

Creating Community Impact through Solidarity



By Adina Șerban, Clara Drammeh
and Dan Moxon

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With many thanks to all the persons that answered to our questionnaires and interviews!

SALTO European Solidarity Corps

SALTO ESC supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The mission is to explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European societies and to promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity. SALTO ESC coordinates networking activities, training, seminars and events that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact. By doing this, SALTO ESC contributes to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations.

SALTO ESC is hosted by OeAD. The OeAD is the national agency for the implementation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in Austria. SALTO ESC is part of a European network of SALTO Resource Centres with the mission to improve the quality and impact of the EU youth programmes as well as to support and develop European youth work.

Find us online at www.salto-youth.net, www.oead.at and www.salto-youth.net/solidarity

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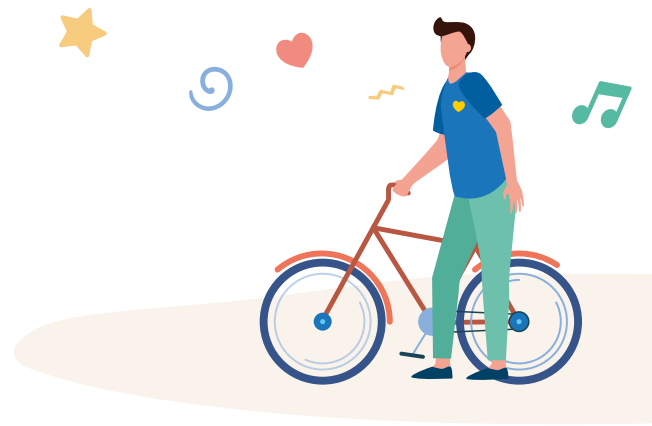
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Foreword – What is community impact?

The background information on the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme indicates that “young people need easily accessible opportunities to engage in solidarity activities, which could enable them to express their **commitment to the benefit of communities** while acquiring useful experience and competences” (*European Solidarity Corps programme guide, 2022*). This is an important sign that the ESC programme rebalanced emphasis on personal competence development and the sense of service. Now it does not only support personal development of young people but is targeting the communities as a beneficiary through the activities implemented by youth and youth organisations. This is one of the main reasons why there is a need to talk and explore the community impact of ESC activities.

It is not easy to grasp the meaning of community impact, not only in a practical sense, but also to define it and to agree what can be considered a community. While preparing the desk research on community impact (*Community Impact Indicators for Learning Mobility, 2021*), in the group of researchers from the European Platform on Learning Mobility (EPLM) we kept circling back to the question: **What is a community?** Is a youth organisation a community? How tightly are communities connected to physical location? How do you pinpoint a digital community? Through the desk research we found out that the meanings that are attached to the concept of community, can also depend on the language, culture, and history of a country. What we could all agree upon was that the community is defined by **a shared identity and a sense of belonging**. This agreement was later contested by another group of experts saying that, if one does not feel that they belong or don't want to belong to a particular community, are they still considered a part of it? As you can see already, there are many questions regarding communities and both researchers and practitioners do not have one single correct answer. Therefore, defining what are the communities that you will be including through your European solidarity corps project and what other groups might be affected by the activities that you implement – is the first step into acknowledging and maybe even measuring the community impact.



Understanding impact might be even more complicated than defining a community. It is usually not tangible; it is different from the project results, although in many cases these two are mixed up. What makes it more difficult – it happens often after the actual activities and is not a consequence of a single activity but consists of a sum of components and circumstances that happen in a particular area, organisation or a group of people that are connected by specific interests or characteristics. In the simplest terms I would suggest approaching community impact in terms of change. What was not there before but is here now? Maybe more young people joined the activities of a youth centre? Maybe other members of your village have more positive attitudes towards young people? Maybe the community members started organising gatherings and activities that include different generations? With community impact we are focusing on the before and after measurements and observations, while keeping in mind that a single project might have created a significant change in the community, but more realistically it has contributed to it as one of the many steps and directions that the young people, youth organisations, volunteering organisations and/or other stakeholders were working towards.

As the desk research indicated, community impact can be **direct** - through involving community members into certain activities of the project and **indirect** – through visibility measures. Direct impact, one can observe in the hosting communities, while indirect community impact can be felt by people that we might not even know about. Indirect impact is also tightly connected to individual impact which can transform into community impact, but this one even more subtle than the community impact that stems from direct interaction with local communities.

This is an insightful overview of possible impact on the individual, organisational, or community level. The authors of this research grasped different types of community impact indicators that can potentially be looked at in the European Solidarity Corps projects – more cohesion of local communities, intergenerational communication, intercultural awareness, networking with other organisations and decision makers, sense of initiative and new activities run by young people, etc. This publication demonstrates that ESC projects contribute to the areas of community impact that were described and identified in the EPLM desk research on community impact indicators for learning mobility – active citizenship and participation, social capital, intercultural dialogue, mobility and many more. This publication also indicates that it is always important to look beyond what is written by others, but to closely look at your community and your concrete initiatives and see the changes that are happening. Enjoy the reading and find inspiration for increasing (or observing and measuring) the community impact of your ESC projects.

Justina Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska

Co-author of the desk research “Community Impact Indicators for Learning Mobility”



Introduction

This research explores the way community impact occurs through European Solidarity Corps (ESC) funded projects. It is funded by SALTO European Solidarity Corps and conducted by People Dialogue and Change. The goal of the research was to explore the various ways ESC funded projects and organisations create community impact.

The research explores a series of 15 examples of practice from organisations implementing ESC funded actions. The various actions explored are:

Solidarity projects

A non-profit solidarity activity initiated, developed and implemented by young people themselves for a period from 2 to 12 months. It gives a group of minimum five young persons the chance to express solidarity by taking responsibility and committing themselves to bring positive change in their local community.

Team volunteering projects

Solidarity activities that allow teams of participants coming from at least two different countries to volunteer together for a period between 2 weeks and 2 months.

Individual volunteering projects

A solidarity activity of a duration of 2 to 12 months. This type of solidarity activity provides young people with the opportunity to contribute to the daily work of organisations in solidarity activities to the ultimate benefit of the communities within which the activities are carried out.

In many cases the organisation explored implementing a combination of the above actions over a long-term period.

Organisations (and informal groups) were nominated by SALTO ESC for inclusion in the research, based on feedback via the National Agencies for Erasmus+/ESC about the high quality of the organisation's work with ESC. In this sense they are likely to represent some of the more effective projects funded through ESC in relation to community impact rather than a reflection of activity under the whole programme. Each example of practice is based on an interview with the project manager or their equivalent. During the interviews project managers were asked to identify the various ways that their projects created community impact and the types of impact created. Full assessment of community impact is a complex research process, beyond the resources of most of the projects involved and the scope of this research. In this regard, a limitation of this research is that whilst it provides a good insight into the types of impact identified by project leaders, it is not a full evaluation of the projects involved. Contact details of project leaders appear by permission.



Community impact is explored at three levels based on a framework by Community Impact Indicators for Learning Mobility (2021, p.52). The levels were:



The individual level

This refers to the impact on the ESC participants. It includes the development of participant competencies, experiences, and links to others.



The organisation level

This refers to the impact on organisations involved in ESC (or their connected partners) It includes things such as development of organisational processes and structures, creation of new projects, and development of partnerships.



The community level

This refers to the impact on the wider community created by the ESC projects and the organisations. It includes things such as impact upon young people or other community members who are not ESC participants, but are affected somehow through the work of the ESC projects as well as broader impacts across a community such as changes in self-perception, community bonds or inclusion.

Each project's connection to the four cornerstones of solidarity - empathy, human rights, active citizenship, inclusion (European Solidarity Corps programme guide, 2022) are also identified.



Examples of practice



Young Improvers for Youth Development

Bulgaria



Project type

Multiple solidarity projects

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[YouTube](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[3D tour of youth space](#)

Contact

Valentin Kehajov

youngimprovers@gmail.com

DESCRIPTION

Young Improvers for Youth Development (YIYD) is a youth non-governmental organisation developing projects and initiatives with and for young people. The organisation was established in 2015, in a region where young people face difficulties in accessing opportunities that their peers in other regions have. It works mainly with young people with fewer opportunities around Smolyan city and the surrounding villages. The activities of the organisation use training and learning to promote young people's civic participation. The organisation also leads advocacy and lobbying processes and is an equal partner of the local authorities in developing youth policy.

Through eight different solidarity projects the organisation developed a youth infrastructure, starting with a youth space that is open to all young people, to creating sport facilities that are cost free, to opening an art gallery where the students of the local art school organise their own exhibitions. All these initiatives were created by groups of young people with the support of the organisation.

