



# Study on the Impact of Transnational Volunteering through the European Voluntary Service

*Executive Summary*  
*April 2017*

# **Study on the Impact of Transnational Volunteering through the European Voluntary Service**

## ***Executive Summary***

### **EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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## Executive summary

### *Why was the study initiated?*

Since its foundation in 1996, the European Voluntary Service (EVS) has provided about 100 000 young people from all across Europe and beyond with unique opportunities to volunteer abroad to develop their personality and skills, to reinforce the work of non-profit organisations and to support communities.

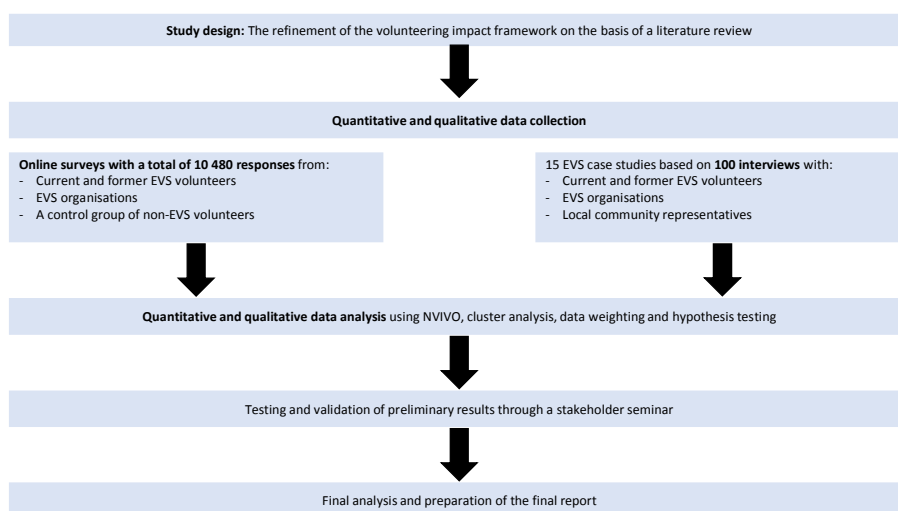
In 2014, EVS became part of the Erasmus+ Programme. Within the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programming period, 100 000 volunteers are expected to be involved, almost double the number of volunteers involved in the period 1996–2013. Currently, nearly 5,200 organisations from 33 programme countries, 22 partner countries and more than 100 other participating countries from around the world are involved in EVS which has become an important element in young Europeans' life and the public sphere.

This study provides a detailed evaluation of the impact of EVS on the young people, participating organisations and local communities involved. A wide range of effects is analysed, from the contribution to young people's employability and career success, to the internationalisation of participating organisations and benefits to the society in terms of openness and cultural diversity. The goal of this study is, on the one hand, to identify and highlight the contribution EVS makes to its beneficiaries, and, on the other, to provide useful feedback and contribute to the further development of the scheme.

It analyses among other aspects whether the outcomes are greater for certain target groups of young people participating in EVS, how impact could be increased especially for young people with fewer opportunities, what the challenges of implementing EVS projects are and how these could be overcome to increase the participation of a larger variety and number of organisations, and what the added value of the EVS scheme is in comparison to the volunteering schemes at the national level.

A list of policy recommendations in the final chapter of this study suggests ways to make EVS even more effective and efficient.

### *How was the impact study conducted?*



Prior to the data collection, an extensive literature review of the impact of volunteering on individual volunteers as well as on organisations and local communities hosting

volunteers was conducted, comprising a total of 15 EU monitoring reports and 47 academic articles, research studies, reports and publications.

The study itself covers the entire period 1996–2016. For the quantitative part of the study, the data collection has included all programmes as well as partner countries. For the qualitative part of the study, case studies were conducted in 15 countries. The selection of case studies was made proportionally to ensure a wide range of perspectives, thus representing the scope of the EVS. The results drawn from the quantitative and qualitative analysis were discussed in a stakeholder meeting in Brussels, in order to provide a deeper understanding and their contextualisation.

The study includes three levels of impacts (individuals, organisations, local community) and within each a different set of impact areas.

Level	Impact area
<b>Individual volunteer</b>	Personal and social development
	Learning and competence development
	Improved employability and career prospects
	Increased participation in civic and political life
	Stronger sense of belonging to the EU
	Further mobility
	Increased intercultural learning and dialogue
	Improved social inclusion and solidarity
<b>Organisation</b>	Organisational development
	Internationalisation of the organisation
<b>Local Community</b>	Improved social inclusion of direct beneficiaries
	Community cohesion

The **qualitative data collection** comprised 100 targeted interviews and 15 in-depth case studies. The **quantitative data collection** consisted of online surveys were designed to capture information from EVS volunteers, EVS alumni and EVS organisations, as well as from a control group of non-EVS volunteers. Overall, 10 480 individuals responded to the surveys. This includes responses from 8 600 individuals and almost 1 900 organisational representatives.

