

# International volunteers in Polish schools and kindergartens

Research report on the impact of long-term Erasmus+ Volunteering projects on schools and kindergartens in Poland





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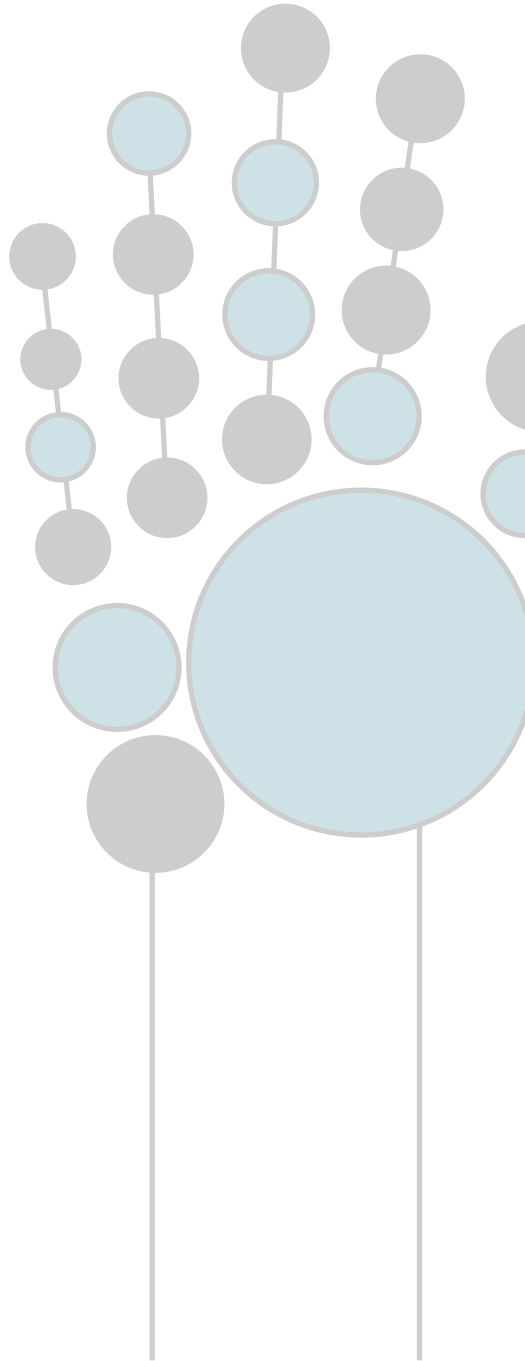
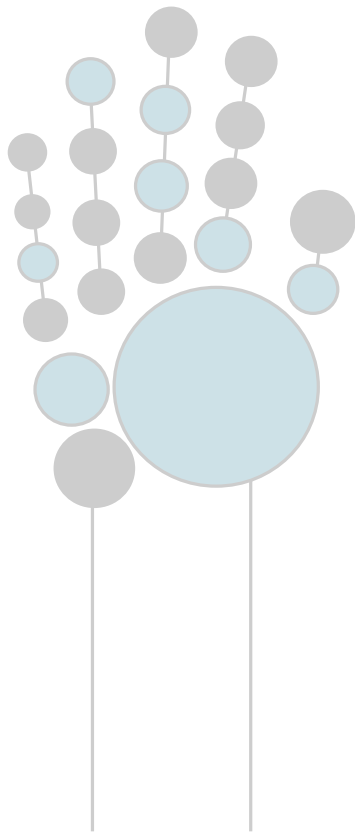
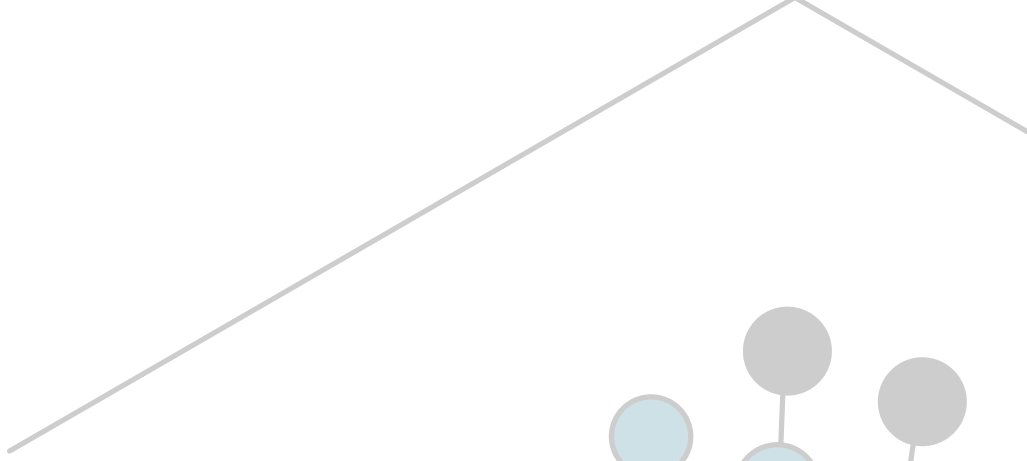


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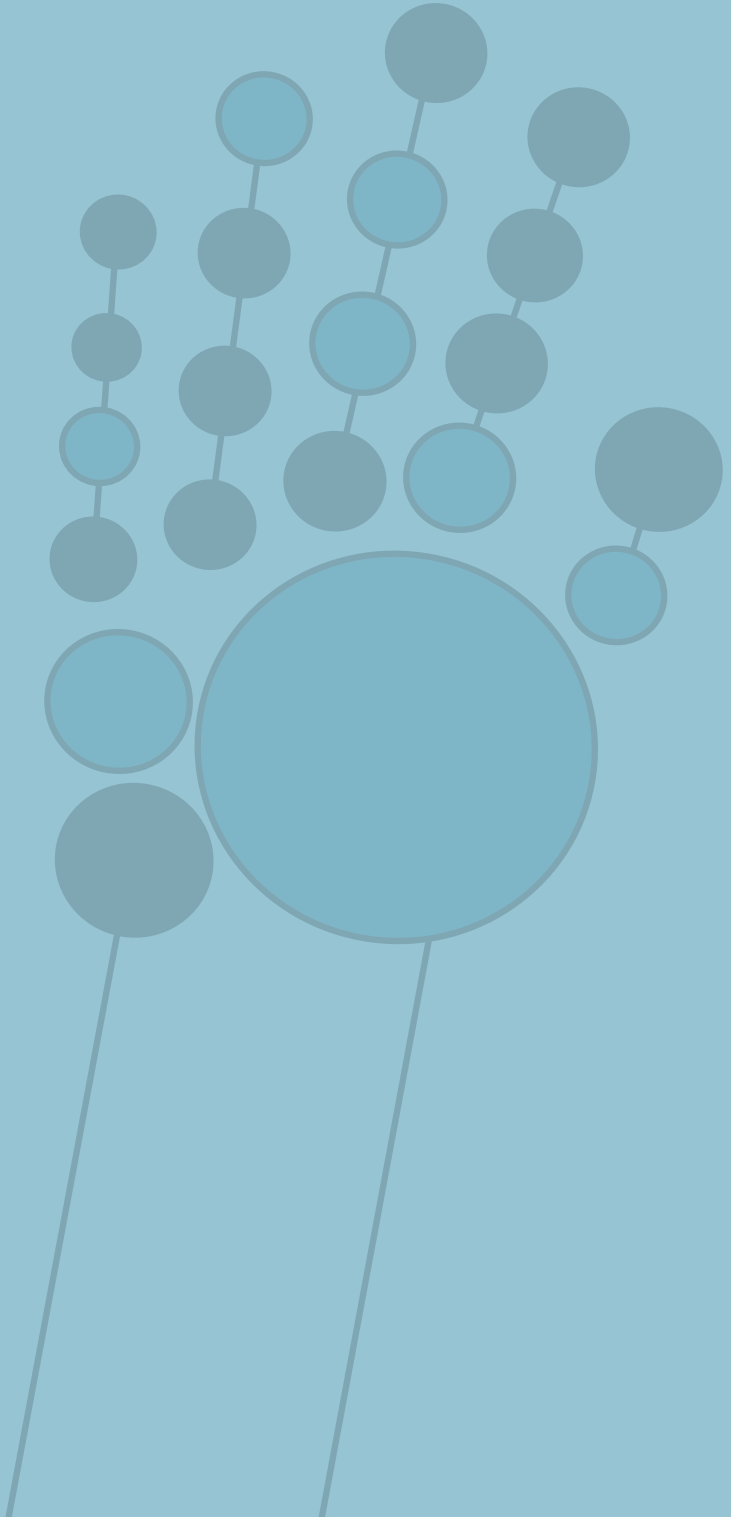
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# Introduction



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## Erasmus+ Volunteering

Erasmus+ Volunteering provided young people aged 17–30 with opportunities to engage in a voluntary service abroad (in any country of the European Union or beyond)<sup>1</sup>. Voluntary service projects were carried out on a full-time basis and could last for a maximum of 12 months. Volunteers participated in daily work of hosting organisations (e.g. NGOs, community centres, libraries, schools or kindergartens) and, for example, focussed on: work for local community, civic activity, social care, integration of disadvantaged people, work with disabled and disadvantaged people, environmental protection, broadly defined non-formal<sup>2</sup> education activities, activities centred around culture and arts or cooperation aimed at development. A voluntary service project could involve up to 30 volunteers who performed voluntary work individually or in a group. Erasmus+ volunteers did not bear any costs for their participation in the project, except for possible contribution to travel costs (if Erasmus+ grant did not fully cover these costs) and additional costs not related to the implementation of the action. Basic costs of volunteers' participation in a volunteering project were covered by Erasmus+ grant or by other funds allocated for that purposes by participating organisations.

Applications for funding for Erasmus+ Volunteering projects were submitted to National Agencies responsible for the implementation of EU programmes for youth (in Poland, this function was performed by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, which is also currently implementing the European Solidarity Corps – EU programme whose main component is volunteering).

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1 Erasmus+ Volunteering was previously called European Voluntary Service and was a component of the following programmes: YOUTH 2000–2006; Youth in Action 2007–2013; and Erasmus+ 2014–2018. In 2018 the European Commission has started phasing out of the name European Voluntary Service, replacing it with Erasmus+ Volunteering, but the principles and themes of the projects remaining unchanged. For the sake of clarity, in this report the name "Erasmus+ Volunteering" is used for European Voluntary Service projects (2000–2013) and Erasmus+ Volunteering projects (2014–2018). Since October 2018, international volunteering projects have been implemented under a new programme called European Solidarity Corps, which builds on 20 years of experience of the European Voluntary Service and supplements its existing activities with national activities, work and internship projects. This study does not cover European Solidarity Corps projects.

2 This report adopts the following definitions based on the Erasmus+ Programme Guide: 'formal education' (school and university education based on core curricula and study programmes compulsory up to a certain age), 'non-formal education' (provided out of school, structured, intentional and voluntary), 'informal education' (incidental, unplanned and often non-intentional learning).

Each Erasmus+ Volunteering project involved three types of actors: sending, hosting and coordinating organisation. Their applications were evaluated by experts from the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, which decided on the allocation of funds.

The duties of the coordinating organisation included: submitting an application, as well as financial and administrative responsibility for the whole project before the National Agency, coordination of the volunteering project in cooperation with all sending and hosting organisations and distribution of project funds between all sending and hosting organisations – in accordance with the division of tasks as laid down in an agreement on implementation of a volunteering project. Moreover, coordinating organisation was responsible for ensuring the participation of volunteers in the whole cycle of training and evaluation of voluntary service, and for broadly understood support provided to volunteers.

The main task of sending organisation was to prepare future volunteers for participation in international projects by helping them find and contact a hosting organisation, providing appropriate preparation before departure corresponding to individual needs, providing help in buying tickets and, acting in agreement with coordinating organisation, concluding an insurance contract for the volunteer. Sending organisation also maintained contact with volunteers and hosting organisations during project implementation and upon volunteers' return provided support in their reintegration into local environment, provided opportunities for the exchange of experiences and conditions for acquiring knowledge, skills and competences, and guidance and information on further education, training or employment opportunities. In Poland, mainly non-governmental organisations act as sending organisations.

Hosting organisation, i.e. the one where volunteers worked, was responsible for all aspects of volunteer's stay, ranging from organisational issues (e.g. providing adequate accommodation, paying pocket money or organising catering) to the assignment of a mentor who was directly responsible for individual, linguistic and pedagogical support to volunteers and to whom volunteers could turn in case of any problems. Hosting organisation also made arrangements for volunteers to learn the language of the host country and prepared them for the tasks they were entrusted with and, if necessary, offered them training to improve their qualifications and skills (e.g. required when working with people with disabilities or operating specialised computer software).

During their stay, volunteers were obliged to participate in on-arrival training and mid-term meeting organised by the National Agency of the host country. The aim of the former was to provide induction for the young volunteer

preparing him/her to provide help to the organisations, give orientation concerning the stay in the host country lasting several months, and to provide opportunity to meet other volunteers and learn about the principles of volunteering projects. The mid-term meeting took place during the implementation of the project (the volunteer's stay in the host country) and aimed at providing feedback on the project's progress and was another opportunity to meet other volunteers and inform them about other opportunities as part of EU educational initiatives.

A grant application concerning Erasmus+ volunteering project could be submitted by coordinating organisations. In order to apply for funding, they had to undergo an accreditation process (which also applied to sending and hosting organisations involved in project implemented by the coordinating organisation). It was created to ensure high standards of project implementation and support organisations in finding partners. Accreditation contributed to ensuring the quality of the activities and facilitated communication between the organisation and the structures of the programme, so that all parties involved were aware of the values, objectives and principles of Erasmus+ Volunteering. All organisations had to demonstrate their capacity to carry out volunteering projects in accordance with Erasmus+ rules. Therefore, accreditation was the organisation's ticket to Erasmus+ Volunteering and was a testimony to its compliance with the programme's quality standards. Moreover, accreditation was a precondition for participation in the programme, but obtaining it did not automatically lead to obtaining a grant for an Erasmus+ Volunteering project. Grant applications were assessed on the basis of criteria set out in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide with taking project quality into account.

Volunteers carried out their projects in organisations holding accreditation, but in many cases organisations delegated volunteers for short-term assignments in other friendly institutions, which did not have to be accredited to host volunteers.

### **Erasmus+ Volunteering in Poland**

In Poland, 428 organisations and institutions received Erasmus+ accreditation. The vast majority of them are NGOs and the second most numerous group are schools and kindergartens.

Out of 127 schools and kindergartens authorised to host volunteers, as many as 91 decided to implement volunteering projects. However, none of them have applied for a grant to the National Agency on their own. All of them cooperate with experienced coordinating organisations, which on their behalf submit applications, support them during volunteer recruitment process and support schools and kindergartens in the implementation of projects.

## Organisations accredited to implement Erasmus+ Volunteering projects.

### Breakdown by organisation status and type, 2014–2018<sup>3</sup>

Type of institution	Number of accreditations	Status awarded
NGO (association, foundation)	197	Hosting, coordinating, sending organisation
Kindergarten	69	Hosting organisation
Public institution (including: libraries, community centres, welfare centres, museums, county councils, municipal counties)	60	Hosting, coordinating organisation
School	58	Hosting organisation
Church organisation	23	Hosting, coordinating, sending organisation
Voluntary Labour Corps	13	Hosting, coordinating, sending organisation
Other	8	Hosting, coordinating, sending organisation

Source: own study based on statistics developed by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

### Research rationale

In accordance with the principles set out in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Erasmus+ Volunteering projects were implemented following non-formal education principles and consisted in learning through practice and experience, which is not based on the traditional student – teacher relationship<sup>4</sup>. Pursuant to the definition adopted by the European Commission, in non-formal learning a person who teaches (facilitator) and a person who learns (participant) are in a relationship based on partnership<sup>5</sup>. Facilitators (in the case of Erasmus+ Volunteering these are usually employees of the organisation hosting a volunteer) can support and influence learning processes, but should not impose knowledge and information on participants. The participant is at the centre of the learning process and it is the task of the facilitator to support him/her in this process.

<sup>3</sup> In the second half of 2019, accreditation was replaced by the Quality Label of the European Solidarity Corps.

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus+ Programme Guide: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on youth work, 2010/C 327/01.

Moreover, non-formal education (Bratek, Miłoś, Szlę 2014):

- is based on voluntary participation and often results from the intrinsic motivation of learners who are also responsible for defining the purpose of the learning process;
- takes place in an organised way, within a structure developed and established jointly by the facilitator and learners;
- is based on experience and reflection;
- takes place outside the school/university, in a diverse environment, depending on the needs of learners, in their free time;
- emphasises creativity, self-expression, individual and group involvement;
- should provide favourable conditions for self-fulfilment and self-development of participants;
- assumes changeability of roles, on the basis of mutual learning: facilitator can both share knowledge and learn from participants.

Schools and kindergartens are institutions operating on the principles of formal education, which, in contrast to non-formal (*Recognising...* 2010) learning:

- is mandatory until a certain age, and participation in it is mostly due to external motivation;
- is implemented in the framework of core curriculum imposed by the authorities, the implementation of which rests on teachers and lecturers who pass on knowledge to pupils and students;
- involves a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student;
- is mainly provided in a homogeneous classroom or lecture room environment;
- involves a grading system, and diplomas and certificates issued by the institutions are used to attest learning outcomes;
- is subordinate to state authorities (e.g. the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education or the Ministry of Health).

In Poland, the implementation of long-term international volunteering projects based on the principles of non-formal education in schools and kindergartens is a relatively new phenomenon, therefore there is not much information about it in the literature on the subject. Although there are studies examining the impact of international exchanges on schools, like for example, the report entitled *The impact of EU projects on the quality of school operations* by Bożena Ciesielska of the Primary School in Żabnica (Ciesielska 2015) or an article by Grzegorz Dobek entitled *The impact of school youth exchanges on the development of students' personality*" (Dobek 2014), but these studies refer to short-term projects, in which pupils experience international mobility. A similar subject matter, but focussing

on teacher mobility, has been described by Michał Pachocki in his report *Mobile teachers change their schools* (Pachocki 2016).

On the other hand, there are few studies examining the impact of long-term projects implemented in non-formal education sector, more and more of which are carried out in Polish schools and kindergartens. Attempts to evaluate such activities are made by organisations hosting and coordinating Erasmus+ Volunteering, e.g. the Anawoj Association for International and Intercultural Exchange from Michałów or the Polish Robert Schuman Foundation from Warsaw.

The publication entitled *European Voluntary Service in institutions of formal education* by Paulina Podolak and Anna-Sophii Pappai of the Anawoj (Podolak, Pappai 2017) Association focuses on the reasons for hosting international volunteers and presents examples of good practice of projects implemented in schools and kindergartens in the Podlaskie Province. Among the reasons mentioned were the growing involvement of Polish schools in international activities (e.g. youth exchanges), and Erasmus+ Volunteering can serve as their natural continuation. In addition, the role of volunteers in introducing non-standard methods of working with young people based on experimentation and play was highlighted, as well as their positive impact on the development of language competences among young people attending the institution.

As part of the project entitled "EVS as added value to formal education"<sup>6</sup>, in March 2018 Polish Robert Schuman Foundation hosted a seminar focussing on the presence of international volunteers at Polish schools and kindergartens and challenges related to that. The most important ones included, among other things, problems with communicating with volunteers, difficulties with clearly defining the roles and tasks of volunteers and their relationship with teachers and children attending the institution.

