

# ESC Galaxy

Guidebook for ESC coordinators

EVS Galaxy 2020 update

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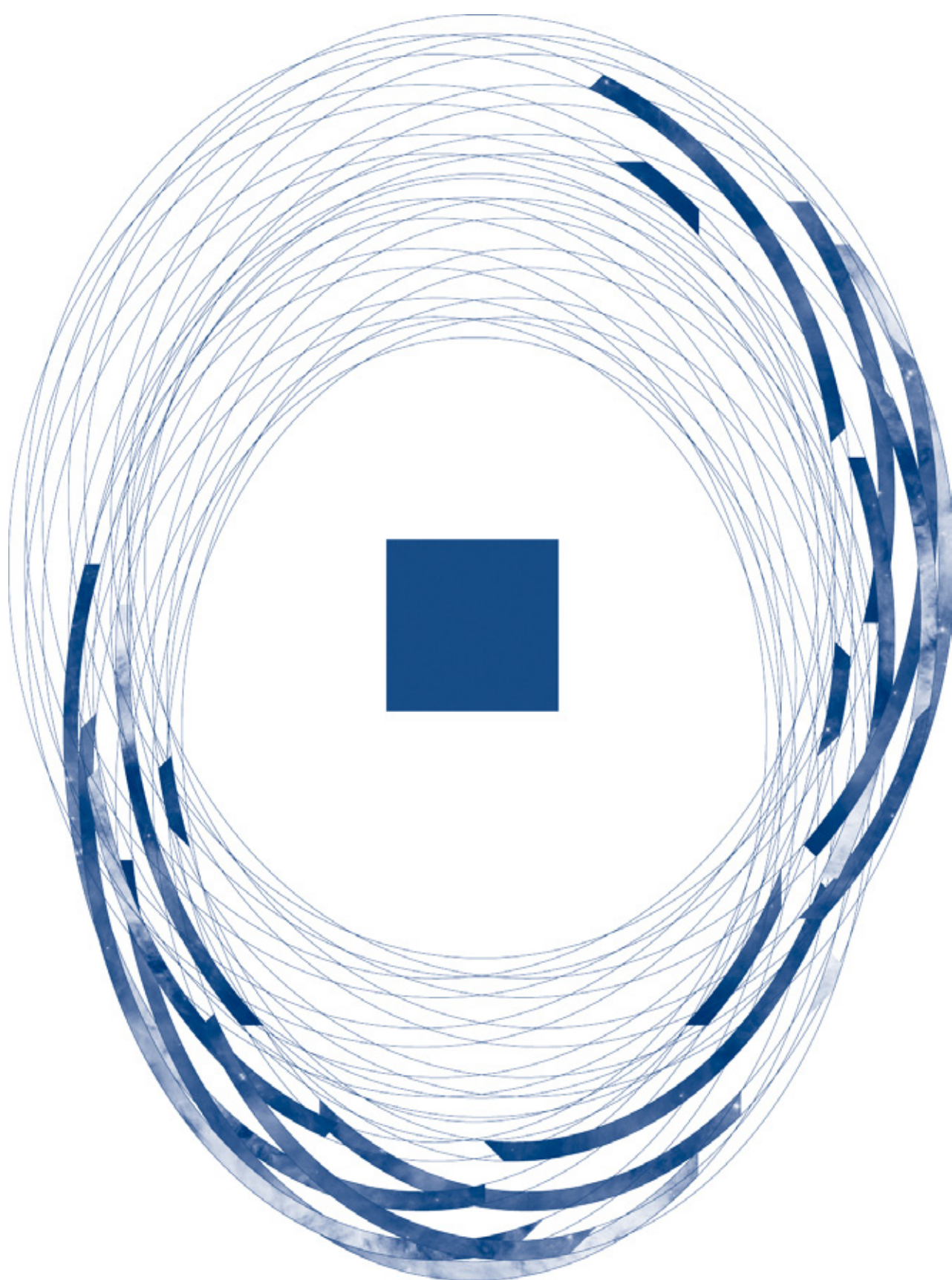
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## **Acknowledgement**

**We would like to  
thank to all authors,  
who were willing to  
share their experience  
with EVS projects  
and contributed  
actively to the content  
of this brochure.**

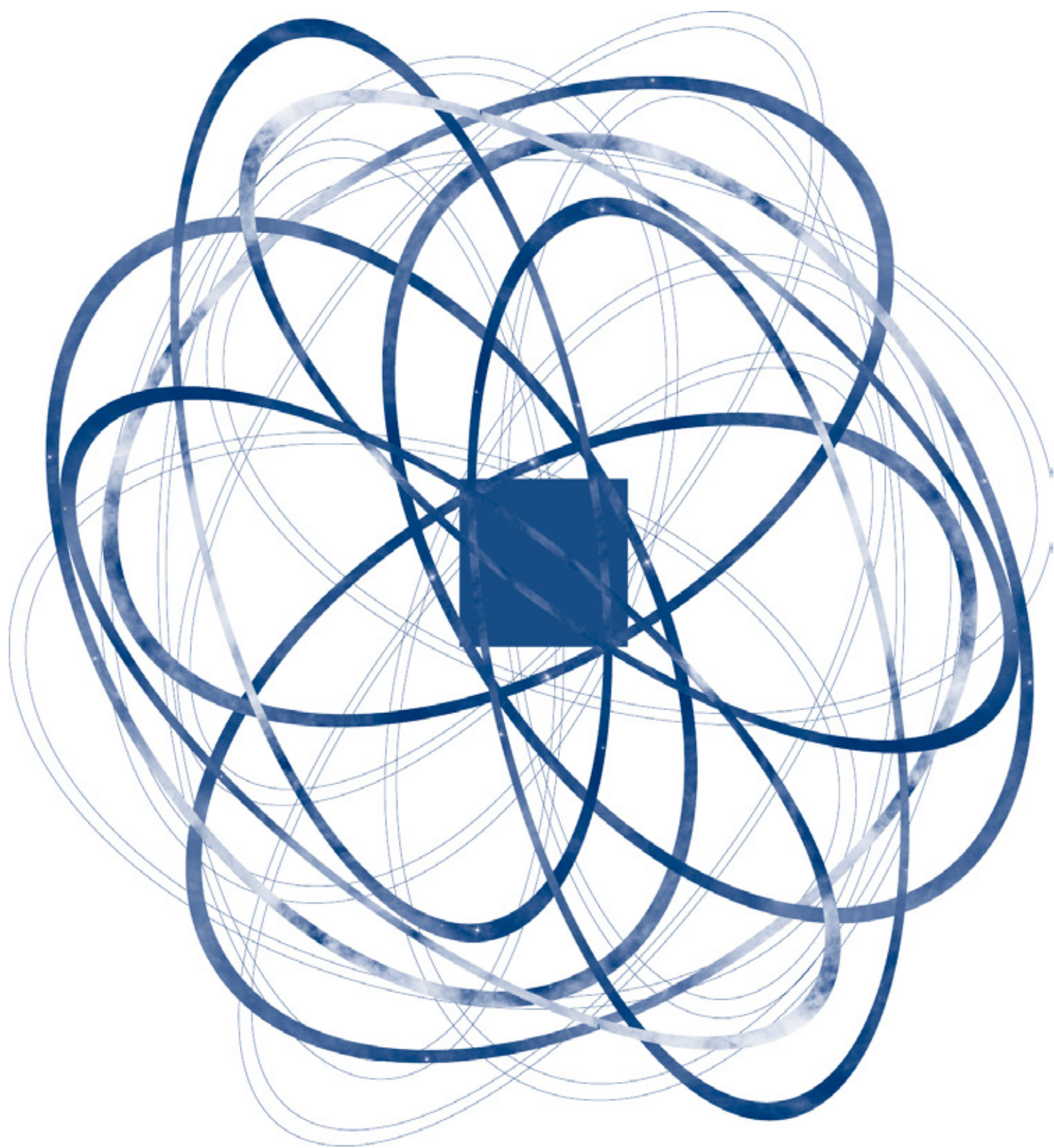
**Many thanks  
to all of you!**





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# Introduction

After almost three years, we are revisiting “EVS Galaxy”, an on-line guide for EVS coordinators of volunteering projects, which was originally developed as an outcome of two International Training Courses (“EVS in Our Hands” in 2015, Prague, CZ; “EVS Gathering” in 2016, Morávka, CZ) with the aim to share experience, good practices, tools and methodologies for international volunteering projects. The brochure is designed primarily for organisations that have been involved in EVS and have recently started or intend to start new volunteering projects within the European Solidarity Corps programme (acting as supporting and/or hosting organisations). It should be useful mainly for coordinators of volunteering projects who are eager to explore new inspirations and motivations in order to improve the quality of their work. At the same time, the brochure intends to provide practical tools for mentors of volunteers and anyone else who may be directly or indirectly involved in volunteering projects.