In order to analyse the impacts particularly on individuals, special instruments such as psychometric measurements of personality (memo©) and cluster analysis to identify types of volunteers were used next to classical analytical methods such as frequencies and distributions. Data weighting was applied to the quantitative data in order to increase their representativeness. This weighting ensured that no group of participants is over - or underrepresented in the sample, thus possibly biasing the results.

### **Who are these EVS volunteers?**

EVS volunteers responding to the survey have some clearly identifiable characteristics:

- The majority are women (63%);
- The parents of the majority of EVS volunteers and alumni are educated to a tertiary degree level;
- Like their parents, the majority of EVS participants have completed/are in the process of completing/are planning to complete tertiary education: 61% of current EVS volunteers hold a tertiary level degree and among the EVS alumni, 74% held a tertiary degree at the time of the survey. Findings suggest that the apparent social selectivity in EVS should be perceived as a selectivity of volunteering as such, rather than a unique characteristic of EVS as a volunteering scheme;

- Substantially more EVS (12%) than non-EVS (2%) volunteers were actively looking for a job. This might indicate that international mobility through EVS is more attractive for young people in a 'precarious' job situation;
- Participants see EVS as an opportunity to a) gain skills and experiences that are attractive to employers and which will differentiate them from their peers; b) explore new and different career possibilities; and c) escape a precarious situation, be it (long-term) unemployment or unsatisfactory work, and identify new outlooks and a sense of direction;
- Significantly more young people with fewer opportunities stated that they engaged in EVS in order to improve and widen their career prospects or because they wanted to enhance their future employability (45% compared to 35% among young people without fewer opportunities);
- The most common sources of motivation for current volunteers were the opportunity to learn a foreign language (87%), meet new people (86%) and the opportunity to live abroad (84%), followed by soft skills development (78%) and benefits for career prospects (63%);
- Most EVS volunteers (70% of both current participants and alumni) had previous volunteering experience before taking part in EVS, and a third had previously been abroad as part of another longer-term scheme, such as Erasmus exchange or a work placement.

Despite the similarities, the study could also identify five "types of EVS volunteers" through cluster analysis who share a number of characteristics: '**Standard students**'<sup>1</sup>, '**Mediterranean students**'<sup>2</sup>, '**Experienced workers**'<sup>3</sup>, '**Disadvantaged jobseekers**'<sup>4</sup> and '**Western pupils**'<sup>5</sup>.

### ***What characterises EVS organisations?***

The majority of participating EVS organisations (76%) belong to the private non-profit sector and most of them have only few employees (64% have less than 10) and most of the EVS organisations host only a small number of volunteers (two thirds have less than 10 volunteers annually).

However, the longer an organisation participates in EVS, the more likely it is that they host a larger number of volunteers per year. They operate predominantly in local languages, with approximately a quarter of the responding organisations stating that English is their primary working language. In general, the EVS organisations stated that a substantial proportion of their volunteers are young people with fewer opportunities. Only 17 % stated that fewer than 10 % of their volunteers came from disadvantaged backgrounds, while in 5 % of the organisations over 90 % of the volunteers were considered to be young people with fewer opportunities. On average, across the EVS organisations who responded to the survey, 41 % of the volunteers recruited were young

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<sup>1</sup> These are students at universities from across the whole of Europe and other regions, excluding Southern Europe, with an average age of nearly 24 years. No young people with fewer opportunities are included in this group.

<sup>2</sup> The profile of these students is almost the same as for the previous group except that all the 'Mediterranean students' come from Southern Europe and their average age is slightly higher – 24.5 years.

<sup>3</sup> These volunteers were already employed full-time before taking part in EVS. They are more or less equally distributed across all countries, although Northern Europe was their most common home region and Southern Europe the rarest. Most are aged 26 or over and only a few young people with fewer opportunities are included in this group.

<sup>4</sup> These participants are all recruited from among young people with few opportunities, most of whom were actively seeking a job before taking part in EVS. They are spread equally across all regions and have an average age of 24.5 years.

