

EVS projects in Eastern Europe and Caucasus countries (EECA)

What the regions (EU and EECA countries) have in common?

The volunteering culture in EECA countries, especially in Armenia, is highly appreciated. EVS volunteers are the “eyes” for Armenian youth to discover the World, different cultures and realities especially taking into account the fact that Armenia is blocked by two neighbouring countries and the youth of Armenia have different problems with mobility.

What aspects the regions (EU and EECA countries) differ?

The most prominent difference is connected with the culture, traditions and daily lifestyle of people. Being a nation of high culture the people, family members are very closely connected to each other and very often it causes problems with having their privacy and confidentiality.

Potential benefits: What are the positive outcomes of ongoing projects?

As a positive outcome of the projects first of all the cultural aspect should be mentioned. There is also a huge need for such kind of projects, foreigners with different mentality, techniques, approaches and perspectives for the development of youth and community. The society in the Caucasus region is very open and accepting for foreigners.

Potential risks: What are the most common pitfalls and difficulties of ongoing projects?

One of the risky factors is the integration of the volunteers in a different culture, values and traditions they live in. In the case of the Caucasus region also the existence of conflict situation (no war, no peace) can be considered as a risk factor.

What 's about the selection process of EVS volunteers?

The statistics of our region shows that mainly the volunteers are coming from Eastern Europe. The selection of the volunteers is often complicated because the youth from EU countries have a lack of information about EECA countries and they avoid doing voluntary work there. The majority of volunteers in Armenia are involved in youth work and social work that is why during the selection process of the participants the main stress is put on them leaving out youth from other fields. The organisations mainly avoid receiving volunteers with disabilities which is also the result of the absence of the necessary infrastructures in the country.

How does work preparation of EVS volunteers?

There is a big problem with the preparation of EVS volunteers coming from EU countries because the organisations very often don't organise pre-departure and orientation meetings for them. The main support from sending organisations the volunteers get during their service.

What about activity plan for EVS volunteers?

In some cases, the organisations don't have an activity plan which is a big problem as there are no exact tasks designed for the volunteers and they think the volunteers are responsible for designing tasks themselves. Another problem is that the organisations receive the volunteers with the thought that they are going to replace their staff members. I would mention also the fact that after the changes in the Erasmus + Programme, when there is no coordination status for Partner countries anymore, the volunteers don't have the opportunity to implement some activities in other organisations/institutions as well.

Managing the learning process within the EVS project /some specific attitudes, methods used etc./?

The learning process of EVS volunteers is generally organised in a proper way by the receiving organisations which are in the form of learning days related to the culture, traditions, history, cuisine, stereotypes and other things. The volunteers have the chance to participate in various kinds of cultural events, exhibitions and so on. Also for the better integration and learning of volunteers for the first month they are usually living in host families.

What is the role of mentors in EVS projects?

The role of mentors is very important for the receiving organisations. Many of them have structured plans and different mechanisms of the recruitment of mentors and for that reason, a number of local and international trainings are organised for their development. The mentor also has a vital role in the learning process of the volunteer. As a rule, ex-EVS volunteers are selected as mentors (it is not preferable for staff members to be mentors).

How are ensured practicalities in EVS projects /accommodation, food, visa, insurance etc./?

Separate flats/houses are rented for volunteers which they share with other EVS volunteers (sometimes there are two people of the same sex in the bedroom). The flats/houses are fully equipped and have all the facilities and means of communication. **The visa process is quite simple as there is a free visa system for EU citizens. The volunteers are supposed to stay not more than 180 days after which they should get a residence permit. But when the volunteers participate in On-Arrival Training course and Mid-term Evaluation (the volunteers hosted in Armenia have On-Arrival Training course and Mid-term Evaluation in Georgia) and they cross the border these 180 days are renewed again.**

What can be surprising to EVS volunteers?

- The family relations (in many families even 3 generations live together),
- Transportation system (public transport is not so good organised and there are no buses to some parts of city after 18:00),
- Living style of people (you can see both very open-minded and very conservative people in the same society at the same time),
- Religion (the majority of volunteers think that Armenia is a Muslim country but on spot, they even find out that 99 % of Armenian population are Christians and Armenia is the first country in the world which adopted Christianity as a state religion).

What about way of communication?

The main population in Armenia speaks Russian and the new generation knows English, French and German which makes the communication easier. The society is very hospitable and open to the foreigners which make the integration process faster. The volunteers get language course during their whole service (in most cases).

Resources

EVS with Youth Initiative Centre (YIC), Gyumri: <https://web.facebook.com/groups/yic.evs/>

SALTO EECA Resource Centre: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/eeca/>

EVS Manual: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download-file-975/EVS%20Manual%20-%20KEKS.pdf

EVS coordinators in/with EECA region: <https://web.facebook.com/groups/evseeca/>

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