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Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities
within the European Youth in Action programme



Hopscotch to Quality in EVS 2.0

A practical handbook for enhancing quality
in European Voluntary Service

Revised and updated second edition

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**Looking for more tools for more quality
of your EVS projects, all in one place?
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Welcome to Hopscotch to Quality in EVS 2.0!

Did you ever play the hopscotch game as a child? After drawing a hopscotch with a piece of chalk on the ground you take turns hopping, together with your friends, from square to square in different ways until you reach the last square, your goal. Our goal is to support you in implementing European Voluntary Service (EVS) projects that are a great experience for your organisation and volunteers. Hopping attentively and successfully through the different squares of our EVS Hopscotch should help you reach this goal.

Since the start of the European Voluntary Service programme in 1996, close to 100,000 young volunteers have offered their service within an EVS project to an organisation in another country. Over these past 20 years, the opportunities for participating in EVS have increased, but so have the requirements of the Programme in view of what organisations should offer to their EVS volunteers to make their EVS projects valuable learning experiences.

While the volunteers' learning has noticeably gained in importance, EVS still remains distinctly different from other long-term mobility projects, such as traineeships or university studies, because its approach and expected impact are designed as a two-way street: both the volunteers and the organisations involved should benefit from the project. EVS should be a true learning-service.

After the successful first edition of "Hopscotch to Quality in EVS" (2009), the new "Hopscotch 2.0" comes as a completely re-written and updated practical handbook for EVS organisations. It aims at increasing quality in EVS projects implemented within Erasmus+: Youth in Action. "Hopscotch 2.0" guides the interested readers through a process of reflection about the key steps (presented as the Hopscotch model) to be taken on the road to better quality in their EVS projects and provides a number of hands-on strategies on how to organise high quality European Voluntary Service projects.

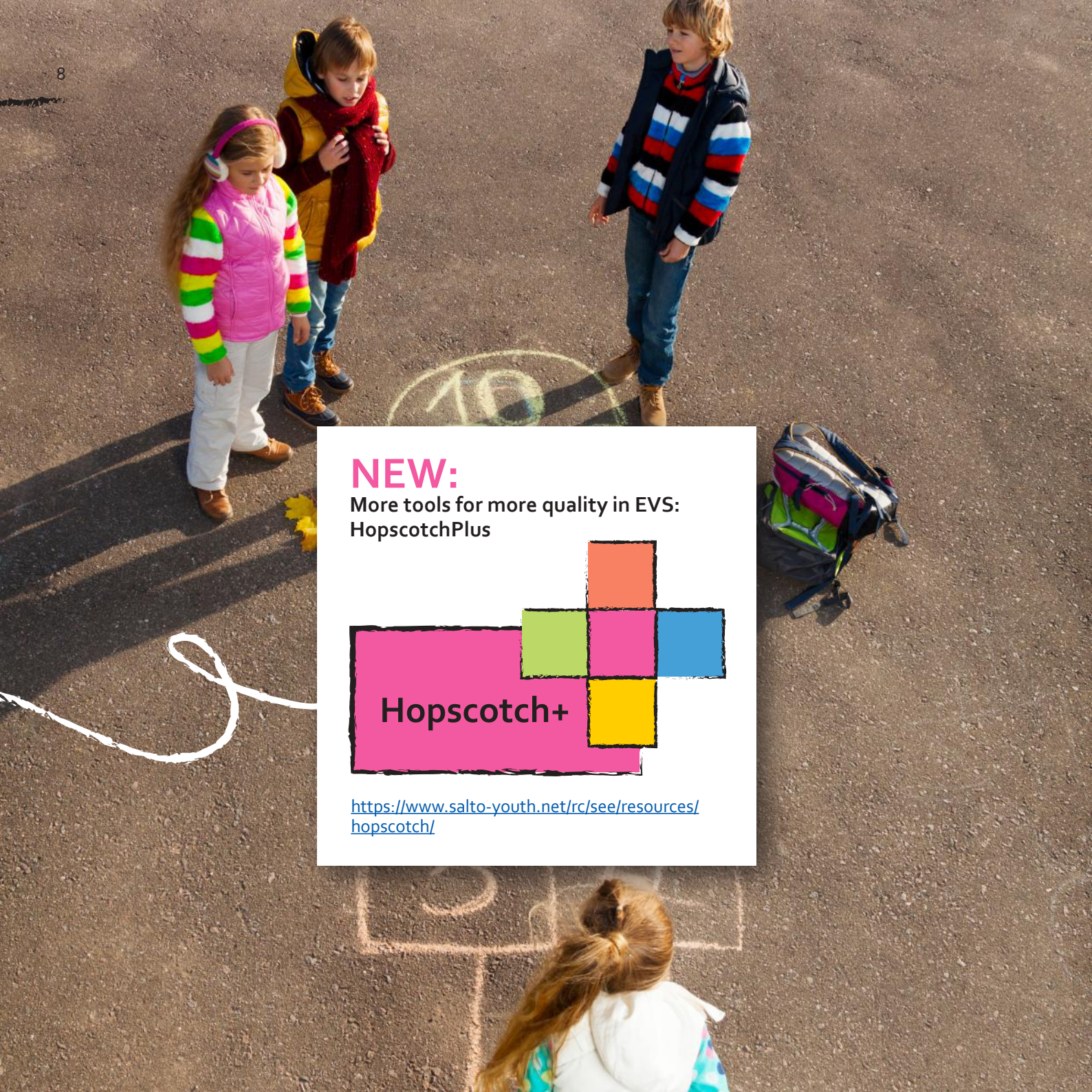


Formal criteria for participation and funding details are only briefly dealt with in this publication, as far as they serve as a basis for understanding the Programme. For complete and up-to-date information we advise you to regularly consult the website of the European Commission and in particular the relevant chapters of the latest Erasmus+ Programme Guide.

"Hopscotch 2.0" was written by an international team of experts in EVS, Darko Marković (SRB), Dragan Atanasov (FYROM) and Bob McDougall (UK), who have brought in their complementary perspectives on the topic of quality in EVS.

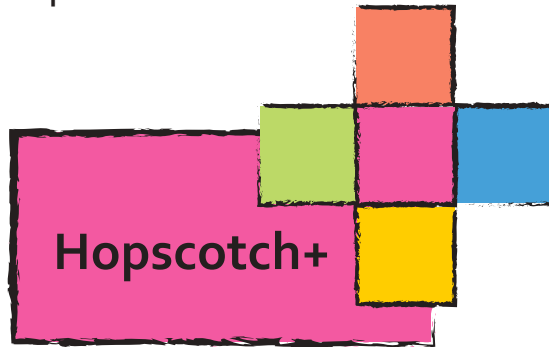
We hope that this handbook will become a companion in your EVS projects, where you can check one or the other aspect relating to EVS projects as you go along according to your specific experience and needs.

Sonja Mitter Škulj
Coordinator SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre



NEW:

More tools for more quality in EVS:
HopscotchPlus



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

"Quiz: Start your own Hopscotch!"

Dear reader,

Before diving into the topic of quality in EVS, take a moment to test your current level of knowledge about the programme. The results of the test below may help you navigate better through the contents of the handbook.

Toss your "stone" and enjoy Hopscotch to Quality in EVS 2.0!

Questions:

1. **The European Voluntary Service programme, also known as EVS, started in:**
 - a) 1996
 - b) 1998
 - c) 2000

2. **European Voluntary Service supports:**
 - a) only individual voluntary service
 - b) only group voluntary service
 - c) both individual and group voluntary service

3. **Currently, EVS is part of the larger programme called:**
 - a) YOUTH
 - b) Youth in Action
 - c) Erasmus+

4. **EVS projects and EVS Activities are:**
 - a) simply synonyms
 - b) an EVS project may have one or more EVS Activities
 - c) an EVS Activity can include one or more EVS projects

5. **In order to participate in EVS, interested organisations have to be:**
 - a) accredited
 - b) certified
 - c) qualified

6. **In order to provide adequate support for the volunteer during the service, the receiving organisation should nominate at least:**
 - a) one person
 - b) two people
 - c) three people

7. **Essentially, EVS is:**
 - a) mainly a volunteering programme
 - b) mostly a learning programme
 - c) both learning and volunteering programme

8. **When selecting volunteers for their projects, the organisations can ask for:**
 - a) a minimum of foreign language competence
 - b) previous relevant work experience
 - c) none of the above

9. **The official document that summarises the rights and responsibilities of all the parties involved in an EVS project is called:**
 - a) EVS charter
 - b) EVS agreement
 - c) EVS contract

10. **Preparation of volunteers before the departure is done by:**
 - a) sending organisation
 - b) receiving organisation
 - c) national agency

11. **The receiving organisation is responsible for:**
 - a) enrolling the volunteer in the health insurance system
 - b) providing decent and safe accommodation for the volunteer
 - c) enrolling the volunteer in an officially recognised language school

12. Supporting the volunteer's learning process and personal adjustment in the new environment is done mainly by:
- the mentor
 - the supervisor
 - both of the above
13. The Common European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning describes learning in EVS as consisting of:
- 6 competences
 - 7 competences
 - 8 competences
14. The instrument for recognition and visibility of learning outcomes in EVS is called:
- Europass
 - Youthpass
 - Vol-pass
15. The name of the resource centre publishing this publication is SALTO. This acronym stands for:
- Support, Alternative Long-term Travel Opportunities
 - Support, Advice and Lifelong Training Opportunities
 - Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities

Instead of answers: where to go from here?

Instead of giving you the correct answers in the end of this quiz, we would rather encourage you to look for them on your own. In fact, in many cases, as you will see, there are no ready-made answers that would work in all organisational and national contexts, so you might be invited to formulate your own approach to quality in EVS.

For questions 1-3 you may wish to read the chapters [What is European Voluntary Service?](#) and [Impact of EVS on volunteers and organisations](#), as well as the chapter [Coordination of larger projects and group EVS](#) in section D.

For questions 4-6, have a look at chapters [EVS project cycle overview](#) and [Support systems in EVS](#).

Regarding question 7, look for your answer in the chapters [Involvement in EVS as reflective practice](#) and [Learning and competence development in EVS](#).

Regarding question 8, jump to the chapter [Inclusion in EVS and selection of volunteers](#) and deepen your understanding in the chapter [Working with inclusion groups - inclusion in practice](#).

The answer to question 9 you may find in [International partnership](#) or simply by browsing the key terms online.

The answers to questions 10 and 11 are covered in the chapters [Preparing volunteers for their activities](#) and [Preparation for receiving volunteers](#).

To find your answer about the role division in question 12 you should read both [Task-related support: managing your volunteer](#) and [Mentoring EVS volunteers](#).

For questions 13 and 14, take a look in chapters [Learning and competence development in EVS](#) and [Recognition of EVS competences after EVS](#)

And finally, for the answer to question 15, check the information about SALTO-YOUTH at the back of this publication or visit www.salto-youth.net.

Part A



EVS in brief...





What is European Voluntary Service?

Following an initiative of the European Commission and a strong demand from civil society, the European Union launched European Voluntary Service (EVS) as a pilot action in 1996. The programme enabled young people from EU member states to spend a period of voluntary service in another European country, contributing to local community development and their own personal growth. The response to the evaluation of the pilot action showed that EVS was regarded as a relevant policy to address various challenges. These included: increasing European mobility, fostering active citizenship, tackling problems of social cohesion and enabling youth transition towards adulthood. EVS also tackled marginalisation and social exclusion, social deviance and delinquency, intolerance, xenophobia, and racism. EVS was also regarded as a means to promote social cohesion and solidarity within and outside the European Union¹. Subsequently European Voluntary Service was established as the EVS Community Action programme (1998-1999), then Action 2 of the YOUTH programme (2000-2006) and Youth in Action programme (2007-2013) and finally as an action of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme (2014-2020).

Where is EVS in Erasmus+: Youth in Action?

Key Action 1 – European Voluntary Service

Key Action 1 – Large scale EVS events

Key Action 2 – Capacity building in the field of youth

Some **facts and figures** about EVS:

- During the first 10 years of EVS (1996-2006) approximately 30,000 volunteers participated in the programme.
- In the Youth in Action programme (2007-2013) the grand total was 50,669 volunteers.
- It is expected that before the 20th anniversary of EVS in 2016 the total number of EVS volunteers will reach 100,000 volunteers.
- An average individual grant per volunteer in the Youth in Action programme was approximately €7,000.
- On 16th December 2015 there were 4,750 organisations accredited to participate in EVS.

Today, within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, European Voluntary Service provides young people from participating countries with an opportunity to have an international voluntary experience. This can take place either as:

¹ The ex-ante evaluation of the Multi-annual European Voluntary Service Programme for Young People – Report prepared by the Tavistock Institute, UK, October 1996

- a. From 2 months to 12 months in an **individual long-term EVS activity**.
- b. From 2 weeks to 2 months for **short-term EVS** involving young people with fewer opportunities.
- c. From 2 weeks to 12 months in a **group EVS activity**, involving between 10 and 30 volunteers.

In addition to that, the programme has created a possibility for organising **Large-scale EVS projects**, accompanying events such as the World Youth Summit, European Capitals of Culture, European Youth Capitals, etc. These projects should involve at least 30 EVS volunteers.

Although it includes elements of language learning, travelling and gaining some work experience, **EVS is not:**

- occasional, unstructured, part-time volunteering
- an internship in an enterprise
- a paid job; it must not replace paid jobs
- a recreation or tourist activity
- a language course
- exploitation of a cheap workforce
- a period of study or vocational training abroad

In fact EVS is a true "learning service". Throughout **non-formal learning** experiences young volunteers improve and/or acquire competences for their personal, educational and professional development as well as for their social integration. At the same time, it is an opportunity for young people to express their solidarity and social responsibility through **voluntary service** in local community development. The programme also supports increased youth mobility and contributes to the development of genuine European citizenship. The documentation of the experience and recognition of learning outcomes is implemented through the instrument called **Youthpass**. This is based on the Common European Framework of 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning².

The programme is open to **ALL young people** aged **17 – 30 years**, regardless of their social, cultural, educational or economic background. Typically, EVS is a "once in a lifetime" experience – a volunteer can take part in only one EVS Activity. However, an exception is made for volunteers who carried out an EVS activity lasting a maximum of 2 months.

The total duration of the project, including all project phases **cannot exceed 24 months**. **Each EVS project could include one or more EVS Activities** (actual voluntary service).

Each EVS project is developed in partnership between the **sending organisation**, the



² For more information about Youthpass and Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, please visit the Youthpass webpage: www.youthpass.eu

receiving organisation, the coordinating organisation and the volunteer(s). In a simple EVS project, the role of coordinating organisation is taken either by the sending or receiving organisation. In this case the coordinating organisation is responsible for submitting the application, as well as for overall management of the project.

It is also possible that a separate coordinating organisation applies for the project on behalf of the partnership of organisations involved. In this case the coordinating organisation does not have to be either the sending or receiving organisation. However, in order to get involved in EVS all organisations must be accredited for the sending, receiving and/or coordinating role³.

EVS accreditation is *"a procedure to support organisations that want to take part in EVS. It is designed to ensure consistently high standards in EVS and to help organisations find partners. Accreditation is a quality assurance process facilitating communication between the organisation and programme structures, so that all parties involved are aware of the values, objectives and rules of EVS. All accredited organisations must show they are able to implement EVS projects according to the rules of the Erasmus+ programme."* (from EVS accreditation guidelines, 2014). The accreditation procedure is managed either by National Agencies in Programme countries or SALTO Resource Centres in partner regions (Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, Russian Federation and South Mediterranean countries)⁴.

All EVS-accredited organisations are published in the [Database of Volunteering Opportunities](#) (VoD) on the European Youth Portal. New functionalities to this database were launched in 2014, allowing organisations accredited under Erasmus+ to post information about current vacancies addressed at young people interested in volunteering. Young people can use the database to look for vacancies posted, or find contact information to get in touch with organisations directly. From 2016, organisations that are not accredited can also post volunteering vacancies in the VoD.

³ With the exception of organisations applying under "Key Action1 – Large scale EVS events" who do not need to be accredited to take part in such projects. For more information, consult the latest version of the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#)

⁴ For more information about how to become an accredited organisation for EVS in a Programme country, please consult your National Agency: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/partners-networks/national_agencies_en.htm
For the partner regions, please contact the respective SALTO Resource Centre, <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/>

The Programme is open to organisations and volunteers coming from both Programme countries, partner countries neighbouring to the EU and in some specific conditions to the organisations from other countries of the world. For a detailed and up-to-date list of participating countries, you may consult the latest version of the Programme Guide, published annually.

The EVS organisations could be:

- a non-profit organisation, association or Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)
- a European Youth NGO
- a social enterprise
- a public body at local level
- a group of young people active in youth work but not necessarily in the context of a youth organisation (i.e. informal group of young people)



as well as the following types of organisations and institutions (with reduced programme funding for their organisation costs):

- a public body at regional or national level
- an association of regions
- a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
- a profit-making body active in Corporate Social Responsibility.

To be an eligible applicant an organisation must be legally established either in a Programme country or Western Balkans country (in case of applying for the projects under Key Action 2 – Capacity Building in the field of youth). One of the organisations assumes the role of coordinating organisation and applies for the whole project ('one-sided funding') on behalf the partnership. Applications for projects could be submitted to:

- a. An Erasmus+: Youth in Action National Agency in the applicant country, if the applicant organisation is coming from a Programme country
- b. The [Executive Agency](#) if the applicant is coming from a Western Balkans country and applying under Key Action 2 - Capacity Building in the field of youth⁵

Please note that applications from partner regions **cannot** be submitted to SALTO Resource Centres! For detailed information about the application procedures, please visit the European Commission's website and download the latest version of the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#).

⁵ Additional possibilities for other partner regions are planned.

Impact of EVS on volunteers and organisations

"Facing many unexpected situations during my EVS, I gained a flexible attitude. I started realising that it's impossible to plan every possible situation or outcome of my decisions beforehand. This way I gained another perspective on life. Rather than planning and expecting everything to go according to plan, I became more conscious of the environment I'm in. This perspective values what exists and recognises the possibilities connected to this situation instead of striving to achieve something else.

[...] My EVS experience also taught me to be more tolerant. I gained a better understanding towards other people, mainly because of this new attitude that I described above. To me cultural differences are not some kind of obstacle, but an opportunity to learn from people with different backgrounds, different kinds of strengths and perspectives."

(Joris from Belgium did his EVS in Moldova)

"Mostly I was working with children but also I was working on lots of events where I needed to present or talk about EVS, and I was always successful. The variety of my project was such that I even learned to work with animals - birds, hedgehogs, you name it. But the best thing of all is that I learned how to manage in totally unknown situations and still do my job successfully. Now I know that I can do anything.

[...] I really can say that this experience taught me many things but most important of all I think it changed me in a nice and positive way. Not because of the country or city, but because of the people. I meet beautiful people (from inside) who have shown me a bigger picture. I learned many things about different cultures and that helped me respect my own culture more: my country and the people in it."

(Amina from Bosnia-Herzegovina did her EVS in the Netherlands)

"I made friends there, friends and teachers, brothers, sisters. A family made not by blood but life ties. I have learned so much from them, and with them. After the EVS, we continued to cooperate. Together, we made some really beautiful performances and countless smiles on children's faces. I have learned a lot about performing art, as well as about European project networking, international and intercultural team working, also leaders skills, etc. All these skills and competences are of great importance to me now."

(Mojca from Slovenia did her EVS in Bulgaria)

"Discovering another country and another culture, seeing life through someone else's eyes, learning new skills and new competences through sharing someone else's day-to-day life on a professional and personal level... That's what made my EVS so significant and valuable!

No book can teach you what you can learn from European Volunteer Service. It is about being there, being part of a team, sharing skills and knowledge and all together making a positive contribution to make a difference..."

(Marion from France did her EVS in UK)

Working with EVS is such a unique experience – sometimes hard, but always amazing and inspiring. We have hosted many EVS volunteers in our youth centre and we are thankful for the existence of this programme.

There are so many stories to share from our experiences with EVS. Thanks to our volunteers, more people from our town are able to use English, French, Spanish and other languages now. Since we started involving EVS volunteers in our work, children with disabilities from the local daily centre are smiling more often; the young ex-drug users that we work with are socialising and integrating better; and our young members are appreciating hikes and outdoor activities much more than before. And we, as a youth organisation, gained lots of meaningful experiences and expanded our scope of work by far. The EVS volunteers opened new horizons to the young people we are working with, but also brought Europe closer to us and turned our youth centre into a cosmopolitan union. Thanks to all the EVS volunteers we have hosted so far!

Aleksandra Ristova
Youth Association creACTIVE
Kavadarci, Macedonia

This is a story about the unexpected impact made by an EVS volunteer, who decided to become a volunteer in Serbia after she met some members of our organisation at a training course held in Iceland. Upon implementing numerous activities during her EVS, as a final activity she visited many municipal youth offices, youth clubs and schools around Serbia in order to promote EVS, its values and the opportunities it offers to Serbian young people.

At one of the presentations, she had an unfortunate meeting with a hostile local who left an extremely rude and insulting comment about her on the social networks. The number of people reacted to such a behaviour of the politician has over exceeded everyone's expectations. The reaction was huge. Subsequently, the news about her EVS and this unfortunate event were covered by most of the mainstream media in Serbia, which contributed to an enhanced visibility for the Programme and "Hajde da..." group as never before. In fact, in the previous 15 years of our existence our organisation has never had such publicity and such an amount of articles published. And it was the first time we ever appeared on a national TV.

And the impact of her work did not end there – at the very end of her project, our EVS volunteer and some of our local members prepared a project application for a follow up training course that was implemented in Iceland after her return.

Suzana Krstić
„Hajde da..." group
Belgrade, Serbia

For over ten years now, Mu-zee-um has been a hosting organisation for EVS volunteers.

Our art education organisation from Oostende involves (them) as members of our team for a period of 12 months. This cooperation is a win/win situation for both! The volunteers have an opportunity to be involved in the daily work of Mu-zee-um. They take part in all our activities and learn a lot not only about arts, but also about themselves, about building good relationships and functioning in a working environment. They gain skills for living alone in another country and become competent in using the new language. At the end of the project they deliver their own workshops/activities in Dutch. Being a volunteer for a year gives them the opportunity to learn how to make choices, which is also a very important skill in life.

We in Mu-zee-um are very proud of all our volunteers! Even when the project is finished, we stay in touch with our volunteers, and sometimes new projects arise, such as international youth exchanges. Next year Mu-zee-um will celebrate 15 years of existence. All past EVS volunteers will be invited for a big reunion, to exchange their Mu-zee-um experiences.

Ann Deyle
Mu-zee-um
Oostende, Belgium

Likewise in the four volunteers' stories above, many former volunteers would testify that EVS can be a truly life-changing experience. As they would say, it can be hard and challenging, as well as joyful and exciting, but inevitably it makes a great impact on everyone involved. At the same time EVS makes its mark on the organisations involved, as well as on the local communities.

