this sense, we will continue in this way for the time being: we will see from year to year who can carry out which task, will we need one person to coordinate or will the different people involved in the network with different tasks coordinate themselves?

On the part of the programme, we hope that there will be more support for the formation of networks, the training of actors in the South and the work of returnees.

## THE USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

It was the pandemic caused by Covid 19, which got us used to using digital video-conferencing tools. For this project, we used them. It allowed us to give briefings to candidates when it was mentioned in the World Cafés that more information was still missing, we have used them for Country Coordinator to coordinate among each other, to train them and to evaluate. We have also used them once for pre-selection.

There were two organisations that proposed several candidates. If they had done the pre-selection, they would have expressed a preference, which could have had an effect on the commitment to the organisation of those who were not selected, so in this case, World House Bielefeld participated together with the mentor and the country coordinator in the pre-selection. In the case of Nicaragua, some talks helped to discuss how to readjust the programme in a difficult socio-political context.

Picture: group work, generation 2019-2020





Picture: preparation seminar for the first generation in Mexico 2014-2015

Digital communication, continuous dialogue and coordination meetings between various countries. These meetings will certainly be used in the future for the development of the programme. However, we also see the drawbacks. Digital cannot replace human contact in person. There are also other limitations when it comes to multilingual groups. On the one hand, the most common tools such as Zoom only offer translation functions in their corporate and education versions. For a small NGO it is not feasible to buy at least 10 licenses, so this function is not accessible. We have asked students to provide us with their accounts, but having to work with translators meant either higher costs or the conferences had to be held in monolingual groups, which in the end we did in most cases. This meant multiplying the meetings by a factor of three.

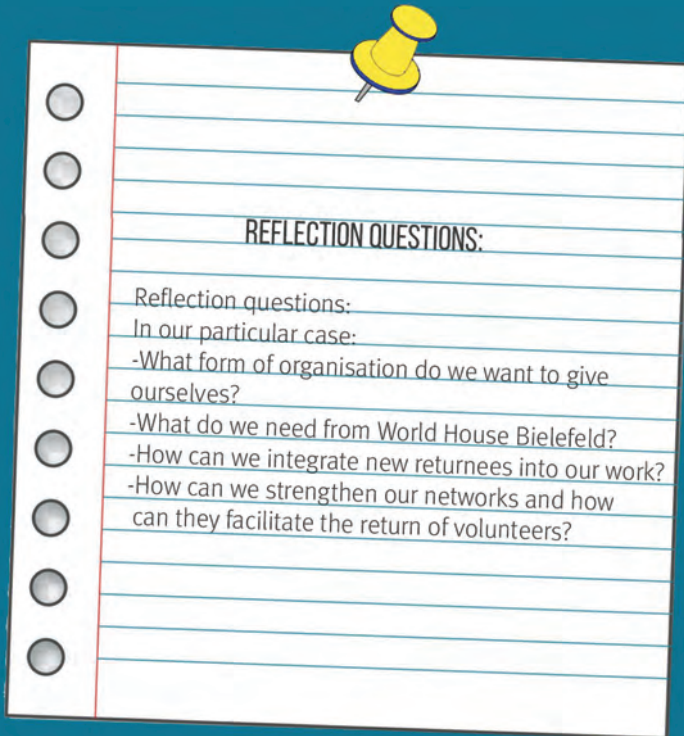
### TRANSNATIONALISING NETWORKS

We have been able to observe, especially through the use of digital communication, that it has been possible for people from different countries to participate in the different elements.

Returning volunteers who were not in their country of origin were also able to participate. A volunteer from Zimbabwe, who is currently in vocational training in Germany, shared her experience at the validation seminar, and Nicaraguan volunteers in different parts of the world encouraged those who are still in Nicaragua. These networks remain fragile in the sense of working continuously in a stable network, but they allow for new perspectives.

To sum up, it can be said that what we have experienced in this project and what we see as a perspective corresponds to the experiences in the volunteering itself. It does not end with the stay in Germany. Encouraging dialogue, encounter and communication between different actors helps to create more horizontal and participative relationships. The experience is a learning experience for everyone involved. The process continues after the stay in Germany, but also after this project. It is the people, the actors, who form and give life to the structures that are established.

# SUMMARY:



## SUMMARY:

- Networking is an essential part of the volunteer programme.
- Return to the country is an additional issue to be developed. To facilitate the return, networks of organisations can also play a role in welcoming volunteers, including offering jobs.
- Returned volunteers are very important and motivated actors.
- At the moment, there is no advantage in formalising the networks. Informal networks offer flexibility in terms of taking on responsibility and committing for a certain period of time, as well as flexibility for the integration of new people.
- The use of digital communication enables dialogue between different actors from different countries, even the transnationalisation of Networks.