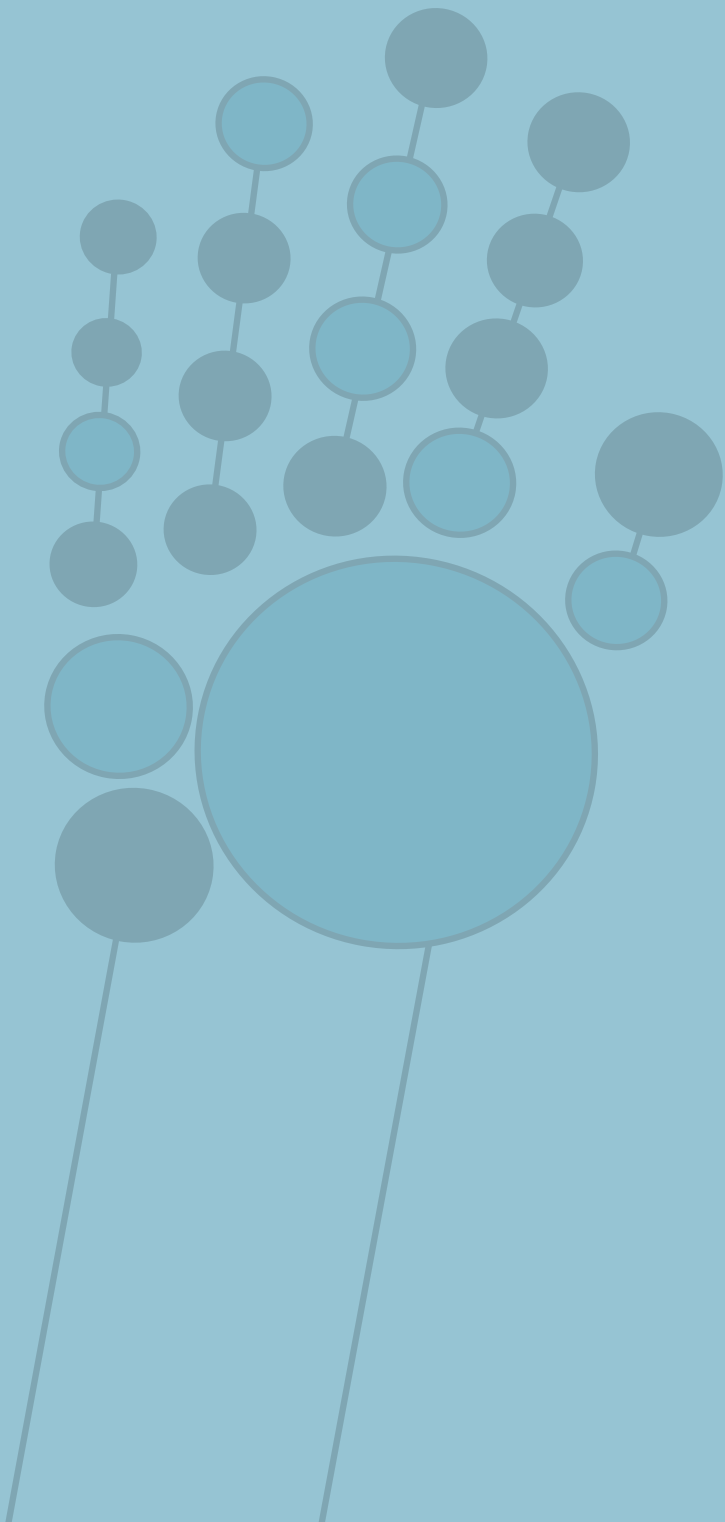
As far as research conducted so far on the impact of Erasmus+ Volunteers on institutions operating in formal education sector is concerned, the report prepared by the Archimedes Foundation – Estonian National Agency of Erasmus+ is worth mentioning. The report entitled *The impact of non-formal education activities on the formal education institutions through the Youth in Action programme European Voluntary Service projects* (*The impact...* 2013) analyses the impact international volunteers have on formal education institutions (it should be noted that in Estonia a large number of Erasmus+ long-term volunteering projects are carried out in schools and kindergartens). The study proved that thanks to the implementation of volunteering projects

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6 Seminar "EVS as added value to formal education" (12–17 March 2018, Warsaw).

in schools, teachers' knowledge of non-formal education methods has significantly improved and teachers themselves felt more motivated to learn a foreign language. The interviewed teachers also stressed the positive impact of volunteers on pupils (e.g. in the context of learning about different cultures and customs or developing the ability to communicate in a foreign language).

# Research objective and methodology





The objective of the study was to identify and describe the impact of long-term volunteering projects on schools and kindergartens (in accordance with the 'impact' evaluation criterion), and to assess the extent to which the needs of hosting organisations, as defined in their grant applications, have been satisfied (the 'efficiency of implementation' criterion)<sup>7</sup>. The study was also intended to describe long-term activities undertaken by international volunteers in Polish schools and kindergartens and to learn about the reasons for choosing a school or a kindergarten as the place of one's long-term international volunteering.

Given the above assumptions, the focus of the study was defined on the basis of the following research questions:

- What did Erasmus+ Volunteering projects in schools and kindergartens involve? (Additional questions: What were their objectives, course and outcomes? What duties did the volunteers have?)
- Why did schools and kindergartens host international volunteers? (Additional question: Did they work with Polish volunteers too?)
- Did such volunteering projects have an impact on schools and kindergartens? If yes, what was the nature of this impact? (Additional questions: Did they have an impact on teachers and kindergarten workers, pupils and institution's environment? If yes, how?)
- What was the profile of the international volunteer on a long-term volunteering project in a school or a kindergarten in Poland?
- Why did international volunteers decide to go on a long-term volunteering project in a Polish school/kindergarten?
- Were the schools and kindergartens satisfied with the hosting of international volunteers? (Additional question: What factors contributed to satisfaction or lack thereof?)

In order to answer these research questions, triangulation of methods was applied: desk research and an analysis of Erasmus+ Volunteering project statistics; quantitative research (an online survey questionnaire was sent to former international volunteers who worked in Polish schools and kindergartens in 2014–2018); and qualitative research (individual in depth interviews with teachers and project coordinators, and one focus group interview with representatives of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System who are responsible for the implementation of Erasmus+ Volunteering projects and the European Solidarity Corps in Poland).

Because of the relatively small size of the researched community (and the community of schools and kindergartens who hosted international

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7 The adopted evaluation criteria are consistent with the standards defined by the Polish Evaluation Society, <http://pte.org.pl/o-ewaluacji/> [access: 28.02.2020].

volunteers in relation to the total number of schools and kindergartens in Poland) and the limited range of the phenomenon in question, the research was primarily qualitative and its nature could be described as descriptive and explorative.

The study was conducted using the following methods and techniques:

- At each institution selected for the study dyadic interviews were held. Each interview involved at least two respondents: a person responsible for coordinating Erasmus+ Volunteering project at the institution and a staff representative (school or kindergarten teacher). In four cases, the head of the institution also participated in the interview.
- A focus group interview was conducted with employees of the National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme responsible for evaluating Erasmus+ Volunteering projects.
- An online survey questionnaire (via the online tool [webankieta.pl](http://webankieta.pl)) in English was sent out to former international volunteers who participated in long-term volunteering projects in Polish schools and kindergartens in 2014–2018.

### **Research limitations**

The main limitations were related to the methodology, i.e. they concerned the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee. The study was conducted by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System – an institution responsible for providing financial and expert support to Erasmus+ Volunteering projects, which may have had an influence on the answers given during individual in-depth interviews and in the survey. The respondents seemed quite reserved about commenting on any problems associated with international volunteering projects at their institutions.

It should also be noted that the study methodology asks for some caution in interpreting its results. The study sample was neither random nor representative of the entire population of schools and kindergartens in Poland hosting international volunteers. However, the systematic selection facilitated the creation of a typology of schools and kindergartens and was, furthermore, motivated by accessibility of subjects.

### **Selection and description of the research sample**

#### **Schools and kindergartens**

According to data from the Foundation for the Development of the Education System in 2018 there were 128 formal education institutions accredited to host international volunteers under Erasmus+. 69 of them were kindergartens (including one playgroup) and 58 were schools (33 were groups of schools and

25 were primary schools, including two special needs schools). There was also one higher education institution with the accreditation.

In the qualitative study, the sample was selected purposefully, based on the following typology:

- Three accredited institutions (two schools and one kindergarten) which had previously hosted one long-term Erasmus+ Volunteering project;
- Four accredited institutions (two schools and two kindergartens) which had previously hosted more than three long-term Erasmus+ Volunteering projects;
- Three non-accredited institutions (two schools and one kindergarten) which had hosted long-term Erasmus+ volunteers on a non-full-time basis.

In five of the studied institutions a long-term Erasmus+ Volunteering project was being implemented at the time of this study.

#### Profile of the sample of researched institutions hosting long-term volunteers.

Type of institution	Size of institution	Location	Voivodeship
Combined kindergarten–primary school	520 pupils	Town > 10k inhabitants	Świętokrzyskie
Group of disability inclusive schools	300 pupils	City > 100k inhabitants	Podlaskie
Group of schools (upper secondary general and technical school)	120 students	Town < 5k inhabitants	Podlaskie
Secondary school of fine arts	170 students	City > 100k inhabitants	Śląskie
Group of special needs schools	100 pupils	City > 100k inhabitants	Małopolskie
Primary school	250 pupils	Town 30–50k inhabitants	Pomorskie
Kindergarten	120 children	City > 100k inhabitants	Mazowieckie
Kindergarten	50 children	Rural commune < 10k inhabitants	Pomorskie
Disability inclusive kindergarten	80 children	City > 100k inhabitants	Świętokrzyskie

Source: own materials.

A total of 10 in-depth interviews were conducted (6 in schools and 4 in kindergartens) with 44 staff members (20 Erasmus+ Volunteering project coordinators, 20 teachers and 4 headteachers).

All institutions which participated in the qualitative study had some experience with international education projects, although this was not a selection criterion. Many of them had also extensive experience in conducting local volunteering activities, e.g. at school volunteer clubs. A distinction should be made, however, between the volunteering efforts of students from those institutions (mostly older youth from secondary and primary schools) addressed

to the local community and the cooperation with Polish volunteers acting for schools and kindergartens.

## Volunteers

In addition to in-depth interviews with the management and staff of the schools and kindergartens, a quantitative study was also conducted (via an online survey) among former international volunteers who were hosted in Polish schools and kindergartens in 2014–2018 on a long-term (minimum six months' long) volunteering project. The survey questionnaire contained 14 closed-ended and 5 open-ended questions, and was distributed to 464 former international volunteers. Over a period of five weeks 169 surveys were returned, of which 120 were more than 85 percent completed (and only those were deemed eligible to be included in the quantitative analysis)<sup>8</sup>. This means that the survey was completed by 36.4 percent of those invited to participate in the study (and 25.8 percent completed at least 85 percent of the survey).

A vast majority of the respondents (73 percent) were women. They were also more likely than men to have a degree in education science. Also, more than half declared that they had already had some experience working with children and youth in their own country before the Erasmus+ Volunteering project in Poland.

Men accounted for 27 percent of the study sample. Some had a background in education, but equally often a degree in services or social sciences was declared. Slightly more than a quarter of the men said that before the volunteering project in Poland they had had experience working with children and youth.

### Education and experience of volunteers

average age: 26

27.5% with a degree  
in education science

more than 51%  
had experience working  
with children and youth  
before volunteering  
in Poland



73%

n=92

27%

n=28

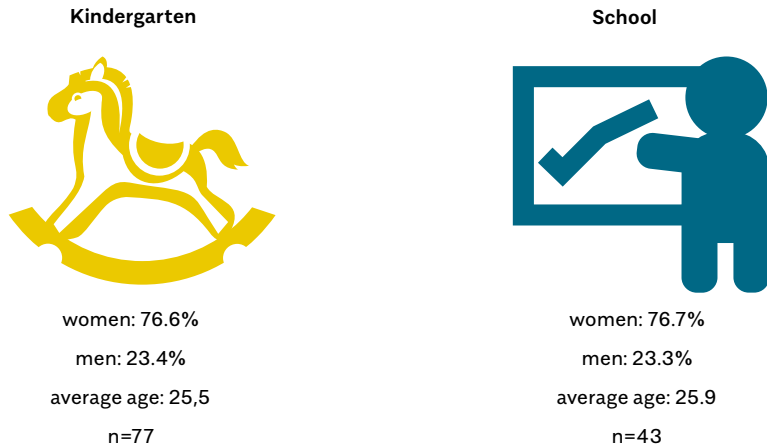
19.5% with a degree  
in education science

28% had experience  
working with children  
and youth before  
volunteering in Poland

8 In the charts illustrating volunteers' answers, the "N" stands for the total number of analysed responses, whereas "n" stands for the total number of answers for a given question or in a given sub-group.

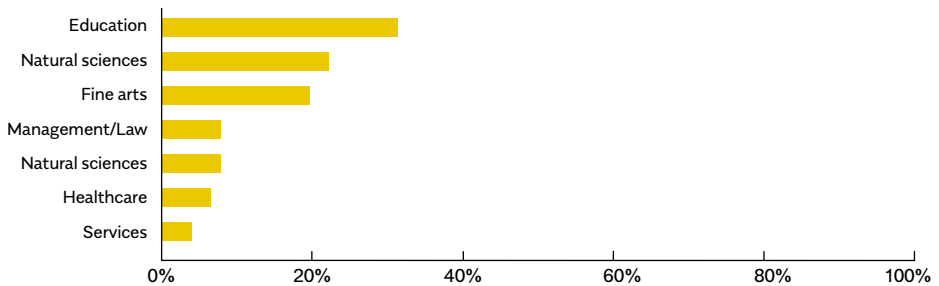
There were significant similarities between the two settings where the volunteers were hosted in terms of their sex and average age. Most of them were young adults. At the time of their volunteering project in Poland they were in their final years of study, or had just graduated before coming to Poland. Younger persons, aged 18 to 24, accounted for less than 20 percent of the study sample.

**Research sample divided by hosting organisation**

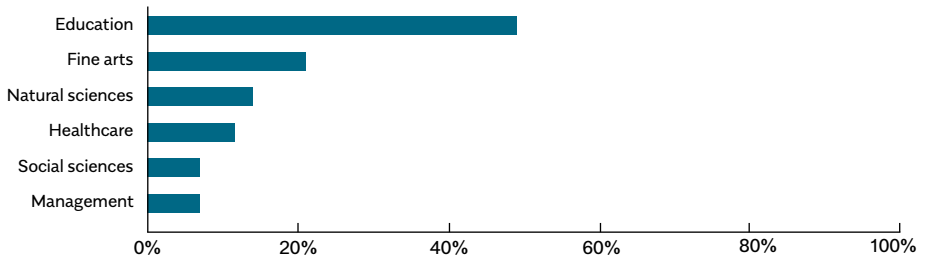


There are further evident similarities between the volunteers hosted by the two types of institutions. The former volunteers usually had an academic background in education (more often those hosted in schools – 48.8 percent of the respondents – than those hosted in kindergartens – 31.2 percent of the respondents). The percentage of respondents with a fine arts degree was similar in both groups. Interestingly, there were significantly more persons with a social sciences degree among the volunteers hosted in kindergartens.

**Academic degree. Responses of volunteers hosted in kindergartens (n=77)**



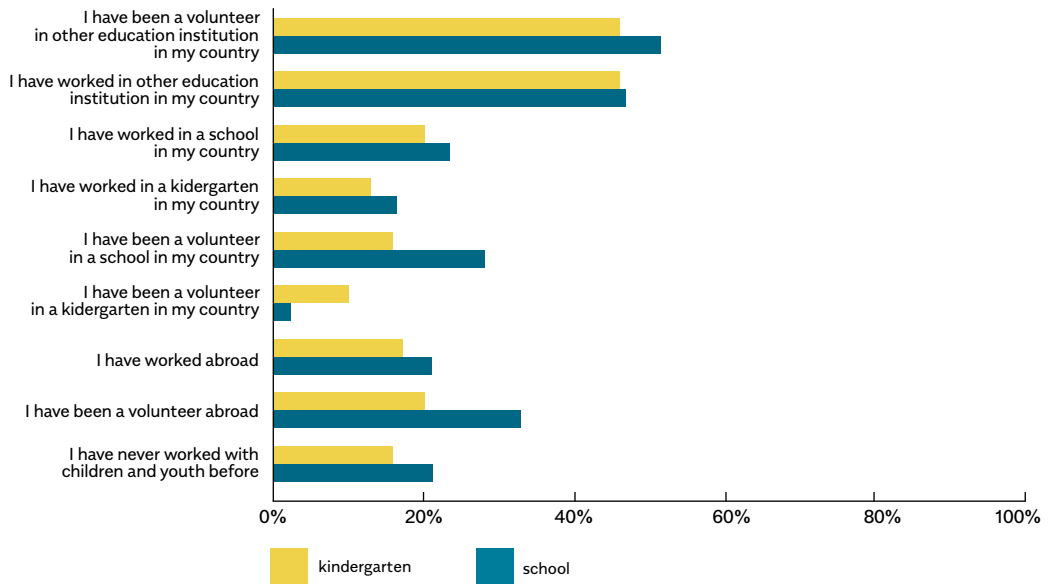
**Academic degree. Responses of volunteers hosted in schools (n=43)**



Moreover, there are similarities when it comes to the experience gained before the volunteering project in Poland. Nearly one half of the respondents had some experience working or volunteering in a school or other institution for youth (cultural centre, library or community centre) before starting a long-term volunteering project in a Polish school or kindergarten. Of those, the percentage of respondents who declared previous volunteering in a kindergarten was the lowest. A significant share had experience working or volunteering abroad. 21 percent of volunteers hosted in schools and 15.7 percent of those hosted in kindergartens had never worked with children or youth before the project in Poland.

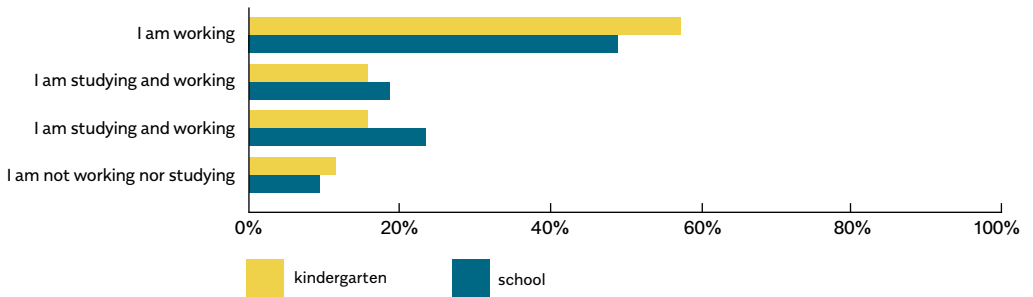
**Experience prior to a volunteering project in Poland.**

**Responses from volunteers by type of hosting organisation (N=120)**



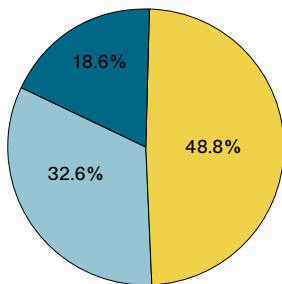
As for the current occupation of former volunteers, regardless of the hosting organisation, most of them work. On average, one in six respondents either studies and works or continues to study. One in ten respondents answered that they neither studied nor worked. An analysis of the open-ended questions suggests that those from that last group were, at the time of the survey, either volunteering (both in their home country and abroad), or looking for a job or between jobs.

**Current occupational situation of former volunteers by type of hosting organisation (N=120)**

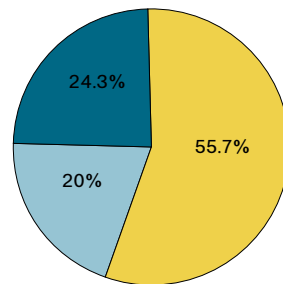


When asked about their current involvement in volunteering, most of the surveyed volunteers declared that they were either regularly or periodically engaging in such activity. One in five former volunteers did not pursue such projects at all. No significant differences were noted between the two types of hosting organisations.

**How often do you now engage in volunteering?  
Responses from former volunteers  
hosted in schools (n=43)**



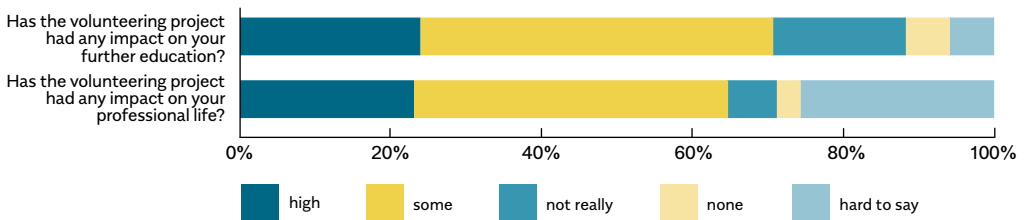
**How often do you now engage in volunteering?  
Responses from former volunteers  
hosted in kindergartens (n=77)**



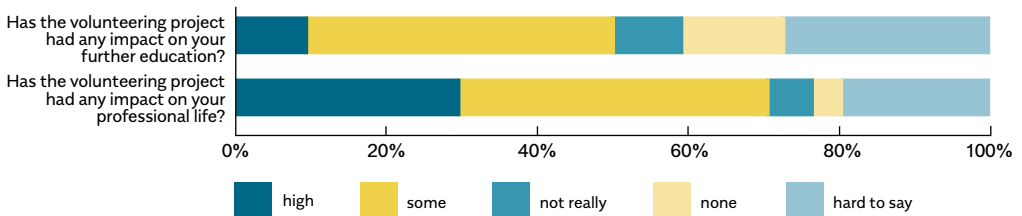
I do not engage in volunteering
  I engage in volunteering occasionally
  I engage in volunteering regularly

The volunteers differed in their assessment of how volunteering has impacted their professional life and further education. More than 64 percent of those who had previously volunteered in schools thought that participation in an international volunteering project had had big or some impact on their further education. In the case of former kindergarten volunteers, 50 percent of the respondents were of that opinion. Furthermore, a similar share of former school volunteers stated that the project had had big or some impact on their professional life. It should be noted, however, that about one in five former kindergarten volunteers were not able to specify whether the project had had any impact on their professional life and further education. A similar percentage of former school volunteers were not able to say whether the project has impacted their professional life. Nevertheless, the overall share of those who explicitly said that the volunteering project had had no influence on their professional life or education was minute.

