

Key Action: Learning Mobility of Individuals
Action Type: Mobility of youth workers

Project Title

ESC Gathering - Let's develop good quality and stronger partnership in the European Solidarity Corps volunteering

Good practice example

Project Coordinator

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Project Information

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Partners	EKOLOSKO UDRUZENJE "JEZERO" (BA) , Association Solidarite Echange et Developpement (TN) , SINOP EGITIM PROGRAMLARI VE EVRENSEL VE KULTUREL AKTIVITELER DERNEGI (TR) , "Bright Future" Youth Public Union (AZ) , Qendra Rinore Ardhmeria-Kline (XK) , KOSARKASKI SAVEZ GRADA NISA (RS) , JOVESOLIDES Egypt (EG) , Akcelerator drustvenih promjena - Zid (ME) , Udruzenje gradjana "Zil Vern" - Centar za multikulturalnu saradnju (RS) , GYUMRI YOUTH INITIATIVE CENTRE NGO (AM) , INFORMAGIOVANI ETS (IT) , Peace Volunteering Network (AL) , YOUTH ASSOCIATION DRONI (GE) , REGIONALNE CENTRUM WOLONTARIATU (PL) , CIVIC ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT CENTER PANGEYA ULTIMA (UA) , PERTEJ BARRIERAVE (AL) , COUNCIL FOR PREVENTION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY KAVADARCI (MK) , OBCIANSKE ZDRUZENIE KERIC (SK) , Besiktas Municipality (TR) , VIER PFOTEN Kosova (XK) , EFEM AKDENIZ GENCLIK DERNEGI (TR) , Tomorrow Together e.V. (DE) , Foundation "Situational Center Open Doors" (BG) , UNITED SOCIETIES OF BALKANS (EL) , PISTES SOLIDAIRES (FR) , STEINBEIS INNOVATION GGMBH (DE) , XENA CENTRO SCAMBI E DINAMICHE INTERCULTURALI (IT)
Topics	International relations and development cooperation ; Quality and innovation of youth work ; Key competences development

Project Summary

Objectives

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Implementation

We organized an international training course with study visit elements entitled "ESC Gathering" - Let's develop good quality and stronger partnership in the European Solidarity Corps volunteering.

A total of 28 organizations from 21 EU and non-EU countries participated in the training course, with their selected participants representing QL accredited organizations in the roles of ESC volunteering project coordinators or mentors (in supporting and/or hosting and/or LEAD organizations). Specifically, these participants came from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Egypt, France, Montenegro, Czech Republic, Italy, Kosovo, Germany, Poland, Greece, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine. During the participant selection process, we strived to emphasize a balance of participants from EU countries and the three Partner Regions: SEE/Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries, and Euromed. The range of participating partner organizations, their focus, and their experience with ESC volunteering projects were truly diverse, bringing variability, innovative approaches in working with international volunteers, and a wide range of knowledge, skills, and experiences, including examples of good practice. We are grateful for this unique opportunity to connect so many socio-culturally and thematically diverse organizations and participants on the topic of ESC, with the aim of supporting the development of competencies needed for the role of ESC coordinators, their cooperation, and focusing on the process of finding common values and mutual understanding, openness, creating a safe environment, and trustworthy partnerships for future ESC projects.

We were surprised to receive a large number of applications during the search for suitable training participants, far exceeding our participant limit. Based on clear, transparent, and pre-established criteria, we selected a group of participants matching the required profile. At the same time, we worked with a "waiting list" where we placed a certain number of participants, according to the needed countries, who had the required profile for this type of training but could not be selected due to the limited number of places.

Despite the significant diversity and large number of participating organizations/participants, the group remained stable throughout the entire duration, with no significant changes or the need to replace participants. We targeted the invitation at coordinators and mentors of ESC projects with previous experience in ESC projects, as well as newcomers – organizations that are starting with ESC volunteering projects and have recently obtained QL accreditation. As a result, all organizations were able to contribute informed insights and observations from working with international volunteers and their involvement in Solidarity Corps projects from the beginning of the cooperation. At the same time, these experiences were enriching and motivating for "newcomers" – organizations that had only partial experience so far. We feel that this training was inspiring for participants on various levels (interactively chosen methodology, training delivery method, combination of training with study visit elements, how to support the development of soft skills in coordinators, how to manage and educate volunteers, working with the Solidarity Corps program, networking opportunities, working with group dynamics...), especially for participants from Partner Countries (EECA/EaP, SE/WB, and Euromed). Just as in previous international trainings in 2015, 2016, and 2019, we noted in the participants' feedback an interest in this type of training and a

need for the topics and the approach we take to training on these topics. Some participants, especially from the Western Balkans, Eastern and Partnership countries, and Euromed, mentioned that they have limited access to similar training activities to develop their competencies in working with Solidarity Corps volunteers and to further develop and improve their work as ESC coordinators. At the same time, when selecting partners, we tried to take into account cultural diversity and involve a wide range of larger/smaller countries, participants from various socio-cultural backgrounds within and outside the EU, with varying levels of experience (long-term involvement/newcomers...). A significant and important element of the training was the topic of partnership building. We believe that despite the wide cultural diversity of the countries, not all of which cooperate at a political level (or are even in conflict - e.g., Serbia-Kosovo, Serbia-BiH, Armenia-Azerbaijan, Turkey-Armenia...), the establishment of partnerships and the deepening of long-term cooperation between the participating countries from the EU and all three Partner Regions were well supported.

Achievements

We successfully achieved the project's objectives, with the support for new partnerships being particularly appreciated. Thanks to the participatory methodology, we managed to gain not only information from each other but also trust and a good level of communication, cooperation, mutual respect, and understanding of intercultural differences.

The participants left motivated, inspired, and strengthened for the development of their projects, more competent in utilizing the potential of projects effectively and creating a quality environment for the service and learning of all involved. New partnerships were established, and we are already receiving reports of positive changes within the organizations and their impact on local communities. The group of participants was very diverse, so different aspects were important to them. In identifying the most significant outcomes, the following elements emerged in particular: new partnerships, new contacts, new contexts of how projects function in partner countries, motivation to continue pursuing the Quality Label (including its expansion to other types of volunteering – for example, in addition to individual long-term projects, also short-term ones for people with fewer opportunities, and in some cases, involvement in Teams...), and to develop existing projects, and understanding the different needs of individual ESC actors.

This training also had a strong intercultural dimension. Participants came from a total of 28 organizations and 21 countries from the EU and Partner Regions (SEE/WB, EECA, and Euromed countries). By using non-formal education methods, we managed to create a safe environment in which participants could express their opinions, share their experiences, values, and attitudes on various topics. Despite the significant cultural diversity of the group, we managed to identify universal attitudes and values, such as equality, inclusion of all without distinction, respect related to the perception of personal and others' needs, the creation of a safe environment and the maintenance of peace, tolerance towards differences and other cultures, helping others and solidarity, the promotion of humanism and concern for the development of the environment in which we live. This contributed to a friendly, creative atmosphere within the group and openness to cooperation among participants, even from cultures that do not cooperate at a political level or are even in open conflict. We believe that from this perspective, the training was a unique example of good practice, demonstrating that cooperation between individual nations and cultures, even from politically hostile countries, is possible.

One of the important outcomes is also the expansion of the EVS Galaxy brochure (now ESC Galaxy - Guidebook for ESC coordinators) with 5 new contributions from course participants from various countries, including those from the Euromed region. This resulted in an even more comprehensive material that can well serve coordinators and mentors of ESC volunteering and further contribute to the quality of Erasmus+ projects and non-formal education in general.

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