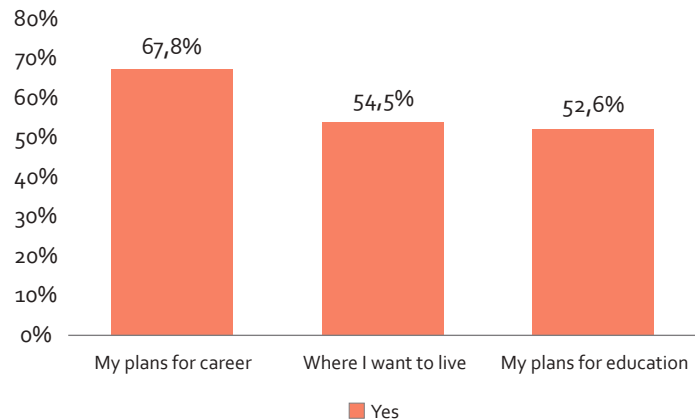
Some typical benefits for young people from participation in EVS:

- increased self-esteem
- sense of independence and self-initiative
- foreign language competence
- communication skills
- project management skills
- intercultural sensitivity and awareness
- team work skills
- establishment of networks and partnerships
- work experience gained

Some typical benefits for organisations involved in EVS:

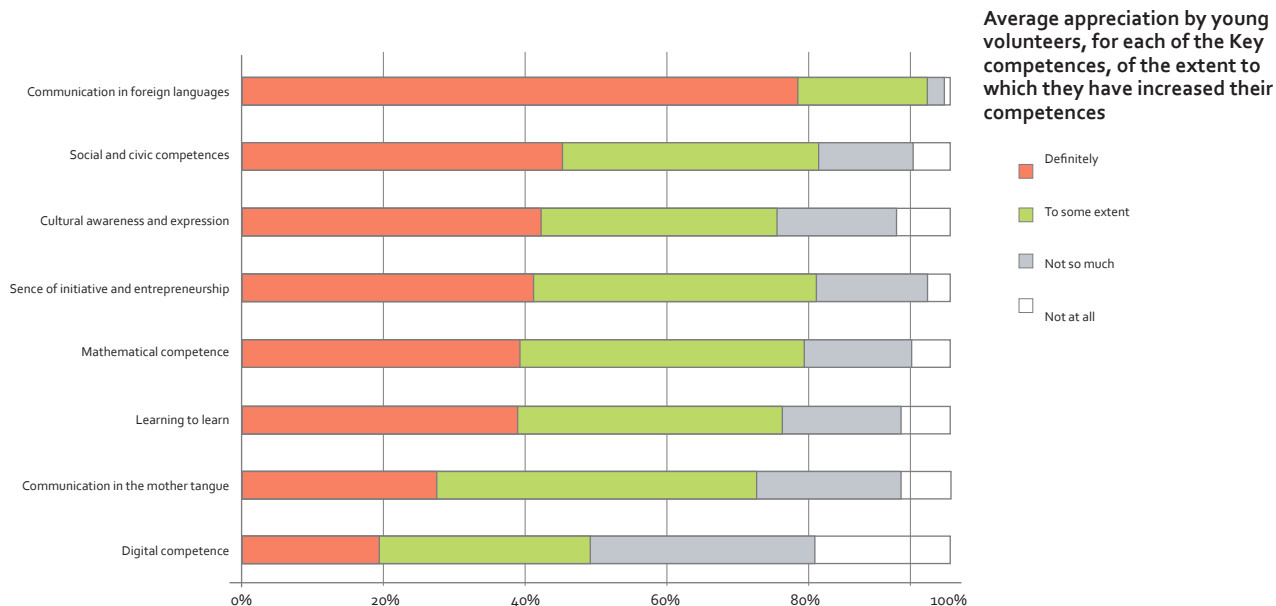
- improved profile and image of the organisation
- gaining a "European profile"
- improved people and project management skills
- foreign language competence
- intercultural sensitivity and awareness
- additional ideas and new perspectives
- enhanced ability to work in an international partnership

What we know from the practice of doing EVS is that EVS has an impact; this has also been confirmed in a number of surveys. In recent research⁶ on the impact of EVS in ten European countries, for 1,419 ex-EVS volunteers "the EVS experience played a very important role in shaping their lives. Following EVS, they seem to have re-evaluated their future plans, mainly regarding their plans for education, career and where they would like to live." (Senyuva, 2014). 52.6% of former EVS volunteers in the overall sample (78.6% in Bosnia-Herzegovina) report that their EVS had a positive impact on their plans for education, 67.8% on their career paths (83.6% in Belgium), and 54.5% on the decision of where to live (72% in Hungary). 40% of surveyed ex-EVS volunteers have decided to work in the same field as their EVS project and 23% of them have decided to work in the country where they did their service.



⁶ Senyuva, Ozgehan, EVS Competences for Employability (2014), EVS C4E Full Survey Report., <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusiontraining/evsskillsandemployability/>

Another survey⁷ (launched by the European Commission in March 2011 among participants in projects supported by the Youth in Action programme) has shown that EVS can make a positive impact on all 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. This impact is particularly strong on communication in foreign languages, civic and social competences, cultural awareness and entrepreneurship.



The same survey has shown that EVS can also have a significant impact on the local community.

According to the results:

- The EVS project has often been perceived as enrichment by the local environment/ community,
- The local environment/community showed interest in similar projects in the future,
- The European dimension was received with interest by the local environment/ community,
- The local environment/community became more aware of the concerns and interests of young people.

⁷ Accessible from: http://www.aktivungdom.eu/element_db/23/2311/Results_EVS_leaflet.pdf

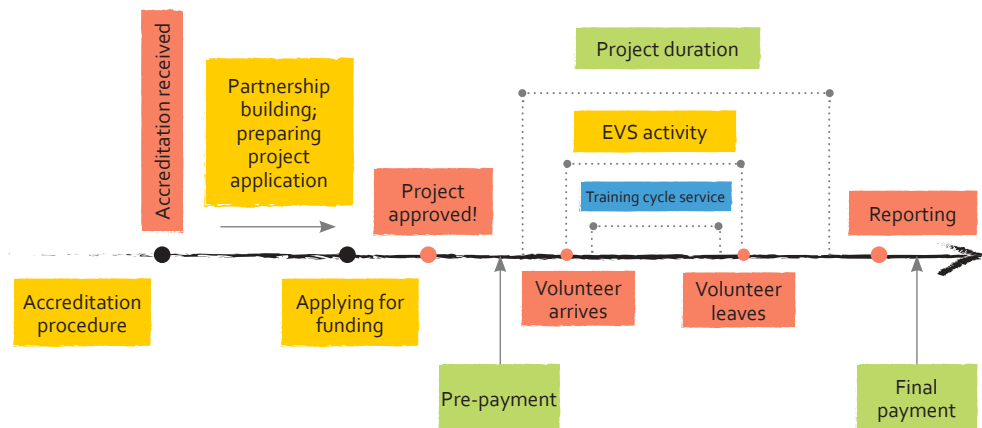
EVS project cycle overview

If you have opened this section of the handbook, chances are great that you are considering implementing an EVS project⁸, either by sending or receiving an EVS volunteer. Congratulations! Having the motivation is the first step towards starting to work in the field of EVS.

This section will provide you with a basic overview of the different phases of an EVS project. If you already have some experience in project design and management you are probably thinking that implementing an EVS project is not much different from implementing any other projects. You are both right and wrong. Indeed, working on EVS projects is similar in many ways to working on any project your organisation may have already implemented. Whenever you are developing a project you first need to plan and prepare, then implement the activities, and at the end evaluate the project and consider a follow-up. You need to do all of that when implementing an EVS project, but you also need to consider some specific particularities. Let's go through the main steps you need to take in order to successfully send or receive an EVS volunteer.

Framing it all

Implementing an EVS project can be confusing for newcomers. To help you understand the different phases we have prepared a graph that includes the main elements of a typical project. Please note that this is an example of a simple EVS project with only one activity. The graph also assumes that the project is approved the first time the grant application is submitted, which unfortunately does not always happen. Still, it should give you a clearer picture of what are the activities that you should plan, and in what order. On the next pages you are provided with more detailed information about each of the project stages.



⁸ Note that according to the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#), there are no “EVS projects” as such. Projects involving EVS activities are applied for as Mobility projects for young people, under Key Action 1 of the Erasmus+ programme. For the purposes of this handbook, Erasmus+ projects with EVS activities will be informally referred to as “EVS projects”.

Inform yourself

To begin with, EVS projects are part of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission. Thus, they must be implemented according to the rules and procedures of the Programme, such as the application process, deadlines, financial rules etc. Some of the basic rules are included in this handbook, while all others can be found in the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#).

Always make sure that you are consulting the most recent version of the guide, as rules can change on an annual basis. When exploring the guide, don't forget to check the annexes, since they include specific rules and information applicable to the different types of projects, such as EVS. If in doubt, you can always consult the [National Agency](#) responsible for implementation of the Erasmus+ programme in your country, or the regional [SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centre](#) - if you are based in a neighbouring partner country.

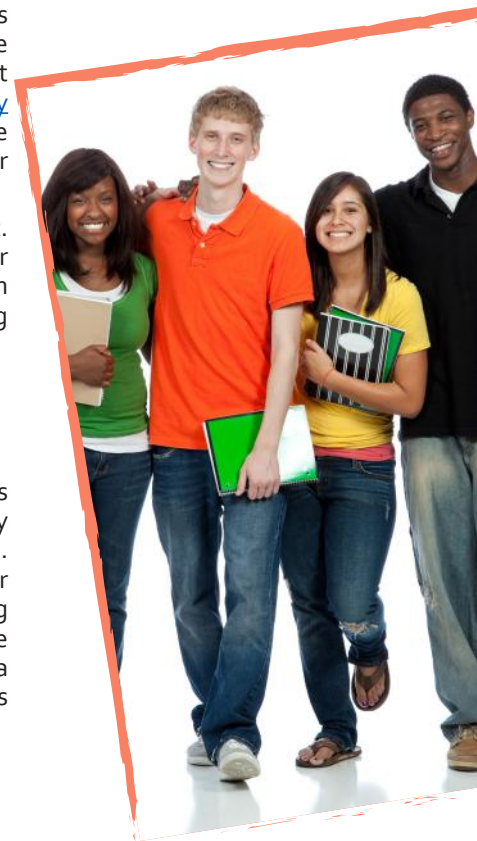
It is important to have all updated information before you start preparing your project. Consulting this handbook is a good start, but don't stop here. You may also consider applying for participation in training sessions in the area of EVS in order to learn more about working with EVS volunteers. Information about international training opportunities can be found at the [European Training Calendar](#).

Get accredited

In order to send and receive volunteers, as well as to apply for EVS funding, organisations have to be accredited. The accreditation serves to gain access to European Voluntary Service and to ensure that the principles and minimum standards of EVS are met⁹. The accreditation process is conducted by the [National Agency of your country](#), or by the regional [SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centre](#) responsible for your neighbouring region. Please note that the accreditation procedure takes up to 6 weeks, if there are no additional questions or requests from the accreditors. Since you need to have a valid accreditation at the moment of submitting the project application form, it is important to plan enough time prior to the deadline.

Build partnerships

Like any other Erasmus+ project, EVS projects are based on international partnership, which should include at least two organisations from two different countries. Partners have to be identified before the project is applied for funding. In addition, all partner organisations are expected to be involved in developing the project idea and preparing the application form. This means that finding partners and establishing cooperation with them is one of the first steps of the project planning process. To facilitate the process of identifying partners, the European Commission has established the [European Youth Portal](#), which is a database of all accredited EVS organisations, and



⁹ Information from Erasmus+ Programme Guide (version 2015, page 266)

also a place where you can look for partners and find calls from other organisations. More information about this phase can be found in the [International partnership](#) section of this publication.

Plan before you apply

Proper planning is essential before submitting an application form for funding. A number of factors need to be taken into consideration: when do you want to start the project, when should the volunteer(s) arrive, to whom are you applying for funding, and who is taking over the coordination role? [The Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) clearly sets the timeframe in which projects should start, when applied on a given deadline. Thus, it is very important to envision a timeline for your project before you decide when to apply. It is also important to consider any preparations and formal requirements that need to take place before the volunteer starts volunteering - such as arranging transportation or obtaining a visa. For example, if you are expecting that the volunteer will arrive in the receiving organisation in October, it is advisable to have the project start date in June, or even earlier. This means that you would need to be applying for funding in February. Keep in mind that it takes time to get the project approved; manage all technicalities and do all preparations before the volunteer actually starts volunteering.

Another important question is who is going to apply for the funding. In order to take over this role, the organisation needs to have accreditation as a coordinating organisation. It should also be based either in a Programme country, or in a partner country that is eligible for applying for Erasmus+ grants. You need to make sure that one of the partners can formally act as a coordinating organisation, but you also need to discuss the division of responsibilities on all sides before you apply for the project. It is recommended that all rules and responsibilities of the partnership are set in a formal agreement.

Get ready

Preparation is an essential part of every project. In EVS projects it is even more significant. While it might seem like the receiving organisation is responsible for most of the preparations, both sending and receiving organisations have responsibilities in the preparation phase.

Preparations in EVS projects start well before the start of activities. In fact, a good time to begin working on your project is the day when you get the news that it has been approved for funding. Inform your partners about the good news, as well as the volunteer – if one had been selected when applying for the project. If not, then it is perhaps time to start discussing the selection process, along with all other aspects of the project. Set an appointment with your partners and go through everything that needs to be done before the volunteer activity starts. In this way you will be prepared

to get to work as soon as your project officially starts.

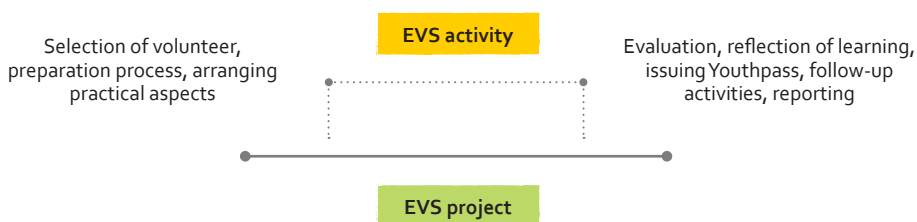
During the preparation phase EVS volunteers should not only be selected, but also properly prepared for the voluntary service. The sending organisation is responsible for carrying out a pre-departure preparation, which includes, but is not limited to, informing the volunteer about the project, programme rules and organisations' and volunteers' responsibilities; obtaining insurance; organising travel; supporting the volunteer in getting a visa; preparing the volunteer for the intercultural experience of volunteering in another country; initiating the learning process and informing the volunteer about [Youthpass](#) etc. Meanwhile, the receiving organisation needs to prepare the project, the staff and the environment. More detailed information regarding the steps to be taken by the receiving organisation is available in the section [Preparation for receiving volunteer](#) of this publication. Likewise, information about the role of the sending organisation is available in the [Preparing volunteers for their activities](#) section.

Many of the responsibilities are shared between the project partners. This is why it is important to clearly divide the tasks for each organisation at the time of application, as well as to closely communicate throughout the whole preparation process.

Implement the EVS activity

Sure enough, implementation is the most fun part of the project. This is when the action happens and when all your hard work finally gives results. However, it is also the phase when most challenges occur and when partner organisations need to work well together on responding to any situations that may arise.

In this handbook, under implementation, we are referring only to the actual volunteering activity. Please note that preparation and evaluation are also part of the project that you are implementing. In EVS projects, there is a difference between project dates and activity dates. The project is always longer than the EVS activity, as it includes measures that are taken before and after the actual voluntary work. The Erasmus+ programme defines project duration as the time period when you can spend money for the project. The EVS activity, on the other hand, is only the period when the volunteer is participating in voluntary service in another country.





Note that even during the EVS activity, much more happens than just the voluntary activity. While the volunteer is implementing activities with the receiving organisation, all partners work together on providing on-going support, reinforcing the learning dimension of EVS and monitoring and evaluating the project activities. EVS training sessions are held and the volunteer gets the opportunity to meet other EVS volunteers. Very often, [Youthpass](#) is also prepared and issued during the EVS activity. In short, the EVS activity is the most dynamic part of the EVS project.

Evaluate and report

When we talk about evaluation in the context of EVS projects we refer to two different dimensions. On one hand, evaluation of the project should be done with the volunteer. The process of evaluation should start while the volunteer is still in the receiving country, and it should continue upon the volunteer's return home. Evaluation in the home country is particularly important as it also gives a chance to the volunteer to plan follow-up activities and the next steps on a personal level.

The other level of evaluation is between the project partners. After the volunteer has returned home and has already evaluated the experience with the sending organisation, the organisations should also plan some time to discuss the project results, the main challenges, successes, the level of cooperation, the lessons learned and the impact of the project on all partners and on the local community, etc. This type of evaluation is essential for preparing the final report of the project, but also for planning the future cooperation between the partners. You can read more about the evaluation process in EVS in the [Evaluation and follow up](#) section of this publication.

Support system in EVS

Try to imagine yourself in the shoes of an EVS volunteer. You are in your early twenties and for the first time in your life you are leaving your home country for more than a week. Dozens of different thoughts are going through your mind as you are flying to your new home for the next 12 months. Will you like it there? Will the project be interesting? What if the tasks are too difficult for you? Will you be able to make friends? Will you remain in good relations with your friends back home? Will you miss them and your family? How will you deal with the moments of sadness and homesickness? What if you want to go home?

Still thinking from the perspective of an EVS volunteer, consider if a strong and reliable support system will make it easier for you to deal with all the challenges you might be facing.

EVS volunteers inevitably face a number of difficulties throughout their projects. During their EVS experience they have to integrate in a new living environment, learn about foreign culture and language, get used to a different working environment in the receiving organisation, as well as deal with a variety of personal issues. Sending and receiving organisations need to work closely together in order to provide the necessary support, so that the volunteer can have a successful service. The institutions that are implementing the Erasmus+ programme ([National Agencies](#), [SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centers](#), [FACEA](#)) also provide specific types of support to the volunteers which makes them an integral part of the EVS support system.

Support to the volunteer should be provided throughout the whole project. The level of involvement of different partners and the specific activities will depend on the project phase, but overall the volunteer should be able to benefit from an organised system that covers all areas in which support might be needed.

What kind of support should be provided?

The project partners are responsible for providing the volunteer with different types of support responding to each of the challenges they face. The dimensions of support include, but are not limited to:

- **Task related support.** The receiving organisation is responsible for providing the volunteer with adequate training and continuous support in relation to volunteer's tasks. At any time during the project, somebody from the receiving organisation who is familiar with these tasks should be available to help the volunteer learn about the work and implement the planned activities.
- **Personal support.** The personal challenges that volunteers are facing should be taken seriously and addressed adequately by both sending and receiving organisations. Support on a personal level should be provided throughout the

whole project, starting from the preparation process in the home country and finishing with reflection after completing the EVS activity. However, volunteers have the greatest need for personal support during their voluntary service. The receiving organisation should support the volunteer in overcoming (and if possible preventing) any difficulties, either in their personal life or work-related.

- **Intercultural learning support.** The receiving organisation should be aware of the potential intercultural challenges that the volunteer might face while trying to integrate in the host culture. Intercultural clashes are often not obvious because they are caused by differences in attitudes, beliefs, values and other elements of cultural identity. For exactly the same reason, intercultural learning challenges can strongly affect the volunteer. The receiving organisation should provide the volunteer with a safe space to reflect on their intercultural experiences and use them as opportunities for learning and personal development.
- **Linguistic support.** EVS volunteers are entitled to receive free language training during their service. The format, duration and frequency of the training will vary depending on the volunteer's needs, interests and abilities, the project tasks, and the capacity of the receiving organisation. Organisations can choose between two linguistic support formats (at the time of project application): [Online Linguistic Support](#) (OLS) is available in six main European languages. (The goal is to expand progressively the OLS system to all EU official languages by 2020.) If the main language used by the volunteer during their service is not covered by the OLS, organisations can apply for financial support for offering language training to long-term volunteers.
- **EVS training cycle.** Throughout the project, volunteers have the right to take part in one or two training sessions in the country where they volunteer (depending on the length of their volunteering activity), and in an annual EVS event in their home country, upon returning from the EVS activity. The EVS training sessions are organised by the [National Agencies](#) (or the [regional SALTO Centre](#) if the activity takes place in a neighbouring partner country). The receiving organisation is responsible for ensuring that the volunteer participates in the on-arrival training session and the mid-term evaluation, while the sending organisation should provide the volunteer with information regarding the annual EVS event. Some National Agencies additionally offer pre-departure events for outgoing volunteers.
- **Learning support.** Learning is a very important aspect of an EVS project, and this is what makes EVS different from many other volunteering programs. The receiving organisation is responsible for providing learning support to the volunteers by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning, setting learning objectives and reflecting on their learning process. The mentor appointed by the receiving organisation should also help the volunteer do a self-assessment of the learning outcomes, as well as making those achievements visible and recognised through preparing and issuing of a [Youthpass](#) at the end of the service.

- **Free time and socialising.** The receiving organisation should be aware that the time a volunteer spends outside of work is as important for their well-being and satisfaction as the working time. For many volunteers it is not easy to find ways to fill their free time, particularly at the beginning of their service. The receiving organisation can play a vital role in supporting the volunteer with that challenge by facilitating their integration into the local community, assisting them with discovering their new town, helping them to meet local young people and keeping them informed of events and potential leisure time activities etc. People from the receiving organisation of a similar age and with similar interests to the volunteer could be of great help in this process.

Who provides the support?

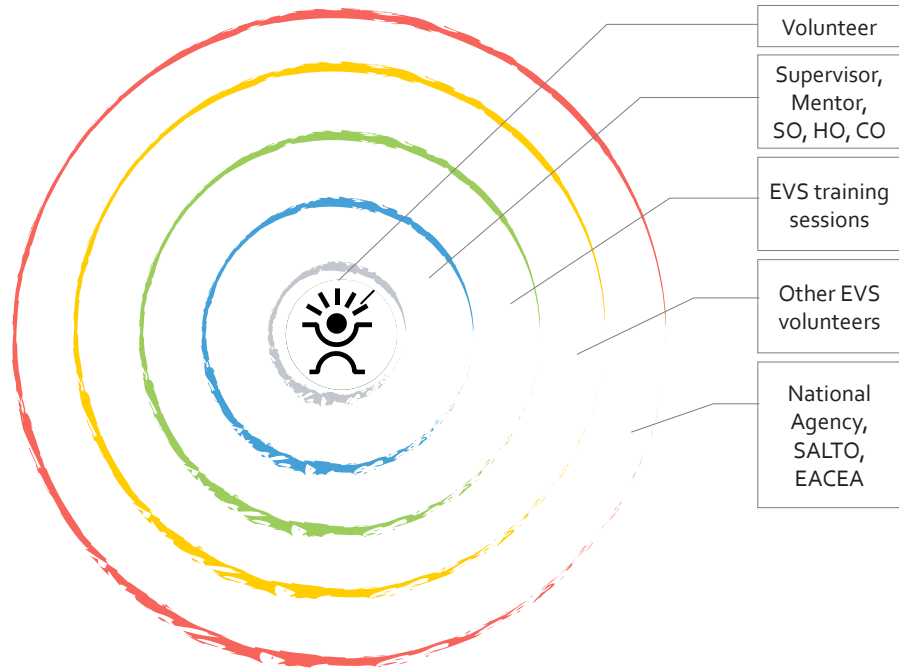
The simple answer to this question is: everyone. Sending and receiving organisations share the responsibility in providing support and take the lead in different phases of the project. The institutions implementing the Erasmus+ programme ([National Agencies](#), [SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centers](#), [EACEA](#)) are also involved, by providing overarching tools and mechanisms for supporting the volunteer throughout the whole project duration.

The volunteer should already be provided with support during the preparation process, while still in their home country. It is the responsibility of the sending organisation to ensure that the volunteer receives all necessary information and is adequately prepared to start volunteering. Pre-departure training should be organised, covering not only technical aspects of the Erasmus+ programme, but also topics such as cultural adaptation, learning, conflict resolution and others, depending on the nature of the EVS project. The sending organisation should also help the volunteer set realistic expectations and personal learning objectives from the project. If the project demands it, the sending organisation will also need to provide the volunteer with task-oriented and linguistic support, while still in their home country.

The greatest need for providing support arises during the voluntary service. As the volunteer is then in the host country the receiving organisation is responsible for ensuring that support is available in all areas: voluntary work, personal life, language and intercultural adaptation, free time and socialising, learning etc. In the meantime, the sending organisation is strongly advised to stay in touch with the volunteer, providing them with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, as well as reacting in case the volunteer is not receiving adequate support in one of these areas.

