



Learning experiences from EVS volunteers within the project “Many Opportunities Real Equality”



Project Number: 2014-3-IT03-KA105-004393



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



c e s i e
the world is only one creature



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I

EVS MORE project in brief

Many Opportunities Real Equality (MORE) has been a 24-month project co-funded by the Erasmus + programme (KA1 – Youth mobility), coordinated by CESIE.

From February 2015 to January 2017, 20 young people living in Italy had the opportunity to carry out an European Voluntary Service in some European countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey.

The project had two different type of service: short term (2 months) involving youngsters with fewer opportunities and long term (6 months) involving young NEET (not involved in education, employment or training).

MORE allowed both target groups to:

- increase personal, social and professional skills through the activities in the receiving organisations
- improve intercultural, social and civic competences through the contact with people from other cultures and backgrounds
- foster solidarity and tolerance and active citizenship through the relationships with other volunteers and local staff
- develop autonomy, independence, self-confidence and European awareness thanks to living in different contexts than their own, with new people, conditions and responsibilities.

Below you have an overview of all the mobilities:

HOSTING COUNTRY	HOSTING ORGANISATION	N° OF VOLUNTEERS	DURATION OF THE MOBILITY
Bosnia and Herzegovina	CARPE DIEM" DOBOJ	2	6 months
France	PISTES-SOLIDAIRES	2	6 months
Germany	Gesellschaft für Europabildung e.V.	2	6 months
Portugal	ProAtlântico - Associação Juvenil	2	6 months
Slovenia	Kulturno izobrazevalno drustvo PiNA	2	6 months
France	SOLIDARITES JEUNESSES MCP	4	2 months
Portugal	Espírito de Mudança - Associação Juvenil	4	2 months
Turkey	Sistem ve Jenerasyon Dernegi	2	2 months

In the following pages, you have the opportunity to discover a little bit these experiences through testimonies of the some EVS volunteers.

II

Six months of continue growth

Francesca's experience in Portugal

“It is around a month I have just come back to Italy after 6 months of the most beautiful adventure of my life till now. My name is Francesca, I'm 25 and I have been a European volunteer in Portugal. My project was divided into two parts: taking part in activities with elderly in a diurnal centre in the morning while with children and guys in the afternoon. Sometimes I'm worked together with the local food bank and once a week with my hosting organisation's office job. It has been a continuous fun: despite my inexperience with elderly I found in all of them grandparents! More than me to them, they have given to me, just sharing with me even only a look, full of experience and histories which I started understanding step by step, as time goes by. Furthermore they taught me sewing, that's an impossible thing to do for me till now. Together we tried to sew the greatest cover of the world. Every day we were committed to unite in lines of 9 wool squares from all parts of Portugal... The day of the cover exposition has been a magnificent party. With children and guys, despite my initial difficulty with the language, it has been a bit easier, given my experience as volunteer in a centre of my city. I supported them doing homework after school, playing, visiting museums, taking a bath in the frozen ocean and spending days at the park. These are some of the activities happened in these 6 months together. And then, they have been the best masters: their patience into explaining each new word for me, I'll remember every time I'm losing my temper. And then there is the best part: knowing a lot of people from each part of the world. Living in a house with boys and girls never seen before, with a different culture than yours (in particular from Togo, Poland, Turkey and Uruguay) and learning to get to know them day by day; the managers and the volunteers of the centres; elderly the same and guys, everyone with different stories. Therefore, EVS is also building relationships which will last for the whole life. Yes because during that months they aren't shared only spaces but they have been shared emotions, experiences, habits, moments of loneliness and moments of pure happiness, travels, parties, drunks after parties, concerts, evening thè, movies and recipes; moments that will stay indelible in the memory. In conclusion, they have been six months of continue growth and discovery of myself. An experience that I would repeat other thousand times”.



*Francesca,
EVS volunteer hosted in Portugal by ProAtlântico for 6 months*

III

Widen your horizons

Laura's experience in Turkey

“EVS is a great experience that everyone should enjoy at least once in life. It is an unique possibility to get in touch with a new culture, to know different point of views and to meet many new people from very different backgrounds, with different religions and traditions. It gives you the chance to widen your horizons and stretch your mind to new realities and at the same time you have the occasion to volunteer, being useful and helpful for other people.