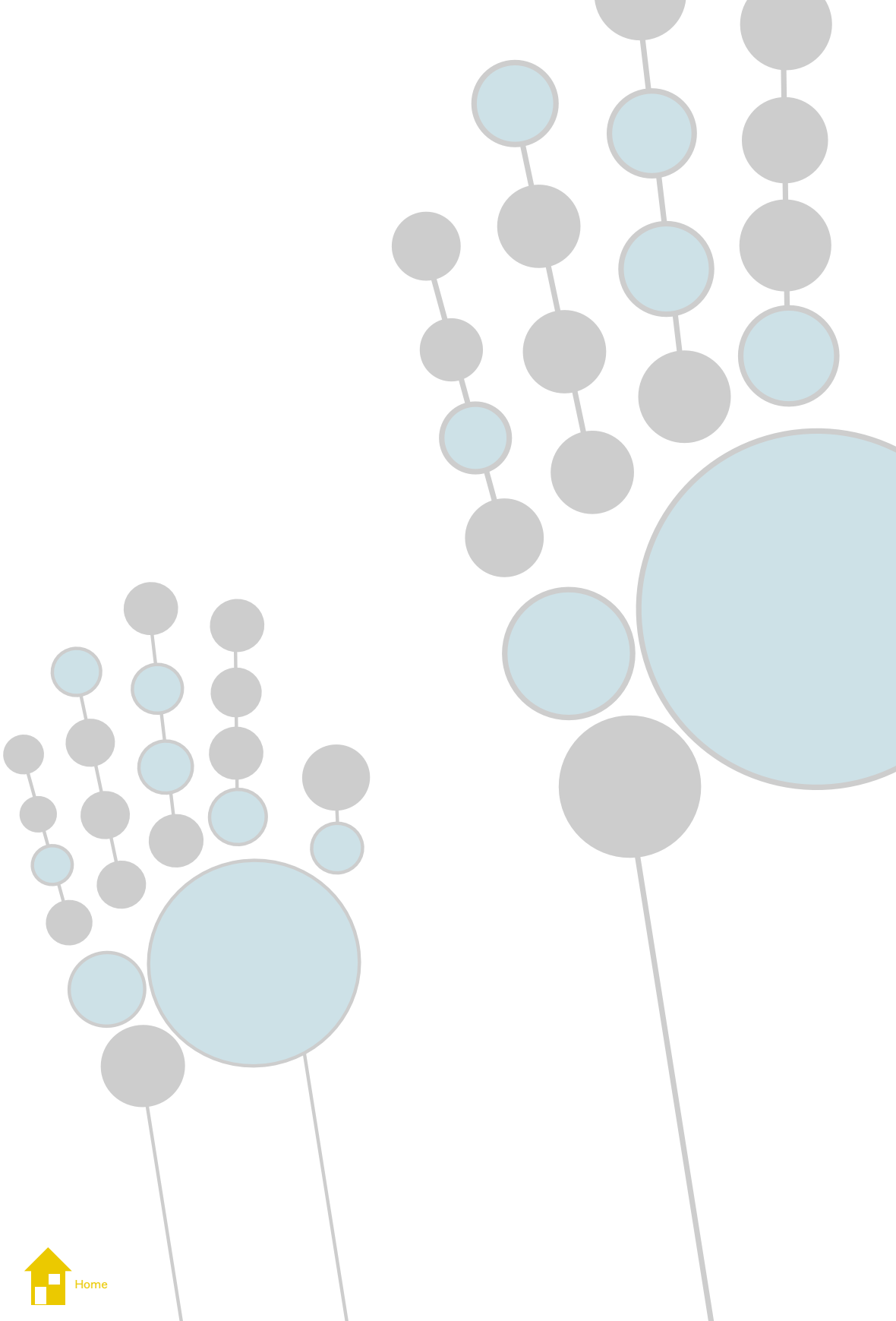
**Impact of the volunteering project on professional life and further education of former school volunteers (n=43)**



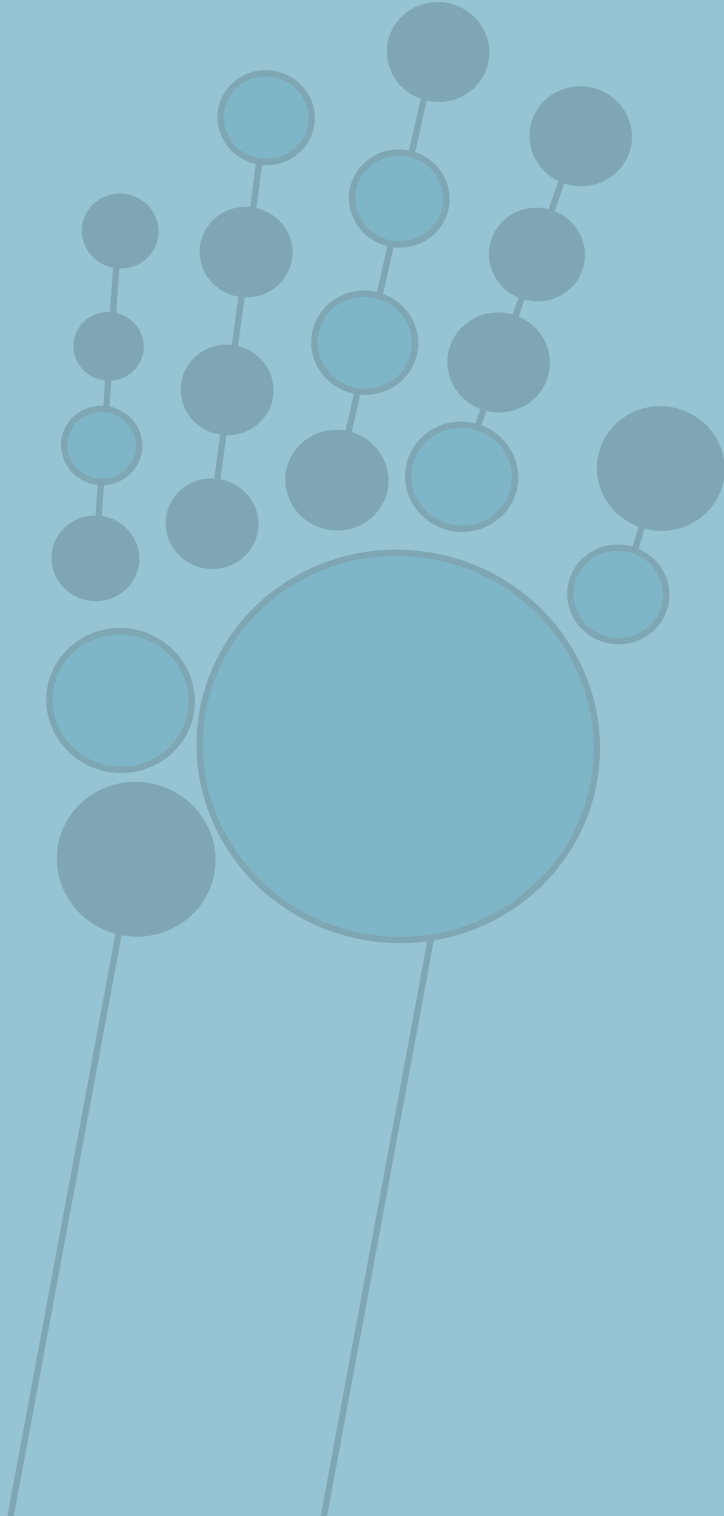
**Impact of the volunteering project on professional life and further education of former kindergarten volunteers (n=77)**







# Reasons for hosting international volunteers



For the majority of schools covered by the study, involvement in an international project was not a new experience. They had previously engaged in staff and pupil exchanges, and implemented projects aimed at developing linguistic competences and those related to the institution's profile. In some cases, the schools proactively encouraged their pupils to participate in volunteering activities, for example through school volunteer clubs or cooperation with local institutions such as cultural centres, care homes or nursing homes.

*We're doing a Polish-Italian exchange this year and we're hosting 45 Italians. And our current volunteer also happens to be from Italy. She's helping us a lot with this project, it simply will be much easier for us.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*We're also working with the Polish-American Freedom Foundation, which awards us grants for projects, and also sends volunteers from the US.*

Headteacher, combined kindergarten–primary school

*It is about helping elderly people from our local community with their household chores, or doing shopping or buying medicines for them. We also organise charitable events and collections in the school. The volunteers are children from our school. Right now we're signing an agreement regarding a larger initiative and our volunteers will be helping at a nursing home in our town. Our youth, accompanied by a catechist, will be spending time with those elderly people, read to them, play music and simply chat.*

Project Coordinator, combined kindergarten–primary school

Apart from one exception, the researched schools said that they were having problems with finding local volunteers from outside their own institution. All of the schools offer placements for students of education sciences, and every year several persons take advantage of that opportunity. One of the institutions admitted that in the past, students, once they completed their placement, would stay on as volunteers, but that kind of support did not happen anymore.

*We don't work with volunteers from our town, there simply aren't any.*

Headteacher, secondary school of fine arts

*There had been local volunteering for several years. The volunteers were students from a secondary school in our town. They would come to scheduled classes, extracurricular ones, organised after school. But there aren't any now, it was getting harder and harder to get them. But then we have international volunteers.*

Project Coordinator



*For some time now, for 10 years or so, it's been increasingly more difficult to get local volunteers. In the past there used to be a certain tendency, students who were placed here would stay on as volunteers, but now it's more difficult to get them. And our institutions has increasingly more "demanding" pupils (in medical terms). Most of our pupils are children and youth who are unable to speak due to paralysis of articulatory muscles. And the volunteer who comes here only for a short period of time finds it difficult to establish any connection, to find a common language.*

Project Coordinator, special needs school

Similarly to the schools, the studied kindergartens – before they made the decision to host a long-term volunteer, had already had experience with international projects. Some of the employees had taken part in international training and staff exchanges. Some of the institutions had hosted international volunteers on a part-time basis, and once they felt confident about such a form of cooperation, decided to get involved in a long-term volunteering project. And just like the schools, the kindergartens also had occasionally worked with local volunteers, who contributed to their institutions.

When asked about their reasons for hosting international volunteers, the schools participating in the study usually stressed the fact that they wanted to introduce some variety into the school's life, open their pupils to the world and increase their cultural or religious awareness, and develop their linguistic competences.

*We wanted to open our students to other people. Students, especially those from a skills training school for special needs persons, often join the programme when they're 21 and are trained until they're 24. So they come with certain established patterns, and we wanted to give them some 'fresh air', show them something different. That there are things other than this and their previous school, that there's also the whole world. So when we refer to the English or the Italians, they're not just some stories, but actual people who really exist. And our students respond really well to such classes with volunteers.*

Teacher, special needs school

*We wanted to open our pupils to other nationalities, so that they could see that foreigners are just like us. And so that they started to speak English, because they are so terribly anxious about it, even though they know grammar really well.*

Teacher, primary school

Another reason for hosting international volunteers frequently mentioned by the schools which participated in the qualitative research was the success of such initiatives observed in other local or partner institutions (schools, cultural centres or NGOs), and the curiosity to see whether such form of volunteering would prove useful for them too. Many of the researched schools were encouraged to host volunteers by NGOs, which acted as coordinating organisations, from their town or province. In one case the positive experience with Erasmus+ Volunteering has led to further international education-related initiatives funded by the EU (youth and staff exchanges).

*There were European volunteers at a nearby school. We heard that it was great, that they supported the school's work, that it was introducing a bit of variety. And so we decided to invite volunteers, too.*

Project Coordinator, primary school

*Our school has worked with a coordinating organisation for 13 years and we've hosted international volunteers. At first, they would stay with us only for a few hours a week and then go back to Kielce, but for several years now we've been hosting long-term volunteers on a full-time basis.*

Teacher, primary school

*We also work with a local foundation which has its own volunteers, including from outside the Erasmus+ programme and from outside Europe, who sometimes visit our institution. In summer, we had a volunteer from the US for three weeks, and despite it being a summer break, we generated great interest from the pupils.*

Headteacher, primary school

*We work with a coordinating organisation, which encouraged us to participate in a project. And because the project was successful, we decided to continue with it and got involved in other projects: other volunteers, and pupil and staff exchanges. As a school, we've become more open to the possibility of participating in such projects. I've known the coordinating organisation for a long time, and, in fact, they made that suggestion.*

Headteacher, secondary school of fine arts

In most cases, the decision to host a volunteer was made by the headteacher, but in all cases it was consulted with the teaching staff. In three cases, it was the project coordinator (usually one of the teachers) who suggested hosting a volunteer and sought the approval of the headteacher and the board of teachers.

*I was told by a friend from a school we've partnered up with that they were hosting a volunteer and that it turned out great; I was curious how that would work for us, and so I talked to our headteacher, and then we discussed it at a meeting of the board of teachers, and so for the last two years we've been having one volunteer every year.*

Project Coordinator, primary school

Similarly to the schools, an important factor in the kindergartens' decision to host international volunteers was the fact that Erasmus+ Volunteering had been recommended to them by another institution (in most cases, by another kindergarten). Other reasons listed by the kindergartens included their eagerness to break away from the routine, to make the classes more diverse, and to open their pupils up to people from other countries. Interviewees from kindergartens also pointed out that in the preparation phase it was important for them to take part in a study visit in a similar institution that has already some experience with hosting foreign volunteers. Such visits made it possible to get to know the volunteering project from up close and to discuss potential problematic situations.

*We're hosting volunteers out of curiosity and, in fact, by chance. We've been working with them quite dynamically and, for many years now, with another local kindergarten. It's a special needs kindergarten. It has been hosting Erasmus+ volunteers for a long time and I knew from its employees that it was great. Then a man came to us from a coordinating organisation for the first interview. We are a mainstream kindergarten, without any disability inclusive sections. And there were some volunteers who are not able to handle work in such specific institutions. The coordinating organisation was managing projects in special needs kindergartens and there was an idea that those volunteers could from time to time do with a break at a mainstream kindergarten. We're a mainstream kindergarten, however we do have children on special diets, so they also need special nutritional, as well as motor stimulation, regimes.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

*Let me tell you from the point of view of a headteacher – if you have a permanent and good team, there's no worries. For 12 years now I've basically had the same staff, we understand*

*each other without words and we're well-integrated. But we also tend to get stuck in a rut, and I really hate that – it never pays off to be too fixed and repetitive. And so I thought that a volunteer – fresh blood and fresh perspective – could be chance for us to stay clear off undesirable rituals and habits as things should change over the years.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

There were evidently quite significant differences between the expectations that the institutions, both the schools and the kindergartens, had towards the volunteers they hosted. Some of them, especially those with lesser experience with long-term Erasmus+ volunteering, said they did not have any specific expectations. Special needs and disability inclusive institutions, as well as some of the kindergartens, were the most precise in describing what they were hoping for. This may have had to do with lower independence of the children they care for and with the more comprehensive nature of the support offered by volunteers in such facilities: ranging from handling logistical and organisational issues through teaching classes to looking after the children both at the institution and outside (e.g. on trips).

*We didn't have any great expectations. We knew that we'd have someone with an extra pair of hands for various jobs, for example trips, and that in itself was brilliant.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*First of all, one of the most important features of volunteers is that they are the same age as our students, which is 20 to 24 at a skills training school for special needs persons. Because our students have poor social experience, as they can't leave their home as often as they could, they establish friendships with the volunteers, to the extent that it's possible in the situation. Our students get very attached, and then, unfortunately, are very emotional about having to part, but, on the other hand, it's a lesson for them that life means changes, separations, and they get an opportunity here to practice that. Our volunteers bring an atmosphere of change and that's important to both our students and our staff. It's also very energising for the classroom.*

Project Coordinator, special needs school

*They're kind of teacher assistants, or, in fact, student assistants. Our students in many cases need help with everything, you need to help them turn on the computer, help them eat, and even though we follow the rule of minimum help, we still need to help a lot.*

Project Coordinator, special needs school

Hosting international volunteers came with many concerns, regardless of the institution's experience and nature. The hosting organisations were anxious about both the procedures associated with a volunteering project (settlements, reporting, financials) and the language barrier between them and the volunteer as well as whether their institution would be an interesting and attractive destination. In most cases the respondents admitted that their concerns were, at least in part, unnecessary. It often turned out that some volunteers, especially coming from Eastern Europe, are able to communicate without major problems. Those, who did not speak Polish or any Eastern European language still managed to communicate in other languages or with gestures – at least at the beginning of the project.

*We were worried that we wouldn't manage to communicate. But that anxiety was only within us.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*At first we were worried because the bureaucracy is terrific. We were also anxious whether we'd manage organisationally.*

Teacher, secondary school of fine arts

*We were mostly worried about the language barrier. Even though our staff speak English well, we were curious how we'd manage in practice, on a daily basis. Especially that the volunteer may not know any English. But we were lucky as our volunteer spoke Polish (she was a German with Polish roots).*

Headteacher, kindergarten

Project coordinators and teachers emphasised that support from both the management and the entire staff was extremely important for the project's success and for handling concerns and challenges.

*Our headteacher is great at motivating us, it's because of her courage that we got involved in this, because we were simply afraid, after all it's an additional responsibility for each and every of us when we have her (the volunteer – author's note) in our classroom. We need to give our time and attention to the children in the first place, so in a way it's a burden. But after a really short period of getting used to each other, she's now very useful to us.*

Teacher, kindergarten



*Let me tell you from the point of view of a headteacher – if you have a permanent and good team, there's no worries.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

To minimise the risk associated with the above concerns, all institutions which participated in the research had made far-reaching preparations before the volunteer arrived, and no significant differences were observed between the schools and the kindergartens. For that purpose, they usually held meetings with the coordinating organisations, and, in the case of less experienced schools and kindergartens, with other similar institutions having previous experience with international volunteers. For all the researched schools and kindergartens, the visit from a volunteer was an important event. In most cases all staff were involved in the preparations, however there were some institutions which delegated most of the planning to the project coordinator.

*We didn't prepare our children for the volunteer in any special way. In fact we told them a day before her arrival that there'd be a new person the following day, it was like a surprise. I think that there's no need to prepare children for something that is supposed to be fun for them.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*Before our first long-term project which we hosted here independently, we were extremely curious how things would turn out. But we had some concerns too. Even though we had previously had some experience with international volunteering, this time two volunteers were staying with us for a whole year. We were wondering how to manage their time, whether they'd feel comfortable in our school, and how the children would feel about their daily presence.*

Teacher, primary school

*The staff were certainly interested, hopeful that something interesting would be happening. We were a bit worried whether they'd settle in well, whether there'd be any conflicts and whether we'd be able to communicate. You see those volunteers in a photo during recruitment, but it's a whole different story to meet them in person.*

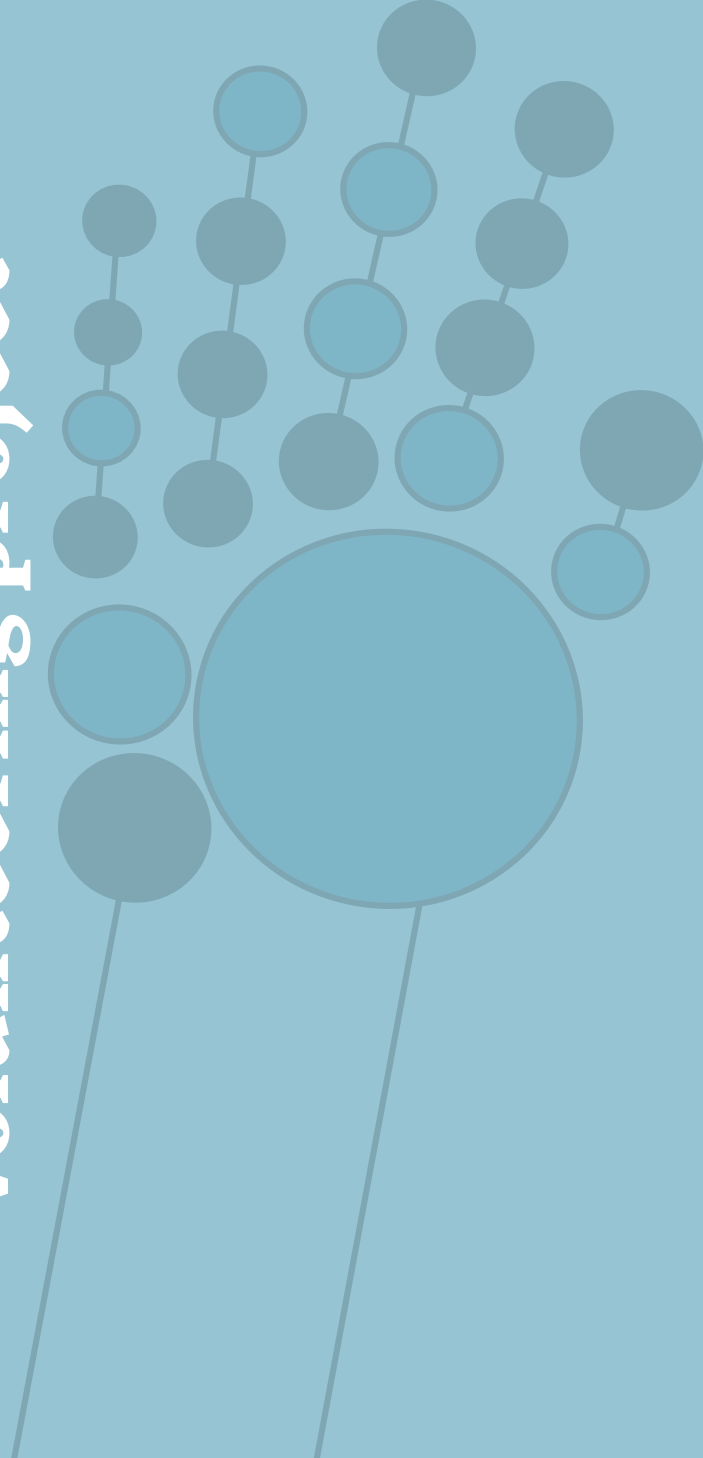
Project Coordinator, group of schools



# Reasons for participating in an international volunteering project



Home

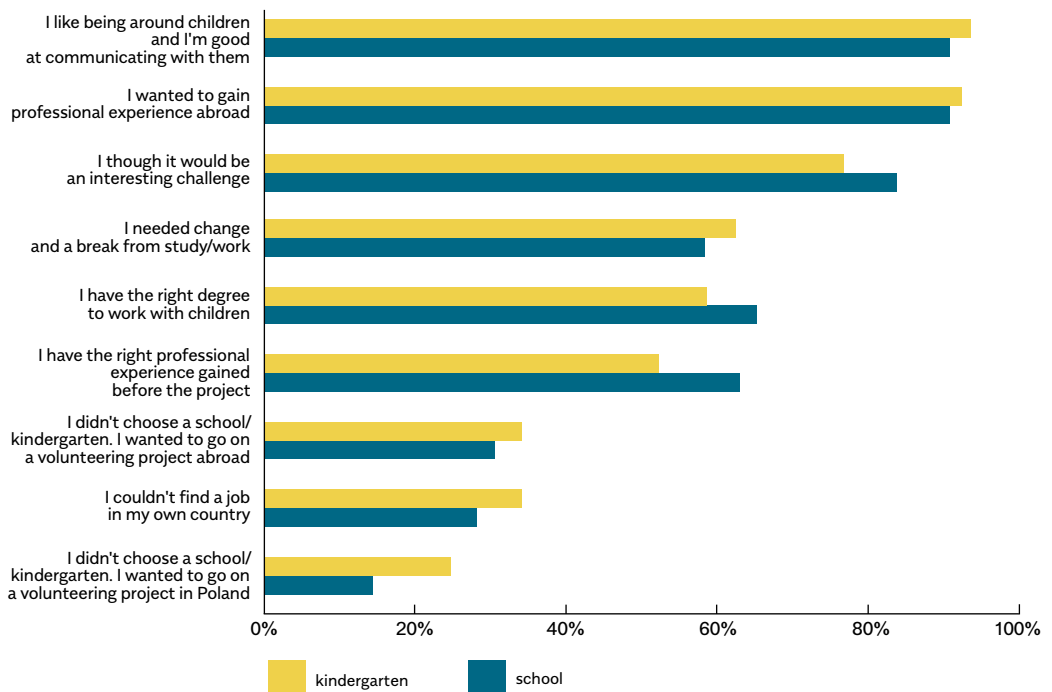


According to the survey, for the vast majority of former volunteers the choice of a school or a kindergarten in Poland as their location for a one-year volunteering project was a deliberate and planned decision, the reasons for which were complex.