The layers of support during the project can be graphically presented as concerting circles, as in the picture below. Obviously, the first and most important circle consists of the support persons in the receiving and sending organisations, as well as the coordinating organisation, in case it is a separate one. Practice shows that most of the challenges can be resolved, and even prevented, by having a good relationship and open communication between the volunteer and the staff of the receiving organisation. In more difficult situations, the involvement of the sending organisation

can be very helpful. The institutions implementing the programme are placed in the last layer, as they should be contacted only in the most serious cases, when the partner organisations are not able to resolve the issues or to provide the volunteer with adequate support. In the meantime, institutional support is provided through the EVS training sessions, which are also a great opportunity for the volunteer to meet other EVS volunteers and benefit from exchanging experiences with them.



Upon the volunteer's return home, the sending organisation again takes the leadership in providing support. The need for support will largely depend on the individual and on the actual experience during the project. In principle, the sending organisation should help the volunteer with evaluating the project, reflecting on the learning experience, reintegrating into the home culture and planning the next steps. If the volunteer is interested, the sending organisation should also provide opportunities for conducting follow-up activities as a result of the EVS project. Finally, the volunteer can also participate in the annual EVS event, organised by the [National Agency](#) or the [regional SALTO Centre](#).

How should support be provided?

For many organisations this is the most challenging question related to providing support to the volunteer. And rightly so – even when you have the best intentions, great knowledge of the programme and very competent staff, it might take some time to learn how to put all those resources together in a functional support system. For sending organisations this can be fairly easy, and usually one or two persons can take over all responsibilities, both during the preparation process and throughout the whole project. But receiving organisations should provide various types of support over a longer period of time, which requires involvement of more staff and having a clear division of tasks.

The truth is that there is no magical formula for establishing a functional EVS support system. The ways in which you provide support to the volunteer will largely depend on your organisation's capacity, workplace culture and the nature of the EVS project. The bottom line is that the volunteer receives support in all major areas, listed earlier in this section.

However, please note that some of the types of support are incompatible and cannot be provided by the same support person. This is particularly true for task related and personal support. **Receiving organisations are strongly advised to appoint at least two different persons who will work closely with the volunteer – a task related support person, commonly referred to as a "supervisor", and a mentor.** In this way you will not only have two individuals specialised in different types of support, but in case any conflict arises between the volunteer and one of the support persons, the third party could mediate. The responsibilities of both sides can vary depending on the model of support structure that you develop, but in general they include the tasks listed in the following table:

Support people in the Receiving Organisation

Supervisor (task-related support person)

- Introduction to the organisation (values, history, rituals, members etc.)
- Information support
- Technical support
- Task-related training (shadowing)
- Project-related support
- Clarity of given tasks on daily or weekly basis
- Safety and security of working environment
- Providing a regular system of monitoring, evaluation and feedback
- Support to attend EVS training sessions
- Encouraging volunteer to attend language training

Mentor

- Personal support
- Intercultural adaptation and intercultural learning support
- Help in crisis situations and problem solving (SOS)
- Potential mediator in case of conflict between volunteer and supervisor
- Support reflection on learning during the service ([Youthpass](#) process)
- Recognition of volunteer's learning outcomes ([Youthpass](#) certificate)
- Introduction to the community and other volunteers (optional)
- Support social life (optional)
- Support with Online Linguistic Support (if applicable to your country).

As you can see, the responsibilities usually assigned to the supervisor and the mentor are very different. Thus, it is not realistic to expect that one person could respond to all of them. Another observation we can make is that various tasks are joined in the mentor's role. Some of them are marked as optional, and organisations often decide to involve other individuals in responding to them. Thus, we can even talk of supervising and mentoring roles being filled by more than one person, depending on an organisation's capacity.

But the question still remains: how can you organise your own support system? Before we move on to providing you with some guiding questions and examples, we would advise you to read through two other sections of this publication: [Task related support: managing your volunteer](#) and [Mentoring EVS volunteers](#), which will provide you with more detailed information about the two levels of support. Then you can return to this section and reflect about the way in which you can set up your EVS support system.

Do It Yourself – EVS support system

Imagine the process of setting up your EVS support system as a Do It Yourself activity, in which you know what you need to produce, but you have no idea how the final result will look. Your task will be to organise the human resources your organisation has in a way that will best utilise the skills and competencies of all individuals for covering the main areas of support in EVS.

Start by mind-mapping **all persons involved in the work of your organisation**. For now focus on the staff; the people who are running your organisation's work. And not only the paid, employed, full-time staff members, simply the people that you consider to be the team. Who are they? How many staff members does your organisation have? How many of them are involved in the organisation's work on a daily basis? Are there different departments in which they work? If yes, then who are the people who work in the sector in which the EVS volunteer will be involved?

Reflect for a moment on the **personal skillset** that each of those individuals possess. Who of them is the most appropriate person to work with the volunteer on the planned activities? We are looking for somebody who is well involved in the organisation's work (or at least in the project that the volunteer will work on), but still has enough time to provide training and daily support to the volunteer. This person needs to have a good understanding of the Erasmus+ programme, EVS in general, good language skills as well as a willingness to work closely with an international volunteer over a longer period of time. Don't forget yourself when mind-mapping the staff; maybe you are the right person to act as the **supervisor**? If you are thinking of someone else, ask yourself if you have consulted this person regarding this role. Supervising an EVS volunteer can be time-consuming and demanding. Thus, when you choose your EVS supervisor, don't immediately dismiss everyone else you had in mind for this role. Both supervisor and EVS volunteer can benefit from other staff members who are willing to help and provide further professional support to the volunteer.

The EVS **mentor** is the next important role that you need to fill. Usually this is the tricky part. Much is expected from the mentor: personal, intercultural and learning support; help with socialising and free time activities and readiness to react in crisis and conflict situations. And all of that from somebody who is either outside of the organisation, or from the organisation but not directly involved in the same project as the volunteer. In other words, you are looking for someone who is a third party and who can keep a neutral role between the organisation and the volunteer. Now is the time to expand the circle of potential candidates. Think of **local volunteers, former staff of the organisation, colleagues from other organisations, friends and acquaintances, ex-EVS volunteers** and even individuals from the local community who have nothing to do with youth work and international volunteering. Can you imagine any of them meeting your EVS volunteer on a regular basis, helping them to reflect on their work, their intercultural and learning experiences, supporting their learning process, helping them to reflect on the learning outcomes, providing emotional support and coaching if necessary? Perhaps someone who likes to spend time with people, who can help your volunteer socialise and make friends, but also someone who will take the volunteer's challenges seriously and will approach your organisation in case there is a problem. If you have in mind someone who fits this description then you have your perfect candidate for an EVS mentor. What is more probable though, is that you will find a few different people who are perfect for different aspects of the mentor's role.

That is what happens to many organisations. And this is the part where you can be creative. The question is who is the best person for which role? Some organisations decide to have a mentor who is responsible for providing personal, learning and intercultural support to the volunteer, done through regular mentoring sessions. Another person is then responsible for helping the volunteer socialise and fill their free time. If the organisation has local young members or volunteers, this role is usually taken over by one of the young people. Other organisations decide to have one person responsible for everything except for the reflection on learning and [Youthpass](#) – a part that is covered by a person from the organisation who does not work directly with the volunteer. **When you are deciding about the mentoring system, it is really about laying down the personal skills and competencies of the people you can count on, and dividing the responsibilities among them.**

If you decided about the person(s) who will take over the mentoring role, there are just a few other questions to consider. How will you manage the linguistic support? If you are not considering cooperation with a language school, do you have anyone in mind who could teach the volunteer? Then, who will take over the practicalities related to the project – accommodation, food allowance, different technical issues that may arise? Is it the supervisor, the mentor, or another person from the organisation? What about the financial responsibilities? And who will take over the reporting at the end? These are all minor roles, but need to be defined before you start implementing the project.

As we already stated earlier, there is no magical formula for setting up an EVS support system. But there can be **a magical formula that works for you**. What did you get as a result of your Do It Yourself activity? If you can draw your model on paper and if you can easily explain it to another person, then probably you have done a good job. Otherwise, keep brainstorming.

Part B



Quality in EVS



Hopscotch to Quality in EVS

The approach to quality in EVS in this publication could be presented as in the **Hopscotch model** below. It goes beyond effective project management and underlines key quality aspects (and potential "crisis points") within an EVS experience. The following chapters deepen the understanding of each "quality step" by offering reflection points and practical strategies on how to ensure successful passing through the fields of the EVS hopscotch.



Key aspects of quality in EVS

Involvement in EVS as “reflective practice”

Perhaps the story about ensuring quality in EVS starts even before you have really got involved in it. It starts with questions for (self-)reflection:

- Why do I and my organisation want to get involved in EVS?
- What are our values and principles that we would like to promote through EVS?
- How do we understand the aims and the “philosophy” of EVS?
- How is the concept of volunteering and voluntary service understood in our community and our country in general?
- What is the relationship between learning and service in EVS?

Where do you stand?

Read the following statements and see whether you **agree more or disagree more** with each one:

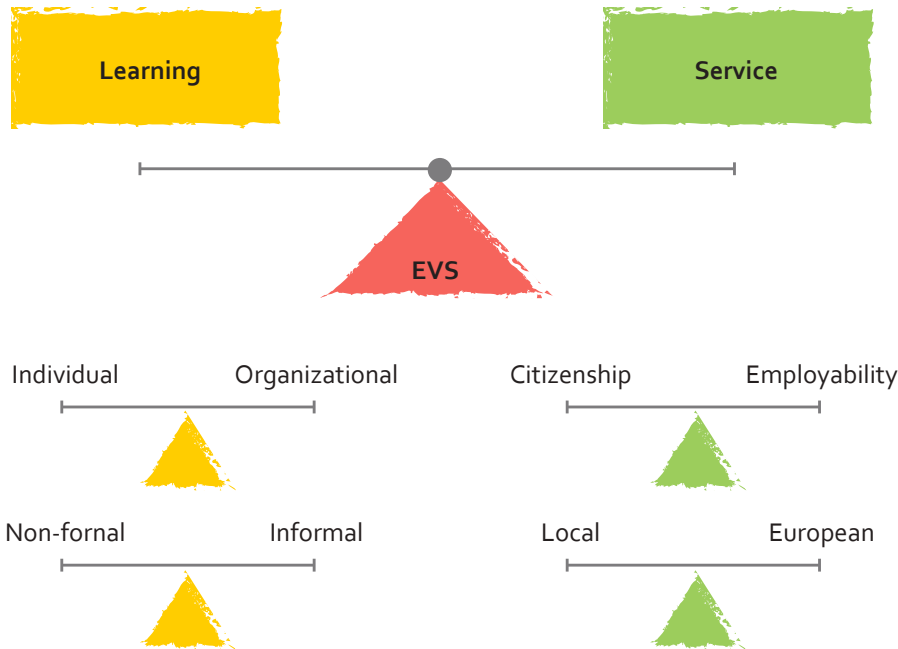
- EVS is primarily a good preparation to get a better job.
- If there is no visible impact on the local community, you should stop organising EVS.
- EVS is mainly about the individual learning of the volunteer.
- Even without any learning support, the volunteer can learn a lot.
- The main aim of EVS is to “produce” European citizens.

Answering the “tricky” statements above might bring some additional insight into your own approach to EVS, especially in relation to your own values and principles which shape your EVS practice and guide your expectations from an EVS project. You might be surprised, but not all accredited EVS organisations (your potential partners) would take the same stand as yours; in fact many of them might be on the other side of the continuum. Why is that so?

As we have already mentioned, EVS is best understood and defined as a **“learning service”** and one of the main challenges of each EVS project is **to find the “balance” between those two aspects – ‘learning’ and ‘service’**. However, there is no “right answer” to this question, so the “right balance” could be 50:50, 30:70, 60:40, or... This is very much influenced by your own and your partner’s “philosophy” behind the EVS practice. While for some organisations, EVS is seen as primarily an “educational programme”, for others it would still be mostly about “voluntary service” in its pure sense of meaning.

Due to various reasons (e.g. organisational values, aims, working cultures, etc.), your approach to EVS could be similar or it could be potentially conflicting. The question is if you are fully aware of your EVS "philosophy" (and its impact on your expectations from EVS) or if you simply take it for granted (expecting that your partners might have the same approach). So, let's think about the main "tensions" that often emerge and how they can be resolved in order to reach an agreed balance.

As shown in the picture below under the "learning dimension", one of the key areas for misunderstanding in EVS is linked to the following questions: is it only about the learning of the volunteer or is it the organisations involved in EVS (particularly, receiving organisations), who learn something as well? If yes, what do they learn? And are they open for learning and for truly being a "learning organisation"?



EVS as a "learning service"

Another point to consider in EVS is linked to the understanding of the terms "informal" and "non-formal" learning²⁰. In fact both of these aspects are present in the EVS learning experience. It is true that volunteers learn a lot informally by being

²⁰ In the context of EVS, "informal learning" refers to an unplanned and unintentional process of learning resulting due to pure immersion in daily life in a different social/cultural context. "Non-formal learning" refers to a more intentional and planned learning process, with an adequate learning support provided (e.g. mentoring in EVS).

immersed in their life experience abroad. However it is still important to ensure the non-formal learning dimension in EVS, which demands more of a planned, structured and supportive approach to learning from the organisations involved.

On the other side of this rocker, under the “service” aspect, it is important to check your own understanding of the reasons for voluntary service. Is it more about providing young people with relevant work experience and the learning of new skills and competences which will help them become more employable in the future? Or is it more about enabling young people to act as real active citizens, expressing their solidarity by helping their own/others’ communities in dealing with important issues and problems?¹¹

Finally, there is also a dilemma of “local versus European”: is it more about working for the benefits of the local community in the host country or it is more about promotion of European values, identity and citizenship?

There are no “correct” answers to these questions, but they are worthwhile thinking through and communicating your thoughts and beliefs to your partner organisations and to your volunteers. **Having an open exchange about these aspects with your partners is a good way to avoid misunderstandings based on different values, concepts and motivation to get involved in EVS. Reading the same [Programme Guide](#) does not necessarily mean that we see EVS in same way.**

¹¹ For more information about history and reasons for voluntary service, take a look at sections 1.3 and 1.4 in the [T-kit International Voluntary Service](#).
p. 11-15

Inclusion in EVS and selection of volunteers

"(Social) inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life".

Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership.

Later in this publication we will offer some practical advice about how best to implement an effective inclusion strategy in your organisation, but first a word about the general underlying inclusive ethos of European Voluntary Service. In fact EVS has always been centred around its inclusive nature. The idea was born from a need that was highlighted in the mid-1990s when there were plenty of options for young people who wanted to take part in international voluntary activity, but always with a condition attached: they must currently be a university student; they must first pay a considerable administration fee; they must have specific professional skills or qualifications. These programmes were, therefore, although valuable in their own way, intrinsically exclusive and unattainable to many young people who would really benefit from such an experience.

Along came EVS whose aims and objectives were broader, and suddenly ALL young people were eligible to take part in a programme which provides young people with important non-formal learning opportunities and possibilities to gain important personal and professional competences, enabling them to get further integrated into society and the labour market. And what's more they could do it regardless of their social, economic or cultural background. What an amazing idea!

What is meant by 'Fewer Opportunities'?

The European Commission has devised an [Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#) for Erasmus+ within the field of Youth which is designed to ensure that the Erasmus+ programme's implementation targets a diverse range of young people and that it is truly inclusive. Outlined in that publication is a description of obstacles that people who have 'fewer opportunities compared to their peers' may face:

- **Disability** (i.e. participants with special needs): young people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities etc.

- **Health problems:** young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions etc.
- **Educational difficulties:** young people with learning difficulties, early school-leavers, lower qualified persons, young people with poor school performance etc.
- **Cultural differences:** immigrants, refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, young people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, young people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties etc.
- **Economic obstacles:** young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system, young people in long-term unemployment or poverty, young people who are homeless, in debt or with financial problems etc.
- **Social obstacles:** young people facing discrimination because of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc., young people with limited social skills or anti-social or high-risk behaviours, young people in a precarious situation, (ex-)offenders, (ex-)drug or alcohol abusers, young and/or single parents, orphans etc.
- **Geographical obstacles:** young people from remote or rural areas, young people living on small islands or in peripheral regions, young people from urban problem zones, young people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) etc.

The publication goes on to highlight that these definitions are purposefully focussing on the situation rather than describing the young people themselves to avoid assigning blame. As you can see this is a very broad spectrum of factors, and it is important to remember that each young person with whom you are dealing is an individual with their own personal needs. We often find that young people who fit the 'fewer opportunities' profile have specific needs within more than one of the above criteria.

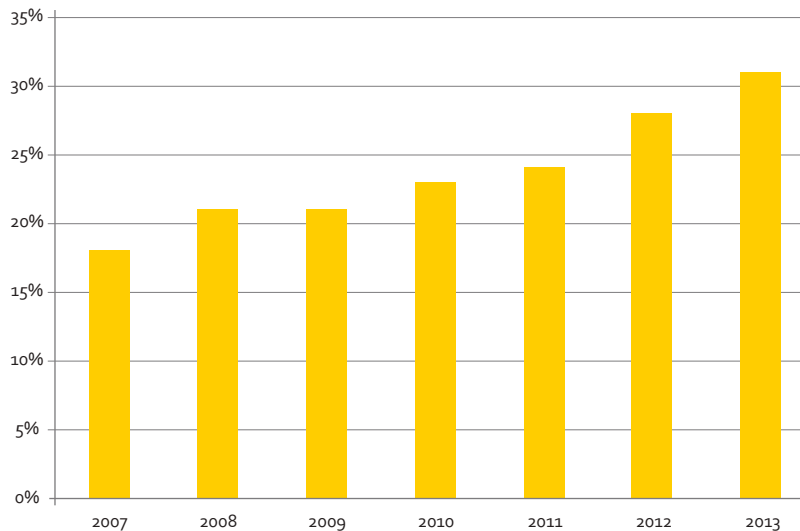
Everyone is working in inclusion

It is possible that many people reading this document might skip this whole section on inclusion thinking: "We are not an organisation that focuses on inclusion, and this does not apply to us!" In reality, it comes down to a simple look at an organisation's recruitment policy.

Do you choose a volunteer based on what they can offer you, or what you can offer them? Do you choose the volunteer who best fits the activity, or the one that will get the most out of it? These are actually tough questions and we should all stop to reflect on our motivations to offer EVS placements. The [legal basis of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme](#) draws specific attention to the need for targeting young people with fewer opportunities, as well as promoting social inclusion:

"when implementing the Programme, inter alia as regards the selection of participants[...], the Commission and the Member States shall ensure that particular efforts are made to promote social inclusion and the participation of people with special needs or with fewer opportunities".

In fact, one of the criteria used to measure the success of the Programme is the number of participants with fewer opportunities. Erasmus+'s predecessor, Youth in Action, saw the percentage of participants with fewer opportunities increase throughout the Programme. The [Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#) demonstrates this visually in this graph:



Graph 2: Young people with fewer opportunities as the percentage of participants in relevant actions in the Youth in Action programme 2007-2013

It may be the case that you are running a short-term EVS placement designed specifically for young people with additional support needs, but even if you are recruiting for a long-term placement and you have no history of working with inclusion groups it is possible to implement a successful inclusion policy by thinking about what you are going to offer your EVS volunteer.

The learning opportunities and experiences that an EVS placement can offer a volunteer can seriously boost their employability in the future, and it might only mean a small amount of additional support from your organisation to make a hugely positive impact on the volunteer's life. It is important for organisations to show altruistic tendencies in their volunteer selection process, and to bear in mind the [Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#) as well as making the EVS placement as mutually beneficial as possible for your organisation and the volunteer.



Selection of volunteers

This is, of course, one of the most important tasks in the managing of an EVS project, and should not be taken lightly. Volunteer recruitment should ideally be the responsibility of all stakeholders, and some thought needs to be put into it to ensure the right volunteer ends up in the right project.

The [Programme Guide](#) states that:

'Volunteers are to be selected in a fair, transparent and objective way, regardless of their ethnic group, religion, sexual orientation, political opinion, etc. No previous qualifications, educational level, specific experience or language knowledge should be required.'

Later in this publication we will talk in length about the importance of ensuring inclusivity in your project in the section entitled: [Working with inclusion groups - inclusion in practice](#). There we will offer some ideas for tools and techniques you might be able to use to make sure your project's ethos is focussed around the needs of the volunteer rather than the needs of the project. Receiving organisations should not be thinking about a cheap work-force, or the most-qualified volunteer, but rather what kind of volunteer would benefit the most from participation in the activities, and which personality type would best fit in with the organisation's culture.

This section is more about the process of selection in general. How do you ensure a 'fair, transparent and objective' selection process? How do you ensure the right volunteer is successful in their application regardless of all those specific factors stated in the [Programme Guide](#)?

You have two choices as to when you would like to recruit your volunteer(s). Many organisations like to make a selection before the grant application process starts. This way the application can be written with a specific individual in mind, and they can be consulted and involved with the funding application. Many organisations wait until the funding has been approved before they begin the process of recruitment. This is especially true when working with young people with fewer opportunities. The application process can take a long time and it is never a foregone conclusion that funding will be granted, so to save potential disappointment, pre-project drop-out and de-motivation, many organisations wait until they have pre-approved funding before the process begins. Whenever you do it, below are some good ideas to keep in mind:

Communication

The first thing that needs to happen is that the sending and receiving organisations have strong communication links between them. The sending organisation needs to understand the activities of the receiving organisation well, so as to prepare the potential volunteer, and to know for whom to look. The receiving organisation needs to know exactly what they want from a volunteer (bearing in mind the inclusion policy). Good quality communication and a three-way understanding at this point can

be the difference between an excellent project and an unsuccessful one, so choose your partners wisely (see the section entitled [International partnership](#)) and get to know them well before collaborating.

Advertising the opportunity

You should make sure that the opportunities you are offering are visible to the potential volunteers you want to attract. An excellent place to start is the [European Youth Portal](#). This is a hub of information to give young people information about projects with which they can get involved across Europe. It includes a comprehensive [database of accredited EVS organisations](#) and you can also advertise live projects to solicit volunteers' applications in the [Volunteering database](#).

Another website offering a similar service is [Youth Networks](#).

It's really important when using these websites to advertise your opportunities that the criteria for selection are clear. Let potential volunteers know what it is that you're offering and whom you would like to attract. What skills are you looking for and what skills can volunteers hope to improve? What else should they expect from the project, and what would be expected of them? You should be sure that you keep all your information up-to-date. You will receive a lot of applications once your projects are live and it will save you a lot of time when short-listing if your online presence is relevant.

The importance of face-to-face meeting

Coordinating organisations, sending organisations and receiving organisations need to get their heads together again for the short-listing process. In some situations the sending organisation will have applications from local volunteers with whom it has worked in the past, or potential volunteers that have come into their office looking for opportunities. This is a positive, community-focussed way of working. But if you have advertised the projects on the above-mentioned websites the applications might come from further afield from young people you have never met. Once a short-list has been made it is a very good idea for the sending organisation to meet the candidates face-to-face if at all practical. Just like a job interview. You would not employ someone in your organisation if you had never met them would you? If this is an impractical ideal then you should at least use Skype or a similar web-based video-conference tool. The good thing about this method is that the coordinating and/or receiving organisation(s) could be invited to the meeting too. In international youth-work all-too-often we rely on email and other typed discussion to communicate, which only ever gives you a shadow of a person's personality. Even a telephone conversation, while preferable to typed communication in this context, can be insufficient compared to the experience one gets when meeting in person.

Once you have had a conversation in person with the volunteer, as well as having digested their motivational letter and CV the final process of selection can take place,



and preparation of the volunteer can begin in earnest, as can preparation to receive the volunteer, now you know exactly who it will be!

International partnership

International partnerships are the basis for implementation of any Erasmus+ project. In mobility projects for young people, such as EVS projects, partnership has to be comprised of at least two organisations from different countries. **The partners jointly develop, prepare, implement and evaluate the project.** EVS projects will be successful only if they are the result of true, honest and reliable partnership between the organisations, in which everyone is truly involved. One of the keys to successful partnership is **making sure that all sides feel ownership of the project** and of the agreements they sign.

