

Q&A E-SIGA 2021



Questions & Answers for Extraordinary Servas International General Assembly (E-SIGA 2021)

The purpose of the E-SIGA is to vote on changes to SI statutes. Statutes can be changed only in a general assembly or an extra-ordinary general assembly.

Background:

SI member groups decided through a SI Distant Vote (SI DV) May2021 (Motion 4 EXCO) to hold a distant Extraordinary Servas International General Assembly (E-SIGA) 2021.

There will be one single item on the agenda for E-SIGA 2021:

A SI Exco motion about amendments to the Servas International (SI) Statutes (2018) to allow for SI to formally register as an international non-governmental organisation (iNGO) and association in Switzerland with a registration number.

Such a registration has been the goal for SI for a long time.

These Questions & Answers have been provided by Carla Kristensen, SI Vice President, Radha Radhakrishna, SI Treasurer and Jonny Sångänger, SI President. However, the Q&A is the combined effort of many, and it has the blessing and contributions of all of SI Exco.

This document will be available on the E-SIGA website and be constantly updated as we receive more questions and answers.

Question 1: Why has the Servas International Executive Committee (SI Exco) made the initiative to arrange a Servas International Extraordinary General Assembly (E-SIGA 2021)? Why not just a Distant Vote?

Answer: All changes to the Statutes must be ratified by the General Assembly. We would have had a GA in 2021, but due to the Pandemic the next GA had to be postponed to 2022. As the changes in the Statutes are necessary for obtaining legal registration, it was imperative to do it during this current year. This could be done with an Extra-Ordinary General Assembly that can be conducted virtually. SI EXCO got approval, through the SI DV in May 2021, to hold an E-SIGA for this purpose only.

Question 2: Why are changes to statutes necessary?

Answer: In order to register Servas International in Switzerland we have to submit our statutes to two agencies in Zurich - commercial and tax - and get their approval for our statutes to be registered. During our discussions with them, they requested some changes to our statutes to get the registration. After further discussion, we arrived at a consensus on the changes

acceptable to both agencies. We need to make these changes to the statutes and submit the updated statutes to them to get our registration..

Question 3: Why are we registering in Switzerland?

Answer: Servas International started this process in 2012 during the General Assembly in Poland. At that time, all countries were invited to consider where SI should be registered. Over time, several options were considered - such as Canada and Sweden. Finally, it was decided that Switzerland provided the best location for Servas International. We also received great support from Servas Switzerland. René Steimer, from Servas Switzerland has done a lot of work to enable the registration.

Question 4: Isn't SI already registered in Switzerland?

Answer: Servas International is operating legally as a not-for-profit entity in Switzerland, but is not registered with the commercial and tax authorities. Consequently, it does not have a fiscal number. With this vote we are working on getting registered with the commercial and tax authorities and getting a fiscal number.

Question 5: Why do we need a fiscal number?

Answer: Over the years, we have received many requests from member groups to provide them with a fiscal number to enable them to register and open a bank account in their own country. That is one of the benefits of getting a fiscal number. Additionally, with the registration, we can more easily get many benefits available to not-for-profit entities. With a registration, it becomes easier to conduct financial transactions, including some that were not possible while we were not registered. Servas will benefit as a whole from the registration.

Question 6: What will change in the Statutes?

Answer: With this vote, SI will bring **3 changes** or items that need to be ratified:

- a) All Board members and other SI Officers work on a voluntary basis.
- b) appointment by the GA (or SI ExCo) of an Auditor, with a term of office that shall be one year and re-election is possible. [Note]
- c) in case of dissolution of SI, the funds remaining in SI Bank account shall be donated to a like-minded, tax-exempt institution, registered in Switzerland. No distribution among SI members will be allowed.

Notes: (a) While the members of SI EXCO have always been unpaid volunteers, our statutes did not state it explicitly. Now it will be explicit. (b) Previously, we appointed our auditors to 3 year terms, to coincide with the time between two GAs. This will change to an annual appointment to bring it in line with Swiss Civil Code. (c) This is required to bring it in line with Swiss Civil Code.

