

Inclusive Solidarity

Guidelines for inclusion in youth and volunteering projects



These guidelines are the outcome of the seminar “Inclusive Solidarity” organised in Madrid from 6-12 October 2019 by Servicio Civil Internacional (<https://ongsci.org/>).

Editors: Thomas Schallhart, Valerie Weidinger.

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Why these guidelines?

This is the outcome of a seminar in Madrid in 2019.

With the project "Inclusive Solidarity", we brought together 15 youth workers from 8 European countries to reflect on inclusion and to share experiences on how to reach and support youth with fewer opportunities to become volunteers. It was funded by the European Commission through its Erasmus+ program and took place in Madrid from 6-12 October 2019. The hosting organisation was SCI Madrid, a branch of the international peace and volunteering organisation Service Civil international (SCI).

We don't talk enough about inclusion.

While "youth with fewer opportunities" has become a popular buzz word in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps circles, diversity is not mainstreamed yet. We need to share much more our experiences and best practices of involving and empowering youth with fewer opportunities to become active citizens.

Including youth with fewer opportunities is extremely valuable.

We as a peace organisation believe in equality and non-violence on all levels. If we want to work on justice, we must make sure that those groups that have the least opportunities are visible in our organisations, our movements and the opportunities to create good in the world that we provide. Including youth with fewer opportunities makes also us stronger, because diversity means strength and resilience as a movement and as an organisation.

These guidelines are incomplete and just a start.

We see a lot of limitations with writing a manual as a small group of youth workers from very different backgrounds and with our own biases. The content of this manual is thus just a start for reflections - we want to give you some tips where you can start to reflect and work on.

Who are youth with opportunities?

Some youth have more barriers than others.

Young people with fewer opportunities face difficulties and obstacles in their lives that other youth don't need to face. This could be:

- discrimination due to being a minority (e.g. black youth and youth of color)
- social barriers (e.g. youth with addiction problems, young parents)
- economical and financial difficulties (e.g. unemployed youth, youth from working class backgrounds, homeless youth)
- learning and educational difficulties
- physical or mental disabilities
- health conditions
- cultural or religious barriers (e.g. young migrants and refugees, youth from religious minorities)
- barriers related to gender identity and sexual orientation (e.g. LGBTI youth)
- geographical barriers (e.g. young people from remote areas or from urban problem areas)

The danger of a single story.

It is important not to generalize. Be aware that every young person is an individual with a story of their own. Not every person with a disability has the same needs or difficulties. And some youth are part of several disadvantaged groups and struggle on several fronts.

Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps have support systems made specifically for youth with fewer opportunities!

The program by the European Commission has lots of opportunities for youth from these groups:

- There is extra funding to support the participation of young people with fewer opportunities. This funding can be used to pay for tailor-made preparation, extra linguistic support, for an assistant, etc.
- European Solidarity Corps usually lasts for 2 to 12 months, but for youth with fewer opportunities individual volunteering can last also 2 weeks to 2 months.

Some questions to reflect on...

Learning

- How can you adapt learning to the individual young person you want to reach?
- What additional resources do you need for their learning to be fruitful? (E.g. specially trained teachers, teaching assistants, materials, expertise)
- How do you need to adapt non-formal education methods to work successfully for the young person with fewer opportunities? (E.g. in terms of abilities to move in certain ways, physical touch, language)

Information

- How can you make different groups of youth with fewer opportunities feel included in the way that you promote volunteering in your promotion, your communication channels, on your website and on social media?
- What positive examples and realities could you promote to show the opportunities that youth with fewer opportunities have?
- What alternative ways of communication and self-expression could you use to reach youth with fewer opportunities in a creative way? (e.g. music, dance, arts and crafts)

Physical spaces

- How accessible are the spaces that you use in your organisation and for your projects for youth with physical disabilities?
- Where are your spaces located and who can reach them easily, who cannot?
- How can you communicate in an inclusive way that your spaces are accessible for youth with fewer opportunities?
- What options for creating exclusive spaces for specific groups do you have? (e.g. women-only groups, queer-only clubs)

Visibility

- What platforms could you use and create for youth with fewer opportunities to be able to speak up and be visible?
- How can you create positive storytelling through projects, campaigns etc.?
- How can you encourage youth with fewer opportunities to become advocates and to take over the stage?