The youth leaders of the organisation support young people from across the region to develop their initial ideas. They then receive support from the organisation in developing their ESC application, finding further resources needed to run the project, organising groups of local volunteers to run the project and obtaining any support needed from the local authorities for their action. For many participants, especially those in the surrounding villages it was the first time having such an opportunity.



IMPACT



At individual level

According to the organisation leaders, by using solidarity projects to create spaces where young people can come together and interact, young people had the chance to develop their self-esteem, their team spirit and their confidence in working with other young people. Through the projects, they understood what is the difference that they can make to other young people's lives.



At organisational level

By linking multiple solidarity projects and using them to support the development of the organisation as a whole, several areas of impact were achieved. The organisation:

- Developed new procedures and working standards,
- Enhanced their public recognition,
- Took a more structured approach to offering learning opportunities to their volunteers,
- Created a local network of five NGOs working together to respond to the youth needs and interests in the region.



At community level

With the enhanced infrastructure and growth of the organisation, it was able to create impact on other youth NGOs and youth policy. It became the main partner of the city council in planning and developing the local youth policies for the region, implementing a formal dialogue process. The authorities are now regularly approaching the leaders of the organisation to ask for support for their actions and youth initiatives. The organisation also became a EURODESK point and now supports other youth NGOs with E+/ESC application. The 'place-making methodologies' developed by the organisation are considered innovative in Bulgaria and are being disseminated to other local and international partners.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

Linking multiple ESC projects together and building cooperation at the local level gives sustainability to the initiative. The long-standing cooperation protocol with the municipalities as well as having very well documented projects – in terms of youth needs and interest – created a great youth eco-system in the region. Also, helping groups of young people grow and carefully investing in their learning process ensures the continuity of the actions.



Lahti City Youth Service

Finnland



Project type

Individual volunteering

Web links

[Volunteer website](#)

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Contact

Irene Luders

irene.luders@lahti.fi

DESCRIPTION

The Lahti City Youth Service is a part of Lathi municipality located in Southern Finland. It provides youth work services for those aged 10-17 are increasingly aimed at supporting young people with fewer opportunities. Service include:

- Youth centres across the city
- Support for young people in NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the 'workshop' system.
- School youth workers.
- A psychological support service, which also addresses substance abuse among young people.

Lahti Youth Service has diverse and long established ESC volunteer hosting opportunities as well as various preparation and mentoring programs for sending volunteers. The organisation started offering international volunteering opportunities in the early 2000s and now has five employees permanently working on ESC volunteering projects.

ESC volunteers who arrive in Lathi have the chance to participate and assist in the implementation of activities in the various youth centres in Lathi, or contribute to the delivery of school workshops. Short-term volunteers are usually placed in one of Lahti Youth Service's workshops to either acquire new skills or share their knowledge with the youth working there depending on where their interests lie. All volunteers hosted by Lahti Youth Service are supported and guided by youth workers and receive Finnish language training. Lahti City Youth Service does also work with inclusion based volunteering projects targeted at young people with fewer opportunities. In these projects volunteers receive longer pre-departure training including four 3-hour meetings, language training, continuous reflection guided by the Youth Pass as well as an accompanying person for the first the days upon arrival in the host country, or during a preparatory visit to the country.



At individual level

According to project leaders, ESC Volunteers grow in independence, confidence, establish their own networks, and develop practical skills such as money budgeting, language proficiency or problem-solving techniques. For young people with fewer opportunities it is in itself a big step in their personal development to travel abroad on their own for a longer period of time. The immersion in a new and foreign vocational context particularly benefits young people who are NEET in their professional orientation; travelling to a new and unknown country significantly broadens their horizons.



At organisational level

Lahti City Youth Service identifies a development in its organisational competencies through continuous learning from hosting and sending volunteers. ESC volunteering programs have impacted on both their working mechanisms and their employees training.

“We have much experience [with international volunteering]. We have made mistakes, and we had to learn from them. I think this is a field of learning every time. So, every time you’re hosting or sending a volunteer or coordinating a project, you will also as an individual learn a lot and also as an organisation.”

The service sends their employees on a regular basis to training offered through SALTO Resource Centres and National Agency network such as the TOSCA online training and support for organisations active in ESC. Through these employees establish networks with potential partner organisations which enhances the capacity of the organisation for international co-operation.



At community level

Lahti Youth Service is a large organisation, with considerable outreach to young people that already create an impact at community level. Through the involvement of volunteers in its activities, ESC participants contribute directly to this impact. The presence of international volunteers within activities gives young people from Lahti the opportunity to experience intercultural interaction in an informal context. Through this local young people, especially those with fewer opportunities become more aware of the possibilities of international volunteering and are motivated to participate in both international programmes and the youth service itself. In one example, Albanian migrants from the area saw an Albanian evening organised by an Armenian volunteer advertised. Through this they came into contact with Lahti City Youth Service for the first time.



WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

High levels of support provided to ESC volunteers is a key factor in enabling impact at the individual level. This intensive support is enabled by hosting several volunteers at the same time; enabling a stronger support offer that can be flexible to meet the needs of volunteers.

Organisational impact is achieved by the long-term involvement with international volunteering, allowing the service to build and improve its capacity for international co-operations over time.

The impact ESC participants create on communities and local young people is an intrinsic part of the impact Lahti City Youth Service itself creates. The close integration of volunteers into the service's existing work means that volunteers enhance and contribute to the service's overall impact.



Atelier des Parcours

France



Project type

Multiple solidarity projects

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation website](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

Contact

Jean-Luc Mazé

atelierdesparcours@gmail.com

DESCRIPTION

The organisation Atelier des Parcours is located in a rural region in the west of France, in Saint Pol de Léon. The region is characterised by the rural challenge of young people lacking opportunities to explore and develop their skills and interests in terms of potential future job opportunities. The mission of Atelier des Parcours is to support young people in their personal and professional development. For this purpose, the organisation offers various counselling services as well as community projects in which young people can develop their skills.

The organisation has so far launched four solidarity projects with young people, with more planned. Volunteers working with the organisation develop the projects which are based on volunteers ideas to address challenges faced by the local community. Around 20 volunteers are regularly involved in the implementation of the various solidarity projects, with an age range of 16-23 years including young people with fewer opportunities, particularly young refugees.

One of the solidarity projects takes place in a local retirement home in cooperation with a bee-keeper. Together, a beehive with information boards was set up at the retirement home to draw attention to ecological challenges and the role of bees. Access to the beehive is not only possible for the elderly, but also for people from the surrounding area who can visit the place and explore the topic together with the residents of the home. The second project addresses the issue of loneliness in old age. In order to promote intergenerational exchange, tandem e-bikes were purchased that make it possible to go on regular bicycle tours in the city together with elderly home residents and young people from schools or French civil service participants. For this purpose, it was also possible to purchase bicycles in which people with wheelchairs can be transported. The latest project that is currently being launched is a type of mobile food bank and welfare store in the form of a bus that makes regular stops at various locations in the city and surrounding villages.



At individual level

The solidarity projects allow the volunteers to develop skills that can be useful for their future employability. In cooperation with the counselling services of Atelier des Parcours, young people have the opportunity to try out their interests and competencies within the framework of a concrete project. In the projects, it is particularly emphasised that young people are given responsibility. For instance, a positive impact that has developed is that young volunteers learn to manage the budget provided for their project. In addition, all projects provide a link to the community, raising awareness among young people about local challenges faced by other groups and teaching them to contribute to solving societal challenges through their efforts and commitment.



At organisational level

Through the ESC grants, the organisation facilitated co-operation between its young volunteers and the local authorities. This has created new partnerships with the municipalities in the region and, among other things, new funding opportunities from the Ministry for the organisation. As such, the projects have had a positive impact on the development of the services and work of Atelier des Parcours, which is now able to support young people in their development in an even more targeted way.



At community level

The solidarity projects of Atelier des Parcours specifically designed to address local challenges, the impact on the community is very apparent. Through the two projects in cooperation with retirement homes, the intergenerational dialogue is promoted locally and challenges such as loneliness in old age are made aware. The e-bike project offers a high visibility effect, as both locals and tourists in the city are made curious about the work of the organisation. Additionally, the second project with the mobility concept for the food bank and the social warehouse enables people with disadvantages to access support services that were previously difficult to reach. Especially in the rural area around Saint Pol de Léon, this extends the range of support for specific groups of people in a very concrete way.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

By working with young people to design ESC projects which address specific community needs, the resulting projects are well placed to create community impact. Creating positive changes at community level is an integral goal of the project design and outcomes from the start.

Utilising ESC projects to create links between the organisation and municipalities is also a key factor that enables the long-term development of the organisation.

