

# Language course

As many languages, you know, as many times you are a human being. This chapter can hardly start with other words, and this should also be the case of EVS projects. Knowledge of the native country language where the EVS project takes place should be a clear challenge to every volunteer who takes this experience as a comprehensive opportunity and expects to learn from it as much as possible. Only a few moments open arms of local residents as much as attempts of foreigners to speak your language. In the EVS project, it works double and multiple times more, since it is a long coexistence process between a volunteer and local community, and the more the volunteer is able to break the barriers of the local language, the more opportunities the project and the host country offer. The aim of a coordinator, a mentor and others who are taking care of foreign volunteers is not to force them to difficult linguistic forms, but motivate them and gradually uncover places and activities in EVS projects, which due to an improvement in their language skills become a great asset not only for themselves but also for the actual host organisation and the local community.

The approaches vary and it depends on the possibilities of the place or the region where the project is taking place, the financial situation of the organisation, the volunteer's individuality and **very often on the ability of choosing unconventional and creative way to learn the language**, to attract the volunteer and to save our project budget at the same time. In the case of long-term projects, it is often good to provide to volunteers intensive language course (e.g. two to three weeks) right from the beginning. Volunteers will learn a basic vocabulary in a few days. Later on, this will be followed by less intensive lessons. Therefore they can engage in the activities which could be quite limited to them from the very beginning without the knowledge of fundamentals.

The language courses which are set in a lower intensity since the beginning of the EVS projects are chosen more often. This can lead us to more risky factors, such as lack of motivation to learn a language that is too difficult for a volunteer, or a fact that a lesson or two per week is not enough. Volunteers sometimes choose to select another «universal» language, which is spoken in the organisation, but it does not give them the opportunity to integrate themselves into the local community, or get deeper understanding of the hosting country culture. There are volunteers who can impress by their ability and diligence to learn foreign language in a few months, but there are also those who are barely able to order in a restaurant in the local language after one year in the EVS. For volunteers who **will not feel like learning a foreign language and will struggle in the long term or reject this possibility** we should accept this reality and try to use their potential in other areas.

For the EVS project it is important to have a good quality language course from the beginning. Whether it is an individual, group or reciprocal way of teaching, it is often very important for the volunteers to attend language course especially in the first few weeks and months. This will help them to connect with the locals and understand the culture of the country from the very beginning. Time will show how it works and whether it is necessary to change anything. As it was mentioned earlier, the question of language course in EVS projects is often very individual. It depends on the conditions of the project, the type of activities, the target group, the volunteer's individuality and possibilities of the location to ensure proper language course.

There are projects where the volunteers focus on learning English with regards to an international team in the organisation and the choice of local language is offered as a second and individual alternative. The important thing is to agree with volunteers on the choice of language and the way of learning in advance, before they appear on the threshold of your organisation. It will give you enough space to ensure a high quality language course. Finally, take your time; ask a volunteer and a teacher how the lessons are progressing. That will often save you time and money. Anyway, in the case of international team in the organisation we recommend to combine universal working language (e.g. English, German) with conversation in local language. This will remind volunteers to keep in mind that local language opens the gate to local souls and better cultural understanding. Here the assistance of mentor can be very helpful.

Do not underestimate the benefits of the language course. The beginnings may be difficult, but the overall contribution for the entire project will be crucial.

Start on time with all the language course preparations. Find out what volunteers expect, whether they are satisfied with the course, or they need a slower pace etc.

With regards to what you find out and to project activities, consider whether you start with an intensive course or choose less regular classes from beginning.

Quality vs. finances. It is not often easy to find the appropriate balance. Start with intense language course and then slow down. Ask local students to become volunteer teachers for individual language courses. Combine group language courses and mix volunteers from several different organisations, maybe they will like it and make new friends. Be open to more possibilities, and if one does not work, feel free to move on to another.

There are creative and motivating online language courses, which are often in some form free. Share them with volunteers, but rather as a supplement teaching.

Motivate volunteers, but do not force them.

### **Our tips for on-line language courses**

[www.duolingo.com](http://www.duolingo.com)

[www.michelthomas.com](http://www.michelthomas.com)

<http://erasmusplusols.eu/online-language-courses/> – this course was design by EU as a supplementary language learning support. Do not consider it as substitution for main language course.

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*Boy at the airport on his arrival to EVS calls for taxi "Haló, taxi!" – Quite sure that the taxi would stop and hang him on. The taxi driver laughing at him answers "Hallo, Fußgänger!" (Hallo in German does not mean a call, but a greeting – Hello walker)*