

Accommodation of EVS volunteers

Once the application form for concrete EVS volunteer is approved, it is time to think seriously about what accommodation to ensure for EVS volunteer. Usually, it is up to the receiving organisation to ensure the accommodation for EVS volunteer. In some cases, the umbrella coordinating organisation can help with ensuring the accommodation if the local receiving organisation, where the EVS volunteer will work later on, has such a cooperation. All EVS partners involved in a project have usually idea about the way of the accommodation already from the description in the on-line database, from the accreditation procedure (information about practicalities, including accommodation, are mentioned in the Application form for accreditation and checked by accreditors).

By choosing suitable accommodation, it is good to communicate intensively with EVS volunteer as well with the sending organisation still in the preparation phase of the project (before an EVS volunteer comes to the receiving organisation). It is important to share his/ her expectations, needs and wishes how to be accommodated and to be open to it. In parallel, it is practical to ask an EVS volunteer for needs of boarding, especially if he/ she has some specific needs (for example dietary, allergies, religion aspects...). This can help also by searching right tip of the accommodation. Also, it is useful to discuss equipment of the flat/ room/ space where the EVS volunteer will live, prior departure on EVS. In the other hand, it is necessary to take into consideration the local situation of the receiving organisation, including often limited budget for the accommodation (even there is financial support for accommodation in the budget in application form) and sometimes other obstacles, which can influence the choice (specificities related to big towns/ rural areas, local villages; urban areas/ natural type of EVS projects/ community projects etc.).

From mentioned information above, EVS volunteers can be accommodated in various ways. The final type of the accommodation depends on a common agreement between EVS volunteer and receiving organisation (eventually coordinating organisation if there is some involved in the project). Anyway, there are minimum requirements which should be respected: an EVS volunteer should have own room, for ensuring needed privacy during the long-term stay in receiving country. The space of accommodation should be clean and should have at least basic equipment (electricity, cold/ hot water, heating available; bed, wardrobe, table, chair are recommended in the room).

Prior the departure of EVS volunteer, the receiving organisation should clarify to EVS volunteer, how planned accommodation is equipped and what the EVS volunteer should bring with him/ her (are in the flat pillows and covers, bed-clothes, towels, flatwares, knives, pots, cook-range, fridge, washing- machine etc.?). Also, the receiving organisation should share all specificity of accommodation with the EVS volunteer (for example electricity/cold- hot water/ heating is available only in some parts of the day, accommodation is placed in specific locality/ subculture...).

Let's present some tips for accommodation for EVS volunteers and which advantages/ disadvantages usually have:

Apartment – studio for each EVS volunteer

- + enough space and privacy for EVS volunteer
- + no misunderstanding between EVS volunteers concerning cleaning, keeping household and sharing common space

- + clear responsibility for a flat and keeping household- possible isolation of EVS volunteer (living alone) from social life, local community, culture
- too much expensive in some cases (usually in bigger cities)

Sharing flat between several EVS volunteers/ other young people

- + separate room for each EVS volunteer ensures relatively enough space/privacy for EVS volunteer, sharing other parts of flat ensures enough social life at the same time (communication/ getting to know each other, sharing experience from EVS, getting to know cultures of other EVS volunteers...).
- + in case the EVS volunteer lives with other young people from receiving country – space for getting to know better local habits, traditions, culture and having somebody who can help in a non-formal way with adaptation/ integration into the local community.
- + possible to share one flat for EVS volunteers between 2 or more local receiving organisations (after common agreement) – this is an advantage for organisations in bigger cities, where renting an apartment is usually expensive.
- + this type of accommodation is usually well evaluated by EVS volunteers according to experience from the Czech Republic
- common misunderstandings between EVS volunteers, usually also because of cleaning and keeping household – need to involve project coordinator in such a case (to help with solving the problem – to discuss the situation with EVS volunteers and to agree on rules of common living, including concrete steps – for example a monthly plan of cleaning with balanced division of housework.
- lack of privacy and space for EVS volunteers
- possible cultural misunderstandings between EVS volunteers (for example in the case of different religions...). Again, the role of the project coordinator and mentor is important during solving problems if needed.
- after leaving of EVS volunteers the flat can be in worse statement than on the beginning of EVS project (possible recommendation for this type of the accommodation: to rent rather an older apartment than the new one and to specify the clearly text of the agreement for renting the apartment).