Villa Elba

Finland



Project type

Individual and Team Volunteering

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation Website](#)

[YouTube](#)

Contact

Kati Paasila

kati.paasila@villaelba.fi

DESCRIPTION

Villa Elba is a national youth centre, based in the city Kokkola in Northern Finland. The organisation works on local, regional, national and international level. Villa Elba offers accommodation, food services as well as various programs, workshops and activities. A core aspect of their work is to provide nature-based education focused on peace and environmental education to all ages. The international youth work section of Villa Elba promotes intercultural exchanges and international encounters in the region, especially within rural areas.

Villa Elba has been participating in European exchange programs since the early 90s as both hosting and sending organisation. Within the framework of its ESC projects, Villa Elba hosts about 20 long-term individual volunteers per year as well as approximately 80 volunteers through team volunteering opportunities of 10-20 people per project. Through its team volunteering projects, Villa Elba tries to reach out to young people with fewer opportunities, as they have identified that there is a lack of suitable projects for disadvantaged young people in the European context. Therefore, together with 20 different partner organisations, they founded the Rückwind Network, coordinated by Cubic, an organisation based in Austria. The network offers international volunteering projects that do not require special skills or previous experience. Within these projects a support person with 24/7 availability is provided to the participants during the project.

Villa Elba's ESC projects are based on the organisation's mission of providing peace and environmental education. International volunteers run the projects which are offered to the community free of charge. One example project is the Elf Project, which celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2022. The elf project is an 'elf path' through the forest for kindergarten children and families, with various activities that lead to physical activity and an understanding of nature and culture among the children. Since 2015, the project has been organised and run every winter for six weeks by international volunteers as part of a team volunteering project with about

1700 visitors coming to the trail every year. Also part of the project is to make Christmas cards together with the volunteers, which are sent to elderly people in nursing homes in the area. Occasionally, volunteer groups also organise choir performances or other events for the elderly in the nursing homes.

IMPACT



At individual level

The organisation notices particularly in its team projects how the volunteers develop during their exchanges and how they gain self-confidence. Specifically for disadvantaged young people who participate in the projects, this is an opportunity to experience that international exchanges are fun and can be mastered by them. This encourages them to participate in long-term volunteering programs, which they could not have imagined before. In addition, the joint team experience is a valuable exercise for the young people to master problems and challenges together in an intercultural context. Here, the participants especially learn the value of a change of perspective and how to understand things from a different point of view.



At organisational level

As Villa Elba's projects have evolved over the years, so has the organisation, which means that the projects have a direct impact on the way the organisation works, especially with regard to the development of new projects. The organisation has established the principle of each project having a distinct objective within a well-defined framework. For this purpose, they have developed checklists for the establishment of new projects in order to be able to pass on the knowledge to new employees and, at the same time, to maintain quality assurance. Also equally important are the clear responsibilities. As Villa Elba has grown, it has been necessary for them to refine their working procedures and to assign well-defined roles and responsibilities within the organisation.



At community level

The organisation provides the most value to the community by offering its services free of charge, making it possible for everyone to participate. Thereby, the inclusivity is also constantly being expanded. For example, a second Elf Path has been developed, which is more physically accessible and gives even more people the opportunity to participate in the program. Furthermore, Villa Elba tries to address social challenges through its projects. According to a Finnish study, for instance, children do not exercise enough. Therefore, they have adapted their Elf Path to this challenge and included more playful physical activities in order to contribute to raising awareness of the issue. Moreover, the aspect of intercultural encounter and exchange plays an essential role in all their ESC projects. The rural region around Villa is not particularly interculturally diverse, which is why many people have little access to intercultural encounters. Through its volunteers, Villa Elba creates important spaces for exchange and encourages other organisations to participate in international youth exchange.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

The example of Villa Elba's Elf Project shows that it is not necessary to have elaborate and complex projects in order to have an impact on multiple levels, from the individual to the community. One of the purposes of the Elf Project is to keep the requirements for volunteers as low as possible in order to allow as many different people as possible to participate. In doing so, the project has been very popular with the community as well as with volunteers and has become a well-established and much appreciated activity in the region, and is now an integral part of the community's annual activities.

To maximise community impact, and reach as many and diverse people as possible, it is helpful to adapt activities and services to the needs of the target group and to minimise barriers to participation, such as the costs associated with the activity or physical accessibility. Not all adjustments have to be made right at the beginning of the project, but they can be identified regularly while developing the project further. In this way, it is possible to reach a very wide target group and ensure that the project becomes an integral part of the community, making a significant contribution to the community over many years.



GAIA

Kosovo



Project type

Team volunteering projects

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation Website](#)

[Facebook](#)

Contact

Helena Poučki

info@gaiakosovo.org

DESCRIPTION

GAIA is a non-governmental organisation established in 2010 and running 5 main programs related to social and environmental justice, education and peace. These are based across Kosovo and include

- Educational programs for Roma communities,
- Environmental activities,
- Peace building activities,
- Permaculture,
- Climate change activities.

GAIA is an official member of Service Civic International and international peace organisation.

GAIA has a long standing experience in organising volunteering activities and in hosting volunteers, and works with both the ESC programme and as well as the German Weltwärts programme and French Service Civique programme to support its work. GAIA hosts and sends volunteers to. It implements both short-term voluntary projects (2-3 weeks), commonly known as 'work camps' and long-term voluntary projects (2-12 months) supported by both of these programmes. Through ESC, GAIA has now hosted five teams of volunteers (10 international volunteers per team) who are interested in developing their intercultural learning competencies and in working on topics related to the five main programs of the organisation. The activities the volunteers take part in vary depending on which of the five organisations programmes they are based in. Depending on the programme, volunteers' experiences range from improving their agricultural skills while living in the permaculture activities, to delivering human rights education and peace building activities to groups of young people in the area or to multi-ethnic communities.



At individual level

According to the project, organisational resilience and awareness are the key descriptors for the impact on volunteers hosted by the organisation. The organisation understands resilience as being developed through independent living skills, understanding the specificities of living in a rural community, while participating in the food production processes and to building and construction projects. In line with the organisation's activities and objectives, volunteers conclude their learning experience being more aware of the global crisis as well as feeling more responsible to contribute to combating the effects of the crisis. Moreover, some of the volunteers developed strong ties with the community members and with the hosting organisation, so decided to stay and to contribute to the development of the organisation's projects.



At organisational level

As Kosovo is an ESC partner country, GAIA needed organisations based within ESC programme countries to be able to submit ESC grant applications. Finding a partner that could apply, that also had the same values and promoted the same causes was not an easy process for the organisation. However, GAIA's team has been persistent and determined to offer well structured learning and working opportunities for international volunteers. They used their experience and connections with hosting international volunteers through the Service Civique International programme to begin identifying ESC partners. To be successful in ESC grant applications additional organisational procedures and processes were developed by the organisation. Organisational development was required to account for the extra time and effort needed for a good management process that is dependent on the direct applicant for the grant.



At community level

The organisation is active and well known in the region bringing people from divided communities together in all the projects designed within the five organisational programmes. However, the impact of ESC cannot be separated from the impact of the long-standing practice of GAIA in hosting work camps and international volunteers in general. The ESC opportunities indeed contributed to better community development processes especially through reinforcing the intergenerational dialogue in the hosting community. Efforts were invested to target young people across different regions in Kosovo to join GAIA's activities and to be part of an intercultural dialogue process with the international volunteers. Therefore, whilst ESC helped the mission of the organisation and contributed to a better social recognition of the projects and activities the community impact of ESC is hard separate front he impact of the organisation.



WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

GAIA's experience developing its organisation to be a successful part of ESC activities shows the impact of ESC even before any grant funding has been received. The steps to develop partners and processes had a long standing effect on the organisation's operational abilities.

As the volunteers work is closely connected to the core mission of the organisation, ESC impact on the local community is hard to separate from the impact of the organisation as a whole.



Hors Pistes

France



Project type

Individual volunteering

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation website](#)

[Instagram](#)

Contact

ESC team

volontariat@hors-pistes.org

DESCRIPTION

Hors Pistes was founded in 2013 and is based in Marseille in the South of France. They provide tailor-made seminars and training in the field of non-violent communication, intercultural dialogue and graphic facilitation for youth workers and social workers. The aim of Hors Pistes is to promote intercultural dialogue, raise awareness of discrimination, identity and culture in the broader region of Marseille. Alongside their training they also offer non-formal education workshops in schools. The organisation currently has three staff working full time on ESC placements and a team ESC volunteering project with 5 participants also supporting its running, alongside other volunteers.