In December 2016, the European Commission decided to launch a new youth programme, the “European Solidarity Corps”, supporting volunteering, local youth initiatives, jobs and traineeships. The programme has specific aims, objectives, rules and conditions and builds on the previous EVS Programme and the experience collected over its 20 years of existence. That is why there are many similarities but also many innovations. The team, aware of potential issues and the need for clarification and sharing of the latest experience, has committed to supporting coordinators in this transition phase from the previous EVS to the new programme by implementing the 3rd Edition of the International Training Course for EVS/ ESC coordinators – “ESCalator – new levels of European volunteering”. Besides supporting coordinators in their role, providing examples of good practice in supporting the learning process of volunteers and other soft skills of the coordinators, we also foster networking – strengthening of cooperation between EU members, non EU participating countries and Western Balkans countries. We have expanded the existing brochure for EVS-ESC coordinators with new topics and experience of various ESC coordinators from different countries in response to the new European Solidarity Corps programme and its specific topics. At the same time, we present new tools for ESC coordinators which have been developed by different organisations across Europe over the past few years. The expanded brochure covers various recent topics and new tools related to the work of ESC coordinators, which may inspire and foster higher quality in volunteering, jobs and traineeships projects. Besides the vast amount of information collected in the previous EVS Galaxy Edition of 2017, we have included experience with international volunteering from additional countries (Turkey, Montenegro, Kosovo...) and we are also introducing new tools that may help improve effectiveness of working with international volunteers (I-prepare platform to support volunteers before they leave, Im-prove Application, Organisational Learning etc.).

We would like to thank all the authors hailing from different countries and backgrounds for their willingness to share their experience with the previous EVS and recent European Solidarity Corps projects, good practice and tools used in the daily work with volunteers as well as for their time and effort they put in their articles. We also appreciate the wide range of authors – from ESCalator participants to seasoned EVS – ESC coordinators, accreditors and Quality Label Experts, to trainers and mentors who tend to the volunteers. All of them bring in different types of experience and expertise in volunteering within the frame of the European Solidarity Corps.

We hope that you will find the latest supportive tools and methodological approaches to voluntary work as well as the experience with ESC voluntary projects from different countries across Europe helpful and inspiring in the transition phase to the European Solidarity Corps programme. We also believe that this brochure will motivate ESC coordinators to pursue further professional development and will contribute to improving the quality of volunteering projects in the frame of the European Solidarity Corps programme.

*On behalf of the ESCalator team*  
**Magda Wagenknechtová Svobodová**



# About the project

## ESCalator – new levels of European volunteering

10.–16. 9. 2019

Trkmanka ecocentre, Velké Pavlovice (Czechia)

## Organised by

ANEV z.s. – Association of Non-formal Education z.s., Czech Republic

## Partner organisations

Verein Generationen und Gesellschaft (Austria)

Klub za osnaživanje mladih 018 (Serbia)

Qendra Per Progres Rinor (Albania )

Asocijacija za demokratski prosperitet – ZID (Montenegro)

Aventura Marao Clube (Portugal)

Xena – Centro Scambi e Dinamiche Interculturali (Italy)

Mladinski center BIT (Slovenia)

Fundacja Europejski Instytut Outsourcingu (Poland)

Initiative Christen für Europa e.V. (Germany)

Qendra për Zhvillim Ekonomik dhe Social (Kosovo)

Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency – SPPMD (North Macedonia)

Eğitim Programları ve Evrensel ve Kültürel Aktiviteler Derneği (Turkey)

## About the course

Training course with networking and study visit elements for ESC coordinators from the EU and Western Balkan/SEE. The main aim was to increase the quality of ESC projects through personal development of coordinators and building long term partnerships of organisations.

## Main content elements

ESC quality related themes

Excursions to different types of ESC projects

Learning and service in ESC projects

Roles, needs and competencies of ESC actors

Space for personal reflection and feedback

Networking and partnership building sessions

Intercultural experience – local wine harvest festival

## Team

### Trainers

Helena Kosková, Magda Wagenknechtová Svobodová, Jan Látal, Petre Mrkev

### Support

Dan Janauer, Lenka Polcerová

## More about the project

### Articles

<https://breclavsky.denik.cz/ctenar-reporter/v-trkmance-se-skolili-dobrovolnici-z-cele-evropy-20191013.html>

### Photos

Jan Látal: <https://bit.ly/ESCalator-album>



# Solidarity as an important aspect of the European Solidarity Corps Programme

In December 2016, the European Commission launched a new EU youth programme: the European Solidarity Corps.

The programme focuses on solidarity as one of the core European values. Involvement of young people and organisations in solidarity activities, such as volunteering, local projects, jobs and traineeships and their active participation in society and local communities as well as willingness to help vulnerable people, significantly strengthen solidarity, open-minded attitudes, tolerance, democracy and citizenship in Europe. At the same time, one of the objectives of the new programme is to respond to new social challenges, including the need for social inclusion of young people in the majority society and the development of long-term cooperation among youth organisations across Europe.

What does “solidarity” mean in terms of European Solidarity Corps, though? Is there a common notion of solidarity across Europe? How to understand this aspect in our daily life and in the activities of organisations that work with young people? How to express “solidarity” in everyday situations? What are the benefits and limitations of solidarity? How to weave solidarity into the fabric of European Solidarity Corps projects?

Solidarity is the core idea behind the European Solidarity Corps Programme. Yet, there is a strong need for a better understanding of the concept of solidarity and its meaning in the context of youth work in Europe. The European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre in Vienna (Austria) responded to this need and commissioned a study to come up with a common narrative on the concept of solidarity from the perspective of research, practice, policy, and young people.

The study “4 thoughts for Solidarity” has clearly shown that many factors influence the perception of solidarity in our society. Different backgrounds create different perspectives. Nonetheless, the study describes 4 fundamental concepts that all target groups involved in the study agreed on: these **4 cornerstones** form the basis of a common understanding of solidarity:

- Human Rights;
- Active Citizenship;
- Inclusion;
- Empathy.

The ‘4 cornerstones’ are supported by **7 supporting concepts**, which were also highlighted to a lesser extent by people from the four participating groups. Nonetheless, they influence the broader perspective of a common understanding of solidarity in Europe:

