

International voluntary services as learning and peace services with Friedenskreis Halle e.V. mission statement

The Friedenskreis and the Friedensdienste or where we come from

The history of peace services in Friedenskreis is almost as long as that of the entire organization. It begins in 1992 with the outbreak of wars in former Yugoslavia. The Friedenskreis Halle provided humanitarian help during these wars.

After the end of the war in 1996, members of the Friedenskreis helped rebuild the old city of Jajce in Bosnia. In order to provide a perspective and positive experiences for children and young people for whom the war was an everyday life, a meeting center was set up in 1997 with other cooperation partners and was open to all children from Jajce and adolescents, irrespective of their affiliation (s) is.

In 2000, the Friedenskreis sent a German volunteer to Jajce for a year, as part of a regular voluntary service. The first volunteers from Bosnia and Russia came to Halle four years later.

Since then, further long-standing partnerships have been established with organizations in the Balkans and, in the meantime, individual other countries.

As a peace organization, we are building a long history of volunteer services with our peace services. This has its beginnings in the period after the First World War and was then strongly determined by the idea of reconciliation and understanding through encounter and cooperation. After the Second World War, these services regained importance.

This history and our own history as an Organization founded in the upheavals around 1990 in Eastern Germany as a peace organization and, as described above, a special relationship with Southeastern Europe has strongly influenced our volunteer services. With this past in mind, we would like to learn from our history and develop ourselves on the one hand, and strengthen our volunteers on the other, in order to stand up against National Socialist and right-wing extremist tendencies and global inequalities.

What are our volunteers doing for the peace service or why are we doing this?¹

¹ See as well: mission statement Friedenskreis Halle e.V.

We understand our volunteer services in the Friedenskreis as learning and peace services. They are characterized by their own experience and relationships with people. The abstract word peace is related to concrete experiences and feelings and so becomes a piece of experience. This can be done in projects of our partner organizations, where actions for peace are visible in small steps, as well as encounters with people who suffer injustice, discrimination or violence or, conversely, the experience of solidarity, recognition or support. Our voluntary services have a lasting effect on the individual development of the volunteers. As returnees, they become multipliers for sociopolitical issues of global and transnational relevance by taking their attitudes into their environment and, in concrete terms, continuing to engage in their homeland. There is also a long-term transnational bond, a system of support and exchange, between the sending organization and host organization and between volunteers and people in the host country. Volunteers, like us as an organization, learn together in an authentic encounter with employment agencies in Halle and partner organizations abroad. The critical questioning of one's own position and responsibility is an integral part of this. so, a mutual strengthening in the sense of our mission statement takes place, steps on the way to a fair, fair and non-violent living together in diversity to do.

In this sense, peace has various aspects for us, which we have formulated in the association's mission statement as our five guiding themes.

Peace needs the recognition of **transcultural diversity**. We do not equate culture with nationality or religion but mean the variety of cultural imprints that a person unitiis. For example, families have their own rituals or different ways of dealing with one another, and students or even long-established inhabitants of a village have a certain culture. Volunteers learn to know, understand and acknowledge people who have a different cultural background from their voluntary service. At the same time, they should deal with their own prejudices, mechanisms of discrimination and racism in our escort seminars. We as an organization also seeing the different cultural backgrounds of our volunteers, as well as the employees of our partner organizations, as an opportunity to learn from different perspectives in exchange. At the same time, embedding in different power structures should not get out of sight, but should become an issue (see above, global justice).

Peace needs **lived democracy**. In their voluntary service, the volunteers have the opportunity to work together with others and actively contribute. They are to be encouraged as returnees to stand up for their convictions and to participate in sociopolitical issues. For us as an organization, living democracy means that we can make participatory decision-making processes and involve partner organizations, employment agencies, volunteers, and returnees. In addition, within the scope of our possibilities, we try structures - e.g. Support programs - to actively participate as civil society actors.

Peace without **global justice** is unthinkable for us. Independent of their background, volunteers learn about injustices and inequalities in the world (such as unequal financial opportunities, unequal educational opportunities, consequences of economic and ecological exploitation, etc.), their own positions, and their own privileges or disadvantages. This is an impetus to solidarize with people they meet and/or to stand up for a more just world.

We too, as a sending and hosting organization, operate within power structures and pursue our own interests. The volunteer services are also learning services for us. This means that we, as a German organization, are aware of our privileges (for example, financial) and our embeddedness in racist, postcolonial structures, and try to be constructive about them. Part of the peace services is therefore to question our actions as an organization itself, to develop new action strategies, to get to know the perspectives of partner organizations and to learn from each other. With our partnership, we strengthen each other as civil society actors across borders.

Peace needs civil constructive **conflict management**. Young people learn to deal with conflicts in their voluntary service and are accompanied by pedagogy. At the same time, they also deal with conflicts at the societal level. In their volunteer service, you will get to know peace projects or deal with them in our accompanying seminars. In doing so, they experience how civil ways to manage conflict (for example mixed-ethnic child and youth work, non-violent demonstrations or everyday civil courage) are profitable. As an organization, we see conflicts with partner organizations, workplaces or volunteers as something on which everyone can grow. They can be an inspiration for change and help us to evolve.