Hors Pistes sends 50 young people into short-term and long-term ESC volunteering placements each year to a variety of different overseas projects and organisations. When placing individual volunteers Hors Pistes takes great care to ensure the host projects meet the abilities and needs of the young people. By assessing the young person's needs, skills and desires Hors Pistes can then customise the preparation of the young person, select a suitable placement and better stimulate self-reflection of the participant. The volunteers are primarily university students or high school students from more privileged backgrounds. However, it also targets young people in rural and remote areas as well as those in poorer and migrant neighbourhoods as the organisation has identified these young people may not have considered international volunteering.





At individual level

Hors Pistes identifies that individual volunteers develop their competences differently depending on the project they take part in. However, through the specific orientation training in the area of cultural sensitivity, all volunteers develop competencies relating to cultural awareness and non-discrimination. This orientation enables volunteers to acquire new and valuable impulses in this area, and then apply these directly in practical situations during their volunteer service.



At organisational level

The organisations volunteers are placed in have identified benefits in terms of how they work and see things. By allowing volunteers to develop and implement new activities themselves, programs and services have been broadened and further developed.

"[The organisation's] always use this reference of fresh air, that the volunteers are like a fresh breeze for the organisations because they are young, and they have their own energy. And so, it brings a lot of good energy to the organisations."

Sosthène Deshouillères-Delbos- Chargé de projets formateur

Hors Pistes engages in a reflection process of what they have learned each time they place a volunteer. Based on this they identify areas to develop their expertise to better respond to volunteer needs. Based on this they have put in place training for staff on specific topics such as mental health and conflict resolution and many more topics. In this way the work with volunteers influences the professional growth of their staff.



At community level

Hors Pistes achieves community impact by encouraging the volunteers to act as ambassadors of international volunteering as well as messengers of the organisation's values. Thus, every meeting and every project carried out with the involvement of the public allows volunteers to share awareness of the organisation and its underlying mission. This leads to more acknowledgement for the work of the organisation.

An additional aspect of community impact is the growing network of organisations in the region which are brought together by Hors Pistes and the volunteers. Twice a year Hors Pistes organises an information event where interested new and existing partner organisations meet and are updated on the ESC projects and opportunities.



WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

Hors Pistes identifies that the establishment of quality and thoughtful volunteer placements maximises the impact that the placement has on the volunteer. Careful choices of placements are seen by the organisations as an essential factor for satisfied volunteers who can take away a life-changing experience from their volunteering. Consequently, as soon as they return to their home communities, they become ambassadors of the values conveyed during their volunteer service.



Grenzenlos

Austria



Project type

Individual volunteering and Team volunteering

Web links

[Organisation Website](#)

[LinkTree](#)

[Volunteer Reports](#)

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Contact

Daniela Fellingner

office@melange.wien

DESCRIPTION

Grenzenlos is an Austrian organisation that has been supporting international volunteering in Vienna since 1949. The organisation's principle is to promote mutual understanding and peaceful living together through international exchange. It organises volunteer exchanges worldwide and has also participated in European volunteer exchange programs since the establishment of the European Voluntary Service (the predecessor to ESC).

Grenzenlos co-ordinate 25 individual ESC volunteers per year. The majority of these are placed in other organisations with 1-2 of them hosted directly by Grenzenlos. In addition the organisation hosts team volunteering projects for up to 30 more volunteers in total. It is also active in sending ESC volunteers to overseas placements. Volunteering opportunities are provided for young people from all backgrounds, but it also undertakes specialist placements for young people with disabilities and in-country volunteering placements for young asylum seekers.

The activities undertaken by the hosted volunteers are very diverse and depend on the respective local partner organisation in which they are placed. They include volunteer placements in:

- Childcare projects organised by parents
- Working at a community centre in Vienna
- Placements in local cultural organisations and institutions

Grenzenlos also offers their volunteers the 'Mélange Jour Fix'. This program offers regular leisure time activities for hosted volunteers outside of their volunteer work as well as meet ups twice a month in a café to offer the opportunity to network with other volunteers from Vienna. The program is supported by former ESC volunteers who have returned home to Vienna but would like

to stay in contact with Grenzenlos and other European volunteers. Through their participation, they can be an important peer contact for the volunteers and also an important social support during the volunteer service. The meet ups are also a possibility for prospective volunteers to network, clarify questions they have and learn from experiences.

IMPACT



At individual level

The organisation identifies that young volunteers work to develop their problem-solving abilities as well as their self-confidence. For young people with disabilities in particular, participating in volunteer service enables them to develop autonomy and independence. They also identify that participants develop empathy skills for the people participants are volunteering with as participants get to better understand the life realities of the communities they engage in.



At organisational level

The organisation identifies three areas of impact on itself as a result of working with ESC.

First, in order to attract a more diverse range of participants to ESC volunteering, the organisation has developed a partnership with Vienna Extra, an organisation providing youth work and youth support. Through the partnership it has been possible to provide additional support to young people during the volunteer application process, to respond to their individual needs, as well as to generate additional funding, which is then made available to partner organisations to provide support for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds during the volunteer service.

Second, by hosting young people with disabilities, the organisation has reflected and revised their internal ways of working, such as the structure of meetings, how they communicate within the organisation, and also practical aspects such as the accessibility of their own office.

Finally, the organisation has built on its experience from ESC volunteering, to inform the development of global volunteer programs.



At community level

Through the 'Mélange Jour Fix' and by staying in contact with volunteers even after their volunteering service Grenzenlos has been particularly effective at establishing a local network of past ESC volunteers. It identifies long-term effects on many young people who are still active as volunteers when their voluntary service is completed. Regardless of whether they took part in-country volunteering or overseas many young people from this network become active in local organisations within Vienna following their ESC. This has been particularly impactful for young asylum seekers by helping them integrate into the local community.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

Grenzenlos maximises its community impact by providing support to volunteers of all statuses (i.e., potential volunteers, current volunteers, or former volunteers). A key part of this is the creation of a community network of local young people interested and engaged in volunteering. The emerging peer network allows for fruitful exchanges and mutual support among volunteers, and also encourages participants to carry on volunteering within Vienna after the end of their ESC placement.



Ergon

Italy



Project type

Solidarity projects and individual volunteering

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation Website](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[YouTube](#)

[Academic article](#)

[Ergon ESC website](#)

Contact

Eegon

bioagrideaf@gmail.com

DESCRIPTION

Ergon is Deaf-led organisation based in Turin, Italy that supports d/Deaf¹ people through its work. Their focus is to increase the accessibility for D/deaf people in society in four thematic areas: Rights, Livelihood, Access to Appropriate Technology, and Wellbeing. The services offered by the organisation are very diverse and include translation services as well as training opportunities for d/Deaf people. The organisation also collaborates with other partners, such as a museum in Turin, to increase the accessibility of D/deaf people to these organisations by identifying barriers to accessibility in their services.

The organisation supported d/Deaf young people to organise a solidarity project "For the Active life of Deaf Seniors". The project focused on enabling young people to support the skill building of D/deaf seniors from Turin. The aim was to teach the seniors how to navigate in the digital world through regular computer classes. Classes included topics such as the use of social media and the handling of office programs. In this way, senior citizens were given access to digital communities and enabled with independence in order to build new communities in the digital space.

¹ Ergon uses the terminology "d/Deaf." A person who identifies as being deaf with a lowercase d is indicating that they have a significant hearing impairment. A person who identifies as being Deaf with an uppercase D is indicating that they are culturally Deaf and identify as part of the Deaf community. D indicates a cultural identity for people with hearing loss who share a common culture and often have shared sign language. 'd' can include people who for whatever reasons do not identify as part of this community, such as those who lost hearing later in life and have a significant level of verbal language.

Ergon has also hosted seven ESC volunteers within the scope of individual volunteering, three of whom were young d/Deaf people. The tasks of the volunteers related to supporting activities of Ergon's main programs. For instance, the volunteers created translation videos for the local museum, helped as assistants in conducting training, or taught courses in video creation and editing to help young unemployed d/Deaf people enter the media industry.

IMPACT



At individual level

Ergon identifies that ESC participants have been able to improve their proficiency in International Sign Language as well as Italian Sign Language. They have also practised and strengthened hands-on skills such as teaching or translation. In The area of media literacy, many of the young people also gained new insights that can help them in their own digital activities.

For the hosted volunteers being involved in a new deaf community in a foreign country, making international friends and getting to know the life realities of d/Deaf people in Turin has also enabled them to develop self-determination and independence.



At organisational level

The ESC participants have an impact on the organisation through the additional capacities they bring into the organisation. The volunteers contribute to the organisation's work through their creativity and their high level of team spirit. The intercultural aspect of hosting international volunteers is a valuable addition that helps Ergon to be more culturally sensitive in their work.