The most frequently mentioned reason was the desire to gain professional experience abroad (91 percent of former school volunteers and 92 percent of former kindergarten volunteers). A crucial factor in opting for a school or a kindergarten as the hosting organisation was the fact that the surveyed volunteers (91 percent of school volunteers and 94 percent of kindergarten volunteers) liked being around children and youth.

Furthermore, more than 65 percent of the former volunteers hosted in schools and more than 58 percent of volunteers hosted in kindergartens stated that they had an educational background which made them suitable to work with children and youth. The percentage of those claiming to have adequate professional experience to take part in such volunteering projects was slightly higher among the school volunteers (63 percent) than among those hosted in kindergartens (52 percent). About 60 percent of the former volunteers agreed with the statement that they needed change and a break from studying or work, and that it was one of the reasons they decided to go on a long-term project to Poland.

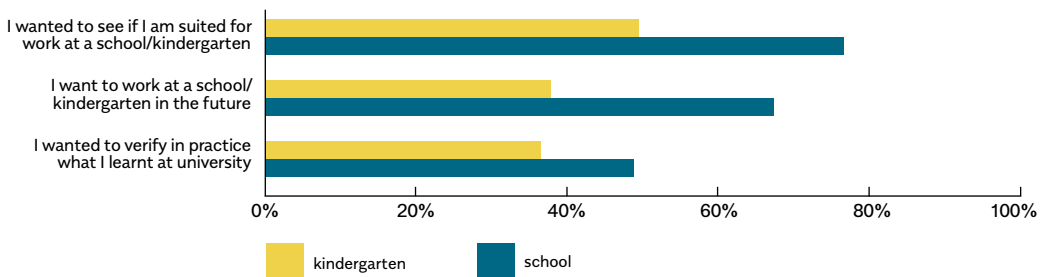
**Selected reasons for going on an international volunteering project in a school/kindergarten – similarities between hosting organisations. Percentage of affirmative answers (N=120)**

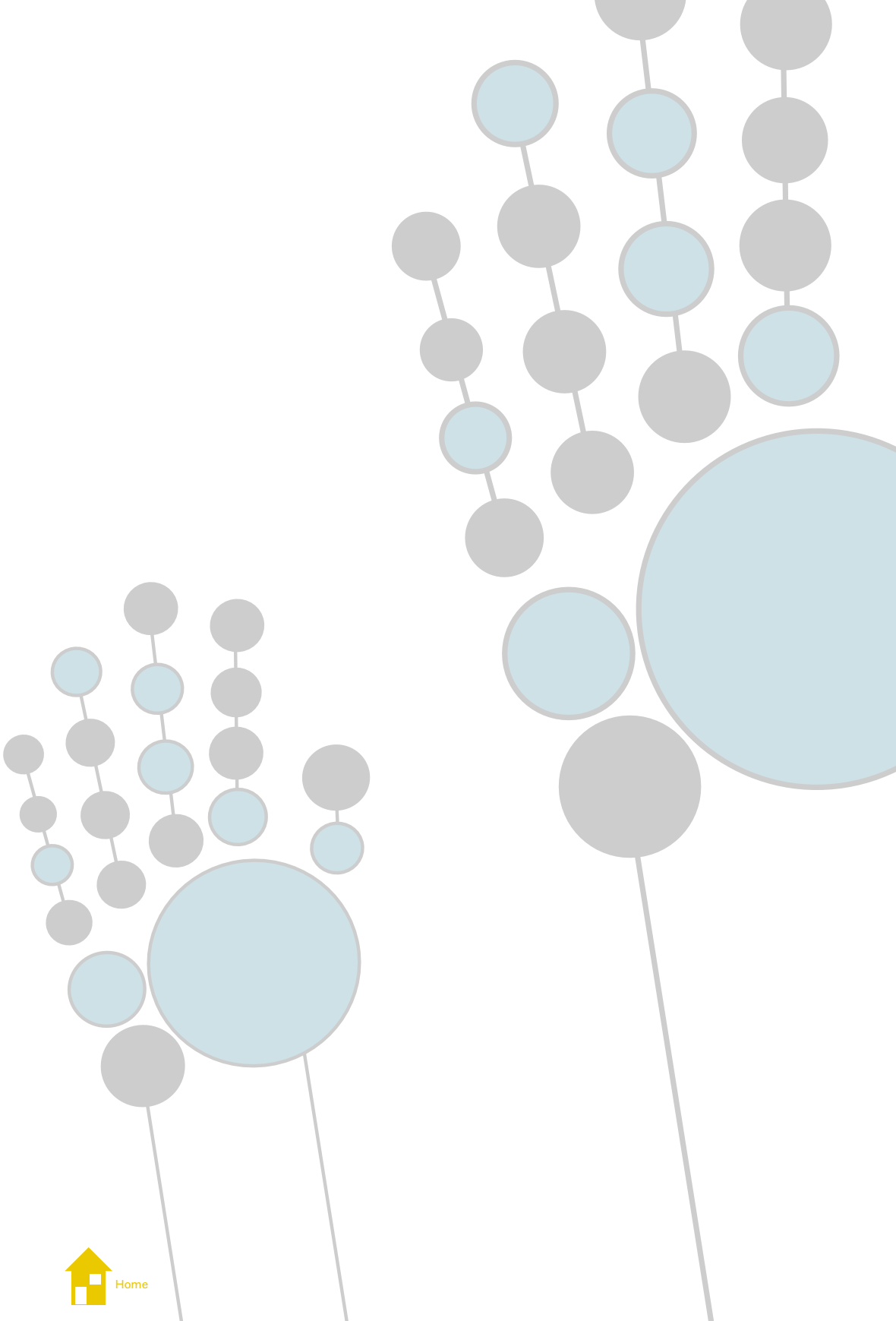


For about 30 percent of surveyed former volunteers hosted in Polish schools and kindergartens, volunteering was a remedy for problems with finding a job in their own country. A similar share said that the type of hosting organisation was irrelevant to them and they simply wanted to go volunteering abroad.

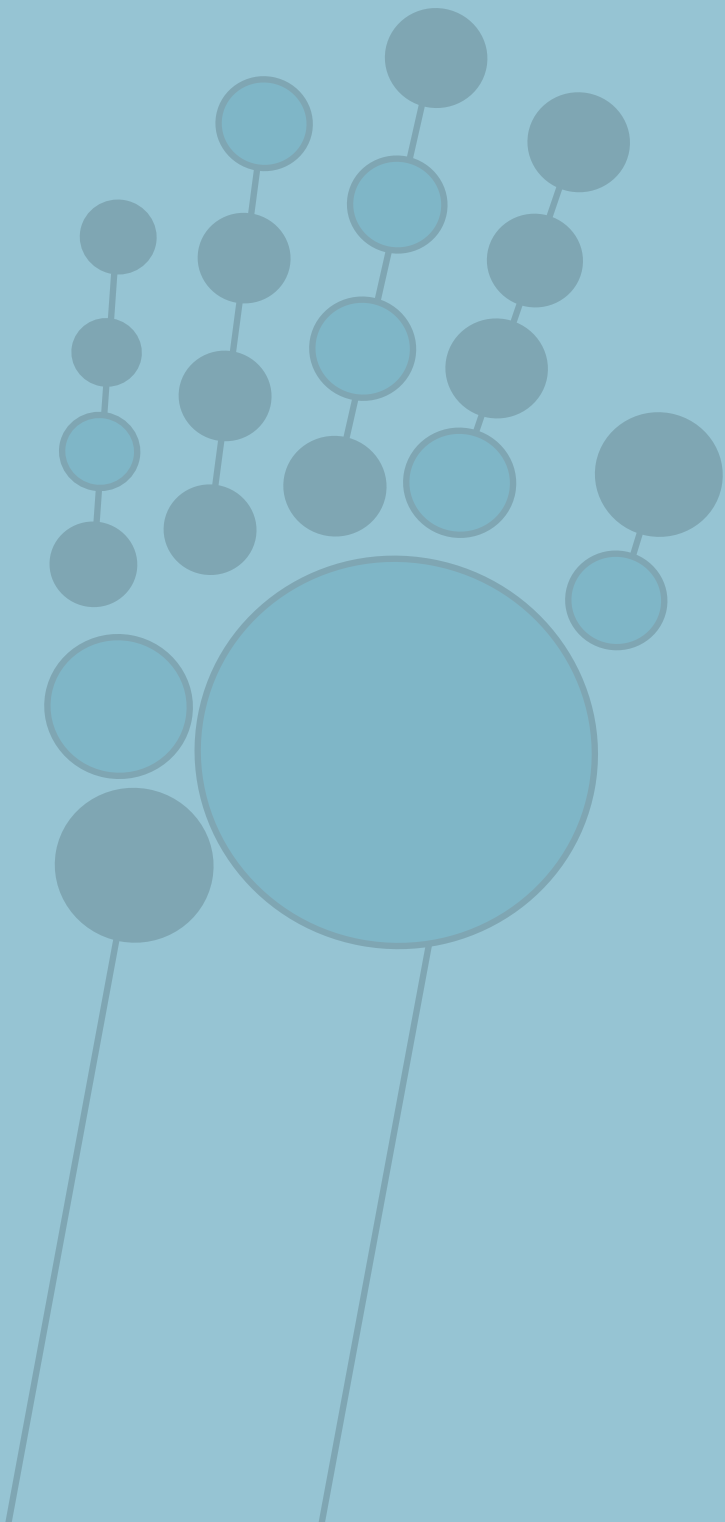
There are, however, statistically significant differences when it comes to other reasons for going on a volunteering project abroad, which depend on the type of hosting organisation. Former volunteers hosted in schools were much more likely to perceive their project in the context of a future career in education. As much as 67.4 percent said that they wanted to work in a school or a kindergarten in the future, and more than 76 percent claimed that they wanted to see whether such work would be suitable for them. Nearly half of the respondents said that by participating in the project they wanted to test their knowledge gained during formal education.

**Selected reasons for going on an international volunteering project in a school/kindergarten**  
– significant differences between hosting organisations. Percentage of affirmative answers (N=120)





# Daily duties of international volunteers



In accordance with the rules of the Erasmus+ programme, volunteers hosted in schools and kindergartens must not replace the teachers and carers or teach classes on their own. They should be involved in after-school activities and have the freedom to implement their own ideas or plans, if accepted by project coordinators.

The research showed that volunteers very often provide significant support to the teachers and carers of an institution: they look after the children and youths, teach language classes under supervision from regular staff, and assist during school trips or events organised at the institution. So on the one hand, they care for the children, but, on the other, themselves require support and supervision, especially when it comes to volunteers hosted in special needs settings or institutions with disability inclusive sections.

### **Volunteers' duties in schools**

In the majority of analysed projects, the volunteers were actively involved in the life of the institution. They mostly participated in after-school activities for the pupils, and also for the staff, they taught English and other languages of their home countries, and talked about their national and regional culture. The respondents also emphasised that the volunteers, even though they could not replace teachers, provided significant organisational support. Furthermore, foreign language teachers said that the presence of a volunteer in their classroom helped to make the class more interesting and contributed to active participation of pupils.

*They are not allowed to teach, but they can support teachers, both during classes and during after-school activities in the after-school club or the library.*

Project Coordinator, primary school

*Our volunteer prepared a presentation and a workshop about colloquial English, which our youth liked very much. He also told them what to do if they can't think of a word during a conversation, how to handle that, it was extremely interesting. He also did individual conversations with our youths in English. And after those conversations our students have become much better in class.*

Headteacher, secondary school of fine arts

*The volunteers teach language to the students and the staff.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*I use the help from volunteers when I teach year 8. For example we have recently done a mini project in class – 'My Dream Trip'. And our volunteer told us about Italy. He also helped us plan such a dream trip from Poland to Italy. The pupils were very involved in that class.*

Teacher, primary school

*They do conversations and games in the after-school language club.*

Headteacher, primary school

The representatives of special needs schools also emphasised the very practical aspect of the volunteers' presence, who, in their case, provide support not only to the teacher or carer, but equally to the children, who require much more attention and help, including physical assistance, compared to those attending a general institution. In one of the schools volunteers assisted pupils in changing clothes or having common meals.

*Trips to various places are important to our pupils. And that's when they help our staff, they're an extra pair of hand and eyes.*

Project Coordinator, special needs school

*Usually volunteers participate in classes at the skills training school, where we have kids with Down syndrome, with cerebral palsy, with all sorts of multiple disabilities, mental and physical ones. Volunteers organise after-school activities, mostly educational. Our volunteer this year has been great with cooking, teaching the kids about Italian cuisine, how to prepare dishes.*

Teacher, a group of schools

The activities of international volunteers, especially once they have settled in, were not limited to assisting teachers or teaching languages. After several months they would gradually become active members of the school community and participated in the majority of schools' events.

*Last year we painted a mural on the front of the building. It's an international project, those murals were created at the same time in more than 40 locations around the world. Our volunteers also participated in that [...] they generally participate in the school's life, when we had a film night, they took part too, prepared presentations about their countries and regions.*

Headteacher, secondary school of fine arts

*The volunteers also go on school trips, provide additional help and support the teachers. It's also a chance for them to see things.*

Headteacher, primary school



It was not without significance that the volunteers often suggested their own initiatives and ideas, which they implemented with support from the project coordinator, teachers and, in several cases, pupils.

*The Italian and Spanish festival was the idea of our volunteers, the whole school had fun, we sang songs, there were copies of paintings by Italian and Spanish painters. The volunteers organised and thought of all of it themselves.*

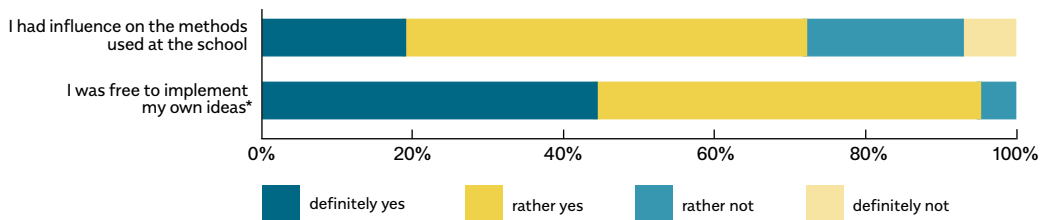
Teacher, primary school

*Our volunteer comes up with tools for working with the children herself. After Christmas she brought a game from France, the children loved it, and, on top of it, it was in French. The children picked up some French words.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

The quantitative research confirmed that the surveyed former school volunteers were free to implement their own ideas (that statement was agreed with by more than 95 percent of respondents), but they had limited influence on the teaching methods used by the school.

#### Volunteers' influence on everyday activities in schools (n=43)



\* None of the respondents marked the answer "definitely not".

The teachers and project coordinators emphasised that they did not require any pedagogical background from their volunteers. In fact some of them said they preferred volunteers without a teaching degree because that made them more open to new ideas, and rather than duplicating the teachers, they were their partners.

*It's great if the volunteers have some idea about teaching. But then, on the other hand, a completely ignorant person may bring a gust of fresh air. Like spring.*

Teacher, group of schools

*They don't need a background in pedagogy, what's important is openness, an open mind, ideas and willingness to learn.*

Teacher, primary school

*I prefer it when they're not pedagogy graduates. They don't try to reform our school and methods then, but cooperate with us. They learn from us and we learn from them.*

Headteacher, primary school

The volunteers often visited other partner schools, kindergartens, cultural centres or libraries. They were invited to talk about their country and its traditions or to teach a language class. Invitations from other institutions were usually around Christmas, but in most cases the volunteer's presence in settings other than their main hosting organisation was quite regular in nature. This was especially true in smaller towns, where after several months the volunteers would become recognisable in the local community, including among the pupils' parents. As one of the project coordinators put it – *they were local celebrities.*

*The volunteers prepared different theatre performances too. They went around local institutions and gave performances about global education for youth.*

Headteacher, group of schools

*Every volunteer has a schedule. Our school is not able to give them work throughout the week so they do work in other institutions too, for example a local primary school, a cultural centre. They're always popular, not only for doing classes, but also for events, Christmas parties, Children's Day, fairs.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*We have a Centre of Three Cultures, where various meetings are organised. They contribute to that. And there's also feedback from our local community that it's great they're here.*

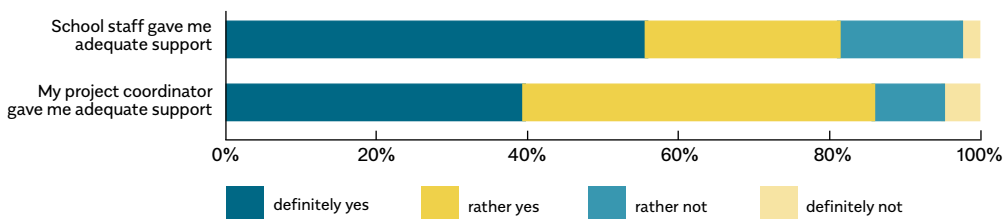
Teacher, group of schools

Planning of volunteers' activities was usually the responsibility of the project coordinator, but also often of the teachers, and occasionally of the institution's management. The planning always took into account the volunteer's input and the institution's schedule. None of the teachers, project coordinators or volunteers reported any major problems regarding this process and how the volunteering was organised at the school. The former volunteers hosted by schools were also generally happy with the support provided by the project coordinator and the staff, however the responses were more polarised in the case of the latter.

*Together we tried to develop a system and tasks for them. At first, we planned the tasks ourselves, but then this system evolved and we developed them together with the volunteers. We took into account many of their initiatives and ideas. But we also expected them to have some ideas.*

Teacher, secondary school of fine arts

### Assessment of support offered by school staff (n=43)



When asked about their greatest achievements, the former international volunteers usually mentioned classes which they had designed and taught themselves to both pupils and teachers, or even to the broader school community (such as the parents or local community). They emphasised that they felt proud at the sense of empowerment when they initiated their own ventures, and also felt largely responsible for their success.

*I thought that the disabled children may really like dancing classes. I do Zumba so I taught Zumba classes to them. It was bull's eye!*

Volunteer, primary school

*I organised a Catalan Day, we danced traditional dances, ate Catalan food.*

Volunteer, general upper secondary school

*One of the teachers invited me to work on another international Erasmus project. We prepared and submitted the application together, and it was accepted. The disabled children from our school went on an exchange to Spain, that was really something.*

Volunteer, special needs school

Many stressed that an important achievement was to overcome the language barrier and learn some basic Polish, or even to become quite fluent in it. According to the surveys, 58.1 percent of the former volunteers did not have any major linguistic problems during the project, while 41.9 percent thought they did face such problems.

*For me the biggest challenge was the language. Polish is very difficult and has no similarities to my own language, Spanish. The staff at the school didn't speak English very well, so at first we had problems communicating, but then I learnt some basic Polish. And the staff were always patient and helpful.*

Volunteer, primary school

*I learnt Polish, I was able to communicate with the teachers and the pupils.*

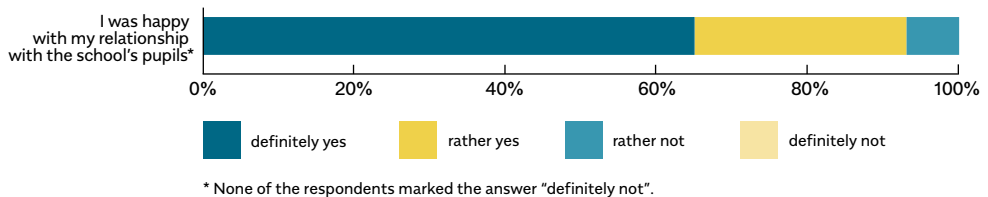
Volunteer, special needs school

*I taught classes to the pupils in Polish, even though I didn't speak the language very well. That's my achievement.*

Volunteer, general upper secondary school

The former volunteers also emphasised the importance of the ties they managed to build with the pupils. More than 93 percent of the respondents were happy with the relationship they had with the children and none of them was decisively unhappy.