Question 7: Will the Statutes of the member countries be required to follow the SI model presented?

Answer: It will be up to each Servas group/country to decide whether they wish to register and what model they wish to follow for their association. The only requirement is that they should follow the Servas philosophy and principles. Some Servas groups/countries are already registered in their own countries as not-for-profit associations. For the others, the process will be made easier by the recognition of SI as an iNGO.

Question 8: The E-SIGA will discuss and vote on a Motion, but how is the Motion presented?

Answer: The Motion will be divided in 2 parts

- a) The **amended Statutes** (if the Motion passes, this will be the definitive Statutes, as approved by E-SIGA 2021)
- b) A **confirmation declaration** (that means that the **SI Member groups approve** and confirm the (1) election and **mandate of the actual SI Board of Directors**, better known as SI ExCo , (2) approve the SI ExCo Board members who have **bank signatory rights** and **(3) approve the Auditor** appointed by SI ExCo).

The Motion (the 2 parts of the Motion) will be voted Yes, No or Abstain, all in **one vote**.

Question 9: How is the voting process?

Answer: Voting during the E-SIGA will be done by email. Discussion of the motion will be via zoom meetings and dissemination of information via FAQs and emails. Each eligible member group should register its delegate by the 21st of July. The delegate will get ballot papers and should cast their vote any time between August 1 and August 15. **To repeat: the voting window is August 1 - August 15.** The results will be tabulated and announced on August 17.

Question 10: Once the Motion is approved, where will SI headquarters be?

Answer: SI fiscal domicile will be in Zurich, Switzerland. Our official domicile (i.e., Servas representative to receive official communications from Swiss authorities) will be a Servas member family in Zurich, Switzerland

Question 11: The Auditor needs to be approved every year?

Answer: Yes, that is according to the Swiss Law

Question 12: Will it be easier for countries to be legally registered in their own countries?

Answer: Yes. SI will be acknowledged as a registered iNGO, and that will give more accreditation for a Servas country to get a fiscal registration.

Question 13: If SI gets an official registration/fiscal number does that mean that all Servas groups that are not yet registered will have to do it too in their own countries?

Answer: No, not at all. Each Servas member group can register in their own country when they feel that they gather all conditions to do so, like having a significant number of members, some funds and a certain stability.

Question 14: Is it possible to add more amendments to the Statutes during the E-SIGA?

Answer: Not in this vote. In order to get the registration done, we have to deliver the statutes with the agreed upon changes to the authorities. Otherwise, we may have to start the process all over again. That would be very time consuming. Also, we don't have more budget to do

so. This does not prevent us from changing the statutes at future general assemblies. We can't make any changes in this vote.

Question 15: How will the process of registration work?

Answer: René S. (Servas Switzerland), our contact in Zurich, will take the documentation, signed by SI President and SI Treasurer, to be recognized by the Tax Authority in Switzerland and the Commercial Chamber in the Canton of Zurich. The rest of the process doesn't depend on SI, but we anticipate that if all the documents are in order, we will take another month to get the registration..

Question 16: As iNGO, will SI be able to raise donations and apply for public or private grants?

Answer: It will be possible, yes. We can also offer tax benefits to Swiss residents and citizens for their donations. In case SI gets donations and grants, SI could lower the fees paid by member groups to SI.

Question 17: Does SI have a budget for this?

Answer: Yes. The initiative to formally register Servas International as an iNGO was decided and partly financed by SI GA 2015, with additional funding from SI GA 2018. From a total of 10.000 Swiss Francs approved, 7.000 have already been spent on lawyers and translations. We foresee that the budgeted amount will be enough.

Question 18: What is the percentage of YES we need, for the motion to pass?

Answer: Since this is a change of statutes, at least 2/3rds of the total number of registered votes to be a YES. Needless to say, that would also imply that the number of YES will be more than the number of No and Abstain.