It is therefore important to think of **establishing partnership as a process**, rather than as an act. It takes time and effort to identify the right partner and to develop a project together, but much more is needed to turn that cooperation into a quality partnership. The project development process inevitably opens questions related to communication channels, division of roles and responsibilities, and even financial matters. From the very beginning, partners are faced with the challenge of agreeing about sensitive matters, and then implementing their arrangements into practice. The organisations that will enter the partnership with a readiness to learn and improve during the process are usually the ones that will succeed in developing long-lasting cooperation.

The Erasmus+ programme is very flexible when it comes to the type of organisations that can participate in projects. It is up to you to define the structure of your project and to decide if you will cooperate with non-profit organisations, public bodies, social enterprises or yet another type of organisation. The way in which partnership is established and roles are divided between the organisations is also left to the project partners. And it seems this flexibility is the source of many questions that newcomers in EVS projects have.

Who are the partners?

There are three different roles that organisations participating in EVS projects can take: **sending organisation, receiving organisation and coordinating organisation.** These three roles are very distinctive – the sending organisation is in charge of preparing and sending the volunteer abroad; the receiving organisation is the one that is hosting the volunteer and the EVS activity; while the coordinating organisation is responsible for applying for funding for the whole project on behalf of all partners.

Within one project, the same organisation can act as a sending and receiving organisation in different EVS activities. Meanwhile, there can be more than one sending and more than one receiving organisation in the project. In a project with only one EVS activity, the coordinating role is usually taken over by either the sending or the receiving organisations. But in projects with more activities the coordinating organisation might be one that does not send or host a volunteer. Their job is then just to coordinate the project on behalf of all partners.

This means that EVS projects can vary in size and complexity. You might implement a project that involves only two organisations and one or more volunteers in one EVS activity, applied by one of the two partners. But you might be also involved in an EVS project with few different sending and receiving organisations, dozens of volunteers and a number of different EVS activities. In any case, the three types of partners always remain the same.

And then there is the volunteer, who also has rights and responsibilities in the EVS project. **Would you consider EVS volunteers as partners in the EVS projects?**

To a certain extent you can, especially if you consider the fact that EVS volunteers are often as equally involved in the project development process as the organisations. However, bear in mind that the EVS volunteer is in fact a participant in your project, and a member of the target group that you work with. In other words, the sending and receiving organisations develop an EVS project on behalf of the EVS volunteer. But because young people's active participation is so important in this programme, it is essential to involve the volunteer in all project phases. To implement a successful project, the volunteer should have a say in choosing the hosting project, planning the activities, arranging the practicalities, and even evaluating the project at the end. So it makes sense to think of the volunteer as one of the project partners. Still, you should not forget that the volunteer does not bear any formal, legal or financial responsibility towards the project, like the partner organisations do.

How is the partnership established?

In the Erasmus+ programme any organisation can take the initiative to establish a partnership. Very often sending organisations contact potential receiving organisations looking for placements for EVS volunteers they would like to send. But sometimes the initial contact comes from the receiving organisation, which is looking for organisations that can send volunteers to its project. So, in principle, you may be approached by somebody else, or you may take the lead in searching for potential partners and making the first contact.

In addition, partnership in EVS can be also initiated by the EVS volunteer. Often volunteers access the online [database of accredited EVS organisations](#) by themselves and they start contacting potential sending and receiving organisations. So don't get surprised if you receive a message from a volunteer who has, for example, already agreed with a receiving organisation about a project and invites you to join the partnership as a sending organisation. This is legitimate as well, especially

because it shows active participation of the young people. However, it's important to remember that even if the partnership is established in that way, you and the other organisation are the partners in the project, and thus you need to assume the roles and responsibilities as soon as you get in touch with each other.

So your organisation has already received an EVS accreditation, you have an idea for an EVS project and you have already checked the Erasmus+ programme rules. For many organisations the next question is how to proceed from that point on. Clearly, you need international partners in order to start implementing EVS projects, but where do you find them?

There are various ways in which partners can be identified. The most obvious way is to check the [European Youth Portal](#), which includes a [database of all accredited EVS organisations](#). There you can browse EVS organisations according to various criteria, including topic, country, project length and others. You can also use the portal to publish specific calls for partners, or to respond to ones that are announced by other organisations. Starting the partner finding process with the [European Youth Portal](#) is a good idea if your organisation is a complete beginner in this field, as you can use it for identifying organisations that work in a similar area and that could potentially be interested in working with you. The portal is also a good resource if you are looking for a specific project, for a particular volunteer that you are working with.

Nowadays, the internet offers a variety of other **online resources and tools** that you can use. An example of such a tool is [OTLAS](#) – a partner-finding tool of the [SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres](#). Calls for partners can also be found at various other forums, web pages, mailing groups and pages on social networks. The importance of these online based tools increases constantly, following the growing influence of social media.

However, you do not always need to rely on the internet. If you have personally met representatives of organisations from other countries then it's worth checking with them if they are working in the field of EVS. Remind yourself of the contacts you have made at international projects in the past. And if you haven't participated in any projects before then feel free to browse the [European Training Calendar](#) and apply for one of the partnership building activities offered there. You might also want to ask colleagues from other organisations about potential partners they can recommend. While it can be limiting, **it is always safer to rely on partners that you have personally known** or that have been recommended to you, in comparison to ones that you have found online.



How to build quality partnership?

Establishing successful partnership is never an easy task, and even less so when it is international. To do EVS projects, you will need to rely on partners based far away from your place of living, while communicating mainly by e-mail, Skype or phone. Chances are great that you will cooperate with organisations for years and you will never meet their staff in person. And still, you will need to trust them, in a situation when you are sending them, or receiving from them a young person for whom the project that you are developing is, in many cases, their once in a lifetime opportunity. Thus, it is important to build a long-distance high quality partnership.

When communicating with your partner, think of what do you need from them in order to feel safe and secure in the partnership. Try to communicate in the way in which you want your partner to communicate with you, but also be as assertive as possible regarding your needs in the partnership. **Being clear about expectations, roles and responsibilities is essential in establishing transnational partnerships.**

To help you with building a successful EVS partnership, here are some general guidelines to follow:

- **Be realistic.** Don't overestimate your work, capacity, or availability. Don't make false promises – if you are too busy for the upcoming deadline, it might be better to postpone the project for the next one.
- **Be honest.** Present your organisation, your capacity, your hosting project, the profiles of your volunteers and your expectations from the cooperation as objectively as possible.
- **Set rules for cooperation.** Discuss with your partner about the way in which you

want to communicate, the basic values of your cooperation and the situation you want to prevent from happening.

- **Divide responsibilities.** Agree with your partner about the tasks that each of you will take, in all phases of the project.
- **Be responsible.** Complete your tasks on time, respect the agreed deadlines and remind your partner for their part.
- **Be efficient.** Try to answer e-mails on time and be available when you are needed.
- **Be supportive.** Maybe your partner is less experienced or meets more challenges than you, so make sure you provide them with support as needed.
- **Update each other.** Stay in touch and inform your partner regarding any changes or updates.
- **Sign agreements.** Prepare one document that will summarise your project and make sure it is signed by all partner organisations prior to the EVS activity. Prepare another agreement that will be signed by the volunteer as well.

Agreements

Despite the flexibility provided by the Erasmus+ programme in defining the roles and responsibilities between the partners, there is still a requirement for forming the arrangements made into legally binding documents. The expectation is that two different agreements are prepared and signed prior to implementing the EVS activity: an agreement between the project partners and an agreement with the volunteer.

The **agreement between project partners** is an internal document that defines the responsibilities, tasks and financial contributions of all sides involved in the project. Though it is not required that this document is sent to the [National Agency](#), the partners are strongly recommended to prepare one. This agreement can serve as a key instrument for preventing and resolving potential conflicts between the partners, particularly in more sensitive areas, such as finances. The agreement between partners should not be confused with the mandate letter, which is a different document, required during the project application phase.

The **agreement with the volunteer** is a volunteering agreement that the EVS volunteer must sign prior to departure. This agreement is also signed by the sending and receiving organisations, and it clearly defines the tasks the volunteer needs to carry out during EVS, the practical arrangements, the intended learning outcomes etc. It is strongly advised that both the organisations and the volunteer are involved in preparing this agreement. Some [National Agencies](#) require this document to be sent to them, while others consider it an internal document. In any case, it is for the benefit of the project to have this agreement properly prepared and signed prior to the EVS activity.

Formal agreements can be sometimes seen as redundant, particularly if the partners feel comfortable working with each other. Indeed, trust is an essential element of a partnership, but relying only on trust can be a big risk and can harm good partnerships.

Including the most important arrangements in an agreement will take a heavy load off your shoulders and will allow you to work on the project without unnecessary fears and hesitation.

But agreements are not only tools for legal protection. They can also be used as a mechanism for deciding on all aspects of the partnership, especially the ones that are not the easiest to discuss. It is very probable that there are many important questions that would not be asked if it wasn't essential to put them in an agreement. Examples of this include strategies for communication, plans for dealing with crises and principles for conflict resolution. Feel free to use the agreement as a reason to talk about possible challenging scenarios. If you do that, you will not only have such strategies written in a contract, but you will also be sure that all partners are aware of them – which is perhaps even more important.

Who does what?

There is no one right way to divide the responsibilities in your partnership, especially because different partners can take the lead in different circumstances. However, it is possible to list a set of tasks that would normally be taken over by the different partners, such as the one presented in the table below.



Division of tasks between partners			
Project phase	Sending organisation	Receiving organisation	
Accreditation procedure	Both organisations fill out and submit an EVS accreditation application form to the National Agency in their country or the regional SALTO Centre .		
Planning and preparation	Supports the EVS volunteer in finding and contacting potential receiving organisations.	Prepares a call for the volunteer, volunteer profile and task description, and undertakes a process of volunteer selection.	
	If the organisations establish partnership prior to finding a volunteer, then they work together on defining the volunteer profile and conducting a selection procedure.		
	When a partnership is established, the organisations work together on planning the EVS project and preparing an application form. The division of responsibilities in this process varies from case to case, but typically the receiving organisation takes the lead.		
Implementation	Before the EVS activity	Prepares the volunteer before departure for the EVS service.	Prepares the project and organisation's staff for hosting a volunteer.
		Provides the volunteer with detailed information about the hosting project.	Ensures there is enough staff to support the volunteer during service.
		Assists the volunteer in obtaining a visa/residence permit and arranging traveling to hosting country.	Makes arrangements for accommodation, meals, local transport and other practical aspects of the project.
		Arranges health insurance and other practicalities.	
		Both organisations work on preparing an agreement with the volunteer. The sending organisation ensures that the volunteer is also involved in this process.	
	During the EVS activity	Stays in touch with the volunteer and the receiving organisation.	Coordinates and implements the activities during the EVS project.
		Asks the volunteer for regular reports on the project.	Organises all practical issues regarding the project.
		In case there is a need, gets involved in resolving difficulties and challenges.	Provides the volunteer with task-related, personal, language, learning and other types of support.
			Ensures volunteer's participation in the on-arrival training session and mid-term evaluation.
			Helps the volunteer reflect on the learning throughout the EVS service, manage their self-assessment of the key competencies and prepare the Youthpass certificate.

	After the EVS activity	Helps the volunteer reflect on the value of EVS for their personal growth and future path.	
		Supports the volunteer in re-integrating into their home community.	
		Supports the volunteer in setting goals for utilising their competences in the future.	
Evaluation and follow up		Ensures the volunteer's participation in the final evaluation of the project, as well as in the annual EVS event.	
		Offers a possibility to the volunteer to develop activities in their home country with the purpose of sharing their experience gained during the EVS project.	
		Both organisations work on preparing a final report from the project and ensure volunteer's participation in it.	

In addition to the tasks stated above, the organisation that will assume the **coordinating** role also takes an additional set of tasks and responsibilities. Here is a list of the most usual ones:

- Submits the project application form on behalf of all partners
- Has financial and administrative responsibility for the project to the [National Agency](#) or the [EACEA](#)
- Coordinates the project on behalf of and in coordination with all other partners
- Distributes the grant according to the signed internal agreement
- Carries out all or some of the administrative tasks of the sending and receiving organisations
- Provides support with obtaining health insurance, visa and the [Youthpass](#) certificate

Note that this is just an indicative list of responsibilities that sending and receiving organisations are usually responsible for. It is in no way exhaustive, and both sides should expect to take over other tasks as well. For a more detailed division of roles consult the [EVS Charter](#), which is a document published by the European Commission.



To sum-up: should partners do everything together?

At the beginning of this section we said that partners jointly develop, prepare, implement and evaluate the project. But what does this actually mean? Should you involve your partner in every step of the project, in every decision that you take?

Developing an EVS project should be a balance between the work you are doing by yourself, and the steps that you take together with your partners. For example, you will probably develop the concept of your hosting project as a receiving organisation, but you will certainly need to adjust something after you discuss it with your partners, in order to better respond to the needs and interests of the volunteers they are sending. Or, you might have developed a standard process for preparing the volunteers before departure, but you may need to add new elements required by the hosting project. Keep in mind that your role as a sending or receiving organisation is only one part of the EVS project. Your vision, ideas and goals need to be matched with those of your partners and of the volunteer, and sometimes compromises have to be made.

When it comes to the specific project elements it is advisable that the partners jointly work on preparing the application form, defining the task description for the volunteer, conducting the volunteer selection process, dealing with all technicalities (traveling, visa) arranging the practicalities in the hosting country, planning the preparatory process before departure, preparing the support system for the volunteer etc. Again, it is very natural that one of the partners will take over the lead of some project aspects. Sometimes you will make decisions together, sometimes you will consult the partners, and sometimes you will inform them about conditions that cannot be changed or compromised. The most important thing is to always involve the partners in the process. One of the keys to successful partnership is making sure that all sides feel ownership of the project and of the agreements they sign.

Preparing volunteers for their activities

Way, way back in the old Youth in Action programme the EVS training cycle, by which I mean the training that was available to the volunteers, was four-fold: All EVS volunteers were eligible to receive pre-departure training before their project started, on-arrival training in their host country as their project commenced, mid-term evaluation half-way through their project and an annual EVS event back in their home country after the project was finished. All of this was funded by the Programme and it was the [National Agency](#) of each country's responsibility to coordinate its provision ([regional SALTO Centre](#) in those countries without an NA). As times in Europe grew more and more financially difficult towards the end of the life of the

Youth in Action programme the European Commission decided that to save money they would make only on-arrival training and mid-term training compulsory. The main theory behind this was that volunteers were reporting that several similar topics were being covered in their pre-departure and on-arrival training, and many volunteers were staying in their host country after the project, or continued to travel, or immediately started a full-time job or studies and were thus unable to attend their final-evaluation seminar. Some countries continued to offer pre-departure and final-evaluation trainings, although, as it was no longer compulsory, many did not, and volunteers were often sent to their host countries without any kind of national training.



In Erasmus+ the EVS training cycle is clear: on-arrival of the volunteer, as well as being a responsibility of theirs to attend and engage. Mid-term evaluation is also a right/responsibility for volunteers whose projects are at least 6 months long.

To ensure a quality EVS project for all concerned it is essential to offer the volunteers some sort of preparation – especially if the volunteer is at the young end of the spectrum - the eligible ages for participation in an EVS project are currently 17-30. This is broad and the need for preparatory training may be higher in a younger volunteer who is unlikely to have ever lived, or travelled on their own. Volunteers with fewer opportunities compared to their peers would benefit from additional preparation as well.

The onus is on the coordinating organisation to ensure that volunteers are adequately prepared, and what the coordinating organisation should do is ensure the sending organisation is adequately prepared to prepare the volunteers! But what can the sending organisation do to ensure the volunteers are adequately prepared for this incredible experience? Read on and we will give you some ideas.

Meet the volunteers (ideally more than once!)

Unfortunately the sending organisation is occasionally looked upon as an unnecessary formality, especially amongst volunteers with privileged backgrounds. It has been known for volunteers to find their own hosting organisation, and out of necessity find an organisation in their own country to act as the sending organisation on paper alone. No meetings are arranged and no preparation is done. The sending organisation receives their sending costs for doing very little. We are therefore not being patronising when we say 'meet the volunteers' as there are plenty of examples

of organisations who don't. Working in an international setting it is a sad reality that we make contact and build relationships with people without ever seeing their face in real life. If you have ever experienced this you will know that after you finally meet that person suddenly things change! You write to them differently, more confidently and more friendly, and you can hear their voice when you read their mails in your head. Thus meeting with the volunteer and creating a rapport will benefit their experience by knowing they have a team behind them in their sending country. It will also give you an opportunity as a sending organisation to ensure adequate preparation is achieved, using some of the following methods.

Ensure they know what EVS is!

In most countries EVS is not a household name in the same way that perhaps Erasmus is. Many people may not have heard of it, or they might know the name but will be unsure of its aims and rules. It is really important that EVS volunteers understand the programme they are joining right from the beginning including:

- What the aims of EVS are and why it was set up in the first place.
- How EVS is funded and by whom.
- What they can expect to receive in terms of their rights as an EVS volunteer.
- What they are expected to do in terms of their responsibilities as a participant.
- Who will benefit from their placement – them as individuals, the local community where they will work, their local community when they return, Europe as a whole, the world as a whole...!

Much of this information is included in the [EVS Info Kit](#) which is designed to welcome volunteers to the world of EVS, to let them know what to expect, as well as describing the [Youthpass](#) process and practicalities such as their [EVS insurance plan](#).

Another essential document for prospective EVS volunteers to read is the [EVS Charter](#) which outlines the roles of the 3 key organisations, the minimum quality standards that must be adhered to within a project as well as describing the rights and responsibilities of the volunteers themselves.

Get the volunteer to look 'close to home'

Much of the preparation of your volunteers will involve getting them to research the country to which they are going and to start to understand the cultural impact that the new country will have on them. What is also found to be good practice is to start by getting them to think about the country from which they will be travelling. Depending on their background and life experience to date they may have never stopped to think

about key questions about their own country that they may have taken for granted: knowledge about political systems, for example, social issues and cultural issues, all of which are important when considering local and international citizenship. This will begin the process of cultural integration allowing the volunteer to open their mind to the concept of cultural difference, whilst steering clear of the negative influence of stereotyping.

Get the volunteer to volunteer!

Your volunteer might never have offered themselves as a volunteer before, and may be unsure what to expect. EVS is unique in that volunteers will receive an allowance, travel costs and accommodation in another country. These things can potentially be a draw to someone for whom volunteering is actually an alien experience. It's important that the volunteer understands what is expected of them and that they have certain responsibilities in relation to their hosting project. It is usually a good idea to get them involved in some local volunteering if possible. Perhaps there is a local organisation that is similar in some ways to that of the one that will receive them internationally.

Decide on learning aspirations

The learning aspect of EVS is one of the key factors that makes it a powerful experience in an individual's life. Much of the non-formal and informal learning will happen organically without a need to plan specifically for it, but asking an individual what they would like to get out of a project, and what will aid them to achieve that, will help them to keep this in their mind throughout their experience, helping them succeed in the most effective way possible. Like with [Youthpass](#), the process of going through this is the valuable part. If they physically write learning goals it is to act only as an aide-memoire. It might be a good idea at this point to introduce them to the concept of [Youthpass](#) to encourage them to keep a kind of diary throughout the process with a view to reflecting on their experiences regularly.

Communicate with the receiving organisation

This recommendation is not just for the sending organisation, but for the volunteer as well. A strong understanding is needed between the key players in the project, namely the volunteer, receiving organisation, sending organisation and coordinating organisation if applicable. It is strongly advisable that sending organisations acquire a detailed outline of all the relevant practical and task-related information that a volunteer might need:

- Where will the volunteer be staying, geographically? Are there good transport links? Are there sufficient amenities in the environs?

- Will the volunteer be sharing a house/a room? With whom? Can we contact this person/people in advance via phone/email/Skype for introduction?
- Will there be internet access in the accommodation? Is it free? Will it be easy to attain a local SIM card?
- What will be the volunteer's tasks? Is there a specific timetable that will be adhered to? Does the volunteer need to do any research related to the receiving organisation and their work?
- How much allowance will the volunteer receive in the local currency? Will this be given weekly/monthly? Will this include money for food? Will the volunteer need a local bank account? Can she/he receive help in this?

There is a seemingly endless list of questions that a volunteer might have, and most can be alleviated by a call to the receiving organisation. As mentioned in the [previous chapter](#) it is strongly recommended to create and sign an agreement that includes all this information as well as the responsibilities of each of the parties.

Think of the volunteers' health

Through an agreement that the European Commission has reached with the insurance company [Cigna](#), all EVS volunteers are insured for the whole duration of their EVS project. The insurance policy is the same for all volunteers and it covers illness, accident, death, permanent disability, loss of identification and travel documents and other risks as described in the policy itself.

All insurance costs are paid directly by the European Commission and are not included in the project budget. The sending organisation is responsible for enrolling the volunteer in the [EACEA Erasmus+ insurance plan provided by Cigna](#). The sending organisation is able to view a restricted version of the website for the ensured volunteers, where they should also [enrol the volunteer online](#). The enrolment form is available under the section "My plan" on the official web page of the insurance company. Volunteers should be enrolled at least 14 days before the start of their service¹².

In addition to their EVS insurance policy, it is also advisable, if applicable, to encourage and support the volunteer in applying for a European Health Insurance Card. This is a free card to all EU citizens (as well as those from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) that gives the holder access to medically necessary, state-provided healthcare. It entitles the holder to benefit from the same conditions and the same cost (free in some countries) as people insured in that country¹³.



¹² Any questions regarding health insurance and enrolment of volunteers should be sent to EACEA-YOUTH@ec.europa.eu.

¹³ You can find more information about how to apply for the card at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=563&langId=en#nationalinfo>

Preparation for receiving volunteers

Getting ready for hosting can surely be considered as a serious candidate for being the most demanding part of implementing EVS projects. There are many details to take care of, which can be particularly challenging if you are about to host your first EVS volunteer. But don't panic – everything can be arranged if you approach the preparation process seriously and on time. Truly, the months before your first volunteer arrives will be filled with new tasks, in addition to your daily duties. And yes, the work style and daily routine of your organisation will inevitably change when the new person will join your team. But as you will soon experience, all changes and challenges are well worth the efforts.

Prepare the organisation

Well, this is an obvious one, but this is why it can be easily overlooked. It is also the basis of all the preparations that you will need to make. You can't start building a house before laying the foundations, and preparing your organisation for the volunteer's arrival is really the groundwork for constructing a stable EVS project.

Start with the people. When your EVS project is officially approved it is probably a good time to ask yourself if you have informed the others about the EVS volunteer. And by others we mean everyone in your organisation and beyond who will come into contact with the volunteer through their work.

You can't overstate the importance of **having everyone in your team informed and on-board** with the EVS project you are about to implement. Having a new member of the team from another country can be a big change, particularly for small organisations. Don't underestimate the ways in which hosting an EVS volunteer could affect the work of your organisation. To begin with, somebody from your team will need to allocate some time for providing daily task-related support to the volunteer. Other staff members might be affected as well, depending on the planned activities and the nature of the EVS project. Perhaps you will need to anticipate that you will have less time for working on other projects and activities, particularly during the initial period of the EVS activity. Integrating the volunteer in the routine and everyday work of your organisation requires conscious efforts and a sufficient amount of time and energy.

Cultural adaptation is another important aspect to consider. You will need to prepare your team not only for having a new colleague, but also for working and co-existing with a person from another culture. At this point, it is important to reflect about



the past experiences and competences of your colleagues. Have they ever worked in a multicultural team before? Have they been involved in a process of intercultural learning? How much do they know about other cultures? Do they have any prejudices about the country where the volunteer comes from? Do they speak other languages? Depending on your answers to these questions, it might be useful to design and implement a short training or other activities in this area.