My arrival in Turkey couldn't have been better. Turkish people are extremely friendly and hospitable and my hosting organization (System Generation) has an amazing team of people, who did everything was possible to make volunteers feeling comfortable and welcome and who took really good care of all of us. They provided us an introduction where they explained us all the details about EVS project and our tasks and they provided us Turkish classes once per week. During my stay in Turkey I also had the possibility to take part in an incredibly interesting training course in Kayseri about the youth employment challenges, which volunteers from every part of Turkey attended.



During my EVS project in Ankara my task was to raise awareness of the Erasmus + projects among young people and encourage youth mobility. In order to do that we went to visit several universities where we told our stories to the students, telling them how to find these projects, how to apply and how we were feeling about our experiences.

Even more, we opened an info point in our office where young people were

always welcome to come and learn something more about volunteering. Beside this task, when I arrived in Ankara I met several volunteers, either from my same organization and from other ones, together we had the idea to open a school for refugee children in Keçiören (a neighbourhood in Ankara where the number of refugees is incredibly high). In two weeks, without any sponsor or donation, only with the support of my hosting organization and Keçiören municipality, we managed to find some rooms, which we could use as classrooms, some didactic materials and a bus to pick up the children from their homes. We started this project with 25 children and now, after less than two months, we host 60 children.

Many of them could never attend any education, the other had to quit their studies and none of them could speak Turkish. In this school we provide them Turkish, English, Arabic and maths classes, in parallel with some workshops and educative games. At the same time we have also organized some Turkish classes for the children's families.

Our aim is to contribute to the reduction of vulnerability of refugees by improving the level of education of children and increasing awareness, cohesion and mutual understanding between refugees, local population and European citizens.

EVS has been for sure the best experience of my life, it taught me many things, increased my vocational training and developed my personality”.

Laura,

EVS volunteer hosted in Turkey by Sistem ve Jenerasyon Dernegi for 2 months

IV

Get out of the normal life

Giada's experience in France

"I decided to apply for an EVS opportunity in France after two years of working experience which takes me to a period that could be considered as "interior crises". I thought that the EVS project could be a good opportunity to make new experiences towards volunteering, to travel and get professional skills. EVS can give the chance to get out of the normal life, furthermore, the involvement in volunteering activities and in a multicultural environment can enrich our cultural baggage and influence our way of thinking. Three months ago I left from Sicily with specific goals: work with people of different nationalities, understand the NGO's work, acquire professional skills and improve my French. Definitely I wanted to do that by finding out a new country: France!



I arrived in Pau, which is called the "Porte des Pyrénées", in a cold and rainy evening of March. Pistes Solidaires, my host organization, is a no-profit association, NGO and Europe Direct which aims to promote the knowledge, skills and attitude of justice and equality necessary to live in a intercultural society and interdependent world. Education is the heart of their associative project which is promoted through some main actions: non-formal education, educational mobility, socio-cultural development and European cooperation. My EVS, "More: Many Opportunities Real Equality", consists of different duties such as to deal communication, assisting the project manager, managing and implementing projects already

approved but also to promote the knowledge of European Union in primary school. In the month of May, in addition to the normal activities, we have made elaboration, promotion, implementation and evaluation of different activities aiming to promote Europe within Europe Direct activities in secondary schools and other places such as squares, shopping centers etc.

During the European month our daily activities mainly consisted in planning and carrying out meetings, training and events for selected groups of youths, with the aim to understand the impact of the European Union in our daily life and improve knowledge through non-formal activities such as free discussions, quizzes, sketches, games etc.. Every day was a new challenge; life is characterized by the succession of opportunities of educative discussions and boring and angry moments, at work as well as at home.

I can say that these first four months have been quite positive. Each day I learnt something new and I used my creativity to plan and organise activities with the other volunteers. I had the chance to travel a lot around France and Spain, as for work as well for holiday.

The most significant thing about my first months of EVS is that I learnt how to work, interact and cooperate with people coming from different countries with a completely different social and educational background”.