Peace needs **active nonviolence**. Violence takes place as personal violence between people. It also appears as structural or cultural violence in the form of unequal power relations and spaces of possibility. In their voluntary service, young people are made aware of where violence happens, people are marginalized or discriminated against. They are aware of where they are even in everyday violence and actively seek ways to change. We too, as an organization, set ourselves the goal of reflecting on where we ourselves exercise violence towards employees of partner organizations or volunteers, and we also seek ways to constructively use and share our power dreams.

Young people need a space where they can autonomously learn, grow and develop their own positions. This happens in the volunteer services in the (working) everyday life and is supported by accompanying seminars. We want to offer this space to all young people and therefore explicitly address young people who previously had little chance of doing so.

What does that mean concretely or how we design our peace services?

Target groups - the volunteers

We would like to send and receive a diverse group of volunteers from all parts of Germany and various regions of the world (East Africa, Western Europe, Southeastern Europe). For us, it is important that volunteers can feel at home regardless of gender, sexual orientation, educational status, religion, physical condition and (social) origin. In the election of volunteer candidates, we try to reduce unequal chances. Apart from that, we make sure to select people who are open-minded about our values, who already volunteer or want to do so in the future, and who bring with them the competences and background they want, as well as socio-political interests and an attitude of learning.

Exchange in both directions

For years, young people from Germany have had the opportunity to apply for various programs for international voluntary service abroad. This was and is not possible for all young people from other countries - especially the Global South - to that extent. It is important to us that we help this one-way street to pick up. We, therefore, strive to include volunteers from all the countries in which we send volunteers and to achieve an overall balance between volunteering and posting.

The place of assignment (POA) in Halle and abroad include social institutions, especially child and youth work, as well as organizations that work in social and peace policy. It is important to us that the workplaces understand the service of the volunteer as an opportunity for mutual learning: The POA from volunteers should also be encouraged to reflect on privileges, power structures, prejudices, and racisms in their own organization and they can use their skills in dealing with people whose language is not German. The Friedenskreis and the POA, in turn, provide the volunteer in everyday life and during the accompanying seminars, what means peace work concretely.

Regions to which we send volunteers and from whom we receive volunteers

Our focus is on the region of South-Eastern Europe, because we have been able to establish long-term stable partnerships and gain experience here and because this region is neglected within Europe. In addition, we would like to work with partner organizations from the Global South and with Western European partner organizations to cooperate with organizations with different histories, political and economic situations and thus different perspectives, despite the focus on South-Eastern Europe.

We want to show solidarity with people and partner organizations from different regions and learn from each other through intensive cooperation.

Our partner organizations, with whom we work together abroad, are located in civil society. They work in different fields of activity and topics but have similar values and goals as the

Friedenskreis. We strive for a continuous exchange on how we understand and shape our volunteer services

The pedagogical accompanying seminars are a central component of our peace services because only the critical reflection of the practical experiences turns the voluntary service into a learning and peace service. In this sense, the volunteers at the seminars deal with the guiding themes of the association described above and relate them to their experiences. We organize the content-related work of the pedagogical accompanying seminars together with partner organizations. In addition to the agreement on seminar contents, we aim to also attend as many seminars as possible together with representatives of the partner organizations.

We live up to the idea of volunteering through partly joint seminars for seconded and accepted volunteers. This allows the volunteers to help each other with the cultural and linguistic preparation as well as to exchange, compare and reflect on their different perspectives and experiences in voluntary service.

Our escort seminars are holistic and work with the experiences that volunteers bring.

The returnees should be encouraged during their voluntary service to engage in service in society. The volunteers sent by us will be presented with opportunities on the return seminar to get involved in the club and to provide tips on how and where they can get involved outside the club. The volunteers admitted by us receive suggestions during their volunteer service to get involved in the civic / peace policy beyond the service in the employment center in Halle. At the interim seminar, they are also encouraged by the Friedenskreis and partner organizations to reflect on their engagement in their home country after volunteering and receive offers from their respective sending organization on how to get involved after their return.

All former volunteers are invited to participate in the further development of the Peace Services sector and to actively support them, for example as a team member at seminars or as peer mentors.

Organizational and practical implementation in voluntary service

We also want to stand in the organizational implementation of our volunteer services to our values and show that peace refers to the "banal" everyday life. We support our volunteers in order to make ecological, fair and ethical effects tangible in everyday life and live this responsibility towards our volunteers.

Handling of subsidies and support programs

When selecting funding programs, funding providers, and sponsors, we make sure that these do not contradict our values. (See also Code of Conduct and Ethics Criteria of the Friedenskreis). Nevertheless, we operate in a reality characterized by structural inequalities. Often there is a power gap in favor of the German organization in the implementation of the support programs. At the same time, the same programs promote partnership and solidarity

between us and our partner organization and encourage young people to take action against this inequality. We, therefore, decided to use the program constructively and share our power actively with our partner organizations.

Friedenskreis as a learning organization

The Friedenskreis sees itself as a learning organization and continuously develops volunteer services. On the one hand, this means that we are dealing with how and whether we are responding to current societal challenges with our volunteer services and recording current specialist discourses. On the other hand, we learn with and from volunteers and host organizations. This takes place through regular evaluation and exchange so that our work is enriched beyond volunteering by new perspectives, approaches or examples of good practice.