At community level

Ergon's solidarity project has had a very direct impact on the community of d/Deaf seniors in Turin, in terms of empowering them in the digital space. In addition, the weekly computer classes also became an important social space for meeting and exchange. Thus, not only the seniors benefited from the program, but also the young participants were able to learn from the exchange with the older generation and their experiences. Thus, the intergenerational mutual understanding of the d/Deaf community in Turin was promoted.

The work of individual volunteers supporting the organisation's mission and core projects also contributes significantly to increasing accessibility for the D/deaf community in Turin.



WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

In terms of community impact, the case of Ergon shows that empowering certain people in a community can also contribute to the strengthening of the community as a whole. Through its solidarity project Ergon enables both the young participants and the target group, (d/Deaf seniors) to navigate the digital space more confidently and to embrace the digital world as well as building solidarity between them. This builds a stronger digital D/deaf community and enables more digital content to be created and shared in a self-directed way. But also beyond that, participants who have volunteered with Ergon can achieve an impact in their local communities through the skills they have acquired. With the gained media skills, the young people can share their knowledge and skills through videos and social media activity with other members of the D/deaf community in an international context. Thus, the empowerment of volunteers also leads to an overall empowerment of the d/Deaf community in diverse contexts.



L' A.D.R.E.T. (Agency for Rural Development Europe and Territories) Europe Direct Pyrénées

France



Project type

Individual volunteering

Web links

[Organisation website](#)

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Contact

Robin Alves

contact@europedirectpyrenees.eu

DESCRIPTION

L' A.D.R.E.T. is one of 50 Europe Direct centres in France. Their main objective is promoting European values, and programs to connect European actions to the local public. L' A.D.R.E.T. is based in the Pyrénées-Orientales and covers three departments in France as the Europe Direct Centre (Pyrénées-Orientales, Aude et Ariège). The territory is characterised by its proximity to the Spanish border and a large rural population. L' A.D.R.E.T.'s scope of action is concerned with young people's challenges in rural areas such as mobility, connectivity and participation opportunities. The organisation seeks to establish long-term partnerships and projects in the region to connect and inform about European discourses and programmes seeking, to promote active citizenship with a specific European focus.

L' A.D.R.E.T. operates an ESC individual volunteering initiative called "Young, Citizen and European". It collaborates with several other organisations and institutions, each of which hosts 1-2 volunteers per project year. Volunteers from Spain are frequently included in order to highlight the region's proximity to the Spanish border and to facilitate intercultural exchanges. Special attention is paid to young people with economic disadvantages when selecting volunteers, as the region is affected by challenges of integrating young people into the labour market. The programme focuses on promoting democratic participation and interculturalism.



L' A.D.R.E.T volunteers working on European issues work with their host organisations, to develop activities for other young people that focus on European topics and are intended to promote active citizenship in a European context. Some volunteers have, for instance, developed an Escape Game around the topic of Europe and held thematic workshops in schools as well as for the local public. Volunteers take a responsible role in the development of ideas and conceptualisation of the activities. Through their actions, young people are provided with a space to exchange ideas, information, and opinions on European topics.

IMPACT



At individual level

By targeting its volunteering opportunities toward young people facing economic disadvantage and other obstacles, L' A.D.R.E.T. how to enable volunteers to develop job-relevant skills, enabled economically disadvantaged young people to strengthen their opportunity to integrate more easily into the labour market. Taking responsibility for the implementation of projects and workshops enables participants to develop a range of transversal competences useful for employment.



At organisational level

Through their ESC programs, L' A.D.R.E.T. establishes new partnerships and stronger collaborations with organisations in the neighbouring Spanish region and beyond. In this context, their international partnerships help them to further develop competencies such as the employees' English and Spanish skills. The closer cooperation also enables comparison of working methods and thus to constantly reflect and revise own processes.

Through the Young, Citizen and European program, the volunteers' autonomous work on the activities helps them specifically strengthen their language skills as well as their presentation and project management skills. Furthermore, their content-related work enables them to dive deeper into Europe-specific topics and acquire new expert knowledge, which they share with their peers. In doing so, they consciously are encouraged to link their everyday life with European issues such as mobility, digitalization, and sustainability.



At community level

Through its work, L' A.D.R.E.T. creates an impact in the community that is closely related to the region's proximity to the Spanish border and a sense of European connection. By the deliberate selection of Spanish volunteers, the French-Spanish exchange is stimulated, and efforts are made to create mutual understanding and a common sense of European identity. The aim is to encourage young people to share their experiences beyond national borders and to be more open to explore their neighbouring country. Wider than this the project also builds a sense of European identity through welcoming volunteers from other countries such as Ireland.

By hosting and supporting young people with fewer economic opportunities, local young people were given the opportunity to relate to the challenges faced by other young people in the European context and to explore together ways of boosting their competencies to address challenges of labour market integration. Therefore, the program provides opportunities to interact with young people in a similar circumstance and fosters mutual understanding and connection on a personal level. In doing so, the project builds bridges to European priorities and values and helps to integrate Europe into everyday life of young people. By that, they counteract the feeling of disengagement with Europe, especially among young people in the region. In keeping with L' A.D.R.E.T.'s mission as a Europe Direct centre, they thus help create impact in the community that promotes European values.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

The impact created by the Young, Citizen and European ESC project is derived from various mechanisms and decisions in the program design. One of them is the establishment of local and strong partnerships in the territory. As part of their program, L' A.D.R.E.T. has for instance established new partnerships with the educational institution Université de Perpignan, a bilingual school Ecole Agile and the solidarity platform Plateforme de Solidarité Internationale to pool resources and jointly promote European active citizenship on multiple levels with the help of the volunteers.

In addition, L' A.D.R.E.T. created internal mechanisms to better support young people with fewer opportunities as volunteers in their program. They prioritise good and intensive preparation and support for their volunteers by offering reflective guidance. For that and to track their development, L' A.D.R.E.T. uses the Youth Pass as a tool along the process. Although their volunteers are placed in different institutions or organisations, they nevertheless form a group within a project year and therefore also exchange, meet and get supported by L' A.D.R.E.T. Also, the volunteers are in regular exchange with their sending organisation and thus establish a connection to their home base. They do this by creating diary entries, videos or other creative documentation of their progress and sharing them with their sending organisation. This effectiveness of these tools comes from designing them in collaboration with L' A.D.R.E.T.'s local partners.



Curba de Cultura

Romania



Project type

Team volunteering, individual volunteering

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation Website](#)

[YouTube](#)

[Presentation Website](#)

[Youth Radio](#)

Contact

Cosmin Catana

cosmin@curbadecultura.ro

DESCRIPTION

Curba de Cultură is a youth non-governmental organisation developing projects and initiatives with and for young people in sixteen villages in Prahova County. It operates its activities from youth Centres in Izvoarele, and Teișani communes, as well as from a Mobile Youth Centre within a rural mountain community whose revenue source is timber processing and agriculture. The Youth Centres serve the local community providing educational activities, training courses, campaigns, events and also a public library. It also acts as a networking and friendship-building framework for young people in the community offering the space and opportunity for planning trips throughout the country and mountain hikes.

Curba de Cultură runs a variety of ESC projects including team volunteering projects and individual volunteering projects. In one of the individual volunteering projects four international volunteers have the opportunity to volunteer at the youth centre. They are provided with training on project management, using social animation and basic youth working tools and instruments, with learning activities on intercultural learning and also with professional training depending on the activities they are part of (teaching and training; facilitation; social research). The volunteers then work with local young people to develop projects in the interest of the community with the help and support of the staff, managing their own resources for these projects. Volunteers also live inside the community gaining the chance to experience the rural life of the community.

More than that, in a different individual volunteering project, the organisation also ensured their training to the international volunteers in using social research instruments and in producing video and media materials. With the support of the local community, a wide range of materials were produced including documentaries and a cultural monograph by volunteers hosted by Curba de Cultură.

IMPACT



At individual level

The organisation identified that the well structured personal development plan set for volunteers' learning activities had a great impact on developing autonomy, independent living abilities, team building and intercultural communication skills, and also youth work competences.

"Our volunteers completed their learning service and were almost youth workers, in the end!"

Cosmin Catană

Living in the rural community was also said to help develop their civic and social skills.



At organisational level

Curba de Cultură uses ESC projects such as its team volunteering project to contribute to the delivery of its Organisational Development Strategy. The ESC team volunteering project helped develop the resources of the organisation, both material ones and the know-how. Additionally, the human resources capacity of the organisation was increased through the use of volunteers.

All the acquired knowhow and experience will be included in the next Organisational Development Strategy and the organisation is building on its experience to scale up its work. The organisation hopes to replicate the delivery model for the youth centres in Izvoarele and Teișani to a third youth centre currently being developed.