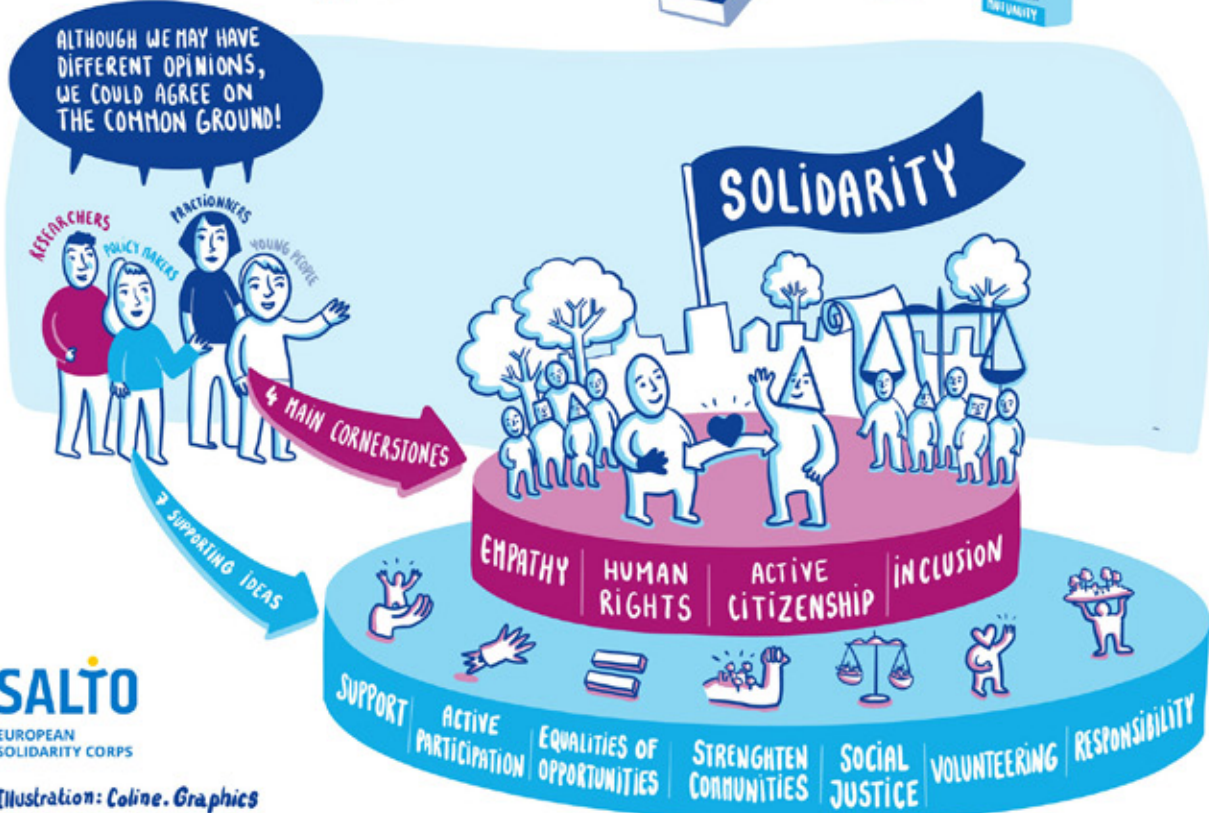
- Social justice;
- Equality of opportunity;
- Support;
- Strengthening of communities;
- Active participation;
- Volunteering;
- Responsibility.

We should also note that the differences in the perception of the concept of solidarity also reflects each respondent’s reality. The study therefore aims to encourage dialogue and stimulate further discussion.

As you can see in [this picture](#), many other values and concepts were discussed throughout the process, some being more controversial than others.



# WHAT IS SOLIDARITY?





For more information about the process and outcomes of the research, please refer to [this infographic](#). If you wish to read the full report, you can access it at <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/>

The common narrative on solidarity should be helpful for a better understanding of what solidarity means in the context of the European Solidarity Corps programme. It brings further inspiration for organisations that are involved in the European Solidarity Corps projects and hold the Quality Label.

## Resources

Infographic with outcomes of both research initiatives: [Coline.Graphics](#), European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre, Vienna, 2019.

European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/>

European Solidarity Corps Guide 2020

[https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide_2020_en.pdf)

Publication „Solidarity in Europe“, authors: Philipp Genschel and Anton Hemerijck. European University Institute, 2018

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/db3d580c-b248-11e8-99ee-01aa75ed71a1>

4Thoughts for solidarity – “a research, a study, a thinking exercise, a thought-provoking resource”

<https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4062/4TDS%20Study%2020200501.pdf>

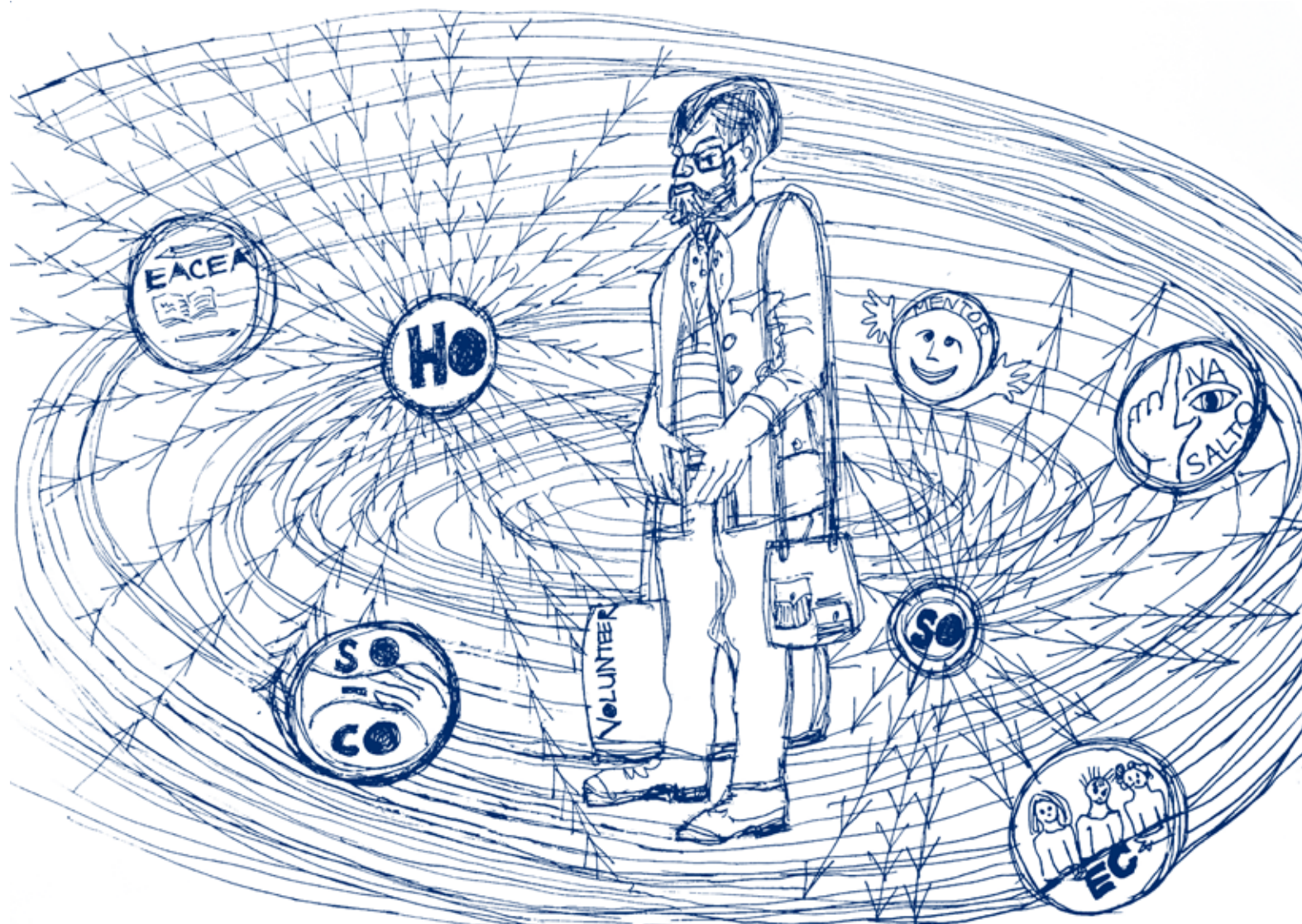
***Magda Wagenknechtová Svobodová,***  
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*long-term experience with topic of EVS/ESC*  
*and with EVS accreditations/ESC Quality Label, Czech Republic*

Many thanks to Mrs. Christine Keplinger (European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre, Austria)  
for sharing background and outcomes of this research in the study “4thoughts for Solidarity”  
(sent personally).

# European Solidarity Corps Galaxy

As you can see in the picture bellow, European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteers enjoy systematic support from various actors (supporting organisations, hosting organisations, mentors, National Agencies, SALTO Resource Centres, EACEA, European Commission...) during all phases of an ESC project. Such support helps ESC volunteers successfully participate in their projects and has proved to be beneficial whenever there is a need to clarify misunderstandings or resolve conflict situations. The diagram also shows a possible problem resolution procedure involving various ESC actors.

In the preparatory phase, it is usually the supporting organisation (SO) that is in direct personal contact with the ESC volunteer (clarification of the volunteer's motivation to take part in an ESC project, his or her expectations, help with contacting foreign receiving organisations, choosing the right ESC project...). Later, before departure for the ESC project, the supporting organisation helps the volunteer with preparations (sharing ESC project content / ensuring pre-departure training support, preparing for life in a different culture, assistance with arranging travel to the hosting organisation...) and with practicalities (insurance, visa, if required, etc.).



