

Framework strategy for country-specific contact points for visa and security matters for weltwärts and other BMZ funding programmes

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1. Background to the development of the system

Along with their partners, some 160 German civil society organisations provide development-related learning and exchange opportunities for approximately 3,700 volunteers per year through the weltwärts programme, funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The organisations and partners involved in the programme are bound by the provisions of the funding guideline¹ and quality standards² for weltwärts. Following the principle of subsidiarity, responsibility for implementing the volunteer service lies with the civil society organisations and their partners in the more than 60 partner countries.

The BMZ also provides funding for development-related learning through other exchange formats, such as weltwärts-extracurricular exchange projects in the context of Agenda 2030, ASA Work and Study Exchanges and the ENSA School Exchange Programme for Development Education, which are implemented in collaboration between Engagement Global and partner organisations and schools in Germany and abroad.

As a result of the evaluation of the pilot phase of the weltwärts programme in 2011, a programme-wide system (called the "Country contact person" system) was introduced to address country-specific challenges concerning visa and security matters. It was rolled out in twelve countries at the end of 2013 and in a further six in 2015.

Towards the end of the three-year pilot phase, from December 2015 to August 2016, the system was the subject of an external evaluation. Based on the recommendations resulting from the evaluation and lessons learned so far, it has been decided that the system will be modified as of October 2017.

This strategy document outlines the framework for the "country-specific contact points for visa and security matters"³ (formerly referred to as "country contact persons") plus the tasks to be performed by the organisations/individuals who perform this role. It thus provides guidance and transparency for all stakeholders. Country-specific task profiles are to be drawn up to enable a flexible response to the situation and specific needs in the partner country concerned. These task profiles will be written by the BMZ, Engagement Global and the quality associations in consultation with the embassies. The latter will also be involved in the tendering/recruitment process.

¹ <https://www.weltwaerts.de/en/detail.html?id=180>

² <https://www.weltwaerts.de/en/detail.html?id=136>

³ The name "country contact person" is to be changed when the system is modified after the pilot phase. As of October 2017, the term used will be "country-specific contact points for visa and security matters". A particularly important aspect of the new name is that it makes the role of the system quite clear from the outset.

2. Existing challenges

a) Visa and residency law

In some partner countries, it is difficult for the organisations in Germany, the partner organisations or the volunteers to obtain a suitable residence document for a volunteer assignment or a different BMZ-funded programme. These difficulties can arise with regard to the visa and the residency or employment status and are caused by different factors. In some cases, the processes involved in Germany and/or in the partner country to attain the appropriate legal status are extremely complex and lengthy.

Volunteers (and participants in other BMZ-funded programmes alike) from Global South countries are often confronted by difficulties in the visa application process for a volunteer assignment in Germany. The visa rejection rate is particularly high in African countries.

b) Security

In some partner countries, the security situation (including health issues) can be complex and often specific to a region. Dealing with this requires not only the regional knowledge possessed by the partner organisations but also, in some cases, provision of information to and communication with the German Embassy in the partner country.

Heightened security risks due to widespread crime and/or conflict situations make it necessary to frequently update and to distribute security information. Emergencies in special crisis or conflict situations, where volunteers' lives are at risk, cannot truly be ruled out in any country and require flexible, swift action. The visa/security contact points provide subsidiary support for the stakeholders' efforts to deal with these issues.

3. Objectives of the system

The system facilitates subsidiary support for stakeholders in the weltwärts programme and other BMZ-funded programmes in their efforts to implement and safeguard the development volunteer service and the exchange formats in their specific countries.

It is intended to provide the support required in countries in which there are complex/difficult situations in the area of visa and residence matters or procedures.

In countries in which the security situation for volunteers requires particular attention and close communication and coordination between embassies and the organisations responsible for the volunteer assignments, these tasks are also part of the subsidiary support provided by the visa/security contact points.

Responses to crisis situations are always the responsibility of the German organisations and their partner organisations; the visa/security contact point only provides support in exceptional cases.

Another intention is that the visa/security contact points will help improve the flow of communication between the German organisations and the German Embassy in these difficult security situations.

The system will help ensure that volunteers in the partner countries obtain the appropriate residence documents for their volunteer service and are informed of any specific security situations in the country. It will also provide back-up support for the stakeholders' crisis management activities.

There are also similar challenges in terms of visa/residency law and security in other BMZ-funded exchange formats. Where needed, the visa/security contact points can also be used for these programmes so as to promote efficient use of resources.