Besides the staff, consider who else should be informed and prepared for the volunteer's arrival. If your organisation is working with **local volunteers**, it is probably a good idea to talk to them and even involve them in the preparatory process. If they are young people themselves, they actually might be very excited about the volunteer's arrival and could be of great use for integrating the volunteer into the local community. Don't forget the target group that your organisation works with, particularly if the volunteer will be involved in working directly with them. Depending on the planned level of involvement with the volunteer, and the characteristics of the **target group**, you might need to organise some preparatory activities with them as well. Also, bear in mind the people from any important **partner organisation or institution**. If the volunteer is to have **roommates**, talk to them before the volunteer's arrival. At the end, inform the **neighbours**, all important friends and anyone whom the volunteer would probably meet in the near future. This will help you to provide a safe and welcoming environment for someone who comes to live in your community.

When thinking about preparing the organisation, don't forget the **working conditions**. Where is the volunteer going to work? Will they need a separate desk with a computer, or some other type of working space? If the activities are to be implemented at a different location the volunteer will probably still need space in the office to do all the preparations. And even if a separate desk is not required, it would be still nice if the volunteer has a corner in the office to use – that would surely make them feel more welcome and as part of the team.

Organisations' **working plans** are also something to consider and possibly revise. For example, if you were planning a big team building activity for your team around the time of volunteer's arrival, it is probably good idea to plan it for when the volunteer will be already there – even if that means postponing it. Or if you know that your whole team will be extremely busy with implementing a project during the whole month, then probably that month is not a good time for the arrival of your EVS volunteer. In such a case, maybe you will need to postpone the beginning of the EVS activity. It is important that the volunteer arrives at the right time, when you are available to provide them with a proper welcome.

Finally, it is good to think even more broadly – is it important that the **local community** your organisation works with is informed about the volunteer? Again, this very much depends on your own local reality. If the EVS project is based in a big city, then there is not much sense in informing the local community – apart from perhaps the closest



neighbourhood. But the arrival of a foreign volunteer might be a big event for a smaller town or a village. In such situations, informing everyone about the volunteer's arrival would be useful not only for the community, but also for your organisation and the volunteer. Think about creative ways of doing it – organising informative meetings with the local population, preparing an event for them (a presentation, or a party perhaps), distributing promotional materials or anything else that you find suitable for the community.

Prepare the activities

The activities that the volunteer will work on are one of the key elements of the EVS project. While volunteers have various motivations for volunteering abroad, the actual voluntary service is definitely among the most important ones. The fact that the volunteer has decided to join your project, and not another one, shows that your work and the planned EVS activities mean something to the volunteer. Organisations sometimes fail to realise how important the voluntary work is for the volunteers, and as a consequence they do not plan the activities properly. For a volunteer who is arriving full of motivation to contribute to the organisation and the community there is no bigger disappointment than realising that, in fact, they are not really needed. Or even worse, learning that the planned EVS activities will probably not even happen.

As you probably already know, planning the EVS activities happens a few times during the preparation process. You first need to generally state the area of work when submitting the application for EVS accreditation, for the purpose of getting accredited as a receiving organisation. Then you are supposed to develop the planned activities in much more detail when preparing the project application form for the EVS project.

The activities should be developed in even more detail when you learn that your project has been approved. Planning is different when you know that the volunteer is definitely arriving. Probably the preparation of activities will also be influenced by the profile of the volunteer who is coming. Once you complete the selection, you will probably need to adjust some of the planned activities according to volunteer's skills, needs and interests. It is the best if this is done in close cooperation with the sending organisation and with the volunteer too.

It is difficult to imagine that big changes might happen after such a thorough process of planning. Nevertheless, there are many factors that influence the EVS project and some of them are out of your control. In some situations, the volunteer arrives much later than the time which was initially planned. Your work on a local level might also be influenced by events and circumstances that have nothing to do with the EVS project.

Therefore, it is of crucial importance to check and re-plan the activities before the arrival day.

Prepare the support system

When getting ready to host, it is absolutely essential to establish the supporting system for the EVS volunteer. Providing support during the EVS activity is mainly the responsibility of the receiving organisation. The system of support should be structured and well prepared before the volunteer arrives, **like a safety net for the young person coming to do voluntary work in an unknown environment.**

Detailed information about the support system that you should provide and about the people who should be involved in it can be found in the section titled [Support systems in EVS](#).

Arrange the practicalities

To host an EVS volunteer means to face a lot of issues of a practical nature and to respond by creating solutions that are at the same time affordable and responding to the volunteer's needs. Sometimes this is not an easy job and you need to be conscious about it when applying for the project. Accommodation, visa or a language course, are not tasks that can be arranged in a couple of days. They are part of a longer process of preparation that starts well before the volunteer arrives.

- **Visa and residence permit**

Obtaining a visa or residence permit is one of the first practical issues that needs to be arranged. This process can take a long time, particularly if various supporting documents are required. Thus, it is of utmost importance to plan enough time for carrying out the procedure, but also to launch the process as soon as possible, after the project is approved. Can you imagine a worse beginning to the project than having to postpone the activity because the visa process could not be completed on time?

It might look like arranging a visa or residence permit is the sole responsibility of the sending organisation, but in fact the receiving organisation has a significant role in the process. Information regarding the legal procedures is usually more easily accessible to receiving organisations. Of course, the sending organisation should contact the embassy in charge regarding the specific rules, procedures and required documents. But it is also recommended to contact relevant institutions within the hosting country, as sometimes they can provide more accurate information. If you are in doubt it is worth consulting other organisations from your country that have already been through the process of obtaining visas for their volunteers.

Regulations concerning visas and residence permits vary from country to country. They also largely depend on the volunteer's country of citizenship. In some cases a visa is not required at all. In others, the visa procedure is fairly fast and simple, and can be completed in the volunteer's home country. However, there are many instances when the national law requires that the volunteer is issued a residence permit, which is different from a visa and takes longer time to obtain. In such cases, the process

usually starts in the home country of the volunteer, and it is then completed in the host country.

Make sure you have all necessary information regarding the visa process before you even submit the project application form, so you can plan enough time and costs for obtaining the visa or residence permit. Also, do not forget that you should assist the volunteer throughout the process, both with guidance and with any necessary supporting documents. Support will be particularly needed if the volunteer does not have prior experience with similar processes.

- **Insurance**

With the EVS insurance, as mentioned in the [previous section](#), the volunteer is able to use the health care system in the host country. It is a good idea for the receiving organisation to explain or demonstrate the local system of health care to the volunteer. Perhaps it is different from their country – they might need to register with their doctor on arrival for example. When visiting a doctor or buying medicine the volunteer or the receiving organisation usually covers all the expenses and then receives full reimbursement – upon presentation of the original bills/invoices. For any specific questions on how to use the insurance you should directly contact the [insurance company](#). Support by phone is available 24 hours a day.

- **Accommodation and food**

The [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) does not contain specific guidelines regarding a volunteer's accommodation. The [EVS Charter](#) states that the receiving organisation is responsible for "providing suitable accommodation and meals (of a food allowance, covering also the holiday period) to the volunteer". Neither the guide nor the charter goes into details about the type of accommodation. Therefore, when talking about general standards we usually refer to "common sense" and we take the living standard of students in the country as a "minimum requirement" for the quality of living conditions for volunteers.

There are a variety of ways in which accommodation and food can be managed. The option that you choose will depend on the hosting environment and the nature of the EVS project, but it is important to make the final decision in consultation with all the project partners. Note that this is also information that needs to be included in the agreement with the volunteer, which is signed before the EVS activity.

The most common way of arranging accommodation is by renting an apartment or part of a house. This is a particularly efficient method when the organisation hosts more than one volunteer at a time. Sometimes volunteers are hosted in local families, and more rarely in an organisation's own facilities. Student dormitories are used as an option as well. Consequently, volunteers either prepare food by themselves (using their monthly food allowance) or they receive meals in the family, dormitory or other institution that the organisation cooperates with.

When thinking about possible accommodation options that you could use for your



volunteer, always take into consideration all the positive and negative sides of each option. Using a local family would definitely support the volunteer's integration into the local environment, but it would not guarantee privacy or independence. Using an organisation's own facilities might be very cheap and convenient, but would probably not provide a clear distinction between the volunteer's living and working environment. Though apartments sometimes might be more expensive, they would probably provide the volunteer with the greatest living conditions, their own bathroom and kitchen as well as protected privacy.

- **Local transport**

As a receiving organisation you are obliged to ensure that means of local transportation are available to the volunteer. The way you resolve this practicality depends very much on the local context – the living and project environment of the volunteer. In general, this means that the volunteer should be able to use the local bus, tram, metro or other means of transportation to travel from home to the working place and back again. Sometimes the use of a bicycle is more convenient for both the volunteer and the receiving organisation and so that can be considered as the means of local transport.

- **Language training**

Language support is one of the types of support provided to the volunteer during an EVS project. The receiving organisation is expected to arrange language training, which should be free of charge for the volunteer and included in the working hours. There is no specific rule about its format, duration or frequency. It will vary depending on the volunteer's needs, interests and abilities, the requirements of the EVS project, as well as on the resources of the receiving organisation.

Some organisations decide to involve the volunteer in courses organised in language schools, while others hire teachers to work with the volunteers. The latter option is particularly convenient if the organisation hosts more than one volunteer at the same time. In case you do not have enough funds to pay for a language teacher, you can always contact students of languages in their last year at faculty. This sometimes works really well since there are many students interested in practicing their skills or wanting to do an internship before looking for a job.

Note that the European Commission also provides [Online Linguistic Support](#); now available in six languages. In case this tool is not available in the language of the host country, you can apply for additional costs for language learning when submitting the project application form. (For more information see <http://erasmusplusols.eu/>)

To do with your partners and the volunteer

So far, this section has been dealing with preparatory activities that are primarily a responsibility of the receiving organisation. Nevertheless, preparation for hosting is a process that presumes close cooperation with the sending and coordinating

organisations, as well as with the volunteer. As your project gets approved, the partnership building process will gradually transform into a preparatory process, which requires **synchronised efforts by all partners**.

Naturally, one of the first steps you need to do with the sending organisation is to select the EVS volunteer – if the volunteer has not been selected already at the application stage. The selection process is an important part of the EVS project, and you can read more about it in the section [Inclusion in EVS and selection of volunteers](#). When the volunteer is selected, preparatory measures need to be taken in the home country. As a receiving organisation, you can help your partner a lot in planning the pre-departure preparatory process. Think of what would be the most helpful for the volunteer to know prior to arriving at your project, and share your ideas with the sending organisation. Keep your partners informed about the practical aspects of your project and when you think it's needed, consult them before making a decision. An **open and participatory preparation process** will assure there are no negative surprises when the volunteer arrives.

Finally, think of what you can do with the volunteer while they are still in their home country. The period before departure can be very stressful for the volunteer and you as a receiving organisation can do a lot to alleviate that anxiety. **Schedule a skype meeting and introduce yourself, the organisation and the project**. This is also a chance for you to get to know the volunteer before they arrive, and, if needed, to adjust the preparation process. You may even go into sharing expectations and exploring the volunteer's interests and learning needs. The more you know about your volunteer, the more prepared you will be for hosting.

In the table below you can see a summary of what you need to do at home, with your partners and with the volunteer. You can learn more about the preparatory process in the volunteer's home country in the section titled [Preparing volunteers for their activities](#), and much more about establishing successful cooperation with your partners in the section [International Partnership](#).

At home:

- The organisation: team, volunteers, members, target group, offices, working plans
- The local community: partners, neighbours, wider community
- The EVS activities
- The support system
- Practical arrangements: visa, accommodation, food, local transport, language support

Summary of what you need to prepare

With the volunteer:

- Support the volunteer with obtaining visa/residence permit
- Hold introductory skype meeting(s)
- Provide detailed information about the organisation, the activities and the practicalities
- Share expectations
- Prepare and sign a contract for volunteering

With your partners:

- Conduct a selection process for EVS volunteer (if volunteer was not selected in advance)
- Plan the pre-departure preparation process
- Agree on communication and cooperation during the EVS activity
- Decide about volunteer's arrival date and time

EVS activity – Day number 1

Your first EVS volunteer is arriving tomorrow. We assume that you have already arranged the practical issues, such as their visa, accommodation and local transport. You have also identified a mentor and found a language teacher. Your team is ready for the new team member, the activities are adapted to volunteer's competencies and everything seems to be in order for this challenge. But is there anything else you need to plan?

The first day of the EVS activity is an event of extraordinary importance for the volunteer. Consequently, volunteers expect that this day is also very important for the receiving organisation and for the whole team. Excited and anxious to finally start the project, volunteers can easily forget the fact that the organisation has its own life and not everything stops because their EVS activity is starting. And can you actually blame them for that? And in fact, why shouldn't you provide your new volunteer with a warm welcome, one that will make them feel welcome and appreciated? So forget about your other duties tomorrow and plan the first day for your volunteer!

Here is a list of what you might plan for your volunteer's first day:

- Double-check the volunteer's arrival time and make sure that somebody from the organisation can pick up the volunteer at the airport or bus/train station. Such first contact in the new environment provides the volunteer with a feeling of safety.
- Take the volunteer to their new place of living and make a proper introduction. Make sure the volunteer is aware of any rules related to the accommodation. If the volunteer lives with a host family, other volunteers or other people, plan a more proper introduction and a short getting to know each other.
- Spend some time introducing the volunteer to their new environment, area of living, neighbourhood, nearest shop, organisation's office and anything else you think is important.
- Think about the people who will be interacting the most with the volunteer. Take the volunteer out for a drink or lunch with them.
- Buy a local mobile phone number for the volunteer.
- Make sure the volunteer receives the monthly food allowance and pocket money, or at least part of it, so they are not left without any money in the local currency on the first day.
- Organise a welcome party – if you see that the volunteer is not too tired.
- Before you leave the volunteer for a well-deserved rest, inform them about the plans for the next day. Decide when and where you are meeting and make sure the volunteer knows how to get there.

Questions to consider after the first day:

- How much time is enough for the volunteer just to "hang around" and discover the new environment?
- When to start with the project activities?
- When to start with the language course?
- How will you introduce the volunteer to the rest of the team?
- What kind of activities can you plan for the next days?

EVS activity – the following days

Setting the right pace for the EVS activity is not an easy task. Very often it can be challenging to tell if the volunteer needs some time to settle down, or if they want to be busy from the very beginning. Organisations are often careful not to overwhelm the volunteer with work and other planned activities. To the volunteer, this might seem like the organisation is not very interested in the project. In a situation when the relationship is at the very beginning and both sides still don't feel comfortable to open sensitive subjects, there is the first opportunity for assumptions and misunderstanding.

A common misperception of receiving organisations is that the volunteer would love to spend the first few weeks just relaxing, meeting new people and getting used to the new living environment. Very often they do not introduce the volunteer to the actual activities and do not ask them to do any tasks. But in general **EVS volunteers want to be busy** – especially in the first period after arrival; they have changed their living environment and they are starting a new part of their life without old friends, obligations and habits. This is why you should not wait too long before you involve the volunteer in the project activities. After all, do not forget that the EVS project is not meant to be a holiday or just an intercultural experience for the young person. Assuming that the volunteer would prefer to just “hang around” in the new environment is not only a misperception of the volunteer's needs and expectations, but it is also a misunderstanding of EVS and of the Erasmus+ programme.

Sometimes organisations wait too long to start with the language course. If they are hosting more than one volunteer in approximately the same period of time, usually they wait for all the volunteers to arrive before they start the classes. Though this might be more convenient for the organisation, you should also have in mind that for the volunteer it is very important to **start learning the local language as soon as possible**. Even if you are planning to start a common language course with one teacher for all the volunteers, you should consider providing at least basic classes for the volunteer who arrives first.

Beginnings are never easy, and this is also true for EVS projects. Probably much of your time and energy will be consumed during the first few weeks after the volunteer's arrival. But with time, the volunteer will become more independent and will get used to the team, the activities and the environment. **Showing assertiveness and establishing open communication** with the volunteer from the very beginning can ease this process. After a while, you will be able to step back and enjoy the successes of your work.

To do at the beginning of the EVS project:

- Introduce the volunteer to the project environment, target group and planned activities
- Make sure that the volunteer receives enough personal support from the mentor and the other members of your organisation
- Assign a person to work with the volunteer
- Make sure that the volunteer is not left alone during the working day
- Involve the volunteer in the current activities of the project
- Give the volunteer the chance to start implementing simpler tasks and project activities on their own
- Invite the volunteer to take part in other activities within the organisation
- In short, make the volunteer feel like a part of your team!

Task-related support: managing your volunteer

All EVS volunteers are entitled to at least 2 distinct people to support them throughout their placement. These are the roles of the mentor and someone providing task related support in their daily work. These people will both offer different areas of support for the volunteer, although they will overlap in some areas. We talk extensively about the merits of mentorship in the chapter [Mentoring EVS volunteers](#), so here we will discuss task-related support in more detail.

The person providing this support will probably be someone who works with the volunteer every day. It is not a paid role per se, certainly not through the EVS funding, but an EVS supervisor is essentially the person that will manage the volunteer in their tasks, throughout the project. It is this person's responsibility to prepare the daily tasks for the volunteer.

An individual's management style may have to be flexible depending on the individual they are managing. Managers might choose to manage as a "helicopter": cruising constantly above the volunteer, being able to offer support at any given moment, or they might choose the "seagull" style: interacting with the volunteer sporadically and allowing them more freedom. This is a decision that will be made on a case by case basis and should be differentiated to suit the volunteer.

In an ideal world, before the volunteer arrives at your project you will have already had some good communication with them via email, telephone, Skype or its equivalent. You may have met them at an Advance Planning Visit. At some point during the communication they should have received a volunteer agreement, and in this document there will have been a realistic outline of what they can expect their tasks to be, and what is expected of them as volunteers. Most volunteers will take this information very seriously, and will have their idea of their roles and responsibilities engraved into their minds. It is important therefore to make sure that the real tasks match the proposed tasks, or, failing that, that the volunteer is very aware that the proposal is not

a strict document. The most important thing to achieve is that the volunteer has something meaningful to do, for between 30 to 38 working hours per week.

At their mid-term EVS training volunteers are given the opportunity to highlight areas of their project that could be improved. One common factor that many volunteers mention is that their tasks are too simplistic. It can be difficult for a receiving organisation to manage the balance of a volunteer's tasks. While organisations should not be giving the volunteer too much responsibility too early, they need to give the volunteer just enough responsibility to keep their interest, to give them hunger to learn more and to allow them to feel valued in the organisation. Interestingly volunteers are



much more likely to complain of not having enough to do than of having too much responsibility. And this makes sense when reflected upon: the volunteers have not chosen this experience for a holiday, they do not have enough allowance to be able to spend too much free time in an extravagant way, and so in general, EVS volunteers' main focus tends to be the work they're there to do.

Managing an EVS volunteer is therefore an organic process. As we regularly state, an EVS placement should revolve around the volunteer's learning, and the tasks should well match the volunteer's ability, whilst at the same time pushing the limits of their ability to encourage them to learn, gain new competences and prepare themselves for meaningful employment or study. This might mean that a receiving organisation needs to regularly change the activities to take the volunteer's learning into account. It should be an individualised process. This can happen in a number of ways:

Regular feedback sessions with the volunteer

Volunteers should meet regularly with their mentor, but they should meet with their supervisor too. It gives both parties a great chance to discuss what is going well, areas for improvement on both sides and a great opportunity to take a look at the volunteer's learning plan, enabling the supervisor to steer the volunteer in the direction they wish to be moving.

Regular communication with the volunteer's mentor

Three-way meetings with the volunteer, their mentor and their supervisor offer all parties the chance to create joined-up thinking and see where there is the opportunity to work together for the common good.

Regular discussion with the staff that work with the volunteer regularly

Other members of staff will probably have a much better idea about the volunteer's strengths, weaknesses and specific needs than the supervisor as they will more than likely be working side-by-side with the volunteer on a day-to-day basis.

It is important that the volunteer feels a part of the overall team within the place of work. A workplace's culture is one that is often difficult to define and for new employees to fully integrate into this culture can take weeks, if not months or years. EVS volunteers do not have the luxury of time and additional efforts should be made to ensure EVS volunteers are respected and treated as valuable members of the team.

Invite volunteers to staff meetings

There's no better way of making a volunteer feel like part of the team by ensuring they attend regular team meetings. This will give them a quick insight into the internal culture of the organisation while ensuring they feel they have a voice within their placement. It might depend on the language level of the individual volunteer whether they will feel ready to join a professional meeting, but it can be a valuable addition to a volunteer's timetable.

Listen to their ideas and share good practice

One of the key aims of EVS is for intercultural dialogue to take place. In many cases EVS volunteers have come from a professional background of working in a similar organisation in their own country and it is more than likely that they will have suggestions of sharing the best parts of their professional culture with those of the host organisation. This will clearly add quality on a number of levels.

Encourage them to partake in a Personal Project

This is something that is all too often overlooked within EVS, yet it is an amazing opportunity for the volunteer to grow as an individual, to develop specific skills and competences and to take the initiative to create something of their own.

Personal projects can be anything. Literally anything. The idea is that in addition to their main tasks and their normal role in the organisation a volunteer will use their initiative to create something unique of their own. Often this can be something related to the organisation in which they are working; they might have an idea for a specific event or activity that isn't currently being run by the organisation but that fits its remit perfectly. It might also be something relatively unrelated – it could be linked to a personal interest they may have; it might be in connection to activities that happen in the local environs in which they are living during their EVS; it might be related to how their own culture relates to that of their host country. The possibilities are actually endless, but it is not only the responsibility of the volunteer to come up with an idea and follow it through – the host organisation should encourage, support and guide the volunteer, where needed, through the process. It is in the interests of the receiving organisation to be as supportive as they can be as it is often the case that the personal project of the volunteer actively promotes the activities of the receiving organisation, raises the public awareness of the organisation and can act as an excellent public relations exercise at the same time as boosting the volunteers self-esteem and personal skills.

The idea behind a personal project is to encourage entrepreneurship and foster volunteers' sense of initiative. During their project they will be gaining a wide range of skills non-formally in their projects as well as informally in their free and social time.

The volunteer's personal project is their chance to showcase their skills and hone their competences ready to take into the world of employment.

Different individual volunteers might need different kinds of support when tackling their personal project. Depending on the profile of the volunteer, a receiving organisation might need to put some time aside to work with the volunteer on their ideas. A supervisor might want to liaise with the volunteer's mentor to discuss their progress with their personal project as this lies within one of the overlapping areas where the lines between task-related support and mentorship might be blurred. The final decisions about the project should be the volunteers; there is no obligation for the receiving organisation to offer any kind of financial help to the volunteer in this case, although a receiving organisation might want to support the volunteer with ideas of how to raise funds themselves. The most important thing is that this is a personal project that taps into the interests, skills and aspirations of the individual volunteer.

Virginia was volunteering in a community environmental project, looking after the green areas of an urban city and educating the local young people about environmental matters both in their schools and at specific workshops laid on by her receiving organisation. She was a particularly passionate environmentalist and she decided that her personal project would be to create a peace garden within a local piece of wasteland. She wanted to make a piece of unused land an area that people could come to reflect and relax. This fitted in with the remit of her host organisation perfectly, and they were in a position to give her a lot of support, encouragement and to use their influence in the local area to allow her to succeed in her plan. The garden became a talking point in the local area and the organisation received media interest during which time Virginia and her receiving organisation were able to promote EVS. The project was also an opportunity for Virginia to leave her footprint on her host town as the garden lived on long after her EVS project finished.

Marco was an amateur photographer doing his EVS project within an organisation that offered support to people with physical and mental disabilities, helping them to live more independent lives. He had little experience in this field before his project and did not intend to pursue a career in this area. Nevertheless he thrived in his activities and made a lot of friends. During his work he took a lot of black-and-white photographs of the individuals with whom he was working. They were very artistic shots and he strived to capture the essence of the individuals' personalities in the photographs. He managed to secure an artistic grant to produce a small book of his work which were given as gifts to partners of the organisation at which he was doing his EVS as well as to the families of the subjects of the photography. In doing this activity he was pursuing his love of artistic photography and at the same time heightening awareness of the problems the individuals he photographed faced. He was also disseminating the positive work that his EVS project allowed him to do.