During the ESC activity, the ESC volunteer is supported primarily by the hosting organisation (HO) and a mentor (M). The hosting organisation provides support to ESC volunteers mainly in the following areas: involvement of the volunteer in the planned activities/work, education, integration in the local community and in the host culture (in collaboration with the mentor), practicalities like language support, finding appropriate boarding, etc. The mentor supports ESC volunteers mainly in personal and social life, helps with the adaptation process in the hosting country, with his or her integration in the local community, with reflecting on the learning process including intercultural aspects of the ESC experience, and provides support to the volunteer in conflict/crisis situations. There are usually several people around ESC volunteers who provide hands-on support. The key and closest people from the hosting organisation typically include the mentor and an ESC coordinator (task-related support, main contact, supervisor... someone who is responsible for planning tasks/flow of ESC projects). At the same time, these people can usually effectively help resolve various issues, misunderstandings or possible conflict situations the ESC volunteer may run into in the host country. Open and clear communication and sharing of impressions and feelings of the ESC volunteer as well as building trust between the volunteer, mentor and staff of the hosting organisation have proved to lower the risk of conflicts significantly.

A separate “supporting organisation in the coordination role” is involved in some ESC projects. In such cases, this organisation provides methodological support throughout the ESC process in the local hosting organisation(s), including provision of continuous support to ESC volunteers. The “supporting organisation in the coordination role” and the local hosting organisation(s) usually make an agreement on the division of tasks, leadership of the ESC project, support and practicalities. It is highly recommended to share such agreement on the roles of these organisations with the ESC volunteers before or immediately upon their arrival to the hosting organisation. This can also help prevent possible misunderstandings and problems in ESC projects.

Besides a close contact with the mentor and the hosting organisation, the ESC volunteer as well as the hosting organisation should be in regular contact with the supporting organisation during the ESC project in the host country. The supporting organisation plays an important role in solving serious problems or conflict situations that may arise and can intervene if the ESC volunteer, mentor and hosting organisation are unable to find a solution acceptable for all parties involved.

Should very serious problems occur, when the ESC volunteer, mentor, hosting organisation, “supporting organisation in coordinating role” (if involved in the project) and the supporting organisation are not able to find an acceptable solution or provide necessary support to the ESC volunteer, it is possible to contact national and European authorities – the National Agency (NA of the host country or the sending country), SALTO Resource Centres, Executive Agency (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency), or representatives of the European Commission (EC). Those organizations can help by analysing the case and providing feedback and official recommendations to resolve the situation.

The supporting organisation continues to play a very important role even after the ESC volunteer returns home. The organisation is expected to evaluate the ESC project with the ex-volunteer, provide support with his or her re-integration process and to motivate him or her to make use of the ESC experience. Besides the possibility to attend an annual European Solidarity Corps evaluation event (held by sending NAs or SALTO centres), it is usually beneficial for both the ESC volunteer and the supporting organisation if the supporting organisation offers involvement in its various activities or supports the ex-ESC volunteer in his or her own follow-up activity.

With this systematic approach, the European Solidarity Corps programme represents a unique, safe opportunity for young people to volunteer in a foreign country, with a strong educational process on the part of ESC volunteers as well as the hosting organisations and local communities, including intercultural learning within a safe project environment.

## Resources

European Solidarity Corps Guide 2020

[https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide_2020_en.pdf)

Hopscotch to Quality in EVS 2.0 (A practical Handbook for enhancing quality in European Voluntary Service)

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/hopscotch/hopscotch2.0/>

European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/>

## Abbreviations

SO – supporting organisation

HO – hosting organisation

SO-CO – supporting organisation in the coordination role

M – mentor

SO-NA – National Agency in sending country

HO-NA – National Agency in hosting country

SALTO RC – Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth Resource Centres

EACEA – Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (Executive Agency)

EC – European Commission

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long-term experience with topic of EVS/ESC  
and with EVS accreditations/ESC Quality Label, Czech Republic*



# Traineeships and Jobs in the European Solidarity Corps programme

Besides well-known international volunteering, which was long supported by previous EU programmes (Youth, Youth in Action, Erasmus+), European Solidarity Corps programme now offers a new type of activities, “Traineeships and Jobs”.

These activities expand the options for young people to engage in international volunteering and offer an opportunity to acquire new skills, competencies and work experience on both the national and international level. Such experience will improve their employability and position on the labour market and will provide a unique opportunity for personal as well as professional growth.

Participating organizations from EU member states involved in the programme will receive support in finding and integrating trainees from their home country and other EU member states, while benefiting from new motivation, new insights and innovative approaches brought in by the young person involved. If they choose to hire someone from another country, they will also have a chance to try working with an international team and develop communication skills. At the same time, involvement of young people in traineeships and jobs is likely to raise various social challenges and should observe the principle of solidarity (regardless of the sector/topic/type of activity).

## Traineeships

This type of activity represents a full-time job (40 hours per week) for 2 to 6 months with a possible extension to up to 12 months. The young trainee should receive compensation under applicable laws of the host country. The traineeship has strong teaching and training elements, helps the trainee to acquire relevant experience for personal, educational, social and professional growth and develop his or her competences in the field of active citizenship. A traineeship should never substitute a regular job and should be clearly separated from volunteering.

The project can take place in the trainee’s home country, at the national level. Such so-called “in-country” projects are intended primarily for young people with fewer opportunities, with the aim to encourage their active participation and motivate them to be active in a familiar environment, society and culture. Such EU-backed projects offer participation even in countries without their own national schemes.



Traineeship projects at the international level taking place in other EU countries are called “cross-border” projects. If an organization wants to send or receive trainees within the home country (“in-country” projects), it is necessary to clearly and comprehensively describe the European added value, the European dimension and the aspect of solidarity in the project idea (in the Quality Label form and subsequently in the Application form). Similarly, it is necessary to justify the benefits of the project for the existing national schemes that support traineeships and volunteering (if existent). For “cross-border” traineeships, the vision of the organization must be clearly and comprehensively associated with the principle of solidarity. This must be clearly explained in both the Quality Label application and in a grant application within a specified deadline.

It is also necessary to specify the educational level of all actors involved in the planned activities, with a clear link to the principle of non-formal education (knowledge of the concept of non-formal education and how non-formal education will be implemented in the activities, methodology, and approach to trainees and the organization’s team; specific approach at the local and regional level...).

## Jobs

The European Solidarity Corps programme also offers young people an opportunity to engage in long-term “jobs”. This type of activity lasts at least 3 months and is open to all young people who reside in the EU, including those with fewer opportunities. If necessary or desirable, this type of activity can last longer than 12 months (with no upper limit). However, the European Solidarity Corps programme will provide support only for 12 months. It is full-time work experience, fully paid according to labour laws and regulations applicable in the hosting country, with strong and well-planned teaching and training elements. An important aspect of the activity is gaining new experience, competencies and background in various fields according to the needs and interests of the young people, which will support their professional growth. Such a project can take place “in-country” (if young people with fewer opportunities are involved) or in other EU countries. The hosting organization is responsible for arranging for an employment contract and appropriate remuneration for the young person engaged in a “jobs” project.



## Ensuring support in Traineeships and Jobs

Young people going to participate in Traineeships and Jobs, like volunteers of the Solidarity Corps, need to receive continuous support in education, personal and professional development, and practicalities throughout the project. Specifically, participants should take part in training courses organized by the National Agencies and SALTOs Regional Centres (“On-Arrival” and “Mid-Term”), attend the “Annual Meeting” after returning home and receive further educational support. In particular, traineeships are expected to support trainees in developing expertise, skills and competences (e.g. by participation in a training course, seminar, long-term education in

a given field/ topic) arranged for by the hosting organisation. One of the key objectives of traineeship is to provide an opportunity to learn as much as possible – both personally and professionally – in a relatively short time span. While bringing their own experience, new ideas, innovative approaches and inspiration to the host organization, they take away new practices, inspirations, ideas, knowledge and skills when they return to their home country. At the same time, the host organization should ensure appropriate ongoing support in the work environment (job supervision, mentoring) and help the Traineeships and Jobs program participants integrate into the culture and local community (in particular, as regards deeper understanding of the culture and language of the country). Last but not least, the host organization is expected to handle the logistics of the project activity and support the trainee with practical arrangements (e.g. a residence permit, board and lodging, etc.).

## Traineeships and Jobs funding

The European Solidarity Corps programme will finance the following: travel costs, organizational support (participant support, project management costs), relocation allowance for participants, language support, inclusion support, insurance, additional costs (if applicable and needed). In order to be able to participate in these projects, the applicant organization must have an appropriate “Quality Label for Traineeships or Jobs” accreditation from the European Solidarity Corps programme. If an organisation already accredited for volunteering in the frame of European Solidarity Corps wishes to start offering Jobs and/or Traineeships to young people, it has to extend its accreditation to include these activities (through National Agencies/ SALTOs Resource Centres).