Organisational structures

- Who is in your board? Who is your staff? What groups do you have represented, which ones not?
- What hinders youth with fewer opportunities from becoming active in your organisation?
- What policies and practices do you have against discrimination, e.g. ableism, classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia?

Normativity

- Who is seen as “normal”? Who is framed as the “other” in your communication and in your projects?

What could motivate a young person with fewer opportunities to do volunteering?

Again, every individual is different. Some motivations that youth with fewer opportunities could have:

- Contributing to the common good of society
- Changing their life, escaping from routine and toxic environments
- Facing fears, becoming independent and growing as a person
- Gaining new skills
- Getting work experience
- Gaining skills and new languages
- Experiencing intercultural settings and traveling
- Making new friends, feeling of belonging, meeting like-minded people
- Finding out what they want to do with their life

Tips for an inclusive sending organisation

Sending organisations are those organisations that send volunteers to volunteering services. There are lots of ways how you as a sending organisation can take youth with fewer opportunities into account and tailor support systems from the beginning until the end.

In this chapter, we focus on the first steps that sending organisations have, from finding volunteers and preparing them to the actual sending. Of course, sending organisations also have support tasks during the voluntary service and afterwards follow-up tasks.

Promotion and communication

- Identify groups/stakeholders who support and interact with youth with fewer opportunities and meet with them to get know their motivations, needs, worries and fears.
- Online campaigning through social media and offline campaigning (e.g. posters and flyers) in the appropriate spaces
- Organising events as university, school, association center and medical center visits, face-to-face meetings, charity, sport events, and including youth with fewer opportunities as advocates.
- Building partnerships and creating networks with NGOs that work with different YWFO groups

Create the project together with the volunteer!

- Meet with the volunteer in person, find out about them (personality, interests, needs, wishes).
- Be open-minded and treat them as an individual rather than projecting your stereotypes onto them.

- Get to know one another - not just one way. Be transparent also about your own experience and what you as an organisation aim for.
- Explain the overall concept of European Solidarity Corps and find out together the best starting project. For the explanation look for the page of your National Agency or more from https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en
- Choose the most suitable option, for example, short-term or long-term etc. You could advise to start with a short-term project before going to a long-term project, as it might be an easier start for less experienced volunteers.
- Depending on your capacities, you can choose between different options: initiate and write the project together based on the volunteer's needs and wishes; find an existing project from https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en and help the participant to apply. It would be good to check if the project and hosting organization can accommodate the volunteer's needs.

The volunteer is accepted! Now to the basics...

Sometimes there are already projects where a volunteer can apply or they have already done it on their own and they need your support as a sending organisation.

- To make the most out of it we suggest organizing face to face meetings with the volunteers - if possible. If not, we recommend using Skype, Facetime or to meet with the volunteer where is suitable for them (in their town, somewhere in the middle etc)
- Should you involve the young person's parents? Some participants may not have parents or have a relationship with their parents, or their parents do not need to be involved). If parents are involved, make sure to build both trust with the volunteer as well as their parents or other important people in their life (their social worker, their spouse, their family etc)
- Introduction of ESC - explain the concept, function and structure. It is good if you explain the values and ideas behind ESC and let them understand their role as Solidarity Ambassadors. Also explain the concept of volunteering, funding and how reimbursement works.
- Get to know the volunteer - why are you here, what are your motivations, get to know the sending organization and hosting organization - workplace, information about the country (habits, culture, history), communication.
- We suggest meeting the volunteer several times (e.g. at least three times) to make sure that there is time in-between meetings for new reflections, fears, needs etc. to come up.
- Organise online meetings with the receiving organisation where they are going and the organisation where they will be volunteering

Preparing practicalities

- It might be good to invite a volunteer from previous years that either did the same project, went to the same country or is willing to share their experience.
- Explain some practicalities: how to pack for the whole duration - explain sleeping bags or other needed skills (camping, using tent etc)
- How to organise travel - it is suggested to be really concrete - go through the stops and connections, show pictures and street views if needed, how tickets are bought (for example from bus or machine etc). Adjust travel according to their needs and possibilities.
- Crisis planning - go through some fears they might have, basic phrases in a language of the hosting country, build a list of emergency contacts. For that, you can use role-plays or other suitable methods.
- Evaluate the situation of the volunteer and their needs - adjust the training according to their previous skills. Do they need help with using home tasks like washing clothes, shopping, cleaning etc? Have they lived in a dorm before? Have they lived on their own?
- Based on the country take also care of insurance, passport, visa if needed, vaccination if needed, registration etc.
- Go through the information sheet - answer questions, identify emergency contacts, determine how they can contact home, get medicine. It will be good for the volunteer to provide some contacts of social centres in the hosting county.
- Ask them if they need any additional support.

