

# EVS projects in the South East Europe countries (SEE)

## SEE 1.1. – Historical overview

In the context of the previous YOUTH and Youth in Action Programmes, the region of South East Europe – SEE has included the countries which were established from the former Yugoslavia's Republics except for Slovenia and including Albania. These countries were the first group of the so-called Partner Countries which became eligible to get involved in the previous YOUTH Programme in 2002 when actually the first receiving and sending EVS projects involving volunteers and organisations from Macedonia and Croatia were implemented. That year the SALTO South East Europe Resource Center – SALTO SEE RC organized the first Contact Making Seminar for so-called Action 2 – EVS projects, which enabled about 15 organisations from the region to find out more about the EVS Programme, to meet already active EVS organisations from the EU and to plan the first joint EVS projects.

At the beginning, the SEE organisations could only be partners to the projects, until the beginning of 2006, when the Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency – EACEA was established in Brussels in order to implement a number of strands of more than 15 Community funded programmes and actions, including centralised Youth in Action projects. In that sense, the organisations from Partner countries where no National Agencies – NAs existed became eligible to apply directly for their own projects. This possibility enabled EVS active organisations to be applicants, therefore to plan better their EVS projects, the dynamics, the partners, the number of volunteers etc.

At the same time, the accreditation of EVS organisations from the SEE region became obligatory for the SEE organisations and accordingly the SALTO SEE RC created its Pool of Accreditors from representatives of already active EVS organisations from the region and mainly from the NAs current or former EVS officers from several countries. This procedure supposed to influence the quality of projects, especially to ensure the support to EVS volunteers from both sides – sending and receiving organisations.

At that period the SALTO SEE RC also established its own Pool of EVS trainers, as a responsible institution for the provision of regular EVS training cycles for all volunteers coming to the SEE region. The annual schedule of EVS trainings was established, where on arrival training sessions are always organised in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, while mid-term trainings are organised in Belgrade, Serbia. These training sessions sometimes gathered together more than 70 EVS volunteers and always have been an opportunity for the volunteers to find out more about the project's reality not only in their hosting country but also in the other countries of the region. Beside the other important inputs, these training sessions have also enabled development of different informal volunteer's **networks, which have often been used by the EVS volunteers to have free accommodation and guidance while travelling around the countries of the region during their free days.**

An interesting specific related to the EVS trainings was an organisation of one-to-one on-arrival training sessions or training sessions for small groups of 2–5 volunteers – targeting the short-term EVS volunteers, whose project dates could not fit into the regularly scheduled and organised on arrival training sessions.

Important changes related to the implementation of the whole Youth in Action Programme, therefore of the EVS, as well, have appeared with the formal establishment of the National Agencies in Croatia and Macedonia. The respective organisations have started to represent Program instead of Partner countries, which enabled

them to be involved as partners in more projects. On the other side, the budgets that these NAs had available were much smaller, compared to the budgets that were available for the whole SEE region at the EACEA at a centralised level. This problem was especially influencing the organisations from Macedonia: for comparison, there were always between 10 and 15 Macedonian organisations being granted per call (three times per year) by the EACEA, while the Macedonian NA was delivering 3–4 grants per call during the first years of operation. Recently the Serbian NA has entered in its pilot phase and it is expected that soon the organisations from this country will also get the status Program instead of Partner, which would probably influence the quantity and types of EVS projects implemented, similar to the processes experienced in Croatia and Macedonia. For the implementation of accreditation procedure and training delivery, the SALTO SEE RC still remains a responsible institution.

## **SEE 1.2. – EVS at Glance – Characteristics, specifics, issues**

I have tried to sum-up several specifics of the EVS projects and organisations in few countries of the SEE, based on my personal engagement in EVS receiving and sending organisation in Macedonia, my experience as an accreditor of the SALTO SEE RC (from 2006 till 2013 in Macedonia, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo, then from 2013 in Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and my experience as an EVS trainer for the SALTO SEE RC (from 2007 till 2013).

I have also used some information from the latest organisational survey implemented among the currently accredited organisations in the SEE region by the SALTO SEE RC in 2016.

### **SEE 1.2.1. – EVS organisations**

The general situation in most of the countries in the SEE, except Croatia and partly Serbia, is that there is no regular support from the state (central or local government) for the work of youth organisations. Therefore, according to the type, source and sustainability of funding, there are mainly two types of organisations:

- Project-based, without permanent employees, tasks performed by volunteers or project-paid temporary engaged staff, usually without their own premises and lots of equipment. Often happens that such organisations apply for many Erasmus+ projects, including EVS projects, because those projects are the only income for them and the only way to ensure (or save) certain budget for their activities, for the people involved and for their regular running costs. Such organisations usually do not have regular activities, but aim to organize and propose different short-term or periodical local activities (quite often in collaboration with other local organisations or institutions, that are actually not accredited, such as primary or secondary schools, centres for young people with disabilities, sport clubs etc. ) in order to provide placements and develop tasks and responsibilities for the receiving EVS volunteers. As there is not paid staff, usually there is no regular working time and activities are organised on an on-going basis, week by week. There may be frequent change of people who are active, influenced by the personal needs, interest and motivation of the local volunteers or temporary paid employees.
- An organisation with long-term foreign support, which enables them to have solid, guaranteed annual budget. This type of organisation mainly exists in the multi-ethnic communities, in the post-war countries of the region. For example, there are many organisations in Kosovo or Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are supported by various German foundation or charities, aimed to support the re-integration of Serbian, Croatian or Roma minority into the newly built society. There are also many cases in Kosovo and Albania, supported by Italian or Maltese churches or catholic organisations, aimed to support the life of minor catholic population surrounded by Muslim communities. Usually, these organisations have their own premises, completely new built or adopted, have a permanent staff, which beside program and administrative employees sometimes includes a driver(s), guardian(s) and cleaning staff. There is all necessary equipment, there are working procedures, exact working hours and regular activities with clearly defined target group(s). I see different motivation among the

representatives of these organisations, which is clearly not the financial one, but the opportunity for intercultural experience for their employees and beneficiaries.

### **SEE 1.2.2. – Receiving EU volunteers coming to the SEE region**

In terms of this division, there are different opportunities for the hosted EVS volunteers. I believe that it is important for every sending organisation and/or volunteer interesting to come to the region and be aware of different working conditions, working procedures, working styles and potential contacts with the local beneficiaries/community, according to the profile of the organisation and proposed short-term or long-term activities. The volunteer can sometimes end up working alone or with other EVS volunteers, without proper supervision or regular support from the local volunteers.

#### **Few general tips on the expectations would be:**

- You do not need visa to come to the countries, you can even enter only with your ID, but you would definitely need visa if your project is longer than 90 days and you should be prepared for (sometimes) long bureaucratic procedure;
- Expect very close relations with the locals, especially if you don't apply for a project in a capital! Every other city or town is 'a kind of a village' where 'everybody knows everybody' and everybody will know about you in one-two days, where people have usual daily routines, according to the part of the year, everybody is interested why you have come there and would like to speak with you, even without any English, and expect people to call you sometimes for a free coffee, local wine or rakia. And don't miss the preparation of 'Ajvar' if you happen to be there in September!
- Many organisations in smaller towns offer to stay with a host family – try it, at least for the first month of your stay! It can be very valuable experience and can help you a lot for your involvement into the local community and for your better understanding and acceptance of the local culture.
- The type/level of accommodation is often one of the most positive aspects stressed by the hosted EVS volunteers. The same feeling is for the amount of pocket/food money, which sometimes is close to the average net-to salary in Albania or Macedonia.
- Whichever country you choose – there are few others at 150–200 km distance. Experience the local/regional transport possibilities (including hitch-hiking!), experience the borders, experience similar, but different cultures in different countries. And try to learn and practice the stereotypes of each of them!

### **SEE 1.2.3. – Receiving EVS volunteers coming from the SEE region**

The main division for me relates to the practice for selection/preparation of volunteers before their departure and adequately the support and opportunities offered by the sending organisations after their arrival back home. Actually it depends on the links between the volunteer(s) and the organisation before and after the EVS project abroad.

#### **In this sense, I group the organisations in this way:**

- Organisations that apply/get involved into projects with a clear perspective about the potential volunteer(s) who may be sent. These organisations send only (or mainly, or give priority to) volunteers who come from/live in their community, who have been/are already active or become active in the organisation during the preparation period. Usually, those volunteers continue to be active in the sending organisation, try to transfer and adopt the learning skills and experience and the sending organisation actually builds its capacity by implemented EVS projects. These volunteers often come with certain experience and skills and have a very clear motivation and expectations from their EVS project, which is foreseen as a part of their personal education and future professional career. Therefore, it should be expected that such volunteers would require clear tasks, a division of responsibilities, opportunities for intercultural and technical learning and complete integration into the work of the receiving organisation and the life of the hosting community. There are often cases of establishing

strong links between the receiving and sending organisation, which can result in development and implementation of future EVS projects, but also other mutual projects. On the other side, these volunteers may face a certain level of frustration, if there are not enough tasks or activities where they will be involved.

- Organisations that apply/get into a partnership without a clear idea or plans at the application stage. These organisations usually open a public call (in case nobody from their close friends or relatives is interested ) and quite often select young people from other towns, whom they do not know at all and even without a personal interview. Of course, it happens sometimes that nobody applies and there is no selected volunteer, but what is more dangerous (from my perspective) is that there is not a proper information and preparation of the volunteer, there are no clear analyses of his/her motivation and expectations and there are bigger possibilities to face problematic situations later during the implementation of the EVS project.

Regarding the profile of EVS volunteers coming from the SEE region, they are mainly graduate students at various universities, who would like to have international experience after the successful end of their formal education or who have waited few years as unemployed and are interested in trying something else in their life. There are fewer cases of graduated high-school students who want to explore international volunteering prior to their further formal education.