Young people express their willingness and interest to participate in a volunteer, trainee or job activity by registering in the [European Youth Portal](#), where registered organizations select suitable candidates for their activities and projects.

## Selection of candidates for Traineeships and Jobs

The organization is required to be open to all potential candidates, including those with fewer opportunities, and ensure transparency of the selection process (based on a clearly defined strategy for choosing suitable participants and an open internal and external communication about the procedure, selection criteria and the results including explanation of rejections). As opposed to Volunteering where the criteria must be open without any preference regarding language skills and/or professional or other expertise, the rules for Traineeships and Jobs allow to consider language proficiency, professional background and other skills and experience of potential candidates in the selection process.

When deciding on the type of activity to offer (Volunteering, Job or Traineeship), an organization needs to carefully consider the different requirements and characteristics:

- level of initial knowledge / skills / competencies,
- scope of responsibility and independence,
- level of knowledge / skills / competencies necessary to carry out the duties,
- types of contracts / financing mechanism,
- duration of activities (Traineeships: 2–6 months vs. Jobs: 3–12 months covered by the European Solidarity Corps programme vs. volunteering “LT-Term” 2–12 months, ST-Term for young people with fewer opportunities or groups of young people 2 weeks to 2 months).

We believe that organizations from across the EU will find the new perspectives and innovative methods that these new types of activities offer as attractive and inspiring.

## Resources

European Solidarity Corps Guide 2020

[https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide_2020_en.pdf)

European Solidarity Corps webpage of the Czech National Agency (DZS)

<https://www.dzs.cz/cz/evropsky-sbor-solidarity/staze-a-pracovni-mista/>

European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/>

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# European Solidarity Corps Programme – new opportunities and challenges for organizations in Western Balkans

The potential for implementation of ESC projects in South Eastern Europe (or the Western Balkans, as the region has been called lately) is determined by the number of accredited organizations in each country. The table below compares the current situation (spring 2020) with the same period three years ago:

Country	Number of accredited organizations (2017)	Number of accredited organizations (2020)
AL	19	16
BA	18	27
ME	3	5
RS	39	36
XK <sup>1</sup>	11	15
HR	63	74
MK	41	59

The table shows that there have not been any major changes in the number of organizations that held a valid Quality Label at the beginning of the last year of the ongoing Programme (except for Bosnia and Herzegovina which has seen a significant increase of exactly 50 percent). However, it is not apparent if they still keep their active accreditation from the EVS Programme or have been granted a new Quality Label from the ESC Programme. The transition of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) as an integral part of Erasmus+ to a separate programme led to some challenges for this study. EVS projects were called Erasmus+ Volunteering projects for a transitional period after the launch of the European Solidarity Corps at the end of 2016, until it became an independent programme in 2018. During this period, the beneficiaries in the Western Balkans region were often confused about the name of the programme to refer to.

In order to address the opportunities and challenges of these organizations, I would initially like to refer to the findings and recommendations of a recent study compiled by the SALTO SEE Resource Center in Ljubljana, Slovenia – *“IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME IN THE PROGRAMME’S PARTNER COUNTRIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS”*<sup>2</sup> which aims to serve as a basis for further development of cooperation with Western Balkan partner countries within the new generation of EU youth programmes, including the European Solidarity Corps Programme. It is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including desk research, a survey and focus groups. The collected data used in the study refer only

<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/erasmus-study/>

to the period until 2018 (and therefore only to Erasmus+), but the survey respondents and participants in the focus groups refer to their experience with and expectations of both programmes.

In the Western Balkan partner countries, around 70% of the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme are youth organisations and NGOs working predominantly with young people. More than a half of them are small organisations or organisations working only with volunteers, and the vast majority of them is to a small or very small extent (under 25%) dependent on the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme.

One of the main findings of the study related to volunteering projects (EVS/ESC) is that these projects have been less demanded by organisations in the Western Balkan partner countries. The main reasons for the comparatively low demand seem to stem from a generally rather low interest and limited capacity of local organizations to host or send volunteers. The focus groups confirmed these challenges, in particular the lack of financial and human resources of many organisations needed for a long-term engagement, while they also highlighted the issue of the long timeframe between accreditation/Quality Label and the actual project implementation. As regards benefits of the programmes, volunteer exchange projects received the lowest scores in the survey. However, organisations run primarily by volunteers still mentioned them as relevant and beneficial. Besides, projects of this type tend to be significantly more successful in receiving grants than others. Accessibility of funding is therefore not perceived as a main obstacle by the beneficiaries.

The conclusion of the study indicates that the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme has become more accessible over the years. However, this does not apply to all types of organisations equally. In fact, the programmes have become increasingly more accessible for organisations with greater resources than for smaller organizations with lesser capacities, which constitute the majority of beneficiaries. To counter this trend, in addition to increasing the success rate of applications, it is highly recommended to simplify the procedures and requirements related to project applications and implementation, and, in particular for the European Solidarity Corps to simplify and shorten the procedures and the timeframe between the Quality Label application and the actual project implementation.

In order to improve the accessibility of the EU youth programmes (including the ESC Programme) for organisations in Western Balkan partner countries, it is recommended to facilitate more networking & partnership-building activities at two levels:

- for organisations at the national and regional (Western Balkan) level, in order to facilitate networking and peer-learning, and
- for organisations involved in the Programme and Western Balkan partner countries to overcome the experienced difficulties in finding suitable partners, especially for Western Balkan organisations that do not belong to international networks.

Furthermore, it would be desirable to introduce specific support measures that would be available within the European Solidarity Corps to support organisations that are already (or are planning to become) active and, most importantly, to reach out to potential new beneficiaries.

There is an environment where youth organizations and the organizations which target young people manage to address only a very small number of young people. Quite often, those are young people who are already involved in non-formal education and volunteering. Unfortunately, those whom the programme would benefit the most often remain without appropriate access to information about the opportunities, as the organizations lack the necessary resources and/or skills to engage them effectively. In addition, the influence of current technological developments and the use of internet, smart phones and social media create new types of role models among young people, while an increasing number of young people become egoistic and interested primarily in the personal profit. On top of this, the programme priorities are changing too frequently because of the evolving problems and needs of the European society. However, organizations find it difficult to respond to these priorities appropriately. They need to change the themes and methodology of their work with young people accordingly

in order to be eligible for funding. Unfortunately, allocating resources to implement the changes affects the quality of projects, which fail to meet real expectations of the young people, support them in their needs, and drive their interest in getting involved.

From my personal experience and observations and according to the opinion of my colleagues from the WB region, organisations face multiple challenges:

There is only one application round for the Balkan window with capped funds, which limits the number of approved projects and organizations that can implement a project. As a result, many organizations are disappointed. The next application round takes place the following year. Organizations are hardly motivated to work on preparations of projects that may be implemented in a year and a half.

The European Commission has introduced a concept of reduced bureaucracy in the application process together with an intention to grant greater amounts of money to the projects. This directly decreases the number of projects and indirectly prioritizes bigger and more experienced organizations, so smaller youth organisations have yet smaller chances to receive support.

The program priorities are often created top-down to address global issues, but are not necessarily based on the real needs of local communities and local NGOs. For example, there is a priority to fight growing unemployment and to improve employability of young people. However, many young people who participate in the program do not mention this as the main motivation for their involvement.

Local, grassroots organizations lack resources, experience, connections and opportunities to be able to plan their specific involvement in the program.

***Petre Mrkev,***

*Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency – SPPMD,  
ESC accreditor and trainer, long-term experience with the topic of EVS  
and the European Solidarity Corps, N. Macedonia*

# iPrepare:

## Online preparation for international volunteering

A support tool for supporting organizations and outgoing volunteers

The Training and Evaluation Cycle including the General Online Training established by the European Solidarity Corps put a great emphasis on supporting engagement in quality solidarity activities and contribute to the development of the ESC community. The participating organizations are responsible for providing proper and comprehensive support during all stages of the project. This includes a mandatory **pre-departure training** (only for cross-border activities) which should be organized by the supporting organization at least a month before departure. It has to be tailored to the individual needs of the participant and the specifics of the project. It should include at least information on:

- the content of the [Info-Kit](#) to be provided to the volunteer and the ESC framework
- the roles involved in the project (volunteer, HO, SO, mentor, tutor, NA, etc.)
- personal goals, motivations, expectations and fears
- intercultural learning competence
- conflict prevention and crisis management
- practicalities on visa (if required), health insurance, pocket money, working hours, etc.
- recognition of individual learning outcomes and Youthpass.