At community level

The organisation develops projects with and for rural youth for over 10 years. Consequently, the ESC granted projects capitalised on the existent experience and helped the development of better and more sustainable youth provision by enabling volunteers to contribute to the work of the organisation.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

Curba de Cultură uses ESC volunteers and projects to contribute to its long-term growth and sustainability as an organisation. By making ESC volunteers a core part of its workforce within the youth centre the organisation can facilitate and enable youth work for young people in its own area. This is enabled by having a clear long-term vision and plan through its Organisational Development Strategy, where it is clearly identified how ESC projects can contribute to the organisation development.



Cubic (Cultur and Bildungim)

Austria



Project type

Team Volunteering

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[YouTube](#)

[Rückenwind strategy overview](#)

Contact

Markus Albercht

markus.albrecht@cubic-online.eu

DESCRIPTION

Cubic was established in 2005 as a non-profit organisation. It aims to support young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, to start their own initiatives and become involved with projects that would strengthen their international experience, intercultural learning and inclusion in society.

It uses a particular working approach – the “Rückenwind Strategy” – which specialises in strengthening the competences of young people with difficulties in the job market. The organisation works with young people who have been unemployed for lengthy periods, or who have educational or health difficulties (for example, young offenders, young people who need some mental care support, homeless youth). The approach combines non-formal learning methodologies with support from experts and social workers.

Using this approach, Cubic send young people from Austria on short and long-term ESC Team volunteering projects. The projects typically involve groups of 5-6 volunteers. For a month, they live and work abroad, accompanied by two social workers from the network of professionals linked to Cubic. The organisation runs upwards of 7 projects per year. Work tasks for each team can be varied but use physical work as a starting point. They have included things such as the re-building and renovation of boats in England and the Netherlands, and community actions in the field of ecology sustainable development (beach cleaning, bicycle cinema), as well as renovating a local youth centre in Portugal and the creation of a public garden.





At individual level

The “Rückenwind Strategy” focuses on how young people can develop skills for the labour market. This includes both practical competences that are of participants’ area of career work interest (for example, video editing, trade skills, and also transversal soft skills. The organisation identifies that participants come back from the projects with more self-confidence and self-awareness, being more ‘themselves’. They have improved attitudes and skills and with new ideas to support their communities. Moreover, the foreign language skills are an asset and participants are often eager to continue their educational path.



At organisational level

ESC funding along with other European funding contributed to the development of the organisation by:

- Enabling the development of the organisations working methods - such as the “Rückenwind Strategy”
- Allowing the development of professionals to support groups of young people and facilitate outreach to young people with fewer opportunities.
- Developing a strong network of European partners able to receive young people and work with the “Rückenwind Strategy”



At community level

Cubic’s work makes an active contribution to the labour opportunities and career aspirations of young people from marginalised backgrounds in the region. This is enabled through the high visibility of its ESC projects via extensive regional promotion of the ESC granted opportunities. Cubic utilises its network of professionals and partnership with the Chamber of Labour in Tyrol, and links with local youth organisations to achieve this.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

Cubic demonstrates the value of professional support for young people in achieving individual impact. This is enabled by having a clear working methodology utilised and developed across multiple ESC projects, a strong network of professionals able to provide support, and well developed partnership with hosting organisations. Underpinning this is the long-term approach taken by the organisation to develop the way it implements Team volunteering placements.



Île y a (Informal Group)

Guadeloupe



Project type

Solidarity project

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation Website](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

Contact

ileya.association@gmail.com

DESCRIPTION

The project “Île y a” was founded in 2018 by two young unemployed women with the hope to enhance their own employment opportunities while bringing added value to the community of Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe. Through their project the two young leaders wanted to better understand the community in which they live and contribute to the positive visibility and promotion of the neighbourhood through a better understanding of the residents, especially the older generation. The name “Île y a” is a French play on words that roughly translated means “to exist”.

The two founders Francisca & Aloha were 25 and 28 years old when they initiated the project after meeting during a social business entrepreneur training. At that time, both were new to the city, as one used to live in Portugal and the other went for her studies to mainland France. As part of their ESC solidarity project, they collaborated with 5 young volunteers to showcase the people of Pointe-à-Pitre Guadeloupe and their life reality. Participants interviewed elderly residents to collect their memories of what made Pointe-à-Pitre an enjoyable city in a video format and published them on the project homepage. A second ESC solidarity project, which followed soon after the success of their first initiative, followed a similar approach collecting and sharing the perspectives and memories of younger people going to school in Pointe-à-Pitre.

A formal social enterprise was established to continue supporting the initiative. Since 2019 the organisation works to share the collected stories in a free guided tour targeting especially young people and tourists. Their stories are told by the two founders in collaboration with the community in which they work, transforming their own narrative and thus the self-perception of the community. Over the years, the tours and their audience have grown steadily, to the point where the two founders have developed close contacts with the community in the neighbourhood in which the organisation conducts its tours. Over time, they wish to support the community more strongly and to contribute to the development of the neighbourhood.



At individual level

Involvement with ESC has been transformative to the two founders, enabling them to move from being unemployed to acting as civic society leaders running a strong social enterprise. This is achieved through the ability ESC solidarity projects provided to implement a concrete idea, which is built into a long-term enterprise.



At organisational level

The two founders were able to build up a social enterprise in the region as a result of their initial experience with ESC. The organisation is now able to employ three people without further ESC funding. ESC enabled the necessary track record and self-confidence in their work to attract further resources and funding. The ESC grants also provided legitimacy and security towards other institutions to support and accept the project.

By now the organisation functions as an incubator for social entrepreneurs from Guadalupe. It supports the participants in creating their own projects by sharing their network, resources and most importantly through training. The organisation provides Training on basic employability skills to locals especially women and will start a new project in future that supports migrant sex workers to be included in the general labour market.



At community level

At the community level, the impact Île y a creates has increased steadily. The neighbourhood in which the organisation is active was not accessible to many in 2019 due to severe safety concerns for locals as well as tourists. The reputation of the area was perceived as quite negative. Since the project has been active in the region with its tours and their office, the perspective of the neighbourhood has changed quite a bit, both for the people who live there and for the public and tourists. Moreover, this new perspective has inspired the local residents to create and implement their own ideas and projects with the support of Île y a. Particularly in the area of career development for female sex workers, the founders were able to achieve significant successes through their computer trainings. This made it easier for the women to exit sex work by building up and developing new skills for the job market.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

This project demonstrates how ESC solidarity projects for informal groups can provide a low threshold and easy to access opportunity for young people hoping to implement an idea. ESC provides the initial opportunity for two young people to grow and develop a project which is then built into a long-term social enterprise, with wide ranging impacts on the community. In this way there is a strong multiplication of the impact of the initial ESC grant.

Lernlabor

Germany



Project type

Solidarity

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Organisation Website](#)

[Facebook](#)

Contact

info@lernlabor.berlin

DESCRIPTION

Lernlabor is a Berlin-based social business with charitable status. They aim to create educational, cultural and artistic projects that foster creativity, (inter)cultural exchange and lifelong learning. Their work focuses on three core elements which are youth participation, outdoor education as well as arts and culture. The relatively young organisation was founded in 2020 and consists of a continuously growing full-time team of four staff members. In carrying out their projects, Lernlabor is supported by a large network of partners and short-term collaborators in the Berlin area as well as in Europe. With a wide diversity of programs, Lernlabors target groups are also very diverse. However, due to the intercultural character of the activities, people from various cultural backgrounds and especially marginalised groups are particularly encouraged to take part in the activities. The participants' age spectrum focuses primarily on young people in their mid to late 20s.

During its start-up phase, one of the first projects that Lernlabor carried out was the ESC solidarity project Kletterfreunde (Climbing Friends). Kletterfreunde was established to make the sport of climbing more accessible, especially for people with migration backgrounds, and also to promote intercultural exchange and teambuilding among participants. The participants, consisting of 12 young people with diverse backgrounds, meet up on a weekly basis and consist of mixed ability groups where the individuals support each other in learning to climb. Through a series of training, participants were offered the opportunity to improve their climbing skills and even become climbing instructors themselves.

Subsequently, Lernlabor developed two further ESC solidarity projects First, they established the cultural project Café Bamako in cooperation with members of West African communities in the Berlin area. Café Bamako's purpose is to provide the West African community in Berlin with a public space for intercultural encounter and exchange. The intention is to break down negative prejudices and stereotypes through being an open and welcoming space for everyone.



For this purpose, Café Bamako organised picnics, small festivals, and other events in Berlin city parks for the past two years, to which all interested people are invited. Across its lifetime, the project has even been expanded to Café Bamako and friends, as groups from Caucasian communities have also joined.