#### Volunteers' satisfaction with their relations with school's pupils (n=43)



*My greatest achievement was to teach classes to the less successful pupils and to see how they made progress. That's what I'm the most proud of.*

Volunteer, primary school

*I was helping a disabled boy. After a while we were able to communicate, and then he, for the first time, managed to make a sentence by himself, from start to finish.*

Volunteer, special needs school

*My biggest success were the ties and friendships with the pupils. Their smile was the best reward.*

Volunteer, primary school

#### Volunteers' duties in kindergartens

Similarly to the schools, the volunteers in kindergarten were involved in a wide range of activities: they supported the teaching staff on a daily basis, looked after the children within and outside the setting, build relationships with the parents and taught basic English and their national languages. They tended

to be involved in one-on-one work with the children to a much higher degree than the school volunteers, because of the lower independence of this age group. The volunteers worked with the management, the teaching staff, the maintenance staff and the children's parents (e.g. to organise performances or celebrations).

*There wasn't a thing in the kindergarten that took place without her participation. Unless she was sick.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*She participated in all outings and trips and in everything else we offer our children, regardless of the age group. She was teaching German in the oldest group. She also interacted with the youngest children – the help needed there is mostly 'technical' rather than educational. She participated in all initiatives which took place in our kindergarten – for example, during our end-of-year event she played the main part in 'Alice in Wonderland'. There was also time for her to talk to the parents and tell them what she did and where she came from. She participated in workshops, training – she has the advantage of speaking Polish, so she benefited from everything that's available to our staff. Moreover, she applied her knowledge gained during training to her work with the children.*

Teacher, kindergarten

Similarly to the schools, the volunteers in kindergartens also had the freedom to come up with their own initiatives, which they usually were happy to do, showing off their skills and interests.

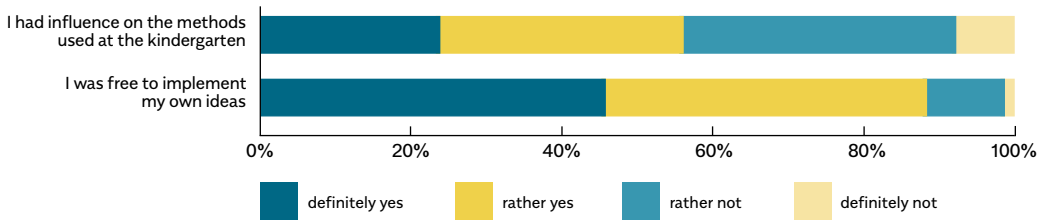
*She shows a lot of initiative, she's recently suggested teaching the children a song in French. And we're also trying not to be too imposing.*

Teacher, disability inclusive kindergarten

*She was very artistic, she made wonderful cut-outs for the children and she even taught them the less complicated patterns, not to mention her painting skills! We still have them, right, here, her paintings!*

Teacher, kindergarten

## Volunteers' influence on everyday activities in kindergartens (n=77)



*I initiated looking for chocolate eggs in the kindergarten garden. It's a tradition from my country, and now children in Poland could get to experience it.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

*I taught English to the children, and then I thought I could also do Spanish. We sang Spanish songs, danced, the children had so much fun.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

The respondents – both the management and the teachers and carers – also emphasised the progress they observed in the volunteers themselves over time. The former volunteers were generally positive about the support they received during the project, both from the coordinator and the kindergarten staff, although analysis of the responses shows that the volunteers were slightly happier with the assistance from coordinators than that received from other staff.

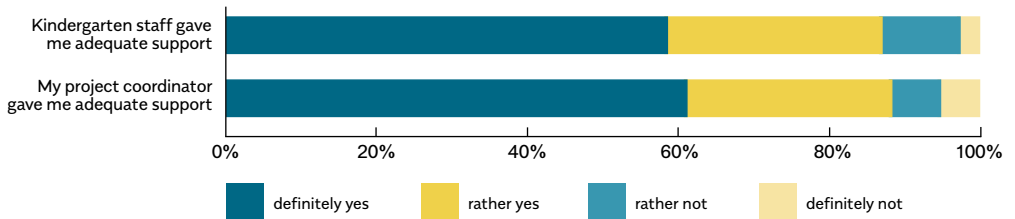
*Her activity here kept developing beautifully and she was free to work with each of the age groups, because that's the arrangement we'd made, that first she'd work with each group and then decide which one she wanted to have on a regular basis. She went for the oldest children. She felt the most comfortable there, she introduced German classes for them, out of her own initiative, it wasn't our requirement. The kids were delighted.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

*In my opinion the volunteer has learnt how to build interpersonal relations, how a kindergarten operates, and how we work, she participated in training, for example how to work with a group. She also mentioned that her Polish had improved. She also started paying attention to nutrition, because our children have to be careful about what they eat.*

Teacher, kindergarten

### Assessment of support offered by kindergarten staff (n=77)



When asked about their greatest achievement during the project, the former volunteers usually mentioned overcoming the language and communication barrier. They emphasised that they had acquired better communication skills, not only linguistically but also in terms of body language, overcoming shyness or improved self-confidence.

*Overcoming the language barrier was definitely my achievement. I communicated with children who didn't speak English or my own language!*

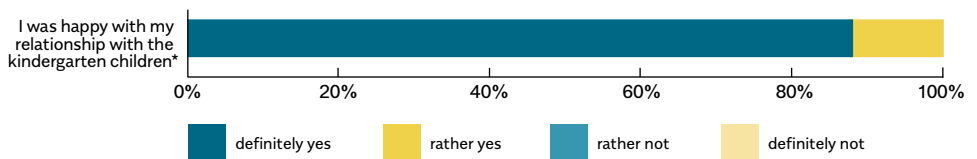
Volunteer, kindergarten

*I'm more self-confident. When you have to stand in front of small children and do an activity, but you can't communicate with them in any language you know, if you survive this, you'll survive everything.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

Similarly to the volunteers hosted in schools, also those hosted in kindergartens emphasised the good relations between them and the children, to the extent that none of the respondents described them as poor when asked to assess them in the survey.

### Volunteers' satisfaction with their relations with kindergarten children (n=77)



\* None of the respondents marked a negative answer.

*I think that my greatest achievement was working with two autistic children. At first we struggled to connect, but then, with support from the teacher, they started getting used to me, and towards the end of the project they would cuddle me and call me by my name.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

*My best memory is that even the shy children opened up and wanted to play with me.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

*The greatest value of my volunteering were the relationships which I had established with the children and teachers at the kindergarten.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

Furthermore, many of the former volunteers emphasised that an important achievement was acquiring the skills to interact with children and gaining practical experience of working in a kindergarten. They had the opportunity to test in practice the methods they learned about at the university or to learn new ones – especially in the case of volunteers working in special schools. They also stressed that thanks to the project they learnt about the Polish education system, which, in many cases, is very different from that they knew from their native country.

*I've learnt how to approach people with disabilities, how to work with such children, what they need.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

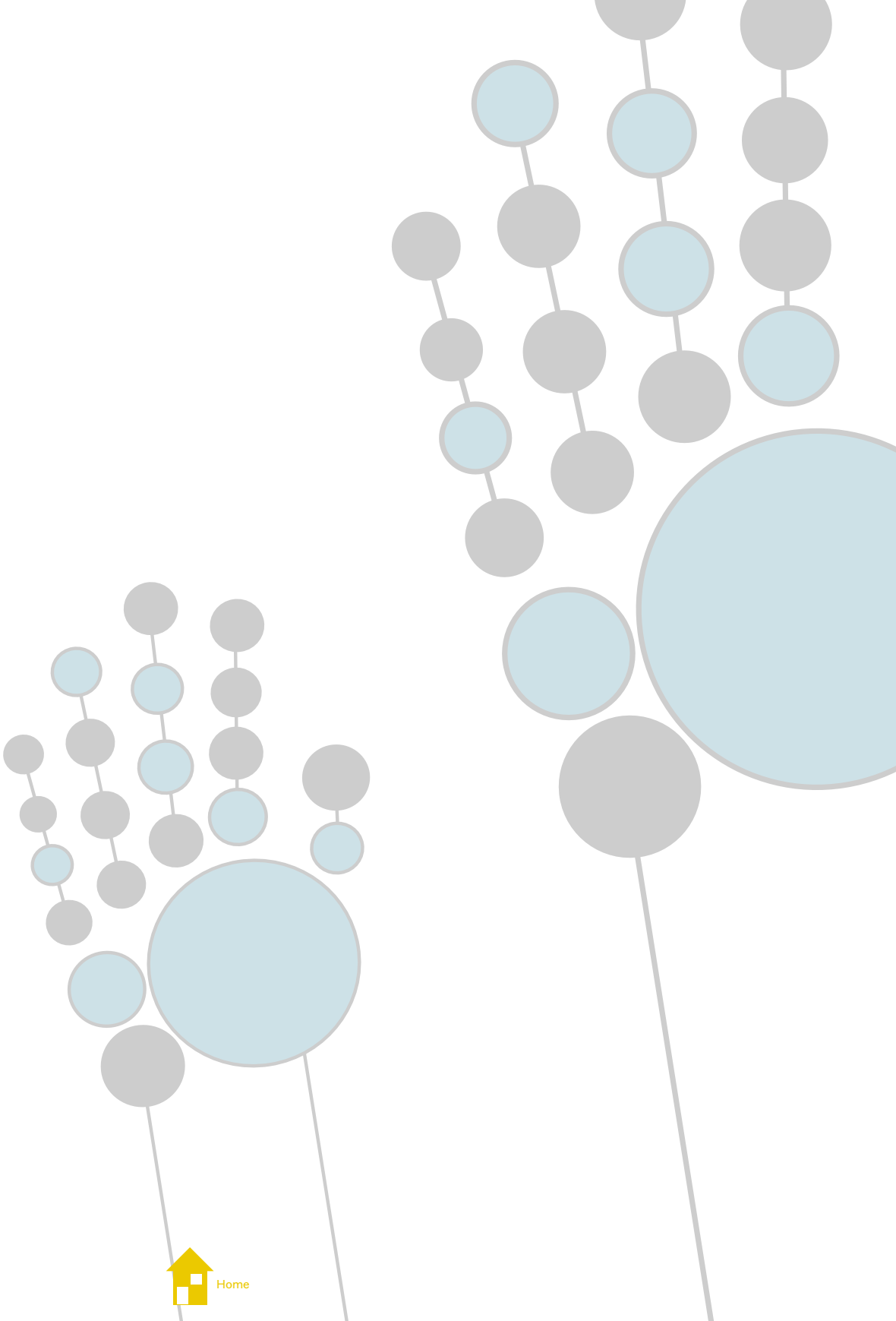
*I've learnt about the Polish education system and how a kindergarten operates.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

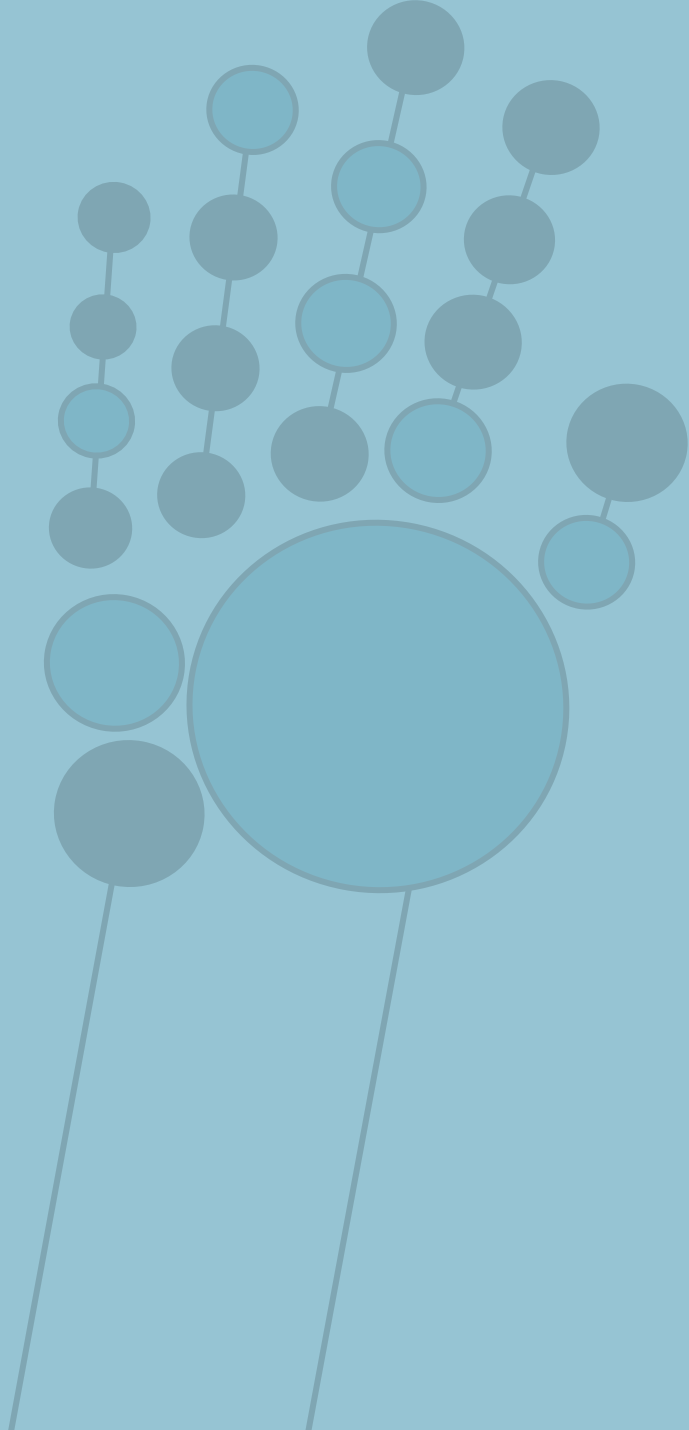
*Thanks to the volunteering project I've gained professional experience. I stayed on in Poland after the project and now work at a Polish kindergarten.*

Volunteer, kindergarten





# Impact of international volunteers on schools and kindergartens



According to the methodological assumptions underlying the study, the attempt to describe the impact of international volunteers on schools and kindergartens was made in respect of two groups: the institution's staff and those attending the institution. Questions regarding the volunteers' impact on those two categories were to be found both in the study's qualitative part (presenting the perception of the management and staff from the researched institutions) and quantitative part (showing the perspective of the volunteers who were hosted by those institutions).

### **School staff**

As for the benefits of the presence of international volunteers, the staff primarily and definitely indicated the opportunity to speak a foreign language and to learn it. Moreover, the volunteers' presence provided additional motivation for many of the school employees to learn a foreign language – mostly English – however, in some cases, the staff were also learning the language of the volunteer's country.

*The teachers use volunteers' knowledge, they have one-to-one English lessons, but the volunteers also teach us their own languages.*

Teacher, primary school

*The teachers are more inclined to learn English, they're beginning to use it effortlessly at school on a daily basis. Even in the staff room. Also the maintenance staff communicate with the volunteers in a foreign language, they really enjoy it.*

Project Coordinator, primary school

*It also invigorates the classroom a lot. The teachers are motivated to brush up on their English.*

Teacher, special needs school

Furthermore, the teachers and the management pointed out that thanks to volunteers they learnt about the culture and customs of other countries, about tolerance and openness. Long-term volunteering projects require them to understand another person – and such an attitude contributes to the success of initiatives.

*We hosted two Muslim volunteers. We had to learn about their customs, Ramadan, what they can and cannot eat and why. It's not a holiday-like encounter with an exotic person. It's daily, long-term contact, you need tolerance from both sides, mutual curiosity, and with a positive attitude towards another person this becomes a priceless experience.*

Headteacher, primary school



*We had to switch and understand that there's a foreigner in our school, who may not perceive or feel everything the same way we do. We really want him to feel comfortable here, but in order to achieve that, we need to understand him first.*

Teacher, secondary school of fine arts

Moreover, volunteers provide substantial support in the institution's daily life. They help teachers look after the children and youth. Because in some cases they are only a little bit older than the students, but play a different role than the teacher, they can establish good relationships. Also, the teachers emphasised that the volunteers helped them look from a different perspective on certain routine tasks, and brought enthusiasm and engagement into their work.

*I quite often have volunteers in my classroom. They're really great with year 1 through to year 3, the kids show no hesitation. They really want the volunteer to, for example, sit at their desk. They can ask simple questions in English.*

Teacher, primary school

*The volunteers are really helpful with looking after the children and youth [...] even when I'm giving a test and they don't need to do anything, they go to the kindergarten, because they may be useful there.*

Teacher, primary school

The management, teachers and project coordinators alike claimed that international volunteers increase the school's attractiveness and contribute to building its positive image. Institutions which host foreign volunteers are perceived in the local community as ones which may offer interesting school-time and after-school activities, and local authorities often showcase them as examples to be followed. Furthermore, the headteachers of volunteer-hosting organisations share good practices regarding such projects with other schools and kindergartens which have not yet had any experiences in that area.

*We've already had two visits from the founder of the Polish American Freedom Foundation, he even taught a class. He was impressed how, over the course of a few years since his previous visit, the school has changed and how our pupils' competences have increased.*

Headteacher, primary school

*They definitely make our institution more desirable. I, as the headteacher, have to say that I proudly talk about our contacts, not only among my fellow headteachers, but also in conversations with the governing authority. I'm also a member of the National*

*Association of Management Staff in Education and I sometimes participate in conferences in Warsaw, and even those in Warsaw were curious about that cooperation.*

Headteacher, primary school

*We, coming from a rural school, are an example for large cities. It makes me so proud.*

Teacher, primary school

Project coordinators also highlighted the fact that they wanted the volunteers to learn as much as possible during the project. The volunteers, in addition to knowledge of Polish, also develop interpersonal and social competences, and, of course, the skills required to be a teacher or a career in educational settings. Many of them also develop professional competences necessary for their future work as teacher, educator or youth worker. The interviewed project coordinators underlined that volunteers' often learn from their own mistakes and in consequence, develop their teaching and pedagogy skills. *Even if not all of them are going to be teachers in the future, they can surely learn a lot about themselves* – claimed the teachers involved in the implementation of volunteering projects.

*The volunteers are my protégés and I feel personally responsible for them. I know that under my supervision they have to learn a lot and it's up to me to make sure they don't learn it wrong. They need round-the-clock care, they have to be shown precisely what they can and what they cannot do. They're not independent enough to function as a teacher in their own right. Let's say they're kind of trainees.*

Teacher, group of schools

*The volunteer wanted to study pedagogy. After the project she took the entrance exams and got in. She'll be a teacher in the future. She strengthened her conviction that it was what she wanted to do. We're happy that we didn't put her off the profession, quite to the contrary. We showed her that it's not easy, but at least it's fun.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

The impact of international volunteers on the staff from the schools should be considered in terms of their relationship with the teachers, volunteering project coordinators and management of the hosting organisations, which often went beyond the customary relationships with colleagues at work. This may be perhaps explained by the extraordinary situation in which the volunteers are placed: school staff tend to be, for extensive periods of time, the only persons who the volunteers interact with once they arrive in Poland, therefore their relations are much more intense than between ordinary colleagues.

For international volunteers, the teachers and management are their first guides around the town, region or country. They also familiarise the volunteers with Polish customs, traditions or cuisine. Moreover, they introduce them to the institution's life, support them in forming relationships with the pupils, and give them tips what activities the volunteer may want to get involved in. Many of the teachers and project coordinators felt the need to look after the volunteer not only at the school, but also outside of it.

*It's a difficult situation for them, a whole year away from home. I try to show them around town and the local, I tell them what to see in the cinema, but also teach them how the school operates. It's a very complex relationship.*

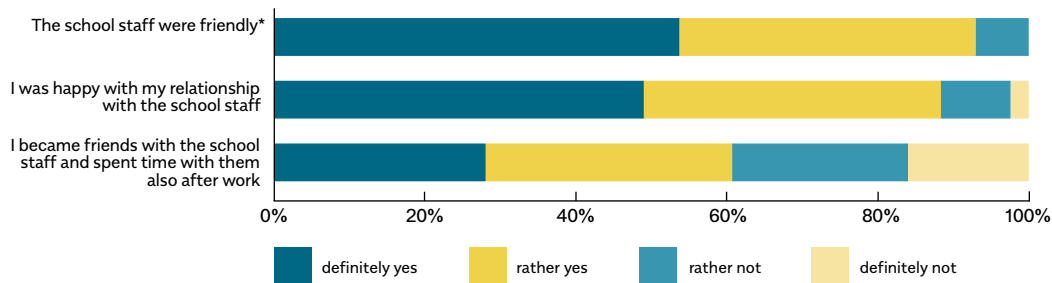
Project Coordinator, primary school

*Our friend even hosted a volunteer from Italy at her home on the first day of Christmas.*

Teacher, primary school

The former volunteers too, when asked about their relations with the school staff, emphasised that they were close and friendly, often beyond the kind of professional or hierarchical relations typically found at a workplace.

#### Relations with school staff (n=43)



\* None of the respondents marked the answer "definitely not".

Those close relationships translated into friendships continuing well after the project. Many of the project coordinators kept in touch with the former volunteers, and there was often special affection about the school's first ever volunteers.

*We're in touch with our former volunteers. To the extent that this year two of them visited us. They came for New Year's Eve, they miss this place.*

Headteacher, primary school

## Pupils

Like the teachers, the pupils most frequently mentioned overcoming the language barrier and the opportunity to speak a foreign language on a daily basis as the main benefits of international volunteers' presence. Not without significance was also the fact that they were able to interact with foreigners, and experience their culture and customs. Project coordinators underlined also that pupils became more open and interested in international cooperation, which might result in further projects with foreign partners.