Giada,

EVS volunteer hosted in France by PISTES-SOLIDAIRES for 6 months

V

Inside a border free bunker

Emanuele's experience in Bosnia

“Before my arrival in Doboj I did not know a lot about Bosnia and Herzegovina and everything I knew was from television during the conflicts in 90s. In addition, I did not know about the existence of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina where Doboj is located. I was quite confused about the Balkan history when I moved in Doboj, and I tried to be more open minded, so I asked local people and heard their stories to have a bigger picture of the situation. I listened at the “contradictions” to better understand the environment. I call them “contradictions” because it could happen that people who got involved in extreme situations like war they refused to agree with the historical facts by focusing more on their own personal experience, their victim status or often reporting something different comparing with books or article I found. I understood that point. It was not easy for me be a simple listener especially when I heard stories about the civil war happened between 1990 and 1995, because war brought a big change in every family of the town. I admit that during these episodes I felt uncomfortable.



I received a really warm welcome from the locals and I felt a connection with them since the very beginning. I liked the town, in particular the medieval fortress and the view from the river Bosna. At first, I noticed many traces of war like bullet holes, damaged roof or minefield sighs; after two months, I started ignoring such aesthetic presence considering it some sort of decorative pattern. I enjoyed the kaphana, pubs, and the traditional music, and as I am vegan, krompiruša (pie with potatoes) and ticvica (zucchini) made my day several times.

I worked six months in the Youth Center as EVS volunteer in cooperation with Carpe Diem organization that gave me the chance to implement my initiatives. The Youth Center is situated in a Bunker who has been damaged by the flood in 2014 and recovered with the economical support of the Norwegian Embassy.

During my EVS, I organized many events to promote human rights, peace and cultural exchanges. The contrast between the place (bunker) and the topics we dealt have been quite interesting. Sometimes it has not been really easy to cooperate with the local organization, e.g. when I organized an event to support LGBT rights (<http://dobj.news/dobj-protiv-diskriminacije/>). It turned out that it was the first time local people get to know this topic, and I have to confess that besides stereotypes and prejudices, I had to face insults and threats.

Living in the Balkans has been important for me because I wanted to get to know more on the European migrant crisis, especially through the Balkan route. I have always been interested in this topic, and I felt powerless so many times. In addition, I left my hometown, Palermo, where many people were arrived after being rescued at the Sicily Channel therefore I needed to clarify to myself this complex topic. I tried to change my point of view and I focused on myself as a stranger in a foreign country, I was the “migrant”

The explanation has come at first as a doubt. I wondered if privileges are the consequence of absence of privileges for someone else. I thought about Europe, and I thought again about the word “contradictions”.

My experience in Doboj ended the first of March, and what I have learned is that I didn’t choose to born as Italian but I got some privileges in any case, and I can be a migrant, if I want. I have more opportunities, freedom, and I can choose to move to a European country that suits me more according to my interests or job opportunities. I thought about all those people that don’t have the same freedom as I do, the one escaping from violence, the ones how died on the way to Europe piled up inside trucks through the Balkan route or among the waves of hope in the Mediterranean sea. That’s what I really learned.

The European Voluntary Service thought me that Freedom cannot be a privilege but a right that has to be extended to everyone without conditions, from now on.

I am outside the bunker now”.

Emanuele,

EVS volunteer hosted in Bosnia and Herzegovina by CARPE DIEM" DOBOJ for 6 months

VI

After climbing this big mountain the skyline is breathless

Tim's experience in Germany

"I'm writing this report after 13 days from the end of my fantastic experience as a volunteer with the feeling of melancholy, because now all the memories are scrolling down in my brain and I miss that time. In this six month I had what I expected when I decided to apply for a EVS. The first good thing was Berlin: it is such a beautiful and cosmopolitan city, where is possible to find every kind of persons, and the people is really open-minded, so It is easy here to create new friendships. The second reason is the GEB Team, is like a family, they supported me and still doing with the German bureaucracy, during and after my Evs. When I applied to do EVS I already knew that it would be a challenge for me, to write new pages of my life. I always have been open to other people of different countries and different backgrounds and so I was bored living in a small town

where life seems the same everyday and let me say that in Italy the conditions for youngsters to find a job are not easy. My life changed for the good. I learned things that I didn't know I was able to do, such as seek and find home, managing different groups from different countries with different language and background. I got used to live by my own, I become more



responsible because I didn't feel any more the protection that I felt when I lived with my mother and father, even if they supported me, but now in different way. I had the amazing feeling to test my abilities, to understand what I am able to do and to solve my problems by myself. Thanks to this independence I was able to discover my skills, for example the language. Now in Berlin I used to speak standard four tongues: Albanian, Italian, English and German. Another reason why I did my EVS is that I strongly believe in Erasmus Plus Program. I was really happy when I received the news that they selected me and I was really happy every time I saw happiness on the face of the youngsters when they finished their stage. The goal of this program is to make people independent, just like when I heard from the Belgian students that after few days, they were able to move in Berlin better than their teachers. That was Magnificent to hear it, and also I was able after few weeks to give directions (mixed German with English) to the people.