Personal projects can be just as successful on a micro level. Many volunteers have the ability to bring their own ideas to their projects: they might create a regular half-hour table-tennis session in a day-centre; they might offer to teach local children the basics of their own mother tongue; they may offer to run a bread-baking workshop to encourage local people to rely less on the supermarket. All of these are real examples and go to show the eclectic nature and possibilities of the personal project.

Mentoring EVS volunteers

Mentoring as a concept and development practice has a long tradition and has been used in various fields of human activity throughout the centuries. The word "mentor" originates from Homer's "The Odyssey", where Mentor was the protagonist Odysseus's older friend who had been entrusted to protect and advise Telemachus, Odysseus's son, while his father left for the Trojan War. In more recent times, the concept of mentoring can be found in fields like career counselling, personal development, on-job training, apprenticeship, education, youth work, etc. In a rather professional context mentoring can take an informal or formal format and can be seen as "*transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)*".²⁴ Some other authors refer to mentoring as "*a relationship between two people with learning and development as its purpose*" (Maggison and Gravey, 2004)²⁵. For David Clutterbuck²⁶, mentoring is "*...primarily listening with empathy, sharing experience (usually mutual), professional friendship, developing insight through reflection, being sounding board, encouraging*" (Clutterbuck, 2004).

With regards to "youth mentoring", an interesting study done by Helene Colley²⁷ critically explored UK government strategies for using mentoring as a tool to re-engage young people "at risk" in the labour market. As Colley points out these programmes were often far too institutionally driven, with a narrow employability focus and have failed to address the real concern of those young people. Following these findings another UK-based research project on mentoring vulnerable young people²⁸ has been looking at "what works for young people in mentoring". Some of the key findings include that "*the friendly nature of the relationship and the 'ability to have a laugh' with a mentor distinguished these from other kinds of relationship. Qualities of trust, shared control, reciprocity and shared experience underpinned successful mentoring*". According to this research, young people valued mentors who shared and were willing to discuss similar background and experiences. On the other hand mentors from the project expressed their satisfaction at the chance to work with young people rather than on young people.

²⁴ Bozeman, B.; Feeney, M. K. (October 2007). "[Toward a useful theory of mentoring: A conceptual analysis and critique](http://aas.sagepub.com/content/39/6/719.full.pdf+html)". Administration & Society 39, accessed from: <http://aas.sagepub.com/content/39/6/719.full.pdf+html>

²⁵ Taken from Anne Brockbank, Ian McGill (2006): Facilitating Reflective Learning Through Mentoring and Coaching, Kogan Page, p.

²⁶ David Clutterbuck is recognised expert and writer on the topic of mentoring. He has authored large number of books on the topic, including "Everyone needs a mentor", CIPD, 2004, <http://www.davidclutterbuckpartnership.com/books/>

²⁷ Colley, Helen (2003) Engagement Mentoring for 'Disaffected' Youth: A new model of mentoring for social inclusion. British Educational Research Journal, 29 (4). pp. 521-542. ISSN 0141-1926

²⁸ Kate Philip, Janet Shucksmith and Caroline King (2004): Sharing a laugh? - A qualitative study of mentoring interventions with young people, accessed from: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/mentoring-vulnerable-young-people>

But what about mentoring in EVS?

There is a considerable amount of challenge for each volunteer in any EVS project. This is linked to integration into a new working environment, adapting to new living conditions, getting familiar with the local community and foreign culture, typically a lack of understanding of the host country language, etc. In addition to that there are many personal challenges and issues a volunteer needs to deal with such as: leaving home, having a break from their "regular life", missing friends and family, own fears and uncertainties, as well as facing the stereotypes and prejudices they bring with them. Therefore it is no surprise that since the very beginning of the EVS programme in the mid '90s, mentoring has been considered as one of the most important ways to ensure the volunteer's integration in the receiving project as well as one of the crucial means to ensure the quality of EVS as a "learning service". At the same time, as the programme has evolved, the concept of mentoring has evolved as well. In the very beginning of EVS the main focus on mentoring was around supporting volunteers' personal adjustment into the new environment, integration into the receiving organisation and assisting with the intercultural learning process. Recently, with a greater focus on competence development and learning in EVS, the expectations of EVS mentors have been considerably increased. Today EVS mentors have at least five to six types of support to provide:



Indeed, the role of mentors in EVS has become more "professional", although in most of the cases these are still voluntary (and unpaid!) contributions from motivated people either from the inside or outside the receiving organisation. In order to respond to this important quality requirement, the organisations are using different approaches, as well as considering different (often very creative) ways how to provide enough of recognition for their mentors

Points to consider for receiving organisations when developing their own mentoring strategy:

- Pay attention that the mentor should not be the same person as the volunteer's supervisor!
- Who are the people interested in the mentor role? Are they from the organisation or outside the organisation? Perhaps some ex-EVS volunteers?
- What is the minimum of competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) these people should have?
- Are they available enough for the role?
- What are the ways the organisation can provide recognition for the mentor's work?
- Consider suggesting them to take part in a specially designed training course for mentors, regularly announced through the [SALTO European Training Calendar](#).

Case 1 – Mentor as an employee in the receiving organisation

In our organisation we have one official mentor who comes from the inside of the organisation and is really professional in her work. Before she became an employee she had been an active volunteer in the organisation. The organisation has recruited her for the mentor role because she was the only one suitable for this job description. She has completed a 40-hour module on volunteer management, she was coordinating volunteers in our organisation that are from the local community, and she herself was actively involved in voluntary activities in the community. She has participated in various training courses for improvement of her performance and her skills. Besides the mentor, we have also a job coordinator who is in permanent contact with the mentor so they can properly track the volunteer's progress and development, or in case of a problem, react and give the necessary support. The mentor in our organisation is in charge of giving support to the volunteers concerning their personal problems, culture shock, and integration in the community, learning process and self-assessment, encouraging the volunteer's personal projects and also paying attention to how they develop when they finish their service. The mentor and the volunteer in the first months meet at least once per week, sometimes even more. After the volunteer is prepared to be more independent in their work, personal life and in the local community, the meetings get less frequent. Obligatory meetings are one the first day of work, before and after the on-arrival and mid-term training sessions, as well as intensive meetings before the volunteer's departure, in the process of self-assessment, and finally a meeting during the final evaluation together with the rest of the organisation. The mentor is always present during evaluation with the organisation's members and on weekly meetings.

Good mentoring practice is to have an open, healthy relationship between the mentor, the organisation staff and EVS volunteers, keeping the relationship really realistic in a friendly environment, but with a good explanation of tasks, roles and responsibilities. Active listening, active and patient communication, regular monitoring, feedback and proper reaction is our model. After hosting more than 15 volunteers from different backgrounds, it's all about good preparation, clear explanation of the tasks and responsibilities, respect and a friendly atmosphere. Mentors do get recognition in our organisation, but maybe there should be more financial resources to pay for their work, because sometimes they work more than other people who are responsible for quality EVS service of the volunteer.

(youth organisation, Croatia)

Case 2 – Mentors as ex-EVS volunteers

Mentoring provides the young people coming to Iceland with support from someone who has been in their shoes, experienced the difficulties of creating a home away from home in a foreign country and faced the same insecurities as most of us do when taking on such a challenge. This is possible as the mentors in our organisation were, as often as possible, all EVS volunteers themselves. The benefits of this approach work two-fold. Not only does it mean that the volunteer has a more understanding mentor, the mentors themselves are also more driven to support their volunteer through the knowledge of how beneficial a mentor was or could have been during their own EVS experience. Each volunteer has one mentor who is there to help them with any personal problems they are having, or with administration tasks such as claiming medical expenses or completing a [Youthpass](#). The relationship that each volunteer has with their mentor depends upon the needs of the volunteer and the relationship formed between the two, but social meetings such as going for a coffee or playing sport together are common place. Typically a mentor and a volunteer will discuss how the volunteer's EVS is going and how they are coping with the likes of being away from their home country or if the project is meeting their expectations. Generally, mentors are a fantastic first port of call when you are unsure of how to approach or tackle a problem.

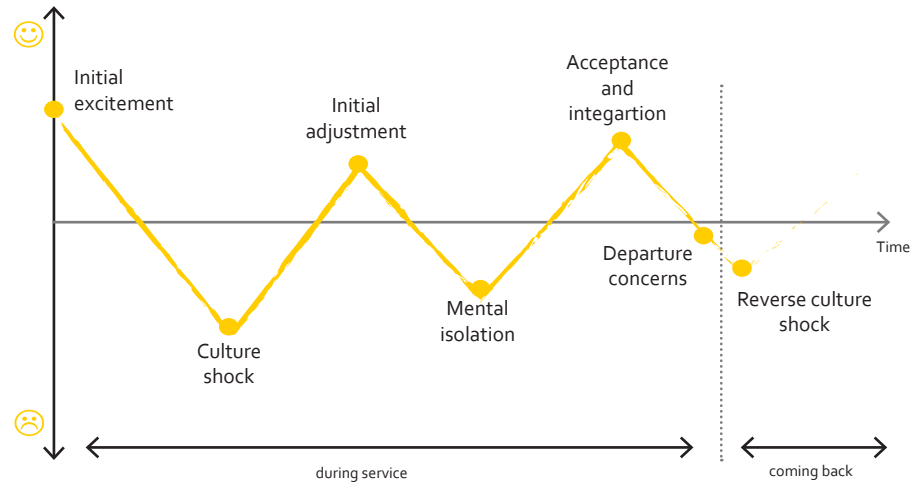
(Reykjavik Red Cross, Iceland)

Personal support: riding on the roller-coaster

In every EVS project one of the first challenges for the volunteer is related to dealing with change and difference in a new living and working context. There are different models for dealing with change and cultural adjustment which try to visualise the emotional process a volunteer might be passing through during and after the service period. One such model is presented in the picture below. It represents the fact that many volunteers report that their process of adjustment was like a **"ride on a roller coaster"**, consisting of emotional ups and downs. The intensity of the "ride" depends on several issues, related to: the volunteer's personal capacity to deal with change; their previous experiences of living abroad; the degree of actual (cultural) difference between their home and the host country; their ability to understand the language of the host community, etc. Therefore some volunteers might pass more easily through the process of adjustment, while for some others the ride might be quite "bumpy" and difficult. It is quite important that the person playing the mentor role is familiar with models like this one and can support both the volunteer's awareness and provide

personal support when needed. Nevertheless, the task of the mentor here is to provide space for sharing about the experiences (and feelings), to help volunteers understand that these emotional ups and downs are just a normal part of the adjustment process, to help volunteers explore their strengths that could be used in dealing with challenges and to provide relevant information about the host community. If necessary, the mentor should encourage the volunteer's learning of the local language.

Emotional roller-coaster: Volunteer's adjustment curve



Emotional roller-coaster: Volunteer's adjustment curve

According to this model, in the very beginning of the service, volunteers are likely to feel some kind of initial excitement and fascination with everything in the new environment and the new cultural context ("honeymoon" period).

However, usually just a few weeks after arrival, the first emotional low phase may come as a normal reaction to the absence of familiar patterns of communication; loss of points of reference, lack of understanding of locals' behaviours and confrontation with different values. This situation of being "over-challenged", sometimes called "culture shock", can be filled with various physical and emotional reactions, such as: irritability, focusing on negative aspects, impatience, anger towards the locals, feeling of incompetence, chronic tiredness, avoiding social contacts, etc. These feelings can be significantly amplified due to a limited communication and lack of knowledge of the local language.

With adequate support (personal, emotional, linguistic etc.), overcoming the stage of culture shock should lead to "initial adjustment". During this phase volunteers feel much more positive, can easily function with the rest of the team, can focus on the tasks and communication becomes more genuine and open.

However, after a certain period of time, volunteers might start to miss their friends and family, feeling that "life out there is happening without them". In addition, this might be followed with a difficulty to express themselves well in the new language (so communication remains superficial), as well as possible confrontation with deeper cultural differences or personal life dilemmas. As a result, volunteers might feel frustrated, lonely or isolated. The phase of "mental isolation" can be the most easily overcome if volunteers have already managed to establish a good social network in the host community, and of course by providing the space for reflection in talks with their mentor.

If successfully managed, this stage can lead to a period of "acceptance and integration" (also called "genuine adjustment" phase). During this stage, volunteers are fully accustomed to the habits, customs, food and values of the people in the host community. They feel comfortable with people, daily tasks and language.

Finally, approaching the end of the service period, some "departure concerns" may arise. Some volunteers might feel afraid of what comes after their return home, others might be sad to leave.

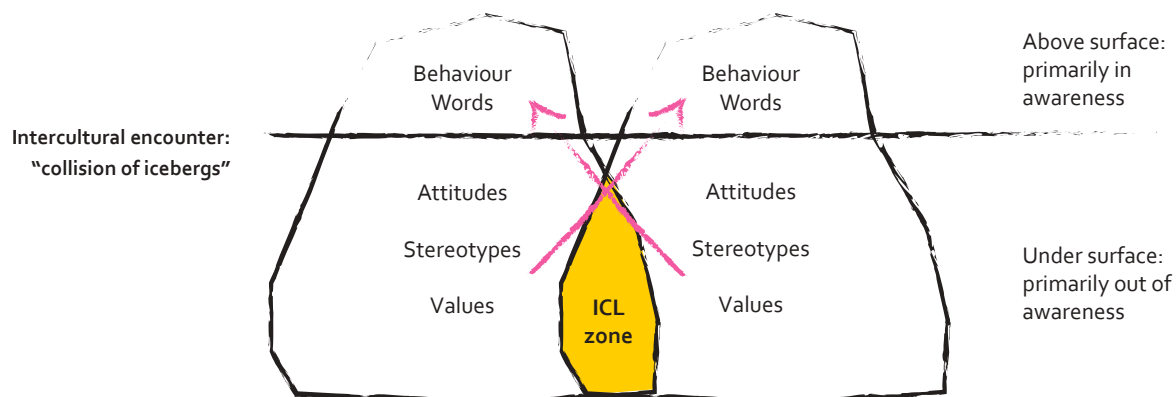
To return home after the service can be both pleasant and difficult, especially after a longer and more intensive EVS. Ex-volunteers have reported certain challenges in re-adapting to their original environment and culture, facing a very similar phenomenon as culture shock from the beginning of the service. But if the "culture shock" was the expected confrontation with the unfamiliar, this "re-entry shock" could be seen as the "unexpected confrontation with the familiar". (Paige, M, quoted in Gibson, R, 2000).



Intercultural learning: from collision of icebergs to... ?

The intercultural learning is inherently connected to the process of volunteers' personal adjustment in EVS. Receiving information about the host community is certainly very important for the volunteer's orientation and adaptation, but the real potential for intercultural learning is under the surface. Paradoxically, intercultural learning is **not learning about others** from a different cultural context, but it is primarily learning **about oneself – with the others**. Being confronted with cultural difference in EVS might bring a great deal of challenge to the volunteers, but at the same time it brings an ultimate opportunity to develop intercultural competence¹⁹.

However, being in an intercultural situation does not guarantee any intercultural learning. On the contrary, it may lead to actual cementing of fixed opinions, stereotypes and lack of self-awareness. True intercultural learning requires personal engagement, readiness to be challenged and a great deal of reflection about oneself in the culturally diverse situations.



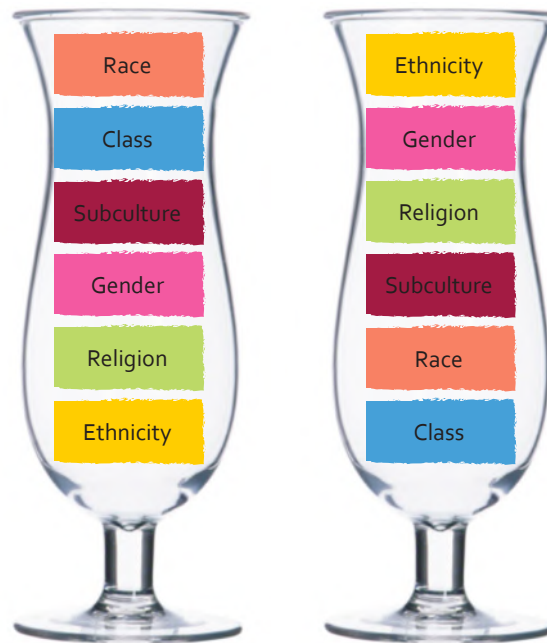
Very often the concept of culture is presented as the "iceberg model"²⁰ above, which describes culture in terms of a relatively small "visible part" on the top and a larger "invisible part" under the surface. Following this logic, an intercultural situation could be seen as an encounter (or collision) of two "cultural icebergs". What we can hear (words) or what we can see (practices) is primarily in our awareness. However, how we interpret the words, customs and behaviours perceived is largely under the influence of our own cultural assumptions, beliefs, values and stereotypes towards the culture we are confronted with (indicated with the arrows on the picture). At the same time, real reasons for certain behaviours and practices lie deep under the surface of the other iceberg.

¹⁹ Intercultural competences research, www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/diversity

²⁰ For more information about the Iceberg model of culture see [Intercultural Learning T-kit](#), p.17-35

Although the iceberg metaphor bears the important message that "we don't see the things as they are, but as we are" (quote by Anais Nin), it also bears the danger

of thinking about cultures in a very simplistic and static way. It may lead to false conclusions like “he is like that because he comes from here” and “I am like that because I come from there”. In fact, the reality of intercultural encounters is far more complex than it may look in the first place. It is true that in a foreign context someone’s national, ethnic or religious identity could become more prominent (“I have never felt so X as I do here”) due to the context of getting to know things superficially (where stereotypes can shape our perceptions enormously!). However, in all of us, no matter where we come from, there is a constant inter-play of different layers of our identities. This complexity within ourselves and others provides our greatest resource for establishing links and connections, even though we are coming from a different “cultural context”.



What is your Identity cocktail?

Therefore, it is the ultimate task of each EVS mentor to create a non-judgmental space for bringing up issues related to confronting difference, reflecting about own values and questioning stereotypes. However, by doing so it is also the mentor’s task to help the volunteer overcome “black and white discourse” in addressing cultural differences in terms of “us versus them”. It is rather the aim to stimulate volunteers’ reflection towards the realisation of the “complexity of one’s identity”²³, where, for example, ethnicity and nationality are just parts of the overall picture, helping them realise that each person is a “unique cocktail of diversity” regardless of their geographical background. Only through this kind of interpersonal and intercultural experience can we learn to deconstruct our stereotypes, appreciate our diversity and rediscover our common humanity.

²³ Some great tools to address the issue of the complexity of identity : “Discover Yourself!” and “Understanding Youth”, www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/diversity

Mentoring in handling conflict situations

Perhaps due to the frequent use of the term “conflict” in the media in relation to extreme violence, conflicts usually have a negative connotation. In this publication, we discuss conflict as a natural human relationship, based on the perceived incompatibility of interests or needs, involving two or more sides, in the context of an EVS project. Conflict situations should be seen as a “normal” part of the volunteer’s integration process into the living and working environment.

Dual nature of the conflict

Most common sources of conflict in EVS²²:

- No clear role or task division in the project/ organisation
- Lack of communication in the project (in all phases, between the main partners)
- Too much work
- Not enough work
- Routine work
- Different expectations
- Job substitution
- Language course is missing
- Language barrier
- Accommodation (not enough privacy, roommates, working and living in the same place)
- Problems with food and pocket money

CONFLICT

DANGER

OPPORTUNITY

The Chinese letter for Conflict suggests that each conflict situation has a dual nature – bearing a potential for violence as well as a potential for learning and positive development.

Within the complex situation of an EVS project, a wide range of potential conflict issues exist between a volunteer and a receiving organisation, people from the host community, other EVS volunteers, etc. Conflicts in EVS can be categorised into three areas: They may be due to different personalities, needs and interests (interpersonal). They may be due to a clash of cultural practices and values (intercultural). Finally they may be due to a violation of the rights, responsibilities and agreements in the Volunteer Agreement (contractual disputes). Certain situations could be a combination of two or three of the different aspects. For example, a conflict about the expected level of accommodation quality might be influenced by a volunteer’s personal expectations and customs, or differences in cultural and social standards, but it could be a serious violation of the volunteer’s rights as laid down in the [EVS Charter](#) and the Volunteer Agreement.

If a volunteer is facing a conflict situation with their receiving organisation, the mentor should first encourage the volunteer to take it as a “learning situation” and handle the challenge on their own directly with the representatives of the organisation. This could be an important opportunity for the volunteer’s growth in terms of increased self-confidence, assertive communication, intercultural sensitivity, negotiation skills, etc. The mentor should also provide space for reflection and useful pieces of advice, if

²² Adjusted from [Conflict-What an Opportunity!](#) booklet, published by Czech NA for Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme

needed. In case of severe conflict that exceeds the volunteer's capacities, the mentor can enter into the role of a mediator, trying to mediate between the parties in the conflict or solving the problem on the volunteer's behalf. In a more severe contractual infringement, the partnership between sending and receiving organisations, as well as the volunteer should meet and discuss how to overcome the situation. In the worst case, the respective [National Agencies](#) should be informed and the project might be terminated. Of course, this is a very last option.

Facilitating volunteers' learning

"A mentor is an open-minded, tolerant and trustworthy person who supports the volunteer and facilitates volunteers' learning in EVS. S/he is able to create a proper atmosphere, empathise, communicate clearly and provide feedback in a responsible way."²³

In comparison to other non-formal learning opportunities for young people (e.g. training courses or youth exchanges), EVS integrates working and living, which allows the learning process to be built in to the real life experiences of the volunteers. In other words, learning in EVS is rather a matter of survival and will happen regardless of their intention to learn. However, to benefit fully from this situation, instead of leaving the volunteer's learning on "automatic pilot", a more intentional and conscious approach to learning needs to be promoted. By doing so, EVS mentors can empower the volunteers to re-gain their passion for learning, develop their ability to direct and assess their own learning and ultimately take responsibility for their own learning.

Taken from [Youthpass Unfolded](#)

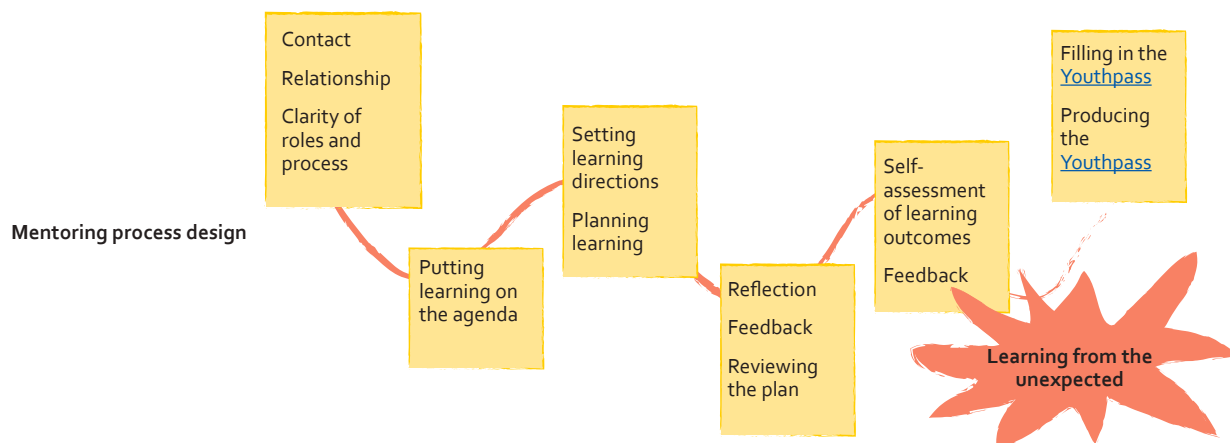


²³ This definition is the outcome of a fishbowl exercise during the training course "Facilitating volunteer's learning in EVS", Predeal, 4-10.10.2010.