*Volunteers ask a lot of questions, they force our children to overcome the language barrier. The kids understand quite a lot, but they're very anxious about speaking [...] but now the fear of speaking is getting lesser and lesser.*

Teacher, primary school

*It's important for the pupils to speak, let them make mistakes – they have every right to do so – but they need to speak.*

Teacher, primary school

The pupils are very positive about the volunteers hosted in their schools. The relations between them are friendly, and in most cases the pupils are eager to show the best of both themselves and their town and country. Volunteers were also often invited to pupils' homes.

*I've even asked the pupils recently about volunteers in class, whether it was how they'd imagined it would be. They told me: 'Last year we were, indeed, afraid to speak, but it's better this year'. Moreover, the pupils said that they thought there would be more activities involving the volunteers. But, at the same time, they did notice that they showed little initiative themselves. So now they know that they need to overcome their barriers to be able to do something together.*

Teacher, secondary school of fine arts

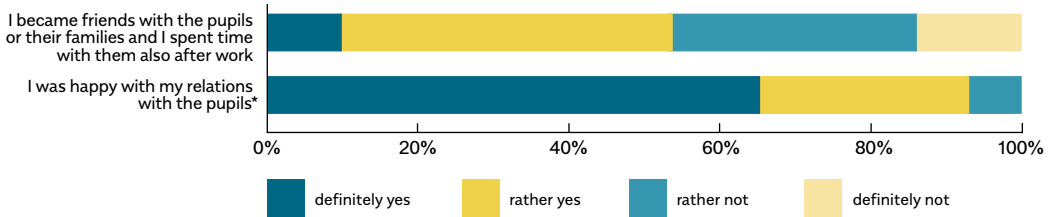
*Our volunteer said one time that he didn't really like Polish cuisine. So the children's ambition had become to teach him Polish flavours. I think they haven't really succeeded with Polish sweets, but what's most valuable is that the children have learnt something about the culture of another country and its inhabitants, and for me, as a foreign language teacher, it's important that they're overcoming the language barrier.*

Project Coordinator, primary school

The former volunteers were also happy with their relations with the pupils. More than half of the respondents had established friendships with the pupils

and spent time with them also outside school, but certainly less often than with the school's staff.

### Relations with pupils (n=43)



\* None of the respondents marked the answer "definitely not".

The project coordinators and staff pointed out that the parents too noticed the positive impact the volunteers had on their children, especially in terms of developing their linguistic competences.

*The children's parents are happy that there are volunteers at the school for such a long period of time (the entire school year – author's not).*

Headteacher, primary school

*The parents speak of the volunteers with respect [...]. They observe them and are happy that their children have the opportunity to naturally engage in conversations and try to use a foreign language.*

Teacher, primary school

Volunteers have a special impact on pupils in special needs schools. Their long-term presence in those setting is conducive to building relationships with the pupils, whose poor social experience makes the volunteer one of the few people, in addition to family and teachers, who interact with them so intensively. In addition, thanks to the great support that volunteers offer to teachers and carers, the latter can devote much more time to their teaching duties, which greatly benefits the pupils.

*The most important changes are those immeasurable ones, those to do with how the pupils feel. That emotional layer, the mood, how they feel about school and about life. And this is priceless. And because the volunteers are their peers and new persons who give them their attention and time, they have a positive impact on those we look after.*

Project Coordinator, special needs school



*Because the volunteers support our pupils physically, they have more time to learn.  
It's an extra pair of hands to help.*

Teacher, special needs school

### **Kindergarten staff**

The study shows that the relationships between volunteers and kindergarten staff were very close and cordial, but difficult to put into a single frame. On the one hand, the management and the carers were the volunteers' supervisors and gave them instructions to follow. On the other hand, the volunteers were treated by the children on an equal footing with kindergarten workers – they were adults and their duties included taking care of them. On the third hand, the relations between the volunteers and the staff went far beyond the framework of professional cooperation. The volunteers (and sometimes even their families) were often hosted in the homes of the managers and carers, and one of headteachers took the volunteer on a holiday in the mountains and paid for it.

*We've met her parents – they've been here. They came to celebrate her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and we prepared a surprise together.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

*We're very close with the volunteers, they visit our homes, they know our families.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*We sorted many things through simple conversation. When she came back to Poland after Christmas and was missing her home in Germany, we sat down and talked. We had a really good connection.*

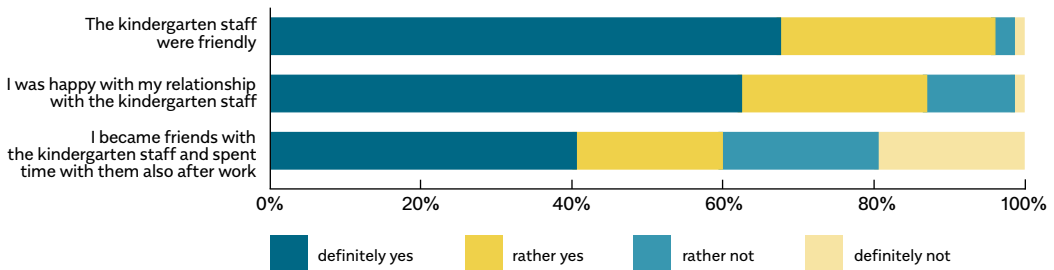
Headteacher, kindergarten

*I have a 21-year-old daughter – I immediately put on my parenting hat. Our volunteer's parents, being so far away, must worry a lot whether our volunteer is fine here. And so we tried to make sure that she was.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

The volunteers were satisfied with the relations present in kindergartens – 87 percent of the respondents positively assessed their relationship with kindergarten workers and over 96 percent thought they were friendly. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents said that they had made friends with kindergarten staff and spent time with them also after work.

## Relations with kindergarten staff (n=77)



As with schools, kindergarten staff are, in some cases, still in touch with their former volunteers.

*When the volunteer was leaving she gave us a medal for 'the best kindergarten in the world'. And she's recently emailed us that she was going to university and starting work too. We're in touch, because for both her and us her kindergarten work was a big deal.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

Volunteers have a significant impact on the teachers. The educators said that they thought more often about how they work and tried to improve their methods so that the volunteers could learn as much as possible from them. What is more, the presence of volunteers is beneficial for their command of English, which they not only learn specifically to communicate with the volunteers better, but also have the opportunity to use in practice on a daily basis. It can be said that the working languages of the kindergarten are currently Polish and English, which has also a very positive effect on the children, for whom the use of a language other than their native language is gradually becoming obvious.

*The volunteers ask questions: why we're doing something that way and not another and how it will work out. This means that we probably reflect a lot more on how we work every day. After all, to answer these questions sensibly, we sometimes have to have a long think. Volunteers also pleasantly break up our routine. In addition, we must try harder. They look at our work, copy us, do as we do, so we have to do everything extra well and precisely so that we don't teach them bad habits.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*We've probably become more open to other cultures, to other behaviours. I have never drunk Turkish coffee, and now I know it's very strong. I was also not entirely aware of the Muslim diet and what exactly Ramadan was. Now I know, and, what's more, our children know too.*

Teacher, kindergarten

The management and the teachers noted that due to the presence of international volunteers, the perception of their institution in the local community is also changing. It is now recognised as a place where interesting things happen and which is involved in thriving international cooperation.

*Our commune head is very happy that we are involved in this type of activity. Intercultural evenings, film screenings, all that in our kindergarten, and these are additional things which would not be possible if not for the presence of volunteers. We're like an international centre in our town and the parents are much more willing to get involved in the kindergarten's life because they know that interesting things are happening here – to both their children and themselves.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

### **Kindergarten children**

In the vast majority of cases, the relationships between the children and the volunteers can be described as very good and close, and much more intense than in the case of school pupils. This is due to the age of the children, but also their involvement in everyday activities is different than that in schools – the volunteers accompany the kindergarten children practically all day which translates into closer relationships. Kindergarten children tended to establish a good connection with the volunteers basically from the very beginning of the project, and the period of initial shyness towards foreigners was relatively short.

*Our ex volunteer wrote to me a few months ago that she still gets postcards from our children with whom she worked, because she gave the parents her contact details after the project.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

*The children were very emotional about the fact that our volunteer's project was over and she had to leave. But she did very well because she told them that there would be another volunteer the following year, and the children were very happy.*

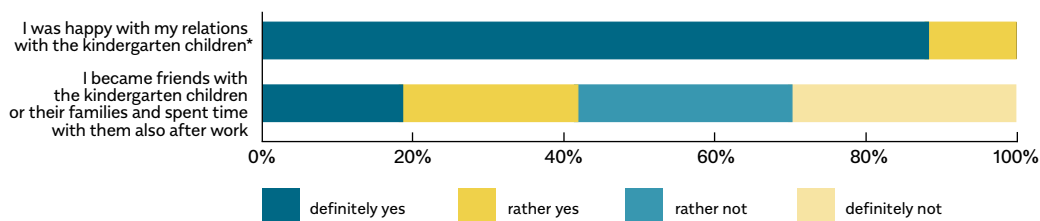
Headteacher, kindergarten

*Certainly her influence on the children, encouraging openness in them and developing their knowledge of German was invaluable. But I also want to emphasise the invigorating effect on the kindergarten. She was not 'contaminated' by us, she had cool ideas and support to implement them. And for kindergarten staff, who could basically be her parents, it was a nice change.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

The former volunteers declared that they were definitely satisfied with their relationships with those in their care. Over 40% of them also established private relations, that went beyond the contact in the kindergarten, with the children and their families.

#### Relations with kindergarten children (n=77)



\* None of the respondents marked a negative answer.

According to the carers, the influence on the children was very large and concerned three areas: firstly, the children had become more open, secondly, they tried to use English without being prompted to do so, and thirdly, they had the opportunity to experience cultures, customs and even ways of dressing, eating or playing music which were completely different from their own. All this, according to the kindergarten workers, has a significant impact on the development of the children they look after and their perception of the world.

*The kids are not as afraid as they used to be when a stranger visits the kindergarten. They don't hide, they're curious. I think it's mostly because we've had so many volunteers and they all interacted with the children, so they had to come out of their shell.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*The children have the daily opportunity to hear spoken English, they try to communicate themselves, and succeed. They also often use body language to get through, just like us, and they still succeed [...] the children can also experience what is perhaps the most valuable about volunteering – the intercultural aspect. They interact with, for example Muslims, who tell them about their culture, diet, about their childhood. The children are curious and can try things they wouldn't be able to in another kindergarten.*

Teacher, kindergarten

*Communicating with a foreign language speaker is not stressful to them. Even though she doesn't understand their every word. At first, they wouldn't say anything to her. Now they know how to talk, and if they can't get through, they use gestures. Their initial shyness has gone completely.*

Project Coordinator, disability inclusive kindergarten

### **Differences in perception of volunteers and trainees**

The school and kindergarten staff, when asked to compare their work with trainees and with long-term international volunteers, pointed out several significant differences. First of all, trainees are present in those institutions because they are required to do so for their teaching practice, which results from their study programme, while international volunteers are in the school or kindergarten of their own free will. Trainees are usually assigned to one teacher and have the task of completing a certain number of hours of practice teaching a given subject, while foreign volunteers usually cooperate with teachers of several subjects and with other staff of the institution, very often in connection with after-school and non-school activities.

Secondly, teaching practice is much shorter than long-term volunteering, hence the presence of trainees is much less noticeable in the institution.

Thirdly, the respondents noticed a much lower level of engagement among trainees, who work with one teacher of a particular subject (school) or one carer (kindergarten), while foreign volunteers usually work with many representatives of the staff, management and even parents of the children. Volunteers, unlike trainees, also have the freedom to implement their own projects or ideas. All this means that volunteers, even after a short time in a school or a kindergarten, become quite settled in that community and form its integral part. It is also impossible to ignore the intercultural aspect – international volunteers, unlike trainees, teach their language to the children and the staff, talk about the culture of their countries and regions, and bring their activities beyond the walls of the school.

*The volunteer has a clear purpose here. It shows. She watches, observes and learns. She's here for us all day, she doesn't just come by for a little while. Trainees jump out of their lives for a moment to come here, but they're in a hurry to move on.*

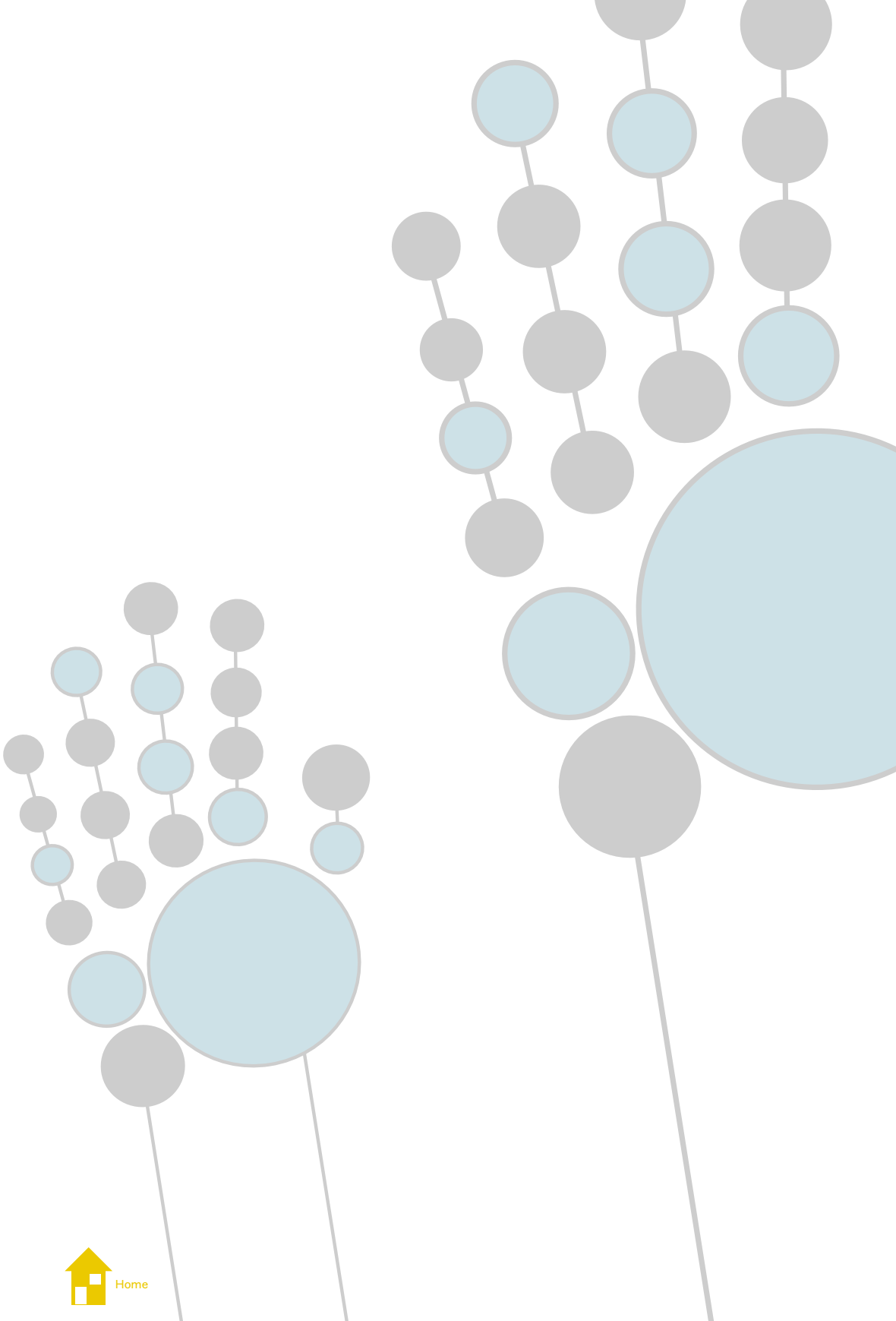
Project Coordinator, disability inclusive kindergarten

*I think that the relationship is better with volunteers. Trainees appear for a moment, then disappear and are quickly forgotten. Volunteers are with us a lot longer and these emotional relationships play a very important role here. Certainly, the bond with volunteers is greater than with trainees.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*The difference is huge. Trainees are short-term, don't get engaged, don't form any relationships with us or with the children. They simply fulfil their obligation. They must do a teaching practice. Volunteers want to be here. It's an important decision for them, because going abroad for a year requires courage and perseverance.*

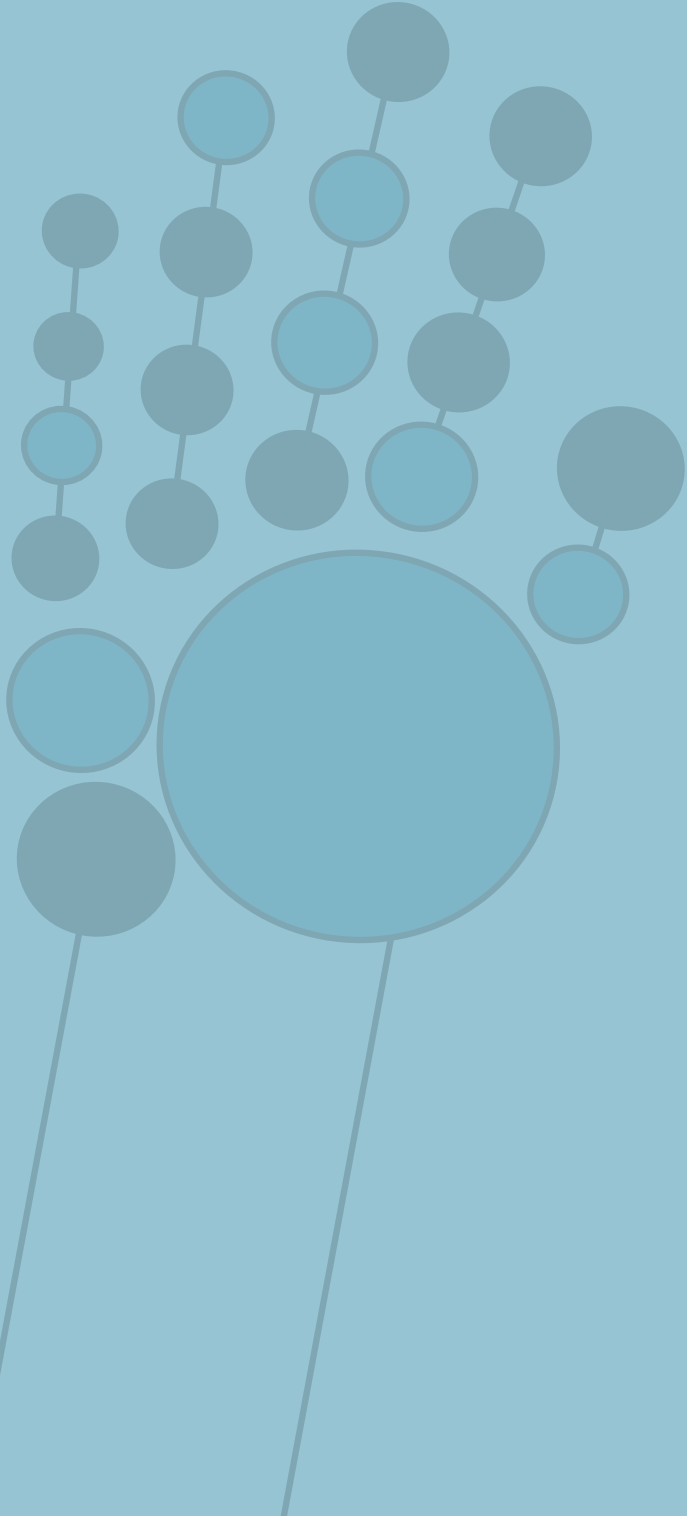
Project Coordinator, special needs school



# Challenges associated with hosting international volunteers



Home



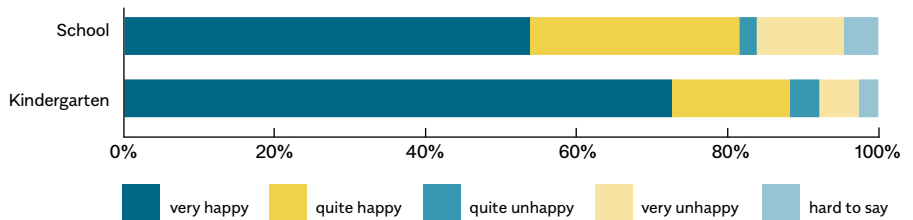


Any long-term Erasmus+ Volunteering project comes with a number of challenges, both for the hosting organisations and for the volunteers themselves. Analysis of the interviews and surveys showed that the hosting organisations see the volunteers themselves as the most common source of problematic situations that arise during the project. On the other hand, the former volunteers, when asked about the challenges they had to face, usually indicated the hosting organisation as the source of their problems, but also their lack of motivation resulting from fatigue in the final phases of the project.

A vast majority of the schools, kindergartens and former volunteers surveyed were satisfied with how their long-term volunteering project went. After an initial period which the volunteers needed to settle in and define their responsibilities and principles of cooperation, the surveyed institutions did not signal any major difficulties with the volunteering project. Any problems encountered by either the volunteers or the hosting organisations were usually solved together, and only in exceptional cases was the project terminated early.

