

# Specifics and peculiarities of EVS

## A tiny map for adventurers to an unexplored territory

Each EVS project is a bunch of unexpected forms of things we expect before it starts. EVS can enable us to become more experienced and more accomplished persons. It can bring new perspectives, new relations, new plans and new opportunities to our organisations, our volunteers, our communities and everyone involved.

To make this possible it may be really important for volunteers as well as for other parties in EVS projects (and especially for EVS coordinators) **to understand basic concepts of EVS** as well as clearly communicate with other parties about **its specifics and peculiarities** (whether related to EVS in general, or to a particular EVS project). This is key for helping volunteer-candidates gain a realistic image of the project and prevent misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations. And even more, it is important for EVS coordinator's professional preparation *of* the project and *for* the project.

It is best for each new EVS-coordinator to start their EVS journey by properly learning the basics, meaning what EVS is and is not. Official EU documents (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, EVS Charter, EVS Info-Kit, EVS database, etc.) belong to the first recommended sources of information for that. However, after studying those you may still be missing a more practical guide for your and your organisation's EVS – preparation. In this section, we will try to reduce this gap.

Nobody has to be perfect, to have a perfect EVS experience. Typically, and almost necessarily during EVS, project everyone involved will be exposed to a lot of new situations and influences. These can be both stimulating and challenging. Your personal EVS-experience will probably be different from "standard" conditions to which you are accustomed. And the same applies to your future volunteers. No one is likely to expect that EVS is the same as their usual "domestic" life. However, it is also **different from studying abroad and different from professional work life or common "in-land" volunteering**.

So, what are the differences? A good example to start with is **climate difference**. Many volunteer-candidates, when responding to published EVS-vacancies, don't realise how big this issue can be on a long-term EVS project. However, in practice, it belongs to the most difficult parts of EVS, simply because it can be demanding to get used to a big difference. Especially if you have interested candidates from a distant location. The length of daylight, proportions of year seasons, common temperatures and proportion of sunny and rainy days in your country can be even very different from what they take for granted. Even if they already have some experience with staying abroad. As an example, it might not be enough to inform your volunteers to "bring warm clothes for wintertime" if they can have a completely different idea of warm clothes and of wintertime than your reality is.

Another big group of differences can be labelled **cultural difference**, which includes **mentality and emotionality**. Both you and your volunteers will have to repeatedly realise that some of your natural expectations from the other party can be unexpected, strange, or even unacceptable due to a different cultural background. This may apply to specific mentality, but also to **local habits, cuisine or fashion**. All of these aspects can really bring a lot of funny, enriching, but also unpleasant moments to everyone involved, whilst their intensity can be influenced by the length and stage of the project. Many times, even very basic things have to be gently and carefully discussed and explained. Therefore it is really good if all actors involved are somehow being prepared, or at least informed ahead about "the unexpected element" in this field.

Next example is another crucial moment in EVS: **language**. Firstly, you have to realise, that on EVS project you will not be able to communicate with volunteers in your native language. Although studying local language is always an integral part of EVS, the level volunteers reach during their EVS placement is rarely comparable with locals. Similarly, volunteers might not be able to communicate with anyone in their mother tongue. (For practising their own language and keeping contacts with family, they will have to use the internet or a phone.) This can bring amusing situations, but also a strong sense of solitude and isolation (especially to the volunteers), misunderstandings and frustration until volunteers become sufficiently integrated into the local community. To be able to discuss most of the topics (especially during first months), you will usually really need to use a third language. And this again brings a huge potential for fun, but also for possible troubles. (Imagine how many misunderstandings happen even amongst locals with no language barrier.) The grant scheme wants project partners to select volunteers regardless of their language skills. But here are some questions for you: Can you afford to accept a volunteer with whom you don't have a mutually spoken language? Will there be someone else in your organisation to interact and speak to the volunteers when you are not available? Will you be able to provide sufficient language training to the volunteers during (and possibly before) the EVS project?

All of the differences discussed until now may seem to bring more problems than benefits to you and your organisation. In fact, these aspects are often really demanding, especially if you (or your organisation) underestimate them. On the other hand, this real international experience **can really help you (and your volunteers) develop highly valuable qualities like empathy, intuition, estimation, respect to differences and tolerance. As well, everyone involved may gain a special „competitive edge“** for the labour market just thanks to the language (or even thanks to "the culture") they have learned thanks to EVS.

And this brings us to the next specific aspect of EVS. Let's call it **working conditions**. EVS as such is a program of **non-formal education** of young people. And it works on a grant basis. This can sometimes bring challenges for traceability and sustainability of your organisation's activities and plans. In other words, you can rarely fully rely on your plans on grant approvals and instant help from volunteers. Yes, EVS volunteers can and should bring added value to your organisation (and surrounding community), whilst gaining new experience and skills. But they should not (and usually even cannot) substitute employees of your organisation. EVS volunteers usually need a lot of various forms of support and attention for their successful integration in your community. Not only because a day has 24 hours and a volunteer's working hours 6 or so.

**A decision to start receiving volunteers always brings a new long-term set of specific responsibilities to a new Receiving Organisation (RO). These cannot be delegated only to one person called EVS coordinator, but have to be recognised and accepted by the whole organisation, with a long-term support of its management. This is because apart from their needs, RO's have to be well aware of their portion of responsibility for the educational part of each EVS project and for personal development of volunteers. If all of the above is realised, planned and implemented properly, then your organisation will already have done a lot to successfully harvest specific fruits of EVS.**

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## *Resources*

[www.dobrovolnici.eu](http://www.dobrovolnici.eu)

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/seepublications/hopscotch/evs/>

***Ondrej Strnád,***

*Centrum voľného času – JUNIOR / Banská Bystrica, EVS coordinator,*

*long-term experience with topic of EVS, Slovakia*