Preparing mentally

- It might be good to go through the following topics: feeling homesick, culture shock and how to deal with them. Explain personalized coping strategies - breathing exercises, mindfulness, how to find a social support system in the receiving country, emotional thermometer, music and arts.
- Practise all the methods together. Make a crisis management plan. Talk about working with stress, put yourself in other people's shoes, be aware of ups and downs, step out of your comfort zone.

Don't forget to ask for feedback from the meetings, in order to improve the quality of you as a sending organisation.

Tips for an inclusive receiving organisation

Get to know the volunteer beforehand

You could send a questionnaire to the sending organisation to understand the needs of the volunteer and be prepared to respond at all the necessities of hosting the volunteer.

Before the volunteer arrives, it might be useful that the receiving organization has a staff meeting to reflect on what are their limitations or challenges they might face while hosting a volunteer, specially from a disadvantaged background.

We also suggest preparing a day of preparation and training both before and on arrival, before starting this volunteer program.

What could you want to find out? Some examples...

- What are your expectations and motivations for the voluntary service?
- Do you have any allergies? Any diets or special food needs we should know of?
- Do you have any health problems?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- Do you need any personal assistance?
- Do you need any medical assistance?
- What language skills do you have? How well do you speak the local language?
- Do you live alone or with other people? What do you need for your accommodation?
- How do you work with other people?
- How do you react in certain situations?
- Have you ever been in crisis situations? Have you ever experienced emotional distress?
- What pronouns would you like us to use for you?
- Who are your closest persons? Who are your emergency contacts in what cases?
- How should we structure mentoring for you?

An inclusive infosheet

It is useful to have all practical information in a written way as well through the so-called Infosheet.

Some things to include:

- What is the volunteer going to do, for how long and where?
- Who are you and who are the people in your team - who will be your main contact people?
- What is your organisation, what are its aims and experiences?
- Link and exact coordinates of the location of their accommodation (hostel, apartment, farm etc) in order to be sure they have the right address
- Information about the right electricity plug and the currency in the country, what is the best option where to exchange the money
- Info about the weather and the climate in general, what to bring and not in most of the cases
- Info about some cultural habits and important laws, and what to avoid doing (also to not get in troubles with the authorities)
- Info about the arrival (if needed, we might send a person to pick up the volunteer and to reach the place in a safety and fastest way)
- Info about the closest useful points, such as the supermarkets, the laundry place, the pharmacy
- The most important emergency contacts: ambulance, police, fireman and of course a person contact from our organization.
- General timetable for the complete duration of the voluntary service (for a longer volunteering opportunity, at least the first two months) with their activities and times, in order to give a description what the volunteer should be prepared for mentally.
- Reports of previous volunteers including tips for social activities

During the volunteering service

- Once the volunteer has arrived, you could provide another info kit with all the gadgets they might find useful or to feel welcome, such as the map of the city, a notebook, a T-Shirt from our organization logo, and a small dictionary with the basic phrases in the local language
- It might be useful to minimize cultural shock and to alleviate homesickness to find activities and to support them in creating a network of friends and buddies, free-time activities, fun things to do etc.
- You could do teambuilding exercises and regular meetings within your team, with other volunteers, other international people and locals as well
- Make sure that the volunteer has a personal mentor to call in any case they need anything as well as buddies to call to hang out and to do free-time activities together with

- You could have regular reflection meetings e.g. weekly. Reflect about new needs coming up and possible solutions for those

Further reading

Inclusion A to Z. A compass to international inclusion projects. The best of all SALTO Inclusion's youth work manuals in one publication.

Value the Difference Resource Pack. Value the Difference is a resource pack for youth workers, containing information and tools to engage young people across many topics relating to cultural diversity

Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. Background of the European Union's strategy to support vulnerable groups in society and young people who lack opportunities of their peers.