<sup>5</sup> This group includes upper-secondary pupils mostly from Western Europe, with an average age of 19 years. No young people with fewer opportunities and no participants from partner (non-programme) countries are included in this group.

people with fewer opportunities, which is double the number of volunteers in our sample who self-reported as disadvantaged. Most of the responding organisations also stated that they work in the field of youth information and youth leisure, which reflects the main areas of EVS volunteering activity cited by EVS volunteers and alumni. In addition, the other major areas of volunteering work among current and past EVS volunteers, such as social exclusion, art and culture or European awareness, were strongly represented among the organisations.

The case studies indicate that organisations' motivations to participate in EVS are either because they were founded or influenced by former EVS volunteers, or because they started off as local partners of EVS and over time, with the help of the coordinating EVS organisation, obtained EVS accreditation, or they had a long history or a specialised profile, with an interest to add an international dimension to their activities or to develop new partnerships with countries with which they do not typically cooperate.

### ***How does EVS impact on individuals?***

In general, **volunteers perceive EVS to be very beneficial**. Almost all of the current EVS volunteers (96%) and of the alumni (97%) agree that EVS is very profitable for their personal development by e.g. giving them the opportunity to learn about themselves and broaden their horizons. Additionally, 96% of the EVS volunteers after return and 98% of the alumni state also that they gained new insights about themselves and their abilities. EVS also has a strong impact on developing volunteers' autonomy and independence.

**EVS attracts participants with an already very high level of personality traits**, which effectively limits the change that can be produced through the EVS stay abroad. Although 87% of EVS volunteers feel that EVS had a positive impact on their personality development, such a positive change was not proven by the psychometric analysis. However, most EVS volunteers have already graduated and/or studied abroad, or had other volunteering experience prior to EVS. Therefore, they had the chance to develop their personality before joining EVS and as previous research tells us, the first interventions have the greatest impact, therefore the chance for EVS to have impact on personalities is limited.

On the other hand, EVS has a **measurable impact on the volunteers' learning and competence development**. Three out of four respondents state that EVS helped them to improve their inter-personal and social competences, especially such skills as interpersonal communication or understanding of other cultures, while the impact on technical skills is somewhat reduced. Almost all of the volunteers (96%) and of the alumni (97%) state that they improved their language skills, both in the local language and in English during EVS. While most volunteers start learning the local language from zero, they usually become fluent by the end of their EVS. The impact on improving English language skills is also strong.

EVS also provides **substantial impact on career and work-related aspects**. More than 80% of EVS volunteers and EVS alumni feel that EVS helped them to identify opportunities for their professional future, helped them to clarify what they want to do later in life, and prepare them for an international career path. Almost all EVS organisations (91%) stated that EVS has a high or very high impact on the employability of volunteers. Moreover, 80% of EVS volunteers coming back from the EVS stay reported that they expect to have better job opportunities because of their EVS experience. Just over half of the EVS volunteers (59%) and of the alumni (55%) feel that the EVS experience helped them to find their first job, and two out of three believe that it was profitable for their career development. Some (42%) of the EVS alumni are holding managerial positions. Significantly higher results also concern Disadvantaged Job Seekers who are more interested in creating their own business/company/organisation or a cultural/youth project, and are more actively participating in social and political life after



EVS. Moreover, EVS is related to an entrepreneurial spirit, as 9% of the alumni already started their own company.

**EVS additionally fosters participants' social capital.** Almost all of the alumni (97%) have friends who live abroad, and 94% still keep in contact with friends they had met during the volunteering period. Most of the EVS volunteers (63%) who returned and 51% of the EVS alumni also have a partner with a different nationality, five times more than among non-mobile volunteers.

**EVS boosts international attitudes.** It makes people more mobile, as half of the EVS alumni have already changed their living/working country at least once, and every fifth even more than once. EVS stimulates the volunteers' interest in travelling and discovering new places and cultures. EVS volunteers already have a strong relationship to Europe and this remains stable over time (for 50% of alumni). After EVS, two thirds of EVS volunteers are more interested in European topics and 36% feel more European. Participation in EVS also often leads to increasing volunteers' knowledge about, and interest in, other countries and cultures, as well as in different perspectives and ways of thinking. EVS volunteers tend to become more open to other cultures and often overcome cultural differences.

Also through EVS, **most volunteers gain a better understanding of the problems faced by certain groups of people in the society** and become more committed to help them. More than 80% of the EVS volunteers and around 80% of the alumni say that they feel more aware of and committed to inclusion issues related to people with fewer opportunities and in general to work against discrimination.

Among the five profiles identified for EVS volunteers, Standard Students are significantly more represented than other volunteer profiles regarding improved job chances after EVS, commitment towards community, and awareness of inclusion of people with fewer opportunities.