Besides a shift of the role from a sending organization within European Voluntary Service to an ESC “**supporting**” role, another innovation brought by the Programme is the [ESC Portal](#), which now allows a direct connection between the host organization and potential candidates. The implementation of this supporting tool has been very successful, as more than 175,000 young people have enrolled in the portal (data as of October 2019) and are now able to apply for projects, even if not previously in contact with a supporting organization. On one hand, this allows young people to become even more aware of their own educational, professional and personal development, fostering their entrepreneurship and personal branding from the very beginning. On the other hand, the possible lack of a proper preparation path, which includes a framework introduction and motivational paths promoted by sending organizations even before the application procedure, may result in a more challenging selection and preparation procedure afterwards.

Also, in some cases, selection from the portal may result in two possible scenarios:


- the selected volunteer indicates a supporting organization he or she is in contact with, which the applicant may not have worked with before, leading to new possible fruitful partnerships, but also potential risks of difficult cooperation;
- if the project partnership is planned already, the volunteer may be prepared by an organization he or she is not familiar with and which can be far away, leading to multiple online/virtual meetings rather than face to face pre-departure training.

Besides these possible scenarios, the supporting organizations have always taken a significantly different approach to the delicate process of pre-departure training, impacting the level of preparation of volunteers (see the [research report](#) drawn up by the iPrepare team on this issue). These aspects drove the need for a **unified specific pre-departure**





**support tool** which would complement – but not substitute – offline preparation offered by supporting organizations and improve the quality of volunteering projects. For this reason, the iPrepare team of experts developed an online platform which could combine typical e-learning elements with non-formal education methods; moreover, the team aimed to offer a tool that could be used by the users for self-study but that could also stimulate them to seek further offline preparation and support for their volunteering experience abroad from participating organizations.



The iPrepare tool has been designed to help the **pre-departure preparation of volunteers** leaving for long-term international projects (especially EVS/E+/E<sup>SC</sup> volunteers).

Using iPrepare you can get information, engage in interactive tasks and reflect about issues that are relevant for a future volunteer.

**iPrepare** is an interactive online platform allowing volunteers to engage in an online learning process while ensuring that they receive all the necessary information and have an opportunity to reflect on relevant issues prior to their departure. It also provides a wide range of content for the supporting organizations to aid the volunteers' learning process and to organize their preparation, making their work more effective and cost-efficient. The tool is freely accessible online to all volunteers and supporting organizations and is available both on PCs and mobile devices. It includes many **different types of interactive activities** (such as tests, quizzes, videos, drag&drop,

Try to match the contents of the Modules to their titles!

Content themes	What is the framework?
the framework and context of my volunteering project, info on the ESC programme	Drop here...
motivations, expectations, emotions about going abroad for the project	What is my motivation?
reflecting on meeting a new culture, intercultural learning, identity, stereotypes, culture shock and adaptation	Drop here...
practical advice from ex-volunteers	How to be useful?
experimenting with conflicts and tips about how to handle them	Drop here...
the role of the organisations, coordinator, mentor, supervisor and tips for my personal well-being	What can I learn?
the service aspect of my project, the concept of volunteering, connection to the local community	Drop here...
possible learnings at each phase of my project, the Hero's journey, non-formal learning, Youthpass	Who can support me?
a lot of questions to discover my hosting place and to elaborate project specific info	Drop here...
	How to deal with conflicts?
	Drop here...
	Where will I go?
	Drop here...



etc.), catering to different learning needs and styles. It offers a set of topics organized in nine modules which include the previously mentioned minimum general information indicated by the ESC Training and Evaluation Cycle, alongside other activities and resources based on years of experience and best practices in this field. The modules cover the ESC framework, the philosophy of volunteering, motivation and expectation, non-formal learning, roles and responsibilities of the actors involved, conflict management and problem solving, general support on how to compile project-specific information, intercultural learning, and practical tips and hints.

The **supplementary nature** of this tool allows supporting organizations to better identify and meets individual needs of the participants and to focus on aspects which cannot be addressed online, such as: trust-building and emotional support, project specific details, practical task-oriented preparation, and additional information based on the volunteers' needs and doubts which might arise while using the tool.

iPrepare can therefore be adapted to any context. Supporting organizations may suggest the volunteers use it autonomously and subsequently discuss their questions and concerns in the offline preparation stage. Alternatively, the organization may prepare an individualized program covering the most relevant topics and activities from the on-line tool. More suggestions on how to use the tool can be found in the [“Note for supporting organizations”](#).



## About

The iPrepare tool was created under the Erasmus+ KA2 “i-Prepare” project (2017-2-HU01-KA205-036198), a collaborative effort of 3 organizations: Egyesek Youth Association from Hungary, Xena Centro Scambi e Dinamiche Interculturali from Italy, and Cia Cekija from the Czech Republic.

<https://www.iprepare.eu>

*Anna Di Muro,  
Xena Centro scambi e dinamiche interculturali, Italy*

# 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 shows the IM-PROVE app interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation 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 four activities listed with checkboxes for 'NO' and 'YES'. The first activity, 'I created a training tool / an activity useful in the training.', has the 'YES' checkbox checked. The other three activities have their 'YES' checkboxes checked as well. At the bottom of the screen, there are two buttons: '< BACK' and 'CONTINUE >'. The app's logo 'IM☆PROVE' is visible in the top left corner of the interface.

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](http://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.

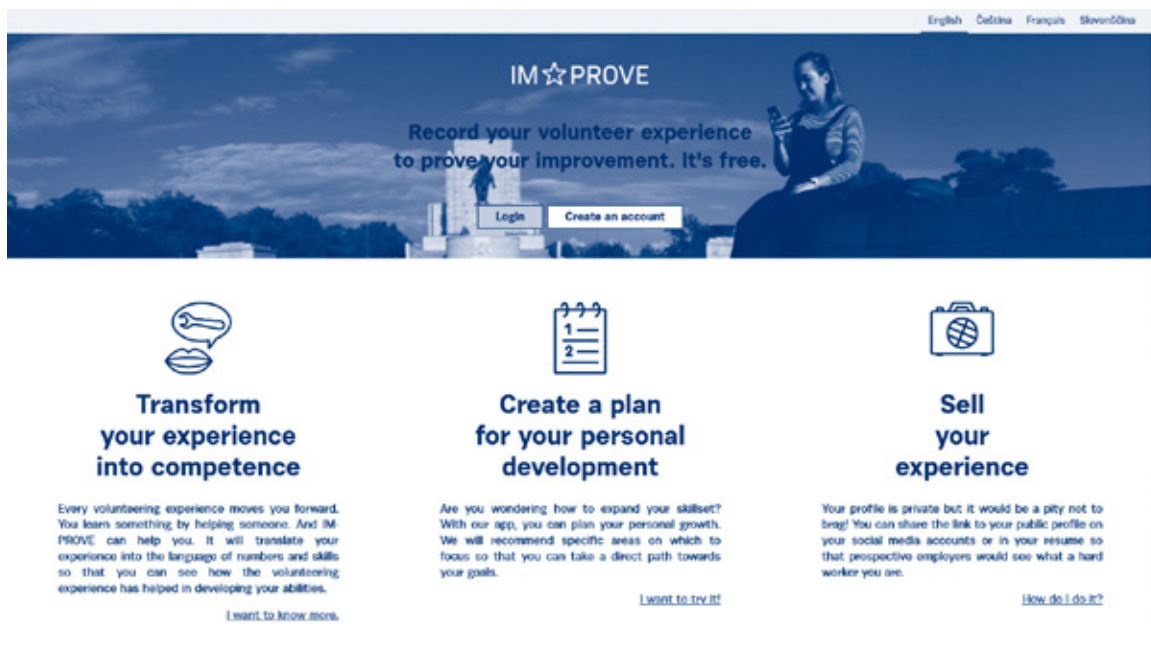
In the Profile, users can see the number of points they have collected and their progress in achieving a bronze, silver and gold medal in each of the 14 competences (flexibility, communication, promotion, work with information, teamwork, creativity and problem solving, independence, self-management, 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](http://www.inexsda.cz)) and Zavod Voluntariat ([www.zavod-voluntariat.si](http://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](http://www.badgecraft.eu)).