Next, they established a project called Open Choir. The choir welcomes especially queer people and people of colour who have been displaced from Ukraine with the idea of providing a safe space for them to exchange and sing together. The choir meets once per week, and also performs charity concerts and public performances in Berlin.

IMPACT



At individual level

The organisation identifies that the impact on individuals from their projects is centred around building feelings of belonging and helping build friendships among people who might never have had contact. Climbing, in particular, is said to build a trust and foster connection between participants that's quite unique. The organisation's projects build communication skills, empathy, and intercultural competencies in the case of projects with multiple social groups.

Alongside this the projects contribute the personal development and sense of person achievement of individuals. In the case of project leaders, they also help develop IT and budgetary competencies, particularly with regard to developing and reporting on ESC applications.

Final in the case of choir participants the new positive relationships and sense of belonging are said to lead to an impact on mental health and wellbeing for those who have left Ukraine as a result of the war.



At organisational level

The various ESC projects have enabled the organisation to build its networks, both across communities and with other stakeholders.

“From an organisational perspective [ESC projects] are absolutely fantastic. And they are one of the most effective ways we have for actually growing our network of community of active young people”

Dr Peter Mitchell - Executive Director

The organisation reports that the flexibility of the ESC supported free development of projects and empowering young people, allowing them to grow a community of active participants.



Alongside this they developed organisation links such as cooperation with DAV Berlin to enhance the diversity of sports activities and clubs in the city. ESC projects helped them foster local partnership with the Chapter of the German Alpen club Berlin, corporations with coaches/instructors, and a West African band.



At community level

The organisation's impact can be understood as community building. This is achieved by bringing groups of people together to offer spaces for encounters and exchange that participants lacked previously (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic).

By working with communities that may lack such spaces (e.g., through (Cafe Bamako), they are able to address isolation within these communities and support their integration into Berlin life. In the case of those from migrant backgrounds this occurs through the development of contacts, and the building of a network of support, directly.

An important part of the organisation work is that they are open to having spaces re-shaped by participants. In this way participants feel appreciated and recognized and take leadership of the space.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

The work of this organisation highlights the importance of friendship, belonging and connection as part of having community impact. Through developing individual relationships participants form into a wider community. In cases with mixed social backgrounds the opportunity of intercultural dialogue also fosters integration.

Building this sense of belonging is linked to the organisation's view that it acts as an incubator or a platform for people that have a drive. They see their role as nurturing talents and providing opportunities to initiative and take ownership of projects.

"So if someone comes with us, and they've got a drive and a passion and it matches with our values and what we want to do, then the best thing is to support this, you know, and then normally, you see really good results."

Dr Peter Mitchell - Executive Director

The organisation identifies it is necessary to empower people to start initiatives and not to worry too much about the pressure to make every project perfect. They identify it is more important for the young people to feel supported and encouraged to reflect on things that don't work out so that they can gain knowledge and experience and be better placed to make more informed plans and decisions in the future.



Fundacja Dziewczyńskie Niedziele ("Girls Sunday Foundation")

Poland



Project type

Solidarity project

Web links

[Facebook](#)

[Video](#)

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Contact

+48517458428

DESCRIPTION

Fundacja Dziewczyńskie Niedziele (The Girls Sunday Foundation) was established in 2021 and focuses its activities on integrating women and girls through art. It's goals are:

- integration of women (including migrants) through art,
- integration of people from different age groups, promoting active participation in culture,
- facilitating and increasing public access to culture,
- strengthening children and youth, especially girls, as a group at risk of exclusion.

The foundation's solidarity project "A-round Table" (Wokół Stołu) enabled a group of 5 Ukrainian and 1 Polish volunteers to organise over 24 arts workshops for 240 people. Participants in the workshops were refugee women and their children who came from Ukraine as locals in Krakow with refugee and migrant experience. The workshop participants were recruited via families and friends of the ESC volunteers, and through the "U-WORK" Foundation which provides humanitarian aid in Krakow.

The goal of the workshops was to:

- Create a safe space for young women who come to Poland from other countries,
- Strengthening young women so that they are stronger, mutually supportive, have a stronger position, skills and experience in the labour market,
- Facilitate access to art and culture for people exposed to economic and social exclusion,
- Promote social activation of migrants, co-creation of civil society.

Workshops were led by the ESC volunteers and refugee artists from Ukraine also shared their knowledge. They were held in attractive venues such as restaurants and cafes and a key feature of them was Polish conversation and eating together “around the table”.

IMPACT



At individual level

Project leaders identified that for workshop participants, the project “strengthened them, allowed them to forget about problems, meet people in a similar situation and obtain useful information, while learning Polish”.

The informal sharing of information and development of language skills was said to have an impact on the inclusion of workshop participants into the local community and labour market. According to project leaders “As foreigners, they are at risk of exclusion. It is more difficult for them because they are limited by the lack of knowledge of the language, formalities during employment, often lack of support from family or friends, lack of information about the local labour market opportunities such as internships and courses. Women are particularly vulnerable to exclusion in this group. It’s harder to find employment, especially full-time, due to being a mother or the possibility of motherhood in the near future. We expect that as part of the project we will help young women to strengthen their position on the labour market.”



At organisational level

The project provided opportunities for the ESC participants to develop their skills and role as civic society leaders. Several volunteers took part in the 1st Congress of Beneficiaries of Solidarity Projects of the European Solidarity Corps. In addition, further ESC projects have been developed to support the organisation’s overall mission and goals.



At community level

A key feature of the projects is the building of a community of Ukrainian refugees which in turn leads to the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the Polish community. According to the organisers “We wanted to organise cyclical meetings so that the participants establish new contacts with each other and with time create informal support groups, where they establish contacts, meet other migrants and Poles, and share information about life and work in Krakow.”



WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

The project illustrates the way in which ESC can be used for community building and the formation of communities. Ukrainian refugees are provided with a network of support, which they become active members of. Through this people with common experiences are united and provide mutual support to each other. Central to this is the role of the ESC volunteers, most of whom were Ukrainian and the way in which they reached out through friends and family to build a wider community network.



Association Ballade

France



Project type

Individual volunteering

Solidarity cornerstones

Active citizenship

Inclusion

Empathy

Human Rights

Web links

[Website](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[YouTube](#)

[Pedagogical suitcase](#)

Contact

contact@associationballade.org

DESCRIPTION

Association Ballade is located in the Great East region in Strasbourg. Its aim is to use music to facilitate intercultural encounters working towards social diversity, multiculturalism and an inclusive society. The organisation runs various music workshops, music projects and international music exchanges. All the services offered by Association Ballade are provided for free and open to all ages. However, particular efforts are made to target them at disadvantaged people such as people seeking asylum, travellers (such as the Yeniche), those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, incarcerated offenders, people with disabilities, senior citizens, people with mental health problems, and many more.

Through its international work the organisation explores commonalities across borders through making music together. This cross-regional partnership work was first inspired by the historical context of the Alsace region, as a border region marked by cultural disputes between Germany and France. First exchanges were organised in cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the two regions share a similar cultural history of disputes.

Association Ballade receives at least four ESC volunteers per year. In general, it is preferable that the volunteers can play one or more instruments or have some other relation to music. However young people with other skills can also join the project, in which case the tasks will be adapted to their abilities. Volunteers assist in the delivery of music workshops and concerts. They are also engaged in the organisation of training or exchange projects with other countries and helped develop the organisation's "pedagogical suitcase".





At individual level

During volunteering at Association Ballade, young people develop a variety of skills. The organisation recognises that volunteers already bring a broad set of skills with them. But by using their skills in a foreign context, often with one or more foreign languages, they learn to use their skills in new ways. This in return enables young people to become proficient in living and working in foreign contexts and to develop intercultural competencies. In addition to fostering practical skills, a volunteer service at Association Ballade also contributes to the volunteers' well-being and self-efficacy. For instance, the volunteers get to know more about their many cultures through music, including their own. By sharing their culture with others, they also learn to cherish it more. Finally, through running their own activities and developing new ideas and projects, the volunteers experience many moments of personal empowerment.



At organisational level

The volunteer has also helped the organisation to offer a more diverse range of services and music to new groups of people in Strasbourg. Often, the volunteers also act as contact persons for people from their community, especially for people who have recently migrated to Strasbourg from the same country of origin. Volunteers complement the intercultural competences of the Association Ballade team and thus, through their language, cultural knowledge and native music repertoire, can expand the services offered and thereby reach and integrate a more diverse range of people into the projects. This has helped lead to the steady growth of Association Ballade in recent years and has also generated more visibility. For instance, the number of music students at its Cronenberg youth centre has increased.