### ***How does EVS Impact on organisations?***

The study shows that EVS **brings clear benefits for participating organisations**, as 97 % of surveyed organisations consider their participation 'successful'. Organisations particularly value the positive EVS organisational impact on 'openness to cultural diversity' among staff (72%) and 'improved project management competence' (62%), while practically all (96%) think that EVS has strengthened their international profile. Consequently, three out of four organisations (74%) plan to stay involved in EVS.

In general, the **benefits that EVS brings to the participating organisations are wide-ranging, although they tend to be less visible and less tangible than the EVS impact on individual volunteers.** EVS volunteers and project leaders have different but complementing views about the organisational level impact. Current and former volunteers feel that EVS participation has a direct, positive impact on youth workers and other project leaders involved in the EVS projects, usually in terms of skills development and intercultural learning. While these impacts are also mentioned by the representatives of EVS organisations, the latter focus mostly on organisational gains including the capacity-building and internationalisation, which again help the organisation to increase the offer and outreach of its activities and develop their quality.

**Volunteers are modest when assessing their impact on the host organisation, as they tend to find it difficult to define.** Many think that they have not had a great deal of impact on the staff or the organisation. There are several reasons for such perceptions. Firstly, volunteers consider that their influence is not high because the organisation has already received many volunteers before them. Secondly, some EVS volunteers carry out their main tasks and activities outside the host organisation,

meaning that their impact on the hosting organisation is not as high as on those groups or bodies (e.g. schools) with which they are frequently in contact.

### ***How does EVS impact on the local community?***

Overall, the **impact of EVS on the local community is perceived as being less visible and less significant than the impact on individual volunteers and their host organisations**. Local community impact also seems to be more difficult and less frequently assessed than the other two types of impacts, partly due to the, often, informal nature of interactions between the community and volunteers, and partly due to the lack of tools to structure impact at local level.

However, EVS **leads to a ripple effect**: volunteers have a direct impact on the target groups (direct beneficiaries) and local volunteers they engage with, but also on other locals in the wider community. Many EVS projects and activities develop capacity of local communities and strengthen civil society.

In terms of the direct beneficiaries of the voluntary service, the **work of EVS volunteers seems to be particularly important for the hardest-to-reach target groups** (e.g. people at risk of social exclusion, Roma community, NEETs, people with disabilities or learning difficulties). EVS often enables them to experience new activities that would not be available were it not for the EVS volunteers. It can also enable them to learn languages and to become more open to other cultures. For some of them, many EVS volunteers become role models.

In relation to the impact on the wider community, the EVS **can have a positive impact on intercultural learning and dialogue through the volunteers' interaction with local community members** (e.g. cultural events). This again often increases the locals' interest in travelling abroad and the motivation of local young people to engage in transnational mobility actions.

**Contact with incoming EVS volunteers also often has a positive influence on local people's attitudes towards the EU**, raising awareness about Europe and their identity as Europeans. Moreover, regular interaction with EVS volunteers can also help to reduce prejudices within local communities towards foreign nationals.

EVS projects seem to have a **positive impact on the awareness and level of interest in local communities about volunteering and the EVS in particular**. A greater understanding of the contribution of youth policy to young people's lives is also often detected.

EVS projects have also often shown to have an **impact on local systems and structures by developing the capacity of local communities and, in doing so, helping build civil society**. Through EVS collaboration of accredited organisations with a network of local partners, an area's capacity to provide opportunities to young people can be strengthened, as too can its civil society.

### ***What hinders individuals and organisations to participate in EVS?***

Despite the overall positive findings for EVS, the study also unearthed relevant obstacles both for individuals and organisations. For individuals, these are as follows.

- Firstly, a **lack of awareness of the opportunity** which tends to go hand in hand with the general level of engagement in both formal and non-formal education, training and youth sector activities, and socioeconomic background.
- Secondly, there is some evidence of **negative perceptions of a value of volunteering** programmes to the careers of young people, especially among those

family and friends who have not been involved in volunteering, often due to a lack of information about the benefits of EVS.