Good luck :-)

**Lenka Polcerová,**  
*INEX – Sdružení dobrovolných aktivit, z.s., Czech Republic*



# Organizational learning in European Solidarity Corps project (ESC)

Imagine your organization as a human being that adopts its own values and behavior, interacts with others, creates its daily routines and develops an organizational brain.

Let's say that the organizational brain is a "breathing mechanism" which creates its own values and behaviors based on its daily routine. The way we handle all processes every single day will define the behavior of our organization. The values of the organization are defined by the most frequently repeated patterns. Therefore, it is really important **to be aware** which values and what kind of behavior each organization is developing in its day to day activities. In this article, we examine how to **increase behavior awareness** of organizations involved in ESC Projects in order to help such organizations increase their learning capabilities and improve their work.

Organizational learning represents a relatively new field of study which has been attracting much attention over the past few decades. Knowledge is now considered as a valuable asset and the way organizations gather, create and manage knowledge is a crucial factor for achieving their goals. Barbara Levitt and James G. March provide three different observations related to organizational learning:

- "Behavior of an organization is based on routines"
- "An organization's actions are history-dependent"
- "Organizations are target-oriented" – their behavior depends on the alignment between their aspirations and actual outcomes.

In this respect, project management and coordination of tens of projects would benefit from certain steps, including:

- Development of an organizational memory policy
- Identification of knowledge-related processes and implementation of evaluation mechanisms
- Enabling people to communicate and share knowledge, ideas and record them
- Leveraging technology to support these processes and finding effective tools
- Taking actions

**Organizational memory policy:** Most NGOs understand the importance of this and focus on creating, gathering, managing, sharing and using knowledge. Good knowledge management supports growth and fosters innovation.

Organizations that underestimate the importance of this step may face serious difficulties in the future as they will not be able to leverage their full learning potential. For each process within an ESC project and for each project, an organization should have an easy and effective process of keeping and sharing knowledge. This will prove invaluable to preserve knowledge when people leave the organization, to accelerate onboarding of newcomers, as well as to foster continuous learning within the organization.

Each ECS project comprises multiple processes. What really helps is to formally describe all the processes to **identify the current routines, assess** each process and seek potential improvements in collaboration with all NGO members. Here are two common initial processes:

## 1. Development of an ESC project idea

The new ESC program calls for a greater impact of volunteer projects on communities. Try to brainstorm with local and international partners and NGO staff to see what initiative you could pursue. Our organization reached out to the community to identify issues where we could provide assistance. We held meetings with school directors, youth workers and sport clubs to find opportunities to organize community based projects while supporting volunteer learning outcomes. We **discussed our needs** with the partners who were subsequently

able to join, support and guide us. Obviously, communication with the right people helps a lot in this process and expressing the need helps even more.

## 2. Finding partners and developing the project

Do you have your own database of contacts with websites and profiles of potential partners? We do. Once we had an idea for the project, it was easy to identify the most suitable partners in our database. We were looking for sports organizations that could help with children sports trainings, since our ESC community project will be focused on supporting volunteers teaching children play rugby, which is a new sport in Kosovo. Without the database that we had built over the time, we would have had to use the ESC database. However, it makes everything easier if you know your partners and they know you. Preparing the application form and developing the project will be much easier once you have defined your objectives and know who and what you can rely on.

There are some other processes to carry out after the project has been approved:

- finding and selecting volunteers;
- finding and selecting mentors;
- finding and booking accommodation;
- definition of tasks and responsibilities among ESC actors;
- defining a method to assess if the desired impact on the society has been achieved;
- providing room and support for the volunteers' own initiative;
- resolving conflicts and difficulties;
- supporting volunteer integration into the local community;
- helping the volunteer with practicalities, such as local medical care;
- mentoring and provision of necessary materials;
- communication with ESC volunteers and stakeholders;
- project promotion;
- evaluation and feedback etc.

Every organization should feel free to add or remove any process based on its specific needs. Nevertheless, it is really helpful to create a list of applicable processes, analyze them and brainstorm over them with your team and stakeholders.

As you can see, everything is about managing processes, **and once you have a process, there is always a possibility to improve and create better routines**. Make sure you have specified and implemented rules for each process as well as evaluation methods that will help you improve the process.

**Each process** involves interaction among **different people**. That is why it is very important to understand their respective roles in the processes. The organization also needs to make sure that relevant knowledge has been transmitted to other people in the organization, including local volunteers. This will stimulate creation of new knowledge and help everyone to be included in the processes and better understand their role in the project.

In order to facilitate sharing of information and knowledge, it is necessary to create conditions that will support interactions among the stakeholders:

There are many different options to facilitate sharing of knowledge, from creating a common coffee space in the office to organizing common lunch breaks and free-time activities with people within and outside the organization to staying actively in touch with partners. Such activities deliver multiple significant benefits.

Learning occurs on different levels and interaction among people in the organization supports sharing of knowledge. Common activities and interactions can help reduce stress, overcome obstacles and understand what is going well and where there are issues that need to be addressed. You will also be able to receive informal feedback from different sides, which will provide valuable insight and improve your awareness of the situation.

**Structuring daily activities** in an ESC project properly is crucial for its successful implementation. Pay attention to the fundamentals – if all members of the team know their roles and responsibilities and if they attend daily meetings. Think what you can do to bring positive energy throughout the work schedule, how to motivate volunteers and how to enable them to actively contribute. Also, be aware of what may kill their motivation. All aspects matter: how long or short coffee breaks are, how you assign tasks and responsibilities, how you respond when someone reports a problem or concern, how you determine the needs of volunteers and your organization in ESC projects, how you translate them into specific activities etc. Basically, the structure of the activities should be aligned with the needs of both the volunteer and the organization. If the volunteers wish to learn how to promote the activities on social media and this is in line with the needs of the hosting organization, then a common plan should be developed. A good plan will specify tasks, responsibilities, expected outcomes, learning objectives, reporting including timing and structure, etc.

**Defining organizational values** and setting the priorities facilitate the development of a great organizational behavior. In our organization, we observe several fundamental values, such as: “family comes first”, “people matter more than anything else”, “do at least one good deed every day”, “if you are stuck, there is always someone who will help you proceed”, “there are no problems, only issues to resolve”.

It is your approach and daily routines that will define your organizational behavior at the end of the day. Knowing your volunteers and staff better and increasing their awareness of the routine will boost your organization’s learning capabilities.

However, nothing will improve by itself. **You need to take action** and make your way forward step by step. No feedback or lesson learned can be beneficial unless appropriate action is taken. Your ability to apply available knowledge in day-to-day operations will determine the pace of your progress and the success of your projects.

*Evzi Hani,*  
*Center for Economic and Social Development/CESD, Kosovo*

# Our organisation's experience with EVS and European Solidarity Corps projects

As someone who has been involved with volunteering for a long time, I should first note that I started gaining my volunteering experience at the age of 17. ADP-Zid is the contact point for EVS (now for European Solidarity Corps) for Montenegro and as such we have had great many EVS volunteers from different countries, such as Turkey, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Estonia, Germany and elsewhere.

The direct beneficiaries of this program are young people up to 30 years of age who are willing to spend their time volunteering in a European country, regardless of their national, religious or social background. Young people can apply for this program only for projects in EU countries.

## What are the requirements for applying?

From my point of view, the only condition for people between 18 and 30 years of age is to have the will and desire to volunteer in an EU country. All lodging, food, travel and visa costs are covered and there is some pocket money paid out on a monthly basis in an amount varying from country to country.

This is also a great opportunity for volunteers to improve their knowledge of foreign languages, because in addition to English, which is usually the working language, they can develop their local language skills while working on the project.

## What are the possible activities?

The volunteers' jobs usually do not involve hard labour. Volunteers in Zid on EVS have usually been engaged in activities related to youth education, office support, kindergartens, schools, organization and promotion of certain prevention and protection programs, implementation of programs of the organization in which they reside, etc. The important thing is that every volunteer has an opportunity to choose preferred activities, as each project provides a detailed description of his/her responsibilities.