#### Satisfaction from long-term volunteering project.

##### Responses from former volunteers by type of hosting organisation (N=120)



#### Hosting organisation's perspective

The surveyed schools and kindergartens were aware that a long-term project in another country was a huge challenge for the international volunteers. Many of them had never been abroad for such a long time, especially in a country whose language they did not know. The hosting organisations tried to support the volunteers in this difficult process. Most of the challenges faced by the surveyed schools and kindergartens which hosted international volunteers were, in their opinion, related to the character traits as well as the attitude and expectations of the volunteers regarding the nature of work in their institution. The schools and kindergartens reported that in some cases the expectations of the volunteers as regards the duties assigned to them were too high.

Several of the surveyed schools and kindergartens noted that the volunteers had kept back some information about themselves at the recruitment stage, which later affected the implementation of the project. Despite these difficulties, project coordinators decided to carry on with the implementation of the project, however the decision to focus more on the problematic volunteers influenced their decision on inviting new ones, who had to postpone their arrival to Poland until the problems were solved.

*Our current volunteer suffers from Asperger syndrome, which we didn't know when she came here because she had kept that information back. Had she mentioned it, it does not mean that she would have been disqualified. But it would have allowed us to prevent many of the disappointments we encountered at the beginning, before we found a common ground. In her case, when I had a small breakdown, when I thought that she needed to go home because she couldn't manage, I said to myself 'No! This has to be solved.' I didn't give up.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*In 90 percent of the cases, perhaps more, these are very successful relationships between our institution and the volunteers, but of course, we also do come across more tricky situations. For example this year two people cut their volunteering project short. One for health reasons, and the other seems to have had a different idea and expectations, and wasn't perhaps cut out for interpersonal work So we said goodbye to them, but we got two new persons in their place, and they've been doing well. Even though we're a bit behind schedule now, I guess it's turned out for the best; neither us nor they continued to 'suffer'.*

Teacher, special needs school

*We'd occasionally have someone who's more interested in leaving their country, going somewhere closer to the West, for example to Poland, than in volunteering itself. But we've only explicitly had such a situation once.*

Project Coordinator, special needs school

The surveyed institutions also noted occasional problems with volunteers' motivation and difficulties in establishing relationships with those under their care. Sometimes those problems were solved after a period of settling in, but sometimes it was a permanent challenge that both the volunteer, the project coordinator and the staff of the hosting organisation had to face. It also happened that project coordinators expected the volunteers to have more sense of initiative.

*There's certainly a point in the project at which the volunteers run out of their initial energy, their motivation. But it's obvious. They have fewer ideas. Sometimes the volunteers are also afraid to ask for help, but they must know that they can count on us.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*Our volunteer had quite a bit of a problem with getting through to and getting our pupils engaged when she was making a presentation or teaching a language class. I gave her a few tips how to get the pupils interested, for example ask them to say a few words about themselves, so that they're not strangers to one another. At the end of the volunteering project she gave me a note which said 'Thank you for teaching me how to teach'.*

Teacher, secondary school of fine arts

In some cases, the project coordinators also mentioned little interest in the volunteers and their potential from other staff in the institution. The project coordinators had hoped to receive greater support from their colleagues – fellow teachers – when it came to engaging volunteers and suggesting tasks for them.

*I was hoping for more involvement from other teachers. It's partly the language barrier, but partly something else. Perhaps fatigue, age, burnout. Maybe also fear that they would not be able to cope and get along.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*I didn't think that I'd become a coordinator of that volunteering project. I thought I would help with the application and that the English teachers would then take over. And one day I look around and I'm left alone with it. I had to overcome my fear of speaking. I think that if I've managed, then others can too.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

This seems to be confirmed by the statements from some of the volunteers, who at times did not feel that the interest and commitment of the hosting organisation's staff was, in their opinion, sufficient.

*Sometimes I felt that the only person who really cared about me was the project coordinator, other teachers rarely let me interact with their pupils.*

Volunteer, general upper secondary school

*Over time I realised that the volunteers were more of a burden than help to the teachers in the school [...]. They had their own methods, and didn't want to change anything.*

Volunteer, primary school

Only one of the surveyed institutions expressed doubt whether it would continue to host international volunteers, but according to the coordinator this is not to do with disappointment over the project, but with the decision of the coordinating organisation, which is not sure whether the project in its current shape will continue at all.

### **Volunteer's perspective**

Many of the former volunteers admitted that, looking back, they could have been more involved in the activities of the schools and kindergartens which hosted them. They expressed regret that they did not have ideas, energy or willingness to carry out as many activities for the children and youth as they could have done during their one-year volunteering project in Poland. They also often mentioned that they wanted to use their own ideas, but this was prevented by the hosting organisation.

*I should have imposed a rule on myself – at least one new activity for the kids a week. I was given the opportunity, but for some reason I did much less than I could have done.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

*I should have been more proactive, but working 7 hours a day in a kindergarten was too much for me, I didn't have the energy.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

*I wanted to do more dance classes for the children, but this wasn't always approved of by the staff.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

The volunteers also emphasised that they were often afraid or embarrassed to ask for support and help. They found themselves in a situation where they were required to take on responsibilities and do specific tasks, but the language barrier and ignorance (at least at the beginning of the project) of the institution's operating principles, core curriculum or the Polish education system proved to be a great challenge for them.

*I was embarrassed to ask for help at the beginning, I had the impression that I kept needing every step of the way. In Italy I was completely independent, and there I needed help with literally everything, of course at the beginning. It got better later, but I shouldn't have been so shy.*

Volunteer, general upper secondary school

*I should have been more self-confident, especially at the beginning, I shouldn't have been afraid to suggest activities or ask for help.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

*I should have been less afraid of interactions with the teachers, with the pupils, I should have been more open.*

Volunteer, primary school

Some of the volunteers mentioned linguistic problems. Several of them also admitted that they had not thought carefully about the choice of country and the setting of their volunteering project, which has consequently led to limited satisfaction with their stay in Poland. They recommended to carefully plan and think before leaving for a long-term volunteering project abroad and to take into consideration one's temper, character and needs.

### **National Agency's perspective**

The Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE), as an institution which finances Erasmus+ Volunteering projects, is in constant contact with coordinating organisations and, less often, with those hosting volunteering projects. This is due to the fact that the volunteering agreement is signed with the coordinating organisation, which is the party responsible for communication with the National Agency. Therefore, any problems are reported, in most cases, by the coordinating organisation. Sometimes, however, especially when there is a conflict between the school, or kindergarten, and the coordinating organisation, schools or kindergartens contact FRSE directly. However, these are relatively rare situations.

It also happens that the National Agency is informed about problems with the project by volunteers themselves or by mentors, who are responsible for training the volunteers (induction after their arrival or mid-term evaluation).

The most frequently reported problems concern the daily duties of volunteers, small variation in the tasks assigned or the amount of work given to them. Another common issue is giving volunteers jobs which are not in line with the Erasmus+ programme guidelines. They may not be teacher assistants nor teach classes on their own, such as foreign language classes, thus replacing the teacher in implementing the school's curriculum. It also happens, especially in the case of volunteers with experience or a degree in education, that they do not understand the Polish education system, because they have worked or learnt about a different approach to children and teaching. Other problems reported to the National Agency include challenges related to communication within the school team or the coordinating organisation, as well as language difficulties.

*We've been told before that a particular volunteer is not suited, in the school's or kindergarten's opinion, to work in such an institution schools and kindergartens are the type of organisations which look for highly qualified volunteers during recruitment. In fact, it is basically never the case that a volunteer who goes there doesn't have a background in teaching or experience working with children and youth. This, in combination with cultural differences, leads to many conflicts, because it turns out that there's often insufficient induction into the specific nature of work in a particular institution and, more generally, the Polish education system. This gives rise to misunderstandings: for example a volunteer from the Netherlands with experience in education is recruited to a state-owned kindergarten which claims to focus on eco education, and then it turns out that what is understood as eco education in the Netherlands, when put in Polish context, seems archaic and incompatible, and gives the volunteer a sense of confusion or even resistance.*

Employee of the National Agency

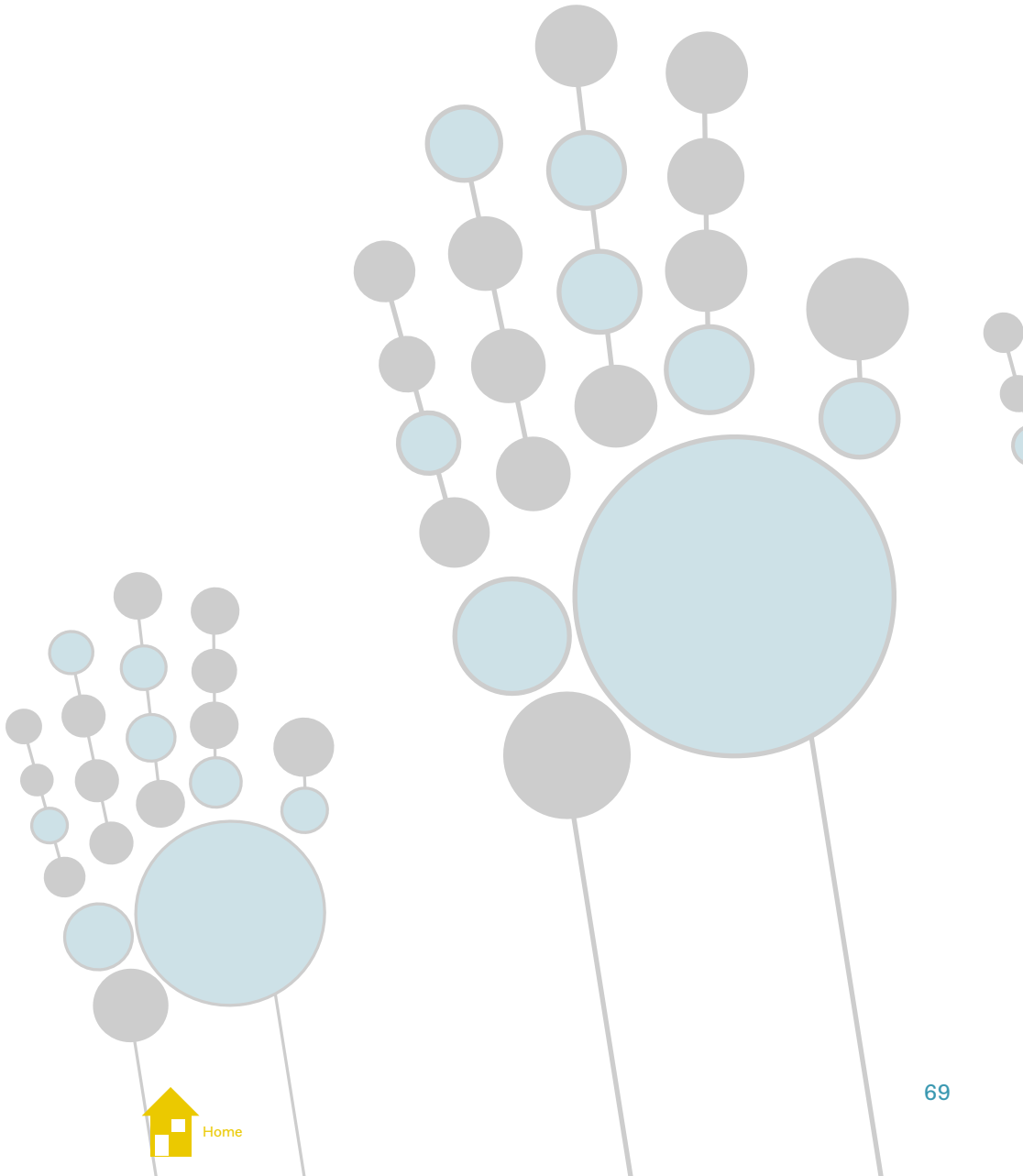
Some problems with the implementation of volunteer projects in schools and kindergartens may result from insufficient cooperation between the coordinating organisation and the hosting organisation. The role of the coordinating organisation is to make schools and kindergartens aware of the principles of Erasmus+ Volunteering projects, show how they are embedded in non-formal education, and plan the learning process of the volunteer. It happens that schools have a problem understanding the rules of the programme. In any case, FRSE gives support and is able to provide examples of good practices that may contribute to resolving potential conflict situations. The FRSE also steps in when a given coordinating organisation starts to cooperate with an increasing number of hosting organisations – the latter can then be subject to an audit to verify their knowledge of the rules of international volunteering projects.

*Coordinating organisations sometimes forget to work with the school or the kindergarten to make them aware that volunteering is not one-sided: that it's not like they will have a great volunteer who will be their help. They must also understand that a volunteer will need support and should get the most out of such a project. Of course, most coordinating organisations do a very good job in this respect.*

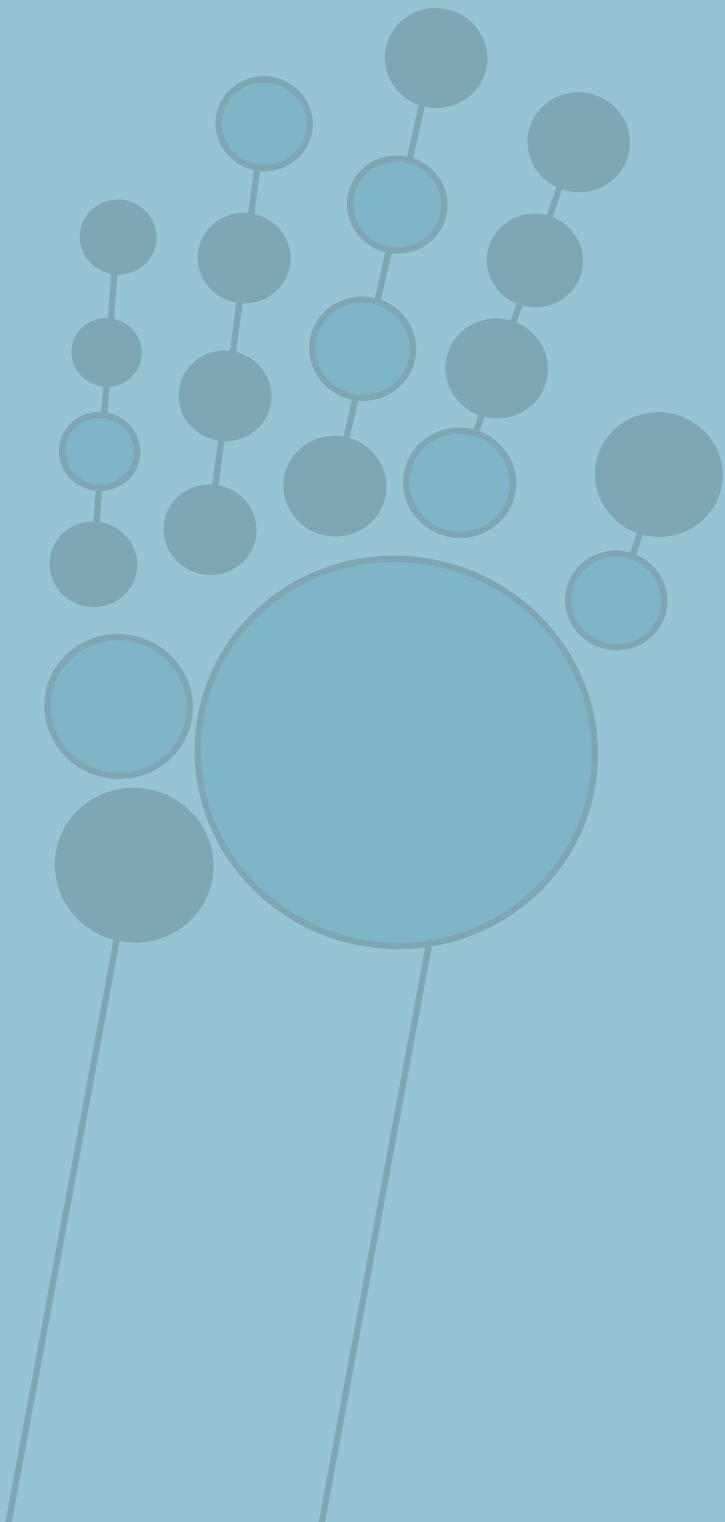
Employee of the National Agency

*Schools are not non-governmental organisations, where a volunteer can basically help with all activities. Schools are problematic in the sense that, according to the programme rules, a volunteer may not get involved in their core activity, that is in the implementation of the curriculum. We know that this is often the case, and it is also our role to show that a volunteer may be engaged in extracurricular or non-school activities.*

The National Agency also pointed out that the implementation of long-term volunteering projects in schools and kindergartens requires flexibility and imagination. In non-governmental organisations volunteers can be engaged in almost any activity, whereas in schools for example their work should be organised around extra-curricular activities.



# Project success factors





## Hosting organisation's perspective

Representatives of the schools and kindergartens participating in the study all emphasised the importance of a properly conducted volunteer recruitment process. At that stage, one should try to get to know the person who wants to go on the volunteering project – their likings, predispositions and preferences – to avoid disappointment and mismatch with the expectations and nature of the institution. Project coordinators and staff also stressed the importance of volunteer motivation and sincerity of their intentions – in their opinion, volunteers should want to help the institution and be aware of the rules which a school or kindergarten follows, rather than just go on a one-year-long tourist trip (such situations are very rare, however).

*I see a problem at the recruitment stage. I don't have a better idea right now how to do it, but our expectations at the recruitment stage are met with high approval from volunteers we talk to, and what they propose to us at that stage seems appropriate, but then time tells all, that's why we should focus more on the recruitment process so that our expectations match the abilities of the volunteer.*

Headteacher, secondary school of fine arts

*At the first stage of volunteer selection there was a boy who was from a large family and was looking for a place in a disability inclusive kindergarten. And at first I regretted that he didn't end up with us. Now, of course, I'm glad that thing went the way they did, but I also think that in our facility, in such a feminized environment, the presence of a man works great, children crave male authority.*

Project Coordinator, kindergarten

*I think that you can't really prepare for such a project. Life is full of surprises, people who come here have their secrets and they do come out. They don't mention them when they apply, but once they're out, they hit the wall. Just to mention our specific climate, it has to be taken into account, it's a challenge for many.*

Teacher, group of schools

Before volunteers arrive at the institution, they also need to be made aware of the difficulties associated with a long-term stay abroad – missing their family and friends, being in a new country where a language they do not know is spoken. The volunteer should have enough perseverance, however, to fulfil their duties, in spite of the initial struggle. Project coordinators emphasised also that, despite good project preparation, in such long-term activities problematic situations, for example those related to cultural differences, will always occur.

*If you get a good volunteer, there shouldn't be any problem. To a large extent, it's a matter of the person and their motivation, approach, commitment, motivation. They must have a clear purpose. This is also what the programme is about – you don't come here on a holiday with a group of friends, but on your own to learn and help. It would be good if they knew that before they arrive.*

Project Coordinator, disability inclusive kindergarten

*You shouldn't be discouraged, but cultural differences will always influence the project. But you have to be honest with volunteers and make it clear to expect the same from them.*

Teacher, secondary school of fine arts

The surveyed schools and kindergartens also emphasised that volunteers should know their abilities, and also be able to share their skills for the benefit of the children and staff. If volunteers have a passion, a hobby, or simply something they are good at, it is easier for them to come up with their own initiative for kids and students.

*It's very important that those volunteers have their own interests. So that we could grab onto something and suggest something to them. Otherwise, there's a risk that we won't be able to offer them any interesting activities that they could engage in and show their strengths. Fortunately, our volunteers had such interests. One of them did everything. The other had problems with himself and after a month he returned home. But the first one was best with small children, he was going 'crazy' in the primary school. He had worked with children before in his country.*

Project Coordinator, group of schools

*Our second volunteer had an incredible desire to act – she would think of what she wanted to do and simply do it. For example, she involved our youth in writing letters as part of an Amnesty International campaign.*

Teacher, group of schools

*When volunteers lose their energy and motivation, you need to give them a little freedom, but not too much, because then it may get worse. But I just ask them what they would like to do and they feel a bit obliged to come up with something.*

Teacher, group of schools

The management of the hosting organisations also stressed the importance of the whole team's involvement in the project and the value of a well-organised and motivated project coordinator. They also noted that the facility must be ready to host a long-term volunteer. The project coordinators claimed that

a successful volunteering project could not take place without the openness and support of the institution's management and staff.

*First of all, the team must want it. The project won't succeed if there are too many doubts.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

*If people like what they do and are open, then every new person in the environment is a positive challenge. But if you like to sit in old slippers and, God forbid, you have to do something extra, it will be a flop. The presence of a volunteer always involves a greater workload for the entire team.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

*A tried and tested and committed volunteer project coordinator – a link between the management, teachers and volunteers makes sure that the volunteers are offered a variety of activities, capable of taking care of everything, but also of promoting. My colleague is a gifted writer and promoter.*

Headteacher, primary school

The schools and kindergartens which already have several years of experience with long-term Erasmus+ Volunteering projects emphasised the importance of the volunteers first hosted in their institutions, which gave them the willingness and readiness to carry out subsequent projects. There is a clear correlation between positive experiences with hosting first volunteers and the willingness to do so also in the future.

*Our first volunteers were great, open-minded. Then we had two problematic people, and probably if it wasn't for that first experience, I would be less motivated. And yes, I know that these can be great initiatives, you only need engaged volunteers and a dedicated team in the school.*

Headteacher, kindergarten

The study involved an analysis of the schools' and kindergartens' websites in terms of visibility of the European volunteers' activity. A vast majority of the studied institutions has a 'Volunteering' tab on their website, which is devoted to the activities of international volunteers. Their involvement is also often described under the tabs 'International cooperation' and 'News'. European volunteers frequently appear in photographs posted on the institutions' websites, and in some cases volunteer welcome and farewell stories were published. In two institutions, the volunteers write a blog addressed to the pupils and the local community, where they describe their impressions

about the hosting town and Poland. One institution has developed a tab in English both to address the currently hosted volunteers and to promote the idea of Erasmus+ Volunteering to potential volunteers who would like to participate in a long-term project in the school in the future.

