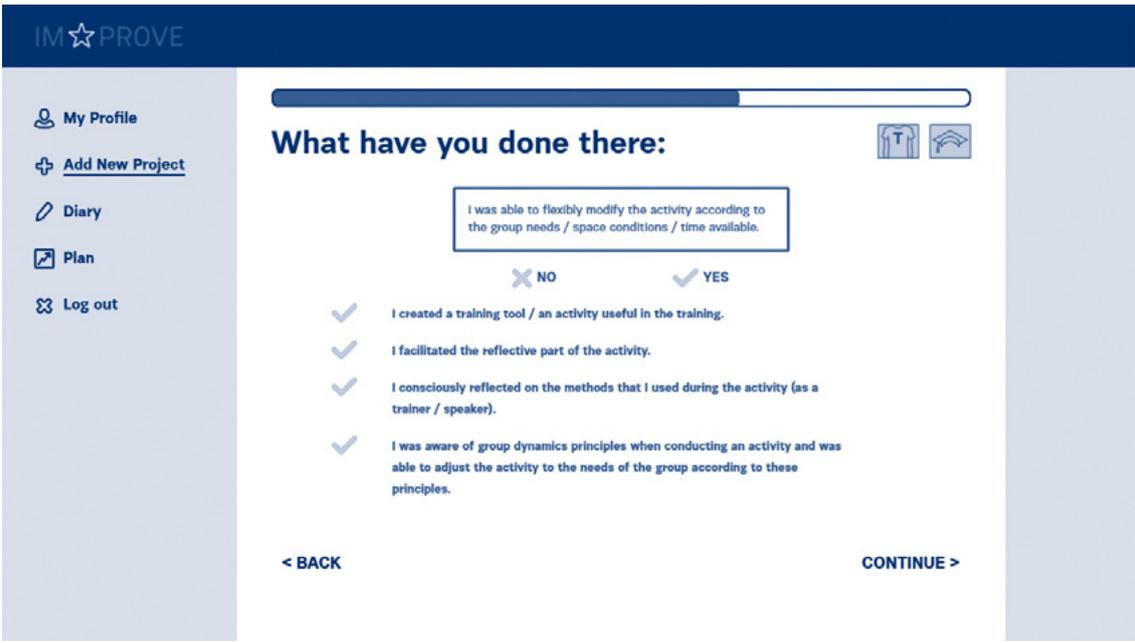


IM-PROVE – an easy way to reflect on learning in volunteering

During and after a volunteering project, coordinators and mentors should support the volunteers in reflecting on their learning experience. Which situations were instructive or inspiring? When did they learn something important for their personal or professional life? How did they change their behavior, habits or methods? Which competences did they develop and how? There are so many questions with unclear answers! There are also many ways to support volunteers in answering them – learning diaries, Youthpass, personal discussions, buddy support, reflection groups, various activities to support individual or peer reflection. However, none of these is easy or straightforward to use – learning diaries and Youthpass require awareness of what “competence” means and how to concisely describe lessons learned in a way that others (e.g. future employers) will understand and appreciate. Personal meetings and buddy systems are awesome, but insufficient to document the complexity of learning progress. And workshops require money and resources to organize. All this made us look for a way to simplify the process for both the volunteers and project organizers.



The screenshot displays the IM-PROVE app interface. On the left is a navigation menu with options: My Profile, Add New Project, Diary, Plan, and Log out. The main content area is titled "What have you done there:" and features a progress bar at the top. Below the title, there is a text box containing the statement: "I was able to flexibly modify the activity according to the group needs / space conditions / time available." Below this, there are two radio buttons labeled "NO" and "YES", with "YES" selected. A list of four activities follows, each with a checkmark indicating it has been completed:

- I created a training tool / an activity useful in the training.
- I facilitated the reflective part of the activity.
- I consciously reflected on the methods that I used during the activity (as a trainer / speaker).
- I was aware of group dynamics principles when conducting an activity and was able to adjust the activity to the needs of the group according to these principles.

At the bottom of the screen, there are two buttons: "< BACK" and "CONTINUE >".

We designed an app that works as a “translator” of volunteers’ experience into the language of competences (knowledge + skills + attitudes). The app called IM-PROVE contains more than 160 situations that volunteers typically experience in various volunteering projects (from short-term workcamps to long-term European Solidarity Corps projects). Users select the situations they have experienced, and the app tells them which competences they have developed as a result. As simple as that. It doesn’t require the user to know exactly what competence means, but it shows their progress and motivates them to learn more by volunteering.

Volunteers have been satisfied with the simple, easy to use and addictive app that offers a convenient way to record all their volunteering experience in a single place. This aspect is appreciated especially by long-term volunteers who need to reflect on their progress continuously, because at the end of a year of voluntary service, it’s impossible to remember what happened in the early days. They no longer need to remember as everything is recorded in IM-PROVE. Also, when people go through 4 short-term volunteering projects (e.g. workcamps, youth exchanges) in 4 years,

it tends to be hard to recall who they had been before they started their first project. The learning process is incremental, which makes it hard to realize the enormous progress volunteers usually make during such 4 years. IM-PROVE is an effective tool to remind them.