With the arrival of EVS volunteers, we made a work plan and program. The volunteers spent up to 6 hours a day in the office and were involved in activities that the project required and that the volunteers found interesting. Prior to their arrival, the EVS Coordinator at the ADP-Wall talked to each volunteer over Skype and had a brief conference call with all of them.

The transition from EVS to European Solidarity Corps has, obviously, brought us some limitations, but I hope that volunteers will still find our projects interesting and will share their experience with potential future candidates in the best possible way.

*Milena Šćepanović,  
ADP-Zid, Montenegro*

# EVS / European Solidarity Corps – experience of young Turks

For young people in Turkey, participating in EVS / European Solidarity Corps (ESC) projects is a way to find a job as well as to gain some status in their respective communities. Since the youth unemployment rate stands at 26.10 %, many young people suffer from severe depression. They think that they are useless. They see that having a university diploma after studying for many years means nothing. They encounter EVS / ESC and they dream about participating in one of the volunteering activities abroad.

However, it is not an easy goal to accomplish as they encounter many challenges. First, a big advantage is to have at least medium-level English skills, alongside a higher education degree. In our experience, many hosting organisations require a certain level of English even before the volunteer joins his or her project. However, most young people do not speak or understand spoken English very well. This is because the education system requires them only to pass tests. They therefore lack practical skills, which causes them to fail in interviews for the volunteering activities.

Second, there are fewer projects than the number of applicants. They must therefore compete with many other candidates for the positions. Most of them are rejected or even do not receive an email about their rejection without being invited for an interview. People should not be surprised to see hundreds of applications from Turkey because there are 17 million young Turks between 18 and 30 years, which is incomparably more than in European countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Czech Republic, etc. From the population perspective, Turkey is like a “China of Europe”.

Those who overcome all the challenges and get a volunteer job, feel as if they have travelled to another planet in the Universe. First they experience a cultural shock. There may not be a huge difference for a Spanish volunteer to engage in a volunteering activity in France, for instance. But there is an enormous cultural difference between Turkey and European countries. So, the Turkish volunteers will have to climb all the steps of Bennett’s Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity – denial, defence, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. In order to create something and work as if it were their own job in their hosting organisation, they need to achieve the integration level, which is an ability to stay true to yourself and your own worldview but also to move in and out of different cultures appropriately and easily. The volunteers should be able to adapt and take on multiple perspectives within the hosting culture with little to no stress to themselves or the people within these different cultures due to an atrophied self-identity.

Another priceless gain from EVS / ESC activities is the acquisition of multiple foreign language skills. The volunteers who already speak English improve their English skills and develop knowledge of the native language of the hosting country. They improve their foreign language skills along with the Bennett’s stages. They learn the language and the culture at the same time. They learn how to order a coffee in the coffee shop, read correctly the facial expression of the old lady waiting at the bus stop, etc.

They find an opportunity for introspection. They examine their thoughts and beliefs. They open their minds with contemplating all the information they receive. They feel more confident in interacting with people in the society. So, the activity they are engaged in fosters their self-growth. They become more aware of social issues and find solutions. They become more active citizens. They feel more European than before. Because feeling European is more unlikely in Turkey, which has been a candidate country devoid of many of the opportunities that EU citizens enjoy.



An improvement in occupational competences is another benefit of the volunteering activities. Volunteers gain work experience. They have office skills, they learn public relations, they have operational experience, they learn how to use hand tools, they develop their digital competences, they learn more about technology and science, etc. They also broaden their perspective of the traditional and contemporary art of the culture they live in. They discover the new World with all their senses. They stimulate their learning functions all the time.

At the end of their volunteering activity, they return as very different individuals – revived, skilled, mature, transformed and experienced in working abroad. Their CVs become so enticing that employers cannot decline their applications. That means that a wide range of attractive job opportunities opens to them. This also means added value for the national economy of the country they choose to live in.

Within the volunteering projects of my two organisations, we have seen many positive stories of the young people. Here are some of them:

- Berfu Yüksel participated in a volunteering activity in Tarrega, Spain, from 2013 to 2014, working with disabled people. Now she works in Zara headquarters in Istanbul.
- Şeyda Yalçın participated in a volunteering activity in Maribor, Slovenia, from 2015 to 2016. She worked in the field of arts & culture. Now she works for a company in Canada.
- Sündüs Öztürk participated in a volunteering activity in Warsaw, Poland, from 2015 to 2016. She worked with disabled kids as a nurse and a volunteer. Now she works in the American Hospital in Istanbul.
- Zeynep Akbaba participated in a volunteering activity in Tarrega, Spain, from 2017 to 2018. She worked with disabled people. Now she has a job as a flight attendant with Turkish Airlines.
- Nazlı Çelik participated in a volunteering activity in Maribor, Slovenia, from 2017 to 2018. She worked in the field of arts & culture. Now she works as a flight attendant with Turkish Airlines.

Volunteering is not only crucial for personal development of young people but also for the survival and sustainability of activities of the organizations involved. Small and medium-sized organisations in particular need staff and innovative ideas to meet the needs of their target groups / areas. Volunteers fill in this need. They bring fresh ideas, energy, enthusiasm and hope. Volunteering also sends a message of personal engagement and collaboration to the society. Once a few people engage in a collective effort, others start join in. The societies will grow stronger as long as civil contribution and volunteering persists.

*Irem Ebru Kuru,  
Eğitim Programları ve Evrensel  
ve Kültürel Aktiviteler Derneği, Turkey*

# Useful Links and Publications

European Solidarity Corps – European Youth Portal

[https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en)

European Commission > Youth > European Solidarity Corps

[https://ec.europa.eu/youth/solidarity-corps\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/solidarity-corps_en)

European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/>

European Solidarity Corps Czech website

<http://www.sborsolidarity.cz/>

Database of accredited volunteering organisations/ organisations awarded with Quality Label

[https://europa.eu/youth/volunteering/organisations\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/volunteering/organisations_en)

Salto South East Europe Resource Centre – SALTO SEE

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/>

Contact Points in Western Balkan region for the Programmes Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/contactpoints/>

Salto Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre – SALTO EECA

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/eeca/>

Contact Points in Eastern Partnership countries and Russia for the Programmes Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/eeca/infocentres/>

SALTO Calendar of Educational Events at International Level (trainings courses, contact-making seminars, excursions, seminars...)

<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/>

Platform for sharing outcomes of European Solidarity Corps projects

[https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects_en)

## Publications

Hopscotch to Quality in EVS 2.0

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/hopscotchevs/>

Erasmus+: Youth in Action – Opportunities for the Western Balkan Region

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/brochure-western-balkans/>

Guidelines on residence permits procedures for volunteers being hosted in the countries of Western Balkans

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/residencepermits/>

Learning support within volunteering projects in Slovenia and the Western Balkans: practices, challenges and needs for development

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/learningsupport/>

Conflict – What an Opportunity!

<http://www.evsgalaxy.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COME-conflict-management-in-evs.pdf>

Conflict Management and Conflict Transformation

<https://yeenet.eu/conflict-management-conflict-transformation/>

Solidarity in Europe – publication of EU

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/db3d580c-b248-11e8-99ee-01aa75ed71a1>

Meant to be a Mentor. Workbook for EVS mentors

<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/meant-to-be-a-mentor-workbook-for-evs-mentors.1766/>

Slabikář – e-learning Bloom's Taxonomy

<https://www.slabikarnfv.eu/cs/e-learning>

Mentorna – practical guidebook for mentors (Czech)

<https://www.dzs.cz/file/8238/mentorna2019-web-pdf/>

## Technical documents, forms, guidelines

EU-login – personal identification entry to various electronic EU systems (Quality Label form, Application forms, ...)

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/cas/>

PASS Manual – version October 2019

[https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/pass\\_user\\_guide\\_v2-0\\_-\\_2019-09-23\\_v17.pdf](https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/pass_user_guide_v2-0_-_2019-09-23_v17.pdf)

European Solidarity Corps IT documentation

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/display/ESCITDOC/Welcome>

Guidelines Quality Label Form

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/display/ESCITDOC/Web+Forms+Add+Quality+Label+details>

Application forms – European Solidarity Corps

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/web-esc/screen/eforms/>

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# Contacts

Do you have more questions about the European Solidarity Corps or the Erasmus+ programme (Youth)? Don't hesitate to contact us. :-)

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## Disclaimer

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**Motto**

**„Life isn't about waiting  
for the storm to pass...  
It's about learning to  
dance in the rain.“**

**Vivian Greene**