I really suggest to all youngsters that live everywhere to do EVS in Europe and all over the World because it's an amazing experience. Like every begin I can say that it s not easy but after climbing this big mountain the skyline is breathless".

Tim,

EVS volunteer hosted in Germany by Gesellschaft für Europabildung e.V. for 6 months

VII

EVS as a powerful instrument of personal development

Ludovica's experience in Slovenia

"I'd like to present myself: my name is Ludovica, I'm 23 and at the beginning of 2015 I decided to take part to a European Voluntary Service's project.

After a degree in Applied Interlinguistic Communication and more or less short experiences of study and volunteering in Italy and abroad, I looked for a new challenge which would allow me not only to travel but also to learn and to contribute to the community of another European country.

Thanks to CESIE I found EVS M.O.R.E. project which took me to live and work at PiNA, a cultural association in the city of Koper, in Slovenia, from the beginning of April to the end of September 2015: fate stood on my side because I discovered this opportunity exactly in the afternoon of the last day to apply for!



So out of hand, finding a project there in Koper, after three years of study in Trieste and an Erasmus project in Croatia, it almost made me laugh: between many destinations Istria and East still called me! In short, it was an ironic sign of destiny.

When I arrived in Koper I just knew that the project topics would be European planning and non-formal education, but actually it has been much more: I was involved in a myriad of activities, from the participation to the media arts festival Invisible Cities to the organisation of the European Day of Languages; from the selection of young adults like me for training experiences abroad to the creation of my project Erasmus+ proposal; from writing articles in English to the participation to a workshop within an intercontinental capacity building project and much more.

Even more thinking back on difficulties met along the way (and there have been so much!) now that the project is finished and that I don't come anymore in that red door every morning, I know EVS allowed me to meet people-colleagues, volunteers and friends-I will always bring with me, it made me even more independent and it put me to the test in the most disparate settings.

Nowadays I can see EVS as a powerful instrument of personal development, of course, but also as an unmissable opportunity to reinforce connections among European citizens and having, as young people, a concrete social impact...so, what are you waiting for!?"

Ludovica,

EVS volunteer hosted in Slovenia by Kulturno izobraževalno društvo PiNA for 6

ANNEX I

Description	EVS (European Voluntary Service), a programme of international volunteering funded by European Commission, allow young people from 17 to 30 years old to complete a voluntary experience in an organisation in EU and third countries for minimum of 2 weeks and a maximum of 12 months. EVS volunteer has the opportunity to support the daily work of the hosting organisation working in educational, social and cultural field and targeting different groups (children, migrants, youngsters, disabled people etc.). Meanwhile, EVS volunteers follow a learning path in non-formal education aiming to acquire and strengthen transversal competences. Finally EVS promotes solidarity and a deep cultural and relational exchange among EVS volunteer and local community.
Duration	From 2 weeks to 12 months
How many times?	It is possible to take part only in 1 EVS project; if the volunteer took part in a short-term EVS (maximum 59 days), it is possible to take in an additional EVS project.
Costs	Expenses of board and lodging are fully covered by the project as well as eventual local transports used for EVS activities. The return travel costs are covered by a maximum depending on distance between the departure and arrival place (http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources_en#tab-1-4). EVS volunteers get also a free charge medical insurance and local linguistic support.
Who can participate	People from 17 to 30 years old. Participants must be resident in the country of their sending organisation.
More information	Erasmus + Programme Guide, pag. 78 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/files/resources/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf

What is European Volunteering Service?

ANNEX II

Useful links

- Erasmus + programme: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus_en
- Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA):
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/index_en.php
- Italian Agency for youth: <http://www.agenziagiovani.it/>
- List of other National Agencies: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/contact_en
- EVS information: https://europa.eu/youth/EU/voluntary-activities/european-voluntary-service_en
- EVS organisations database: https://europa.eu/youth/volunteering/evs-organisation_en

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