Living in flat/ room directly in the receiving organisation

- + EVS volunteer is fully involved in the life of the receiving organisation and local community. Through this can get to know the work as well functioning of the organisation in detail.
- + usually a financial advantage for receiving organisations (no need to pay rent as well travel costs for EVS volunteer to/ from the receiving organisation) as well possibility to ask for a help the EVS volunteer for unexpected tasks/ situations which have to be solved.
- lack of privacy and space for EVS volunteers
- the risk of involvement of the EVS volunteer in various unexpected tasks/ situations in his/ her free time (risk of overloading of EVS volunteer as well as the lack of respect of free time of EVS volunteer from the side of receiving organisation)
- relatively isolation of other social life in the local community/ town/region (risk of „living in a bubble of receiving organisation“ – lack of possibilities for meeting young people from outside which can help to EVS volunteer also with integration and get to know the culture of the country)
- according to our experience, this type of accommodation does not seem to be enough comfortable for EVS volunteers- it causes usually more risky situations, misunderstandings and sometimes problems.

Living in student's hostel or school hostel

- + enough space and privacy for EVS volunteer (separate room for EVS volunteer)
- + sharing other parts of student's hostel/school (usually the kitchen, bathroom/WC) can support social life (communication/ motivation for getting to know each other and local culture...)

- + enough young people around the EVS volunteer, with the various background (not only coming on EVS project). This can be inspiration for EVS volunteer.
- common misunderstandings between EVS volunteer and other young people living in the hostel (usually because of cleaning common spaces). In this case, the role of project coordinator/ mentor is important (help with solving possible problems and with finding suitable solution)
- lack of privacy and space for EVS volunteers (need to share some space-kitchen, bathroom/ WC...)
- in case the EVS volunteer has accommodated alone in the hostel, he/ she can feel a bit isolated from other young people living there, who are usually students (they are living in „other reality“ than EVS volunteers).
- possible cultural misunderstandings between EVS volunteer and other students living in the hostel (for example in case students are coming from different cultures, have a different religion...). Again, the role of the project coordinator and mentor is important during solving problems if needed.

Living in family

- + great opportunity and space for an understanding of the culture of the country, including local specificities, habits, traditions, patterns, a way of thinking. At the same time, intensive communication with a local family can be good motivation for improving the language. Also, living in the family can help in a non-formal way with adaptation/ integration into local community
- + interesting experience as well challenge for EVS volunteer as well for the family
- + separate room for each EVS volunteer ensures relatively enough space/privacy for EVS volunteer, sharing other parts of flat ensures enough social life at the same time
- lack of privacy and space for EVS volunteers (especially in case the EVS volunteer comes with the expectation of getting independence from his/ her family during EVS project)



- common misunderstandings between EVS volunteer and local family, usually because of cleaning/ keeping household, a different way of the daily regime, different characters of persons – need to involve project coordinator/mentor in such a case (to help with solving possible problems)
- possible cultural misunderstandings between EVS volunteers (for example in the case of different religions...). Again, the role of the project coordinator and mentor is important during solving problems if needed. For prevention, we recommend to have a common meeting together with EVS coordinator and local family where an EVS volunteer will be accommodated before the arrival of the EVS volunteer and to discuss with them aims of EVS, rights and responsibilities of EVS volunteer and their expectations towards EVS volunteer.
- according to our experience, this type of accommodation does not seem to be enough comfortable for EVS volunteers- it causes usually riskier situations, misunderstandings and sometimes problems.

Mentioned possibilities of accommodation for EVS volunteers are usually more or less used, depending on country and reality of the receiving organisation. Of course, the receiving organisation can decide for other option of accommodation for EVS volunteers, according to needs of EVS actors and specificities of the environment. Based on our experience we may recommend a shared a flat with separate rooms for each of the volunteer, plus one or two local young people as flatmates. This may be more demanding for a coordinator to manage but is surely beneficial to volunteers in terms of socialisation. The proximity of the workplace and/or city/town centre is upon volunteer`s preferences and limited by budget, but is usually welcome.

Resources

Petr Kačena: «Accommodation of EVS volunteers» (sent personally); freelance trainer and EVS trainer, Czech Republic.

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