Try it out: you can find the full version at improve.inexsda.cz (INEX-SDA organization is the main creator of the app). After registering with just an e-mail address (no other personal data are collected), your profile is created, and you can start entering data into the app. All your data are treated as private, available only to yourself, unless you decide to share your public profile with someone else (otherwise it remains invisible). Besides the online version, you can also use the app on an Android or iOS smart phone.



Let's take a closer look at the capabilities of the IM-PROVE app. First and foremost, users can enter information about their projects and assign relevant situations to them. They can evaluate each situation (on a scale from one to five stars based on their satisfaction and on how they handled the situation) and enter a description, which facilitates detailed personal reflection on what happened and the lessons learned. The more situations with a high rating, the higher level of competences the user achieves.

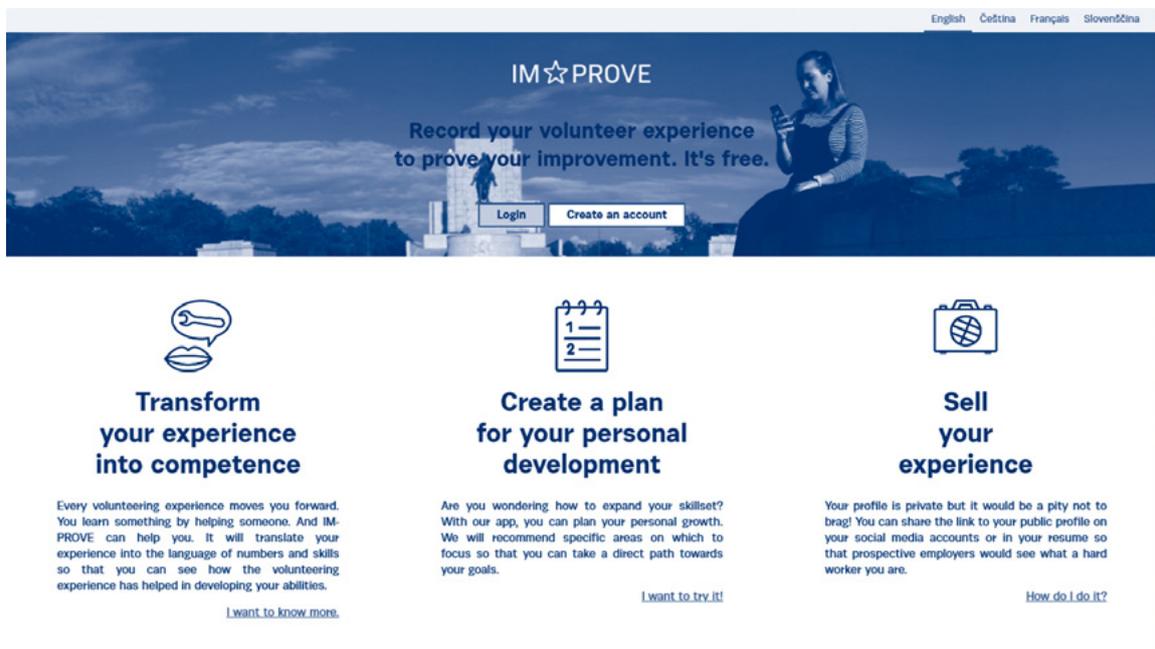
In the Profile, users can see the number of points they have collected and their progress in achieving a bronze, silver and gold medal in each of the 14 competences (flexibility, communication, promotion, work with information, teamwork, creativity and problem solving, independence, self-management, leadership, effectivity, intercultural communication, project management, computer literacy, foreign language). The purpose is to motivate the volunteers to aim higher and go through new volunteering experience.

Users can also activate their public profile where they let the "outside world" know about the competences they have developed during volunteering. The public profile can easily serve as an attachment to their LinkedIn profile or a CV when they apply for a job or for a university. To increase credibility, there is a feature called "badges" for each project – volunteers can ask the respective organizers to confirm the experience they claim to have. The confirmation will activate a badge on the profile. Clicking the badge will reveal details about the project. This third-party confirmation is meant to help those who view the profile to trust that the volunteers have actually developed the competences they declare.

In the Diary, users can revisit their entries, edit and add information. They can browse their volunteering history and reflect on any project again after several weeks, months or even years to see how it impacted them in the long run. And note down their thoughts and impressions. In the Diary, they can see their entire "volunteering career" in a single place. :-)

The Section Plan allows to set goals and work towards them. The feature helps volunteers plan their learning efforts and select appropriate volunteering activities.

With all these options, IM-PROVE might become a highly valuable tool for your volunteers to track their progress and show it to other people. It is available in English, Czech, Slovene and French.



The IM-PROVE app has been developed by expert teams and volunteers of INEX-SDA (Czech Republic, www.inexsda.cz) and Zavod Voluntariat (www.zavod-voluntariat.si) within the projects “Improve Yourself” and “Employability via Volunteering” supported by Erasmus +. The mobile app was created in collaboration with InventiLabs (<https://ilabs.cz/>) and badges confirmation is powered by badgecraft (www.badgecraft.eu).

Good luck :-)

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