

Guiding Principles for the Reception and Deployment of Volunteers: Empathy, Openness and Self-Organisation

The Deutsch-Indische Zusammenarbeit e. V. (DIZ) or Indo-German Cooperation (together with its branch association, the Deutsch-Indische Zusammenarbeit Baden-Württemberg e. V. (DIZ BaWü), attaches great importance to **empathy, openness and the willingness to get involved in new things and the ability of the participants to organise themselves**. These skills should be present naturally in order to be able to start the volunteer service. On site, the skills are further developed and strengthened by the structural and cultural conditions.

We expect volunteers to be interested in and open to the German/Indian culture with all its facets and characteristics as well as to be willing to participate and learn in relation to the work in the German placement sites and Indian partner organisations. We see this interest and openness as the basis for getting involved in new things without judging. We expect **empathy** as the ability to observe behaviour and actions that seem foreign, first and foremost without judgement. A person who acts empathically tries to observe what is foreign to him or her in its respective context and to draw conclusions about the causes of this behaviour. Accordingly, empathy is the competence to want to understand customs, traditions and rites, but also actions and behaviours that appear every day, from their respective cultural context.

In addition to a basic empathetic attitude, volunteers should show a fundamental **openness**. This means openness to the local culture as well as the willingness to integrate in the Partner Organisation. Participants should be willing to recognise and take into account the formal norms of the host and employing organisations and the informal norms of the local culture. This openness does not mean a passive adaptation and adoption of supposedly typical patterns of behaviour, but rather an active engagement with and integration into the local culture, without having to discard one's own values. This openness is the basis for global learning and enables a constant and dynamic expansion of one's own world view.

Empathy and openness as guiding principles relate primarily to dealing with culture. **Self-organisation**, on the other hand, is particularly evident in the work and life in the respective organisations in India and Germany. This distinction between the two central components of hosting and sending is made ideally in order to highlight the characteristics of self-organisation. Self-organisation refers to the volunteers' ability to act in a self-determined manner. They are able to recognise, formulate and take responsibility for their own ideas and interests. However, the term does not mean self-administration or even calling for going it alone. Self-organisation must not lead to isolation: the

essential element that distinguishes self-organisation from self-sufficient self-management is communication. Although volunteers act in a self-determined and creative way, they always interact with their local colleagues, agree on decisions together and communicate their needs. In this way, they take responsibility for their ideas and actions. The principle of self-organisation enables them to develop ideas about their fields of work and their living environment and to implement them after consultation and, if necessary, reflection with the help of their colleagues. In this way, the participants have the opportunity to take responsibility for their ideas and the effects of their actions and to shape their everyday life.

The freedom associated with self-organisation and the related tasks are both an opportunity for creativity and a challenge for the participants' independence and communication skills. Self-organisation is successful when one's own needs and abilities are clearly recognised, used constructively and creatively, and when this takes place within the framework of exchange and communication.

Within the framework of the *weltwärts* programme, there are compulsory seminars that accompany the developmental volunteer service with a strong learning component in a professional-pedagogical way. In addition to the organisational points, the focus is on content-related topics, reflection and impulses for further commitment. In particular, there is a deeper discussion on topics like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), power structures, racism and global injustices. The voluntary service promotes intercultural exchange and global learning. It is a contribution to a fair, peaceful and interconnected world and thus a contribution to achieving the SDGs.

~~*~*~*