- Thirdly, **preparing an EVS application** can be a new and daunting experience and aspiring EVS volunteers may not have prior experience and thus may struggle to familiarise themselves with the terms and concepts of such a process.
- Fourthly, the **lack of mobility placements** specifically for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds is a significant barrier in terms of uptake of the EVS for young people with fewer opportunities. This is due to lack of sufficient focus of EVS services on young people with fewer opportunities, who typically not only require additional financial support to participate in the EVS, but also additional advice, guidance and mentoring to make full use of the EVS potential.
- Finally, regulatory issues such as **visa issues for third-country nationals** and **financial barriers, in particular for young people with fewer opportunities**, constitute barriers to their participation in EVS.
- Organisations also face some obstacles regarding their EVS participation. Financial and resource considerations are an important barrier for some organisations interested in participating in EVS, be it the availability of funding for sending organisations, the lack of a flat rate system for small organisations allowing for pooling resources to make cost savings, or the shortage of resources/incentives to identify, involve and then support volunteers with fewer opportunities. Additionally, many new organisations are now experiencing more difficulties than before in terms of being accredited and having their EVS project accepted under Erasmus+, not least due to increased competition. Small NGOs also generally perceive the administrative burden of filling out applications and complying with reporting obligations as too onerous, given the project budgets and human resources available.

### ***What are the main recommendations of this impact study for EVS?***

The study findings suggest that some improvements could strengthen the impact of EVS.

EVS could be improved for the **volunteers** by

- Raising awareness of the EVS benefits, especially among more vulnerable young people through an appointment of EVS ambassadors (i.e. EVS alumni) tasked with spreading awareness about EVS through word of mouth, social media and talks at schools, universities, youth centres and careers fairs;
- Empowering and training frontline youth workers and those working in formal services, such as the PES, to raise awareness of opportunities and increase young people's confidence to take up international mobility opportunities such as EVS – financial incentives for youth workers to support young people with fewer opportunities have also proven effective;
- Create new and use existing peer-to-peer networks and other structures to raise awareness-- for example, the creation of an EVS alumni network at EU level (similarly to the Erasmus Student Network) and advertising EVS through the Euro-Peers network launched by NAs in Germany and several other Erasmus+ Programme Countries;
- Advertising EVS as a supported mobility programme by investing more in the training of EVS mentors and pre- and post-mobility training for volunteers;
- Introducing quotas for the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities – in other words, specifying that a certain proportion of the volunteers sent and received should fall into the category of 'young people with fewer opportunities';

- Using 'youth-friendly' tools and channels for raising awareness, such as social media, TV and radio channels favoured by young people (i.e. MTV), testimonials on YouTube, EVS stories on Euronews, EVS ambassadors among celebrities, etc.; and
- Preparing jargon-free guides/information materials on EVS, featuring testimonials from EVS alumni.

EVS could be improved for **organisations** by

- Reinforcing the role of the sending organisations in selecting and 'matching' volunteers is important, with a particular focus on reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities, motivating them for mobility, and accompanying them with adequate support throughout the experience (before, during and after the EVS);
- Reconsidering the EVS accreditation process as organisations with many years of experience in preparing EVS project applications have an upper hand, given the expertise acquired and their available administrative resources. At the same time, active volunteers have the potential to make a big organisational impact in small, less organised organisations, meaning that it is important to ensure a wider pool of EVS organisations;
- Strengthening the quality systems in EVS is necessary by raising the capacity of host organisations to offer a quality EVS experience to all volunteers, which would be beneficial both for the volunteers as well as for the hosting staff and the organisation overall. Monitoring the implementation of the projects on the ground in terms of the support provided to the volunteers and the conditions ensured could prove valuable in levelling the standard of EVS projects across the board;
- Improving the capacity and resources of EVS host organisations to ensure consistently high-quality EVS activities, and to provide high-quality pre-departure preparation and follow-up upon return of EVS volunteers. This could include the training of mentors, training on maximising the impact on the local community, and training on supporting volunteers with specific needs. Coordinating organisations and National Agencies are already playing a role in addressing these weaknesses, but their role could be further strengthened and better resourced;
- For EVS sending organisations, concrete proposals for their improvement include training on how to reach specific target groups and how to prepare them for mobility. Some project leaders believe that for smaller or new applicant organisations, it would be beneficial to have targeted training on issues such budget management, reporting, monitoring and volunteer management.
- Supporting follow-up processes after EVS is vital for ensuring the re-integration of the volunteer in the 'home' community. A proper follow-up support of the returned volunteer could direct the individual to appropriate services in the home community, such as career guidance. It could also support the volunteer to share his/her experience with others in the community and, in this way, to extend the positive impact also on the home community.

EVS could be improved for **local communities** by

- EVS projects should facilitate direct interaction between EVS volunteers and locals;
- EVS projects should be designed to match the needs of the local community,
- This level of impact would need to become a more recognised and formal priority for EVS projects and the impact on this level should be planned as an integrative part of the project.



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