In order to do that, EVS mentors should see themselves primarily as “facilitators of volunteers’ learning”, building this approach into their overall mentoring process design. In order to be effective they need to become aware of the diversity amongst the volunteers in terms of the learning preferences/styles/capacities of each volunteer, so **there is no “one size fits all”**. Each process has to be tailor-made for each particular person, relationship, context and style of their own mentoring.

However, there might be some common elements in the beginning and the end of the process, while the largest diversity of strategies and steps will be seen in between (see picture below). **In the beginning** you might expect to work on the relationship building, establishing a climate of trust and support, agreeing on the process and dynamics of meetings and sharing expectations about each other’s roles. There might also be a moment to discuss the concept of learning, self-directed learning and learning to learn, in order to challenge potential negative images about learning and increase the volunteers’ motivation to get involved in an exciting learning process in EVS. **At the end** of the process, you may expect that your volunteers might be doing self-assessment and identification of learning outcomes, enriched with your feedback and trying to describe those when filling in the [Youthpass certificate](#).

All the steps **in between** should be completely tailor-made, although they should include the setting of learning directions/objectives, regular reflection talks about learning, and the use of various learning support tools (learning diaries, learning plans, self-reflection tools etc.). There should also be continuous giving and receiving of feedback and moments of self-assessment. Finally, the learning is an exciting and organic process and even if planned, there should always remain room for learning from unexpected situations. As a mentor, it is your task to encourage the volunteer’s openness and readiness for learning during EVS, thus helping them embrace the unexpected moments of challenge and success as potential moments for significant learning.



Finally, it is useful that the mentor can suggest some tools for various parts of the mentoring process. The tools can help:



- put “learning on the agenda” in any mentoring session
- support reflection about learning
- provide space for self-assessment
- help in planning volunteers’ learning
- assist in documenting volunteers’ learning during the service

You don’t need to have fancy and expensive tools for your work. Sometimes a good collection of pictures from magazines can provide an amazing tool for reflection. Many tools can be found online for free (e.g. [Learning out of the box card game](#), Blob trees, Mandala drawings, Learning plan, Learning style questionnaires, etc.) and perhaps tools not initially planned for learning could be adapted for that purpose. In that sense, a number of digital tools and phone applications could serve as tools for reflection and documentation of learning. Almost anything, from a box of old toys to stones found outside, can become a tool for learning support; it just needs a bit of thinking how to adjust it to the needs of your volunteer and her/his preferences.

For more practical information and tools on how to support volunteers’ learning, take a look at the chapter “How to Support Learning” in the [Youthpass Guide](#) and the publication [Youthpass Unfolded](#). In addition numerous tools for learning and training can be obtained from the [SALTO Tool Box](#).

Assisting volunteers with the online language course (if applicable)

As a means of supporting volunteers' language learning, the European Commission has introduced the [Online Linguistic Support](#) tool for the following languages: English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch. In case one of these languages is spoken in the volunteer's host country the receiving organisation should receive an access code for the online language tool. It is the task of the mentor to assist the volunteer in getting familiar with the tool and starting the language course online. For more information about how the tool works in terms of the assessment and learning, you may check specific manuals available at the [Online Linguistic Support website](#). In case the host country's language is not amongst the ones covered by the online tool, the language support for the volunteer needs to be arranged in a different way using the available funding in the EVS project budget.



Some tips for effective mentoring of EVS volunteers:

- Make contact with your volunteer even before s/he arrives
- Get to know your volunteer well, including his/her preferences, personal style, interests and motivation
- Be aware of your own mentoring style and try to adjust it to fit the needs and the situation of each volunteer
- Reflect on what kind of mentoring would best fit the volunteer: more formal or less formal, frequent or less frequent, more guided or more providing space
- Consider needs for additional support when working with volunteers with fewer opportunities
- Pay attention if your gender and age best suit the volunteer, or if you should find somebody else for the role
- Practice listening and asking good questions that support reflection of the volunteer
- Keep the golden mentor rule: don't do anything instead of your volunteer that s/he can do on his/her own
- Ask your volunteer for feedback, so you can learn and improve your mentoring
- Create your own "toolbox" with tools that you can use in the mentor talks and that you could suggest to the volunteer
- Get familiar with key theories and concepts related to EVS and what the volunteer might be experiencing
- Take part in a mentor training, that can be regularly found in the [SALTO European Training Calendar](#)

Learning and competence development in EVS

It is not news in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme to say that EVS is about learning. In fact, since the very beginning of EVS in 1996 participating volunteers were learning a lot about how to:

- live independently
- integrate into a work place environment
- increase intercultural awareness
- improve communication skills and foreign language competencies
- run a project
- work in a team
- express solidarity and social responsibility
- and much, much more...

At the same time, we should not neglect the fact that this was also a learning process for the other actors involved – sending organisations, receiving organisations, mentors etc.

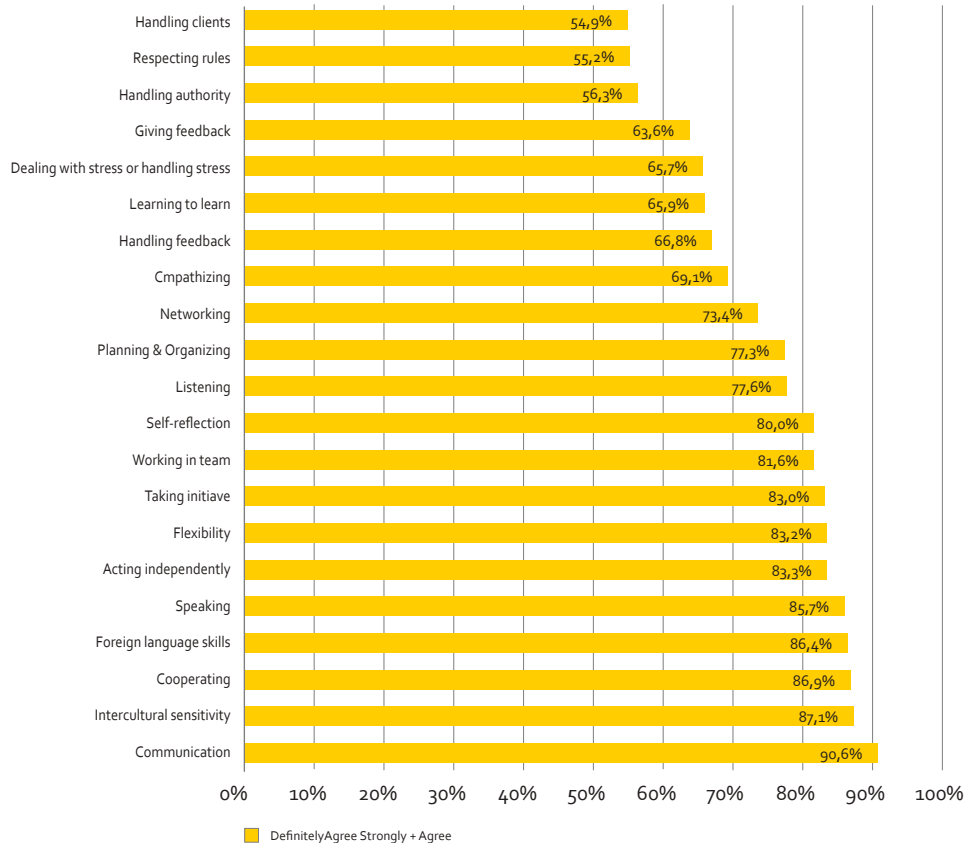
However, what is really new (and it comes with the implementation of the [Youthpass](#)) is the demand to make this learning more **explicit** ([Youthpass Guide](#), p.30) and the learning support **more intentional**. For those concerned about the “service” aspect in EVS, it is important to say that this new focus does not imply any changes in the nature and the concept of EVS as a “learning service”. It does however introduce a new perspective on learning support in general and mentoring in particular.

EVS and competence development

Recent studies on the impact of EVS show that it can be a great opportunity for the development of young people’s competences relevant not only for the field of youth work, but also for competences transferable to other fields like education or employment. The study on [EVS Competences for Employability](#) has shown that EVS can develop significant competences that are valued in the job market. As shown in the graph below, ex-EVS volunteers are clearly convinced that during their EVS experience they develop **all of the 21 listed competences** in varying degrees. When



we look into the overall average, competence development during the EVS experience is at the very significant level of 75% (average for all 21 competences). However, the competences that seem to be the most developed by the majority of the surveyed volunteers are: **communication, intercultural sensitivity, foreign language skills, cooperating and speaking**. The least developed ones are: handling clients, respecting rules and handling authority.



As well as looking at *what* competences are being developed in EVS, the study also tackled the question of *how* these competences are being developed. In other words, what contributes to the process of effective learning and volunteers' competence development within an EVS project. As the results of the study show, both ex-volunteers and EVS organisations agree that some of the most effective ways to become aware of one's learning in EVS is the **ongoing self-reflection during the project and applying the newly gained competences after the EVS**. Nevertheless,

the sending and receiving organisations put more emphasis on the role of feedback given to the volunteer by their receiving organisation, while the volunteers consider more important the reflection on the overall EVS experience upon their return to the home country.

In terms of the most important sources of support for volunteers' learning, the majority of both ex-volunteers and EVS organisations stress the utmost importance of **volunteers' own openness and readiness for learning**. However, these two groups differ in terms of how they perceive the effectiveness of other sources of learning support: while volunteers place high importance on peer learning (from other EVS volunteers) and EVS trainings, the organisations rather value the 'organisational sources', like a supportive learning environment in the host organisation and clear guidance and tasks by the project coordinator.²⁴

Having read these interesting survey results, the question remains, what this means for the practice of EVS organisations in relation to learning support, both from the sending or receiving side? What are the ways to nurture volunteers' openness and motivation for learning? And what kind of learning environment and learning support do we need to create?

What contributes to volunteers' learning and competence development in EVS?

- Volunteers' openness and readiness for learning
- Challenging tasks matching the volunteers' potential to grow
- Task-related support and training in the receiving organisation
- Learning from peers and with peers (other local or EVS volunteers)
- Mentors' support of volunteers' reflection on learning
- Space for own initiative within the hosting project
- Positive learning environment in the receiving organisation
- Participation in the EVS training and evaluation cycle
- Reflection on learning and competences upon return

²⁴ Evrard, G., Markovic, D (2014): EVS Competences for Employability, project narrative report, downloadable from: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusiontraining/evsskillsandemployability/>

Part C



Quality follow-up in EVS

Recognition of EVS competences after EVS

Following the calls for better recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field in Europe, the Youth in Action programme introduced the [Youthpass](#) certificate that has been continued in the current Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. [Youthpass](#) is both a strategy and a tool to make the learning in Erasmus+: Youth in Action projects (including EVS) more visible: to young people themselves, to youth workers, and to other stakeholders (including the education sector, potential employers, parents, friends, etc.) In other words, it aims at better individual recognition of learning achievements and better social recognition of youth work. It is based on the principles of non-formal education and includes the self-assessment of learning outcomes done by the volunteer at the end of their service.

The self-assessment part is using the *European framework of 8 Key competences for lifelong learning* (see text box below)²⁵.

Key Competences for Lifelong learning:

1. Communication in mother tongue
2. Communication in foreign languages
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
4. Digital competence
5. Learning to learn
6. Social and civic competences
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
8. Cultural awareness and expression

It is important to stress here that the 8 key competences framework is just a framework. It does not imply a demand that all youth work projects (including EVS) should change their focus completely and now start working only on the development of these competences. In fact, this framework is built into the [Youthpass](#) to serve as a “translation tool” or “common language” with other sectors (education, employment, vocational education and training etc.), thus making these certificates better understood and accepted outside of the youth field.

²⁵ For more information about Key Competences, consult the following publication. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf or the [Youthpass Guide](#)



Youthpass certificate

The authorisation to produce the certificates is given to the coordinating (applicant) organisation, along with the project number, but obtaining the certificate itself remains – **the right of the volunteer**. It is the responsibility of the project organisers to inform the volunteer about this possibility, but it is the volunteer who chooses whether to do it or not. However, it is expected that if there is a good **Youthpass process**, including effective mentor learning support, the **Youthpass certificate** would come at the end as the icing on the cake. The first two pages are filled in by the responsible person from the receiving organisation, while the self-assessment part is done by the volunteer in a dialogue with their mentor.

For more information about Youthpass in EVS, see the [Youthpass website](#) and the chapter “Youthpass in Practice: Youthpass in EVS” in the [Youthpass Guide](#), as well as the practical publication [Youthpass Unfolded](#).

Since its introduction in 2007, up to the date of this publication, there were almost 500,000 Youthpass certificates issued in various actions of the programmes, with an increasing tendency. This very fact will certainly contribute to a larger recognition of the certificate itself, but still the question remains: what is the actual value of Youthpass after EVS?

As the [Youthpass Impact study](#)²⁶ (2012) showed, between 50-80% of respondents think that a Youthpass certificate enhances the chances of young people especially when they apply for a traineeship or internship, employment or further education. However, the actual process of actively reflecting on one’s own learning (also called the Youthpass process) during the project and doing self-assessment has proven to have a tremendous value in itself. By doing this, it helps volunteers reach a greater awareness and recognition of their own competences gained through EVS, thus ultimately growing a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. In other words, the Youthpass process enhances the volunteer’s ability to transfer and present their own competences to somebody else (e.g. in a job interview situation), even without showing the certificate as such.

Still, often upon the return from the service volunteers feel lost and disoriented, facing lack of recognition by their immediate surrounding for their experience²⁷. They might also need some guidance in getting “settled back” and find the connection between their EVS and their future.

²⁶ Youthpass Impact Study report: <https://www.youthpass.eu/downloads/13-62-115/Youthpass%20Impact%20Study%20-%20Report.pdf> and movie: <https://youtu.be/zCCsYRuLsw>

²⁷ The survey [EVS competences for employability](#) showed that volunteers face better recognition by their immediate surroundings (family and friends) than from society at large. At the same time the survey identified significant national differences identified in relation to how EVS is welcomed and positively valued.



"Since November, I am back in Slovenia, and I will stay here. I want to find a job, suitable for me, my education, skills, competences, and personal characteristics. It is challenging to go through this process, but I can clearly recognise how much I have grown and changed in last five years; specifically, how have I grown and changed during the year of EVS. That year, it was a turning point between two of my life cycles. Before it, I had learned to fly and see the world from a greater perspective; after it, I have learned to land and to employ this bigger perspective back here where I truly originate."

ex-EVS volunteer from Slovenia

And that's exactly the moment for the sending organisation (or a "sending mentor") to play an important role once again. It is their role to provide space for the volunteer to "reflect back" and appreciate the value of the EVS experience and to support further thinking about the pathways of the former volunteer and helping them realise how their EVS experiences (and the competences gained) could be used for these future plans. Therefore it would be very beneficial for sending organisations to provide some hints and tips on how to get the EVS experience better recognised in the national context. This might include ways to present the EVS experience in one's CV, how to "translate" the competences gained into the language of employers, how to deal with the [Youthpass](#) certificate and providing useful contacts and information about where to get information about further education and employment possibilities.

Evaluation and follow-up

There is probably no model of project cycle management that does not include evaluation as one of its main phases. Evaluation is an integral part of every project. Its purpose is to reflect on the overall project cycle and to check if the project objectives and expected results were met. There are many reasons for evaluating your projects, and not all of them are connected to justifying the funds that you have spent. Evaluation is the basis for improving your work. When we evaluate we have a chance to see what has gone well in the project and what could be done better in the future. That helps us learn from our experiences and improve our work. The evaluation process also allows us to understand the real impact of the project and to plan our further actions. And when done throughout the project, it also provides opportunities for improving the upcoming activities and better planning of the next steps of the project.

Evaluation in EVS projects

Like with any other project, when planning the evaluation of the EVS project you need to ask yourself **why, what, when** and **how** you are evaluating. Responding to these basic questions will allow you to properly plan evaluation activities that will give you the results that you expect. Don't just start with evaluation activities before deciding about their purpose, focus, frequency and methodology.

"Why are you evaluating?" might sound like an obvious and redundant question, but it has a significance. **Are you evaluating in order to learn from the experience and improve your future EVS projects, or to make improvements already during the current project?** When we think of evaluation we usually have in mind the evaluation activities that are happening at the very end, when the project is already completed. But if we want to learn about areas that could be improved during the project, then we need to plan evaluation activities throughout the whole project duration. Yes, evaluation can also happen during the project. You can see it as an on-going process that follows the project activities. Surely, you are not supposed to evaluate every day, but you can plan evaluation activities of a certain time period, or after each more significant activity. So there is also the question when you should evaluate? It depends on your motivation for evaluation, but in principle it is advised to evaluate the project both while you are implementing it and at the end.

What you should evaluate is another important question. It may also look easy to answer, but there is much to focus on during the evaluation – **project objectives, achievements, performance, outcomes, process etc.** In fact, all these areas are relevant and enough attention should be devoted to them in the evaluation process. But every time you implement an evaluation activity you will address only some of all those aspects. For example, if you have an evaluation meeting with your partners you may decide to focus on how much the objectives were achieved and how the

cooperation was within the partnership. On the other hand, if you have a mid-term evaluation with the EVS volunteer you will probably pay more attention to the quality of the support system and volunteer's learning outcomes. In order to get a complete picture of the project, you need to make sure that you assess all major components. But as you can't do all that at once, you will need to carefully plan the process.



Finally, the way in which you will evaluate depends on everything we have explored so far. There is a variety of methodology you can use, but **not every method is suitable for each evaluation activity**. If you are measuring the results of the project you will probably need to use quantitative methodology, but if your aim is to measure volunteers' progress in the eight key competencies then you will have to focus on qualitative analysis. Consequently, you will also choose methods that will provide you with qualitative data - such as interviews.

Planning the evaluation process is almost like planning a project within the EVS project. To ease your job, you can think of the **evaluation process on three levels: within your organisation, with your partners and with the volunteer**. The purpose, focus, frequency and methodology of the three dimensions will be quite distinctive. However, all are important and should be planned in the project.

Evaluation within your organisation

Perhaps all of us constantly reflect on the work we are doing. Evaluation is so embedded in the process of implementing activities that it almost goes without saying. But is it safe to assume that evaluation within your organisation will anyway happen during the EVS project, even without your conscious efforts?

It is very probable that throughout the EVS project you will be asking yourself if you are doing the job right. You will probably also discuss this question with some of your colleagues. Add a bit of structure to that, and you will get a planned process of internal evaluation. Depending on the working culture of your organisation, this internal evaluation will be more or less formal. Whatever form works for you is fine, as long as you treat evaluation as an integral part of the EVS project and you evaluate in a planned and conscious way.

There are various aspects of the project to evaluate within your organisation, ranging from the preparatory activities, the voluntary service, the support system, the cooperation with your partners, the learning opportunities provided to the volunteer, the cooperation within your team etc. This is why it is important to know **what you are evaluating, when and with whom**. Make sure you focus on each important aspect and you involve everyone concerned; only then will you get a clear picture of the state of your project. Furthermore, think of the evaluation as a learning opportunity. When you realise what does not work well, act upon it and make instant changes on the go. Regular internal evaluation activities followed by appropriate measures will inevitably result in a more successful EVS project.

Evaluation with the partners

When evaluating with your partner organisations, you will probably be considering the EVS project as a whole. Normally, this would also involve aspects that do not concern the EVS volunteer. On the other hand, this is an evaluation on a macro level and it does not cover many details that you will touch with the EVS volunteer.

Evaluating the project with your partners is the last phase of the project cycle. You have developed the idea together, you have written the application form, you have then implemented the activities and at the end it is time to evaluate the work. **The results of this evaluation will be useful for planning future projects and further cooperation with your partners, but also for preparing the final report for the EVS project.** Therefore, you will need to focus on a few areas: project objectives, design of the activities, the process of implementation, expected results, impact on the volunteer and the local community, the process of cooperation and communication throughout the project etc. Some of the data that you will collect will be particularly useful for the report, such as that which shows the impact or achievement of the objectives. Other data will be more useful for your own future work. Examples of this include your conclusions regarding the process of cooperation, or the design of activities. You can surely include those insights in the final report as well, but make sure you reflect about them when deciding about your future EVS projects, and the further work with your partners.

Evaluation with the partners will normally take place at the end of the project. However, you can also plan evaluation activities at certain points during the project, for example at mid-term. If the EVS project includes more than one EVS activity, it might be useful to conduct an evaluation after the first volunteer returns home, and before the next one starts volunteering.

When you evaluate the project with your partners, you should also take into consideration the results of the evaluation with the volunteer. Perhaps those outcomes will provide the partners with some insights that they have not been aware of. Bear in mind that the feedback that you will get from the volunteer and the partners will not always be positive. When you are in a situation to share, hear or discuss something that is not very pleasant, remember that one of the aims of the evaluation process is to learn. Discuss all issues with your partners as openly as possible, so that you can plan and implement better next time. And even if at the end you decide that you should not cooperate again, it is still a valuable learning outcome.



Evaluating with the volunteer

If the process of evaluation with the partners is focused on the general aspects of the project, then when evaluating with the EVS volunteer you can really go into detail. In fact, you can't even consider evaluating the whole project with the volunteer, and you should rather think of it as **evaluation of the EVS activity**. The volunteer is mostly concerned with the process of preparation before departure and the actual voluntary service. These are also the areas that should be interesting for you when planning the evaluation activities.



If you are a sending organisation in the project, then make sure you evaluate the pre-departure preparation, but also the volunteer's experience within the EVS activity – this will give you clues regarding sending another volunteer to the same organisation. If you are involved as a receiving organisation, then you can focus on evaluating the EVS activities, the quality of the support system and the practical arrangements. The feedback on these aspects can help you make meaningful revisions and improvements for the next volunteer. And if you plan evaluation activities throughout the project, then you can take some measures already while the volunteer is still there.

Don't forget that **evaluation of the volunteer's learning outcomes** should be an integral part of the evaluation activities. The direct impact that the project has on the volunteer has invaluable importance in EVS projects, particularly in the field of developing the key competencies of lifelong learning. However, don't mix this with the learning and mentoring support that you should provide to the volunteer. While in that case you are helping the volunteer reflect on their learning process and become more aware of their own learning, the evaluation should tell you, as an organisation, how much the volunteer is learning, and in what areas.

A good model to follow when evaluating the experience of your EVS volunteer is the **Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model**. While it was invented for evaluating trainings, you can also adapt it to the EVS context. According to this model, you need to look at four levels of evaluation:

- **Reaction**, when you measure how the volunteer reacts to the project. In other words, you will assess if the volunteer is satisfied with various aspects of the project and identify areas that could be improved.
- **Learning**, when you measure what the volunteer has learned from the project. In EVS, you can observe learning as gaining knowledge, practicing skills or developing attitudes. This is what competencies are made of.

- **Behaviour**, when you observe and assess any changes in the way the volunteer acts. Is the volunteer using some of the skills in practice? Do you notice some signs for personal or professional development of the volunteer? This kind of impact can be particularly observed in EVS.
- **Results**, when you assess the long-term impact the project has made on the volunteer. This is primarily related to the ability to utilise the learning experiences in real life. It takes time to notice and measure this kind of impact, and thus it is best if it is followed-up by the sending organisation, once the volunteer returns home.

Having the volunteer nearby provides a variety of opportunities for evaluation activities. While the evaluation with your partners will probably be done via online meetings, you won't face this limitation with the volunteer, at least during one part of the EVS project. Use this to your advantage and have more regular evaluation activities using various methods. Feel free to experiment with the topics you explore and the tools you employ, and you might get some really great information from the volunteer. If you take those outcomes seriously and if you are willing to use them for improving your future projects, they might turn out to be very beneficial.

Follow-up of EVS projects

The question regarding follow-up of the EVS project usually arises as the project is finishing. And it is equally important for the volunteer and for the involved organisations. Sure, the questions that volunteers and organisations will start wondering about will largely differ, but they all go down to one basic question: What happens next?