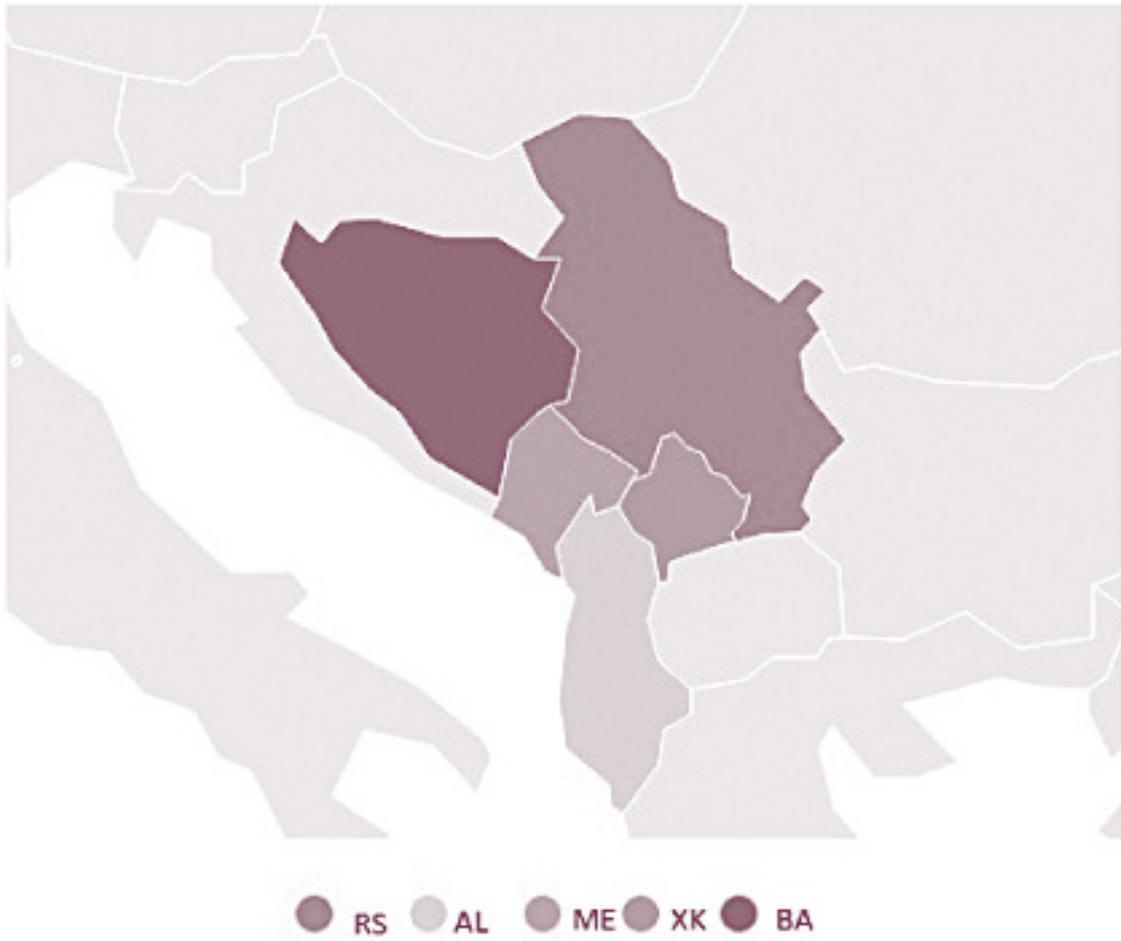
Of course, there are also cases of active volunteers or even more experienced youth workers, who are interested in building on their current experience and to make their first steps into the possible international carrier. Those would be the most requiring and involved EVS volunteers.

**Few general recommendations on the expectations/procedures would be:**

- Young people from Albania usually know very good Italian;
- Young people from former Yugoslavian countries are usually good in English (or German eventually) and they very easily get other Slavic languages;
- Always try to have direct contact with the volunteer. Even if you have big respect, trust and nice relations with the sending organisation, it would still help you to better understand the real motivation, interest and expectations of your future volunteer and would help you to prepare yourselves better;
- Be prepared for long bureaucratic procedure for visa and consider that often the volunteers pay all the documents and travel themselves, which is not easy for them;
- The normal entry visa is still required for young people from Kosovo and there are different consulates where they should apply for it, depending if they are Albanian or Serbian. All the other countries do not need a visa for short stay till 90 days.
- 100 Euro for you does not mean the same for an average young unemployed person coming from a small town from Albania or Macedonia! Please, reimburse them immediately for the costs that they have done before their arrival or during the project activities and pay them their pocket and food money regularly.
- Respect their culture and traditions! They are interested in learning and adopt to the new cultures, but also, deep inside their hearts, they keep the fire of their home and their values!

Country	Number of accredited organisations
AL	19
BA	18
ME	3
RS	39
XK	11
HR	63
MK	41

Number of currently accredited organisations per country (April 2017)



Countries of SEE currently directly supported by the SALTO SEE RC

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