At community level

The enhanced intercultural dimensions and presence that volunteers bring within the organisation helps contribute to Association Ballades intercultural mission. In this way the volunteers contribute to the quality of the impact on different people living in the Strasbourg area.

"The idea is that music is like a universal language. In a sense there is music in every community.... It's a way to express without words and share emotion. You actually synchronise when you play together. And you can learn about the culture of other people while also learning the music ... Music is a tool to be able to be curious, to meet others, and to learn more about everyone and everything."

Diane Caussade - Intercultural Projects Coordinator



WHAT CAN BE LEARNT ABOUT IMPACT

Association Ballade draws strongly on the existing skills and cultural backgrounds of volunteers to help enhance its own impact on the communities of Strasbourg. The organisation sees each volunteer as a link to a person from a different/new community. Nationality is not always the only aspect to be considered, but the diversity of people as a whole. For instance, the possibility of a non-native French speaker to teach other non-native speakers can be a pleasant experience and the volunteer can become a role model. In this way, the volunteers can establish contacts with different people from the Strasbourg region and help build interculturality to integrate through making music together and to live well together.



Conclusion



There is a range of things that can be learnt about community impact from these examples of practices. In all examples impact can be seen at individual level and also at the organisational and community levels. However the process of creating impact is varied, and impact is often a result of the ESC project combined with a variety of other aspects of the organisation work.



Impact at individual level

At the individual level the impact of ESC projects is closely connected to the learning of ESC participants. It represents the development of their various competences from participating in the ESC experience. However, in some examples, the application of these competencies then leads to other impacts for the individual that go beyond learning. For instance, the project *Cubic* enables young people to develop skills which then lead to employment opportunities, Similar *Ergon* and *Grenzenlos* both identify enhanced involvement in communities for individuals following ESC experiences, with young people becoming more civically active or engaged within their community somehow.

Overall, the range of competences ESC participants develop is diverse, and many organisations reported that individual impact varied depending on the participants and the setting they participated in. Across the various projects examples of competence development included, self-confidence and self-efficacy, intercultural communication skills and competences as well as practical elements such as project management, video production and video making or using other tools and instruments that would then offer them better chances to access the labour market. In *Curba de Cultura* and in *GAIA* they are also trained on basics of youth work and some of their former volunteers also developed careers in youth work.

Many organisations identified that impact on individuals was maximised through intensive personal support and specific tailoring of opportunities to the participants. This was particularly the case when young people with fewer opportunities are part of ESC projects. It is the merit of the organisations that either tailor specific projects for young people with fewer opportunities (*Cubic* - Austria or *Lahti* - Finland) or work very closely with the local authorities or with other NGOs in promoting the bringing these opportunities closer to young people (see the cooperation of *Cubic* with the *Labour Chamber of Tyrol*). Learning a new language and interacting with the local community have a great impact, offering participants better perspectives in opening up to living and working abroad - in some cases, they decide to stay and continue their involvement in the hosting country.

Solidarity projects are an essential asset for the achievement and development of skills in project management, in managing budgets or developing partnerships with different public or private organisations and groups. Especially the projects of *Especially Young Improvers for Youth Development* or *Île y a* are showing the potential of stimulating the youth involvement in a snowball approach - groups of young people leading solidarity projects brought on board new volunteers who decided then to run their own projects. In this way individual impact starts to cross over into community and organisational impact.



Impact at community level

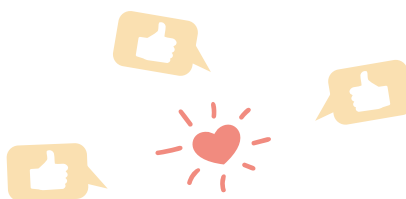
At the community level the impact of specific ESC granted projects cannot easily be approached separately from the impact of the work of the organisations in general. Many of the organisations started their work before ESC and the granted projects are rather a continuation of their work or an added value to their activities in place. Others used ESC funding as a stepping stone to other resources and opportunities. But without the ESC projects, it is clear fewer opportunities could have been offered to host communities, especially to the people with fewer opportunities and less resources would have been invested into the organisational development. For many organisations ESC projects formed a key part of their overall organisation approach to creating impact on the local community.

ESC projects contribute to the impact that the hosting organisation is having on its local community, by expanding and diversifying the offer the organisation makes to the host community and by expanding and diversifying the organisation's workforce. In cases such as *Curba de Cultura* and *Villa Elba*, the ESC participants provide an essential capacity for organisational workforce, enabling the organisation to achieve its social mission. The organisation typically provides training and support for participants to enable them to deliver key parts of the organisation work. In other instances, notably *Association Balade*, the organisation seeks to build on the existing skills and cultural competences that international volunteers bring. In this way volunteers are understood to bring more diverse skill sets to the capacities of the organisation. Thus, many organisations see the work of volunteers as an added value to their operations and also a great chance to bring the European dimension closer to their community. In some cases, the role of volunteers is also essential to building up inter-dialogue bridges, to set up intercultural learning frameworks and to stimulate the interest of local youth into local or international learning activities.

The international dimensions of ESC projects are a great tool for organisations in stimulating intercultural dialogue, intercultural learning or inter-generational dialogue mechanisms in the hosting communities. Examples from *GAIA* (Kosovo) and *L'A.D.R.E.T.* (France) show the achievements done so far in bridging dialogue between communities where either conflict was present for a while (Kosovo) or where the cross-border dialogue would lead to better learning opportunities for young people (France).

One of the clearest community impacts identified is the idea of community building, and bringing different individuals with common experiences together to form a community. This is most apparent in the work of *Lernlabor*. Here it can be seen that ESC projects are used as a way to foster a sense of community belonging, building bridges between participants and creating a safe space around which communities can form and interact.

The impact of returning ESC participants on sending communities was less often identified by projects. This impact may still be occurring, but it was less common for organisations to be attentive to this dimension. *Grenzenlos* is the exception here, where its continued support for returning volunteers is used to create impact on the sending community.



Impact at organisational level

At the organisational level it is clear that impact is best understood as being achieved through operating a variety of ESC projects over a longer period of time. By integrating ESC projects directly into the work of their organisation, organisations were able to use them to build the capacity of their organisation.

Solidarity projects such as those operated by *Young Improvers for Youth Development* are a particular interesting approach to organisation impact. By enabling young participants to generate new projects and ideas which became part of the organisation offer, ESC participants are able to direct and influence the development of the organisation.

Key areas of organisation impact happening across the projects included:

- **Development of new workflows and processes**

Many organisations that were interviewed stated the role that ESC had in supporting the development of new working flows, better administrative procedures and of creating new opportunities for employment for youth workers in the community. New tools and instruments for coaching and mentoring were developed specifically to support ESC participants and based on the experiences of implementing it. Where organisations play the role of coordinating organisations (e.g., *Hors Pistes* or *Grenzenlos*) they also have developed quality working procedures and either transferred part of these procedures or helped the local partners in developing their volunteering management systems.

- **Long-term organisation growth**

For many organisations ESC provided capacity to support the long-term growth of the organisation. They used ESC as a catalyst to enable access to other funding and long-term support from municipalities or other partners. This is most evident in the case of the informal group *Île y a* which developed from an informal project into an organisation. The initial ESC grant also provides credibility and security towards other institutions which encourages them to invest in the organisation.

- **Enhanced partnerships and networks**

For a variety of organisations ESC funding provided a basis to develop partnership and networks with other actors. This occurred but as international networks, networks of local professionals and partnership with public authorities. As in the case of *Villa Elba* (Finland), the ESC granted project contributed to the development of a European network of organisations.

The impact of ESC projects can also be seen through the lens of the trust that is currently invested by public authorities and other actors in the youth initiatives and youth activities of ESC organisations. In countries where youth work benefits both legal and social recognition authorities would see ESC organisations as partners in implementing the mission of supporting youth development and youth transitions. By contrast, in countries where youth work is still under construction/development, authorities became involved gradually in supporting ESC organisation youth projects and the ESC organisations were the driving force behind the resulting partnerships.



In countries where youth work is rather structured or better organised (e.g. *Cubic*, Austria *Lahti City Youth Service*, Finland) the cooperation between the ESC organisations and the public authorities is a great asset to the community impact - *the Labour Chamber of Tyrol* supports *Cubic* in outreaching activities and with financial support for their running costs, while *Lahti City Youth Service* has a great cooperation with the public actors in the community. In countries where youth work is still under development (*Young Improvers for Youth Development*, Bulgaria or *Curba de Cultura* Romania) a greater interest of the public authorities to consult with the ESC organisations was registered and more trust and better resources were then allocated to youth initiatives run by the organisations.