Very often, follow-up of the EVS project happens spontaneously and is not planned in advance. To a certain extent, this is to be expected because of the nature of the project. EVS projects are very dynamic and their outcomes depend on many factors. It is often impossible to predict if the volunteer will have interest in the particular area, or if an opportunity for further cooperation will arise. This is also the beauty of EVS projects – there are plenty of stories about the ways in which EVS changed somebody's life, or impacted the organisations. You can read some of them in the first section of this publication, titled [Involvement in EVS as reflective practice](#).

Still, follow-up activities can sometimes be planned in advance, and then they can be even more successful. For example, you can plan that the volunteer will organise workshops upon returning home, in order to share particular skills gained during the project. Or if you know that an international youth exchange is the planned follow-up activity of your project, you can plan some activities while the volunteer is still in

the hosting country that will initiate the project development directly with the target group. Planning the follow-up activities in advance will allow the partners to allocate resources and even raise funds if needed. Meanwhile, the volunteer will be able to plan at least part of their life after the EVS project. Finally, the impact of those activities can be also evaluated and included in the project final report.

However, unplanned follow-up activities will inevitably happen. For some volunteers EVS is a career-changing experience. Others decide to start new studies, or keep volunteering in the same area back home. In some cases, volunteers remain involved in the receiving organisation, or start working for their sending organisations. There are also examples of volunteers who established new organisations and started sending and hosting volunteers themselves. And there are many examples of international projects developed as a result of EVS projects. Organisations are also involved in follow-up activities. They often support the projects proposed by their EVS volunteers, and keep working on them, either at a local or an international level. It is not rare that the sending or receiving organisation would become heavily involved in a new area initiated by a volunteer. Finally, many international projects can follow a successful project of the EVS partners.

Petar, together with a few friends and other volunteers, established and registered an organisation in his home town. The organisation promotes various forms of volunteering in the small town and it is the first organisation of that kind in the area.

Both sending and receiving organisations are expected to support the volunteer in developing follow-up activities. They are not asked to provide extra funds or to guarantee any resources, but at least they need to help the volunteer in case they are interested in developing something new as a result of the project – particularly if it is related to sharing the skills and experience gained from the project. Volunteers usually have ideas for follow-up activities when they are back home, and implementing them can be a smooth transition from the EVS project to their new reality. Thus, the sending organisation is usually more involved in the follow-up part of the project, though many successful examples include further and long-term cooperation of all project partners.

Sarah organised a group of young people from her home town and took them on an Erasmus+ Youth Exchange in her hosting country. That was a unique opportunity for young people from the two countries to meet and get to know each other.

Dan collected toys in his home town and shipped them to the orphanage in the town where he did his EVS.

Monica started working for her sending organisation. She is now coordinating other EVS projects and preparing other young people to become EVS volunteers.

Dissemination, exploitation of results and promotion

You may have noticed - indeed elsewhere in this publication we have discussed - the lack of popular knowledge around Europe about EVS and Erasmus+ in general. Have you ever had a problem recruiting appropriate volunteers? Is it ever difficult for you to reach potential volunteers with fewer opportunities? Organisations that face these problems often find that lack of knowledge about Erasmus+ and EVS in particular can rouse suspicion with young people that have not heard about it before. The fact that there is this amazing opportunity that costs nothing to them (or relatively very little) can seem too good to be true and as such is often discounted as an option. The dissemination of your projects' successes, and the exploitation of the results of your project can go a long way to ensuring that people in your recruitment area and beyond understand the benefits of the projects that you are running, and can thus increase participation in the future.

It is understood that when you accept your grant that you will do a certain amount of promotion of your activities as a matter of course. The European Commission understands that if all beneficiaries of Erasmus+ grants disseminate their results effectively then public relations around the Programme will improve organically and noticeably over time. Marketing (as is actually what is happening here) is not normally an area where organisations involved in Erasmus+ projects thrive and so the concept can be daunting. What's more is that there is no specific funding in the EVS budget for additional dissemination and therefore organisations need to think creatively about the way that it can be done.



Volunteers as a promotional resource

Arguably the most useful and perhaps the least expensive and certainly the most organic method of dissemination is through the volunteers themselves. A vast number of individuals taking part in EVS projects around the world are themselves involved due to word-of-mouth marketing. They might know someone who had a positive EVS experience; it might be a friend or family member, or a friend of a friend; and this not only educates them about the benefits of EVS but also inspires them to apply to do a project of their own. A volunteer is likely to meet literally hundreds of people throughout the life of their project and if they are encouraged to spread

the word of EVS during this time then the opportunity for exponential dissemination is vast. It is most beneficial, therefore, for volunteers to be fully aware of the rules, regulations, rights and responsibilities related to EVS so they can accurately promote the opportunities. This has implications for the training that the volunteers receive both before their placement and on their arrival, and necessitates the high quality of support that a volunteer receives on a regular basis. Volunteers may offer this service using their own initiative, but it would be a good idea to encourage them to do so.

#Social Media Marketing

In the modern world of digital social interaction dissemination has taken on new life. Most organisations use common, international platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to tell the world about their activities, and it is easy and free to do so. If your organisation does not use any of these platforms then it is strongly advisable that you think about changing your policy. Love it or hate it social media is a great way to reach young people. The nature of the digital world and trends therein might mean you have to try new platforms regularly, but you will not be disappointed by the results. Make sure you take photographs of all the activities that take place. When a new volunteer starts – post a photo! Every time you run an activity – update! Tell the world about it and make sure the world knows the specifics. Do a quick search on twitter for [#erasmusplus](#) and you'll see the huge quantity of people spreading the word about the Programme.

Regular Media Marketing

Having a good relationship with the local media is a great way to promote your organisation and the activities you do within Erasmus+. Local TV and radio stations, newspapers, online publications are always looking for interesting stories on which to report, so why not you and your activities? You can make it much easier for them by writing a press release, which can be a small document outlining what you are doing, why and make sure you make it interesting! Include some pictures if you have them. Organisations that do this regularly tend to find that people working in the media are lazy! If you do the work for them they are almost certain to include it in their publication! If you give them things to include regularly then they will become a good friend, and the word of your project will easily spread. Encourage volunteers to keep an online diary of their activities and share choice pieces on your home page or through your social media sites.

Promotional materials

Most [National Agencies](#) will have promotional materials with their logo and that of Erasmus+. Why not get in touch with them and ask if they will give you a box full?! Everyone likes a gift and next time you run an open day or any kind of event you could offer them as gifts or prizes and all the while you are doing publicity for the Programme and your project. In the past we have seen volunteers walking around with t-shirts, badges and even back-packs with the logo "ask me about my European Voluntary Service!" which were created by a [National Agency](#).

Talks and presentations

It can be very effective to arrange to do a talk or a presentation in schools, colleges, youth clubs or other such institutions to spread the word of EVS. Current or past volunteers could be encouraged to participate and describe their experiences first-hand.

Personal projects

We discuss volunteers' [personal projects](#) elsewhere in this publication. Dissemination is an excellent background for volunteers to create some sort of project where they can use their creativity and gain new skills in promotion. Volunteers often make videos of their experience which can be shared online, or by creating a DVD. Photography is also an excellent medium to exploit the results of a project. In fact the possibilities are endless.

Thierry, an EVS volunteer created a website and CD rom during his EVS placement as a personal project. His project involved him working alongside a volunteer coordinator in an NGO working within EVS and he was astounded how difficult it could be to recruit volunteers for fully-funded international projects. He decided to find out how organisations do it around the world and contacted several international partners and interviewed them about their recruitment techniques. He then collated this information onto a website and shared this with other organisations in the voluntary sector. The effects of this were many and he was able to disseminate his own project while offering a service to the other organisations.

The important thing to remember is that you should be creative. Spreading the word of your project can have huge positive implications for you and your organisation. It might be that a funding organisation is looking for a beneficiary, or that an employer is looking to take on volunteers after they finish their projects. It can only make your life easier and your projects of a higher quality, so think creatively and get promoting!

Part D

D

Specific (advance) practices in EVS



Coordination of larger projects and group EVS

A standard EVS application can include between 1 and 30 volunteers. These volunteers can be hosted (up to 12 months each) over a period of two years. Depending on the nature and capacity of the receiving/coordinating organisation these volunteers could theoretically all be hosted at the same time. Hosting 10 volunteers at a time is considered to be a group EVS.

Who is the Coordinating Organisation?

This is a question that is often asked, especially by volunteers that are confused about their support structure. The coordinating organisation is the organisation that applies for and manages the grant. It could be that the sending organisation and the coordinating organisation are one and the same, if it is the sending organisation that applies to send volunteers and then pays the receiving organisation their coordination costs. It could be that the coordinating organisation and the receiving organisation are one and the same if the receiving organisation applies for funds to host volunteers within their organisation. Occasionally the coordinating organisation is a separate organisation entirely, and normally this is for a larger-scale project.

Multiple receiving organisations - one project

The simplest example is that an organisation could make partnerships with several local organisations that are looking to host a volunteer to help them carry out their work and add an international element to the activities that they do. The rules of Erasmus+ state that all of these organisations have to be accredited as EVS placements. Accreditation is a process a receiving organisation must go through with its [National Agency](#) or relevant [SALTO Centre](#) to demonstrate that it has the capacity to receive and manage volunteers as well as offering a fulfilling, worthwhile project with good opportunities for learning²⁸.

After all receiving organisations are accredited, the coordinating organisation could apply for, for example, 5 volunteers, who could all arrive into the country at the same time (or not, as long as the total length of the project was less than 2 years) and each could volunteer in a different receiving organisation. Generally the coordinating organisation manages the accommodation (unless the placement is residential) and other practicalities like mentorship and volunteer allowance, while the receiving organisation supervises the volunteer on a day-to-day basis. This process can be very effective and gives smaller organisations, which might not have the capacity to apply for and manage EVS funding themselves, the opportunity to benefit from an international volunteer in their organisation.

²⁸ For more information see <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2933/EVS%20accreditation%20guidelines%202014.pdf>.

Group EVS

A good tool for inclusion in EVS is for volunteers to take part in a group EVS activity. Typically this would be a short-term project (from 2 weeks to 2 months) and involve a group of between 10 and 30 volunteers volunteering simultaneously. In this case volunteers are offered good quality peer support in addition to their regular support from mentors and supervisors as they will usually be working and living along with the other participants. Coordinators would need to be aware of the need for possible conflict resolution techniques in this case as it would not be uncommon in such a project for there to be personality clashes, especially if volunteers are not used to living away from home, or travelling internationally. Their intercultural communication skills may be basic and so conflicts would not be uncommon, but these hurdles are easy to overcome with proactive mentorship and guidance.



A good example of a large group EVS is one that took place at a music festival in the UK. 30 disadvantaged volunteers were brought together from 6 different countries to volunteer at a large music festival. Generally their language skills were not good, few of them had experience of travelling, and as they were spending their 2 week project sleeping in a tent, their accommodation was also a challenge for most. The activities were related to the environmental impact of the festival and they were tasked with recycling plastic bottles, aluminium cans and food for composting throughout the festival. Confident volunteers were able to communicate with festival goers to encourage them to recycle their waste and others spent time distributing plastic bags to promote sustainability at the festival. After the festival they would salvage good quality equipment that was left behind to be donated to local charities and youth organisations.

In this case the coordinating organisation applied for [Exceptional Costs](#) to provide reinforced mentorship. As they were living on the festival site the organisation felt the volunteers needed additional pastoral support to ensure all learning objectives were met and that the volunteers' specific needs were catered for. The coordinating organisation was responsible for liaising with the festival and supporting the volunteer managers at the event to supervise the volunteers. The coordinating organisation provided mentors and catering for the volunteers as well

as all the camping equipment. It was a hugely successful project that gave a huge learning opportunity to young people with fewer opportunities that would never have otherwise had the chance to take part in a project on this scale.

Large scale EVS events

It is possible within Key Action 1 to apply for funding to create an EVS project for large groups of volunteers to simultaneously fulfil their service. This is a great chance to get young people together for an international or European event in the field of youth, sport or culture. The minimum number of volunteers in this case is 30, although there is no maximum. The duration is a little shorter for a project of this scale, being between 14 days and 2 months. It is also encouraged to arrange incidental activities within the framework of the project, alongside the voluntary activity such as a workshop or conference to discuss the concept of volunteering. All applications for large-scale EVS must be made directly to the [EACEA](#) so bear in mind that the deadline might be different than for a regular EVS project applied for to your National Agency.

Working with inclusion groups - inclusion in practice

"Inclusion, in practice, is an on-going participative process (a process that recognises that young people are the experts of their own lives, that empowers individuals to control the process and set the agenda according to their current circumstances) that equips young people, irrespective of age, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, belief, socio-economic status or ability, with the skills, knowledge and opportunities necessary to actively participate (having the power and the opportunity to contribute, and having that contribution recognised and respected) as equal citizens at all levels of society..."

[Going International – Opportunities for All](#), p.7-8, SALTO Inclusion RC

Actively involving young people with fewer opportunities can be challenging for an organisation, not the least because rarely are people from this demographic background knocking at your door to take part in a project, and they are unlikely to be sending a CV and letter of motivation to you. Maybe this is because they have never heard of EVS, or perhaps they feel they wouldn't be selected or simply think it sounds "too good to be true". Outreach work is usually necessary when actively looking for young people with fewer opportunities to take part in your projects. You need to go to them rather than the other way around. This can be done by contacting agencies that are working with young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), or young offenders, or indeed unemployment agencies. Schools and colleges are

also a good place to start. If you arrange to give a heartfelt presentation and explain what is on offer then this is the first step to recruiting keen volunteers who will benefit immeasurably from your project.

Stephan was living in a shelter for young people affected by homelessness. He was an early school leaver, had no qualifications and was currently in a NEET situation. A local NGO working with pre-approved EVS funding was looking for young people to take part in their short-term project working in an animal sanctuary in Malta. Stephan took a chance and got involved and left his country for the first time in his life. Working with the animals boosted his self-esteem and gave him the feeling of pride knowing that the voluntary work he was doing was making a difference. Living out of the country and experiencing a new culture broadened his horizons and improved his confidence and social skills. He returned home after 3 weeks and signed up to do a longer project working with animals in Greece. This further boosted his confidence and on his return he enrolled in college to study Animal Management. His long-term goal is now to become a vet or zoologist, an aspiration unknown to him 6 months earlier.

There are certain things that applicant organisations can do to improve the inclusivity of their projects. When working with young people with fewer opportunities it might be worth thinking about:

- working with sending partners who work with inclusion groups in their local areas; they will be able to prepare volunteers well for their international experience.
- offering shorter-term placements. Organisations are able to offer projects from 2 weeks to 2 months for volunteers with fewer opportunities.
- offering language classes to volunteers that need them. There is a budget for this in your grant application.
- offering projects where language is not a major concern. Some of the best inclusion projects are those that are more manual, such as environmental projects or those that involve more physical activities.

Applying for Exceptional Costs

Erasmus+ recognises that the additional support required when working with a target group focussed on inclusion might be more expensive than coordinating a volunteer with a more privileged background. When preparing yourself to coordinate volunteers who fit the 'fewer opportunities' profile you might want to think about applying for additional funding within the 'Exceptional Costs' section of the Erasmus+ application form. This is often overlooked and gives an excellent opportunity for organisations to fund specific support for individuals that really need it.

Advance Planning Visits

This is a remarkable opportunity to meet the volunteer before their project starts, which is often a necessity for all parties to ensure a successful project. Organisations can apply for the costs of 2 people (the volunteer plus a member of the sending organisation) to travel to the environs of the project for 2 days to discuss any specific needs that there might be. Only the travel costs of APVs are included when applied for in the 'Activity Details' section of the application, but additional accommodation costs can be applied for under 'Exceptional Costs' to ensure participants have somewhere to stay during the visit.

Special needs

Real costs related to any specific need a young person may have can be applied for in this section of the application. These may be mobility aids or any other specific item.

Reinforced mentorship

As you know, a young person with fewer opportunities may need additional ongoing support in relation to different aspects of their programme. They may need more regular feedback meetings, assistance in budgeting or shopping for example. An applicant can take this into consideration and apply for additional funding for support under 'Exceptional Costs'.

An accompanying person

Many disadvantaged young people may have little or no experience of international travel, which could potentially be an inhibitive factor in their participation. It is possible to apply for funding to cover someone to travel with the volunteer to the placement and potentially stay for a short while to help them to settle in. You could also apply for subsistence for this person.



Visa costs

You may be working with a partner from a country whose citizens would need a visa to enter the country where the activities are taking place. Likewise you may also be thinking about sending/hosting young migrants that would need a visa for their hosting country. Applying for visa costs within 'Exceptional Costs' is a great way to support inclusivity and diversity in your application. The cost of a visa application could be covered, and you might also want to think about applying for the possible costs of the whole visa application process which could be costly for the applicant, covering such costs as transport to the embassy for the application meeting, courier costs and official translation services. Depending on the nature of the young people with whom you might be working you could apply for the cost of acquiring a passport – they may never have thought about leaving the country.

Additional preparation for short-term applicants

Costs for the sending organisation are designed to include the costs relating to quality preparation work. This figure is negotiable between the applicant organisation and the sending organisation (if it is not the sending organisation applying) although at the end of the Youth in Action programme the suggested sending cost was between 8 and 15% of the project costs. In the current Erasmus+ budget the highest project costs are €630 per month (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, UK). At this rate and at 15% a long-term project of 12 months would mean sending costs of €1134. If the project is the minimum length of just 2 weeks then the maximum a sending organisation can hope to receive is just €44. In reality a short-term volunteer is more likely to need high-quality, supportive preparation than a long-term applicant to give them the best chance to have a successful and fruitful placement, but the sending organisation might need additional financial support to offer this. Under 'Exceptional Costs' the applicant can propose additional preparation and ask for funding to help towards this. The list of possibilities for Exceptional Costs is not an exhaustive one and, as always, it will depend on the specific needs of the volunteers with whom you hope to work. When working with young people with fewer opportunities you may not have recruited the volunteers at the time of application. Under the inclusion framework of Erasmus+ it is acceptable to apply for funding without naming the volunteers at application stage.



Appendices



Where to find support and inspiration: selected links and resources

EVS Accreditation

- National Agencies for the Erasmus+ Programme: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/partners_networks/national_agencies_en.htm
- SALTO South East Europe: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/eisee/>
- SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/eeca/evs-accreditations/>
- SALTO EuroMed: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/evs/>

Partner finding

- Database of accredited EVS organisations: http://europa.eu/youth/evs_database
- Database of Volunteering Opportunities: http://europa.eu/youth/vp/opportunity_list
- OTLAS partner finding tool: <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/otlas-partner-finding/>
- The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations: <http://www.alliance-network.eu/>
- Youth Networks: <http://www.youthnetworks.eu/>
- Find EVS: <http://findevs.com/>
- Various Facebook groups created for this purpose

EVS Project application

- National Agencies for the Erasmus+ Programme: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/partners_networks/national_agencies_en.htm
- Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA): http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/index_en.php

Erasmus+ Programme Guide

- European Commission - Erasmus+ Programme Guide: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/discover/guide/index_en.htm

EVS Training opportunities

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

Youthpass

- Youthpass website: <https://www.youthpass.eu/>
- Demo Youthpass website: <http://demo.youthpass.eu/en/login/>

Handbooks

- Accreditation guide – Stepping into EVS: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/seepublications/guideevs/>
- Be the Hero, be an EVS Mentor!: http://jaunatne.gov.lv/sites/default/files/web/Jaunatne_darbiba/2013/Info_materiali/mentori_rokasgraamata_web.pdf
- Conflict – What an opportunity!: http://www.mladezvakci.cz/fileadmin/user_upload/publikace/Brozura_COME.pdf
- How to be a mentor in EuroMed EVS projects: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3117/03AW_SY%20Mentors%20guide.pdf

- How to develop an EVS project in the EuroMed region: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2317/Injep_guidePratique_Anglais_A5_CORRECT.pdf
- Mentor's Guide: http://www.yia.hu/admin/uploads/angol_mentorkonyv_2.pdf
- T-kit Intercultural learning: <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-4-intercultural-learning?inheritRedirect=true>
- T-kit International Voluntary Service: <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-5-international-voluntary-service?inheritRedirect=true>
- Understanding You(th): <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/cultural-diversity/publications/understandingyouth/>
- Use your hands to move ahead: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionpublications/inclusionforall/useyourhands/>
- Youthpass Guide, <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/guide/>
- Youthpass in EVS training cycle, https://www.youthpass.eu/downloads/13-62-57/Publication_YP_EVS.pdf
- Youthpass Unfolded, <http://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/downloads/youthpass-unfolded/>

Studies and surveys

- EVS Competences for Employability – survey : <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/seepublications/evsemployability/>
- Youthpass Impact study <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/downloads/youthpass-impact-study/>
- Intercultural Competence research report: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/cultural-diversity/publications/interculturalcompetenceresearchreport/>
- Impact of EVS on local communities in EECA: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2682/Impact%20of%20the%20EVS_final%20version.pdf?

Documents

- EVS Info kit: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/tools/evs-info-kit_en.htm
- EVS Charter: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/programme/mobility/documents/evs-charter_en.pdf
- Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for Youth: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionstrategy/>

Tools

- Card game 'Learning out of the box', <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/downloads/learning-out-of-the-box/>
- SALTO Toolbox for training and youth work: <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/>

About Hopscotch contributors



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Dragan Atanasov is an experienced youth worker, project manager and freelance trainer. As one of the founders of the Youth Association creACTIVE, he has worked extensively on creating programs for personal and professional development of young people. In the field of EVS, he has been involved as EVS mentor and coordinator, EVS accreditor in South East Europe and Eastern Europe and Caucasus, as well as EVS trainer in the pool of the SALTO SEE Resource Centre. Dragan lives in Skopje, Macedonia, and is currently working for Peace Corps Macedonia.

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Bob McDougall is a freelance trainer, project manager and EVS coordinator from Leeds in the United Kingdom. Having worked extensively with inclusion in the formal education sector, Bob's passion is for non-formal education to foster competences in young people who find themselves in a difficult situation. Bob is a key trainer on the European Voluntary Service training cycle in the UK as well as regularly coordinating his own EVS projects and mentoring volunteers. Bob is in the pool of trainers for the UK National Agency.

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What is SALTO-YOUTH?

SALTO-YOUTH stands for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport.

Established in 2000, SALTO-YOUTH is a network of Resource Centres working on European priority areas within the youth field. As part of the European Commission's Training Strategy, SALTO-YOUTH provides non-formal learning resources for youth workers and youth leaders and organises training and contact-making activities to support organisations and National Agencies within the frame of the European Commission's Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and beyond.

More information: www.salto-youth.net

What is the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre?

The SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre promotes and supports the participation of young people and other actors in the field of youth and non-formal education from the Programme's Partner countries in the Western Balkans in the Erasmus+ programme, and it aims to contribute to youth work and youth policy development in the Western Balkan region. It acts as a support service for:

- The network of Youth in Action National Agencies in the field of co-operation with this region and
- youth organisations, youth leaders, youth workers and other actors in the field who are interested in developing co-operation between Programme countries and Neighbouring Partner Countries in SEE.

Within the framework of European integration of the SEE region, SALTO SEE actively supports the process of accession of all countries of the region to the Erasmus+ programme in the field of youth.

The Centre's programme of activities is run with the support of pools of trainers and accreditors, in particular in the European Voluntary Service strand of the Programme, as well as Contact Points for Erasmus+: Youth in Action located in the Programme's partner countries in the Western Balkan region.

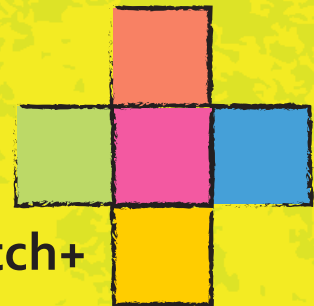
More information: www.salto-youth.net/see

www.salto-youth.net



Looking for more tools for more quality
or your EVS projects, all in one place?
Take a look at HopscotchPlus!

[https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/
resources/hopscotch/](https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/hopscotch/)



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