4. Tasks

The visa/security contact points will be mandated with two areas of responsibility, focusing on different tasks in the different countries. The two areas are:

- provision of information to and, where country-specific structures require, support for the German organisations, partner organisations and volunteers in matters concerning visas and residency (both for the North-South component and the South-North component); and
- provision of country-specific information to and support for German organisations, partner organisations and volunteers in the area of security and crises.

In both areas of responsibility, the visa/security contact points are subsidiary units, supporting the programme stakeholders by the means described below.

They help ensure that volunteers have a secured residency status in the host country. In particular, their tasks include preparing information for the German organisations, partner organisations and volunteers regarding the requirements and procedure for obtaining a visa recognised as appropriate for volunteer assignments, as well as establishing what other legal requirements (e.g. employment legislation) exist for voluntary assignments in the country concerned. Where the local structures are such that coordinated support for the visa and residency application process is necessary, the visa/security contact points provide support on the ground in the visa process, e.g. by collecting and submitting documents to the relevant authorities. In terms of the South-North component (in which volunteers are sent to Germany), they supply the German organisations and partner organisations with information on the national application processes in the German Embassy concerned.

In the area of security, the visa/security contact points provide support, in consultation with the German Embassy, by forwarding security information from the embassies, regional authorities and other actors to the German organisations. The contact points do not assess the security situation themselves, instead using official assessments based on publicly available sources. In this area, the visa/security contact points serve as a link between the German organisations, partner organisations and the German embassies. They help improve the flow of information to the German organisations and partner organisations (concerning the security situation in the country and health-related aspects) and to the embassies (concerning the volunteers present, German organisations and partner organisations).

In principle, crisis and security management is the responsibility of the German organisations and their partners on the ground. If, in exceptional cases, the existing security structures should prove ineffective, the visa/security contact point provides an emergency option and can trigger the notification chain if called on to do so by a quality association, a German organisation, partner organisation or the German Embassy. It thus serves as a “safety net”.⁴

The visa/security contact points help raise awareness in the German embassies and local authorities of the BMZ-funded exchange projects, including the weltwärts South-North component and weltwärts exchange projects.

They do not perform any additional function in communications between German organisations, partners and volunteers outside of the above-mentioned areas of responsibility. If they should be approached in connection with matters concerning the implementation of the volunteer assignments, they will refer the asker to the relevant stakeholders, the quality association

⁴ See also “The crisis and emergency system on the weltwärts funding programme”, February 2016

responsible for the German organisation concerned or suitable funding instruments (e.g. programme accompanying measures for partner networking activities). Their work will be needs-driven. If the requirements in the two areas of responsibility mentioned above should change, the changes shall be taken into account in the work, in consultation with the quality associations, BMZ and Engagement Global.

Where needed in their specific country, the visa/security contact points can also carry out work in the two above-mentioned areas of responsibility for other BMZ-funded exchange formats, particularly ASA, ENSA and weltwärts exchange projects, and for the Engagement Global service unit for visa, residency and security matters.

5. Country-specific task profiles

Visa/security contact points will be set up in the partner countries as needed. A monitoring procedure, which takes into account the information supplied by the programme stakeholders (German organisations, partner organisations, quality associations, Engagement Global and the BMZ), will establish and evaluate the needs and set out the requirements in country-specific task profiles. Provisions for updating the task profiles will also be included. The profiles themselves will be drawn up by the quality associations, BMZ and Engagement Global in consultation with the German embassies. The profiles summarise the current activities in the weltwärts programme and other BMZ-funded exchange formats in the various countries and address the visa and security situation on the ground. Another section deals with the specific tasks in the area of visa and residency law and security and crises to be performed for the various BMZ-funded exchange formats.

Whether or not a visa/security contact point is set up will mainly depend on what support is required for the weltwärts volunteer service.

6. The country-specific contact points for visa and security matters as part of the weltwärts joint operation

The visa/security contact points will be attached to quality associations in the weltwärts programme. The quality associations are responsible for the implementation and supervision of the system in terms of content and administration. The visa/security contact points communicate closely with the quality associations and, through them, with the German organisations and Engagement Global (weltwärts coordination unit and Engagement Global service unit for visa, residency and security matters and the relevant units for the other BMZ-funded exchange formats). In the partner countries, they coordinate their activities with, in particular, those in charge at the German embassies.

The visa/security contact points are to be funded as programme accompanying measures with programme-wide and cross-programme benefits. The scope and details for each visa/security contact point will be agreed on by the quality associations and Engagement Global on the basis of the country-specific task profiles.