### **Volunteer's perspective**

From the perspective of former volunteers, the key to a successful project is openness and a positive attitude, both from the volunteer and the hosting organisation. The volunteers also emphasised the importance of learning the language of the host country.

*You have to be open to everything: to language, to people. You can't spend time only with other volunteers, you have to get out of your bubble and take advantage of being in a new place among new people.*

Volunteer, primary school

*Polish is difficult, but it's worth learning it, even to a small degree, to be able to communicate with the children, teachers or in a shop.*

Volunteer, primary school

*Openness and boldness are key. One shouldn't be afraid of speaking broken language, communicating with words, gestures, drawings, if necessary. You also have to be brave – playing with 20 children without knowing Polish is a hardcore experience.*

Volunteer, kindergarten

The former volunteers also emphasised the importance of thoughtful selection of the coordinating and hosting organisation as well as awareness of their own preferences and expectations. Some also noted that a long-term volunteering project can be associated with various problems that you need to be able to face, both during its course and after returning home. They also stress the fact that in order to make the best of a volunteering project in a school or kindergarten, one simply has to like being around children and young people.

*If you like big cities, don't go to a rural school.*

Volunteer, primary school

*You need to think about why you need that volunteering. Do I just want to go abroad? Do I want to get professional experience there? Or do I want to learn something and develop competences in some field? You need to know why you're going. Then look for an organisation that will give you that.*

Volunteer, general upper secondary school

The former volunteers were also asked to list three character traits that they think a young person who is considering volunteering in a school or kindergarten should have. Their answers are shown in the word cloud below.

#### Most desired character traits of prospective volunteers



#### National Agency's perspective

Employees of the National Agency in the first place highlighted the role of the accreditation process – it is at this stage that the National Agency is able to assess whether the institution knows and understands the principles of implementing long-term volunteer projects. Should any justified doubts in this respect arise, the accreditation is not granted.

*We make them aware of what a volunteer may do and what they shouldn't do in the school, e.g. teach lessons. If the school doesn't accept this, it unfortunately cannot be accredited by us.*

Employee of the National Agency

*We've had a case of revoking a school's accreditation. The school was recruiting volunteers so that they could be teacher assistants. They advertised themselves as having foreign teachers with great experience and pedagogical background (de facto volunteers) which they had select very carefully. And the school was fee-paying. These were obvious examples of programme violations.*

Employee of the National Agency



In the opinion of employees of the National Agency, cooperation between the coordinating organisation and the school or kindergarten hosting volunteers is also very important. It is the partnership of those two organisations that the project is founded on and it has a significant impact on its quality. The employees of the National Agency also emphasised that they recommend that schools or kindergartens participate in the recruitment of volunteers, even though this process is the responsibility of the coordinating organisation. In this way the hosting organisation becomes more aware of the importance of the recruitment process.

*Good cooperation between the coordinating organisation and the host school or kindergarten is crucial: those settings (schools and kindergartens – author’s note) have a curriculum imposed on them. The volunteer will either help them or disturb them. If they are a distraction, problems will arise immediately and they will say goodbye to such a volunteer.*

Employee of the National Agency

It is also important for coordinating organisations to know what they are capable of and work only with such a number of schools and kindergartens that they are actually able to take care of and support, so that this does not affect the quality of projects in the event the organisation is suddenly unable to cope with the large number of entities it had taken on.

According to the National Agency, clear expectations – of both the hosting organisation and the volunteer – as well as awareness of the roles they play are also important. The institution’s idea of hosting a volunteer should be flexible, so as to be able to accommodate various types of volunteers. Long-term volunteering is not a project for highly-specialised participants only, it gives opportunities to everyone. Hence, the school or kindergarten should have a support structure in place for volunteers who have little experience working with children and young people.

*These are the things that often come out during accreditation interviews. Schools tend to have very clear expectations and plans for hosting a volunteer, but sometimes we’re the first people to tell them that the role of a school or kindergarten is also to guide the learning process of a volunteer, to offer them the opportunity to develop.*

Employee of the National Agency

In the opinion of the employees of the National Agency, schools and kindergartens from villages and small towns play a special role, as they often offer young people many leisure time activities outside of the classroom. In the city, there are more choices in that respect and those needs tend

to be satisfied by other institutions, organisations or businesses. In villages and small towns, life happens in schools, libraries or cultural centres, which work closely with these schools.

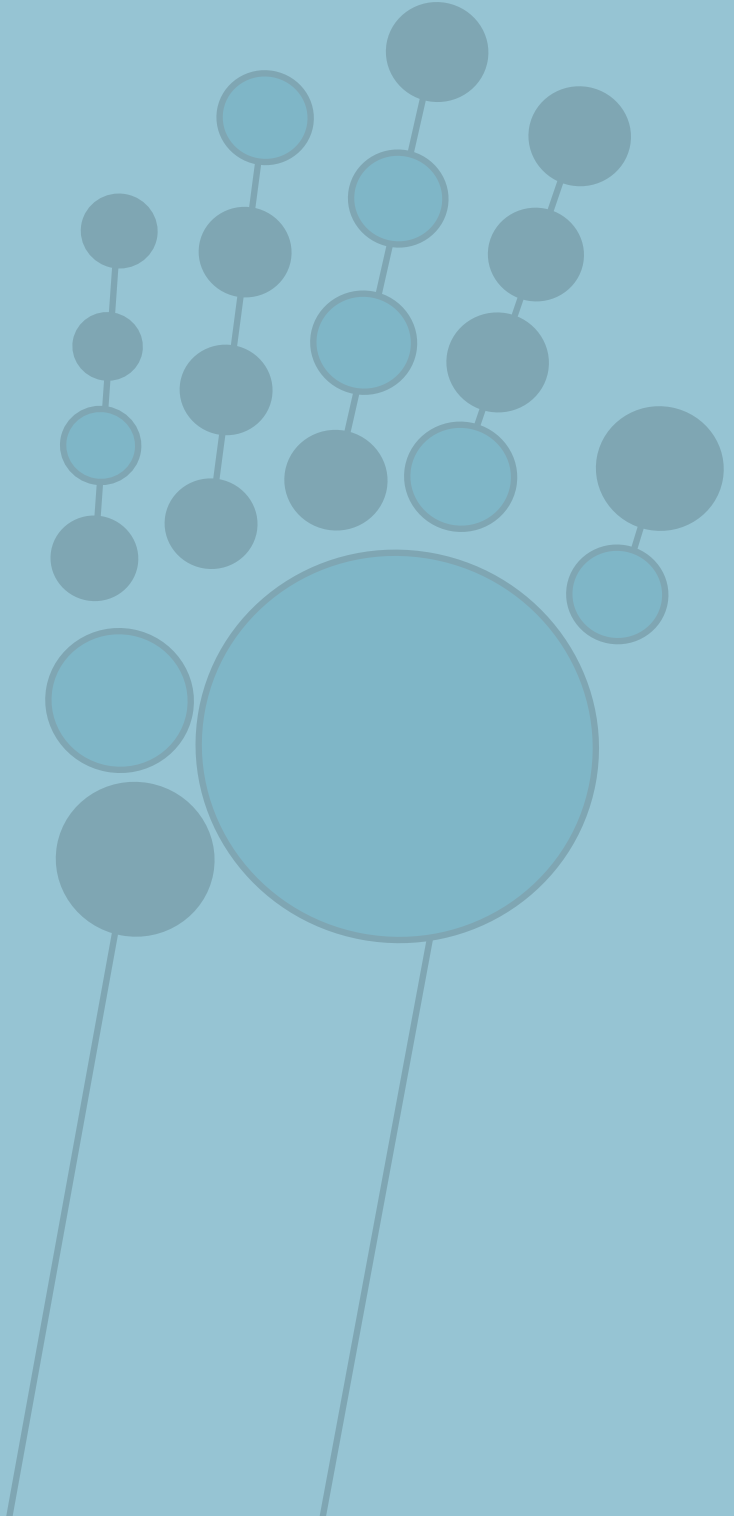
*One of our solid and proven coordinating organisations believes that one of the factors determining the success of projects in schools and kindergartens is whether a given institution thinks of itself, as part of its philosophy and attitude, as an educational institution, one with a mission, rather than one whose role is to closely follow the curriculum, one in which non-formal education takes place, even before it starts implementing Erasmus+ Volunteering projects, one that works with its pupils also outside regular classes, works on their talents during after-school activities. Then you don't need to rack your brain about where to use the volunteer, because the institution already has those spaces and they don't have to be created artificially.*

Employee of the National Agency

# Conclusions



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### **Schools and kindergartens which are involved in many activities tend to host volunteers too**

Most of the surveyed institutions had already had experience with international initiatives (e.g. school exchanges or staff training projects) before they hosted international volunteers. In addition, they had a wide range of extracurricular activities targeted at both their pupils and the wider community – special interest clubs, school volunteer clubs, and after-school sports and language classes. Most of them also collaborated on a regular basis with other local institutions offering activities for children and young people – cultural centres or libraries.

The schools and kindergartens which took part in the study occasionally use the help of local volunteers from outside the school and kindergarten community. However, the schools do encourage their own pupils to become volunteers too, but for the benefit of other people from the local community, e.g. in the local care home, rather than for the institution itself.

The institutions which declared the greatest satisfaction with the long-term volunteering project were characterised by organisational maturity and well-coordinated teaching staff. The management's approval and openness was also significant. It is worth noting that 'maturity' of a school or kindergarten is not synonymous with experience in implementing international projects. Even institutions with little experience in this field were still capable of delivering highly satisfying and valuable projects. Their strength lay in the team and the shared, coherent mission of the facility as well as its welcoming attitude towards change.

The top reasons for hosting international volunteers included the desire to enliven the institution, break away from the routine, open children and youth to the world, and raise their awareness of other cultures or religions. Project coordinators also pointed to the linguistic aspect of the presence of volunteers, who were expected to teach foreign language classes to children and staff. In special needs facilities, however, the basic expectation towards international volunteers was to provide support to pupils in their daily activities and to contribute to their socialisation, so that they get accustomed to interacting with foreigners.

### **International volunteers – a valuable and prestigious asset**

The management, teachers and project coordinators all agreed that international volunteers increase the attractiveness of their school or kindergarten, and also contribute to building their positive image. Institutions which host foreign volunteers are perceived in the local community as ones which can offer their pupils interesting classes and extracurricular activities.

When it comes to the benefits for the staff resulting from the presence of international volunteers, the opportunity to communicate in a foreign language definitely comes to the fore. The presence of volunteers also provides additional motivation for many school employees to learn a foreign language – mainly English – although in many cases the staff, in addition to English, also learnt the language of the volunteer’s home country. It seems that the working languages of the schools and kindergartens which host international volunteers tend to be both Polish and English, which also has a very positive effect on the children, who gradually get used to the fact of using a language other than their native language on a daily basis.

Furthermore, teachers and management alike pointed out that thanks to the volunteers they get to know the culture and customs of other countries, and also learn tolerance and openness. Long-term volunteering projects require them to gain a better understanding of another person – and that attitude is conducive to running satisfying projects.

Volunteers also provided noticeable organisational support in the facility’s day-to-day activity. They helped teachers in taking care of children and youth. Due to the fact that they are only slightly older than the pupils but perform a different function than teachers, they were able to build good relationships with them.

In the case of kindergartens, volunteers also had a significant impact on the carers. The latter claim that now they much more often think about how they work and try to improve their methods so that volunteers can learn as much as possible from them.

As for the impact on children and young people from the surveyed institutions, kindergarten staff, similarly to teachers, listed overcoming the language barrier by the children and the opportunity to use a foreign language in practice and on a daily basis as the main benefits of international volunteers’ presence. The possibility of interacting with foreigners, experiencing their culture and customs was also important. According to the carers, the children have become more open, which significantly contributes to their development and has a positive influence on their perception of the world. Especially in the case of kindergartens, the contact between volunteers and parents was noticeable – in this respect, also them became indirect recipients of volunteers’ activities.

### **Success factors of a long-term volunteering project**

Project coordinators underlined the importance of the volunteer recruitment process. In this respect, the volunteers’ motivation seems crucial, alongside with the honesty of their intentions. Volunteers should be willing to provide help and

assistance at the school or kindergarten, be aware of the rules and follow them. From the perspective of the National Agency, the best long term projects are carried out by schools and kindergartens which are open to out-of-curriculum activities and that have an established cooperation with other local institutions, such as community centres, libraries or non-governmental organisations. Head teachers stressed the importance of involving the entire staff of the school or kindergarten as well as the crucial role of well-motivated project coordinator. In their opinion a school or kindergarten need to mature to hosting international volunteers.

### **Special role of international volunteers in special needs and disability inclusive institutions**

Volunteers have had a distinct impact on the pupils from special needs schools. Their long-term presence in those settings was conducive to building relationships with the pupils, who, due to poor social experience, have sporadic opportunities to interact with anyone other than their teachers and family. In addition, thanks to the great organisational support that volunteers offer to teachers and carers, the latter can devote much more time to their teaching duties, which greatly benefits the pupils. It is also worth stressing that volunteers in these institutions also work out their own way of communication with children, based on words both in English, Polish and the mother tongue of the volunteer, gestures and mimics.

### **International volunteers – future teachers?**

The most frequently listed reason for volunteering abroad, in a Polish school or kindergarten, was the desire to gain professional experience. Many of the former volunteers hosted in schools and kindergartens also stated that they had the appropriate educational background to work with children and young people, and that they saw their professional future as employees of a school, kindergarten or other institution caring for children. This may lead to the conclusion that long-term volunteering projects in schools and kindergartens are sort of professional internships for future teachers or carers.

To some extent, an explanation for this could be the gap created after the Comenius Assistantship – a sub-measure of the Lifelong Learning Programme which enabled future teachers to acquire their first teaching experience in schools and kindergartens across Europe – terminated in 2013. According to representatives of the National Agency, there is a great demand for a programme dedicated to formal education institutions that would offer the possibility of a long-term foreign internship to trainee teachers. Therefore, long-term volunteering projects in schools and kindergartens may be, to some

extent, an attempt to adapt real needs to the requirements of Erasmus+ Volunteering. In the opinion of the employees of the National Agency, if there was such a programme for schools, there would probably be fewer Erasmus+ Volunteering projects in schools and kindergartens, but they would more closely match the definition contained in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide.

### **Differences in the perception of international volunteers and trainees**

There were significant differences in the perception of international volunteers and trainees. First of all, trainees are present in those institutions because they are required to do so for their teaching practice, which results from their study programme, while international volunteers are in the school or kindergarten of their own free will. Trainees are usually assigned to one teacher and have the task of completing a certain number of hours of practice teaching a given subject, while foreign volunteers usually cooperate with teachers of several subjects and with other staff of the institution, very often in connection with after-school and non-school activities. Secondly, teaching practice is much shorter than long-term volunteering, hence the presence of trainees is much less noticeable in the institution. Thirdly, a much lower level of engagement among trainees, who work with one teacher of a particular subject (school) or one carer (kindergarten), has been noticed compared to foreign volunteers, who usually work with many representatives of the staff, management and even parents of the children. Volunteers, unlike trainees, also have the freedom to implement their own projects or ideas. It is also impossible to ignore the intercultural aspect – international volunteers, unlike trainees, teach their language to the children and the staff, talk about the culture of their countries and regions, and bring their activities beyond the walls of the school.

### **Compliance with programme guidelines**

Long-term volunteering projects in schools and kindergartens do not in all respects fit into the definition of non-formal learning contained in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide. The student-mentor relationship is strongly present, and although volunteering is, of course, voluntary, the nature of the institution's work imposes certain obligations and regime, e.g. fixed working hours. The surveyed schools and kindergartens also claim that volunteers are not teacher assistants (which would be contrary to the principles of the Erasmus+ programme), but in practice some of the tasks assigned to them may be of this nature.

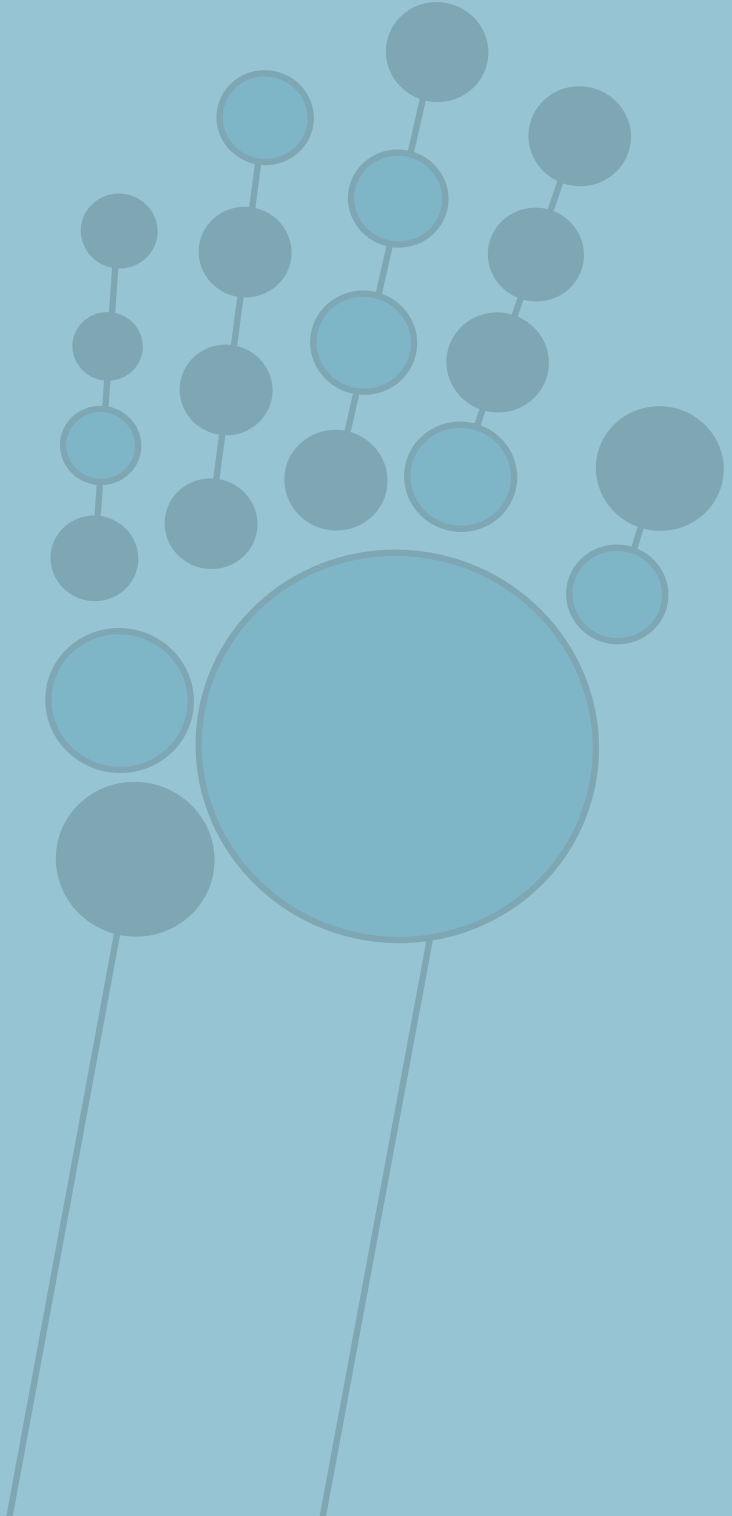
The Polish National Agency is aware of those deviations from programme rules. However, it should be remembered that the ultimate decision on funding projects rests with National Agencies and results from long-term strategies adopted by them. In many countries (e.g. in Poland, Lithuania or Estonia),

especially in smaller towns, there is no alternative to what schools or kindergartens offer as important centres for the local community. In those cases, the mission of National Agencies is to support such institutions (e.g. through long-term volunteering projects) in the implementation of such activities, which are, after all, extracurricular initiatives for those institutions. That is why the majority of schools which host volunteers in Poland are institutions that break away from the usual routine and have, in one sense or another, a specific nature: because of their methods (e.g. democratic schools), their involvement in the local community or their pupils (e.g. special needs schools). The policy of the Polish National Agency is, therefore, to support long-term volunteering in schools and kindergartens in such a way as to promote the idea of non-formal education.

# Recommendations



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In 2018, the European Commission launched a new programme targeted at organisations and young people – European Solidarity Corps – which replaced the previous Erasmus+ Volunteering programme (and operated under the name ‘European Voluntary Service’ until 2017). The new initiative helps young people develop professionally and find their place in the labour market. That programme also allows schools and kindergartens to host volunteers, on the same terms as under the Erasmus+ programme, therefore the recommendations formulated below, despite being developed on the basis of research into Erasmus+ Volunteering projects, are equally applicable to European Solidarity Corps projects.

### **For schools and kindergartens**

- Precisely define the expectations for volunteers before the start of the project;
- Plan activities for volunteers with support from the coordinating organisation;
- Participate in the recruitment process conducted by the coordinating organisation;
- Treat volunteers as a resource rather than a burden on the institution;
- Be open to various volunteer backgrounds, do not limit yourself to hosting people with a degree in education or pedagogy;
- Involve volunteers in planning their activities and provide them with space and opportunities to implement their own ideas;
- Be aware of the existence of cultural differences and communication difficulties (the volunteer may not speak Polish and the staff may not speak English);
- Demonstrate a proactive attitude of the staff in solving problems – the volunteers may not always be willing to discuss their problems or doubts).

### **For volunteers**

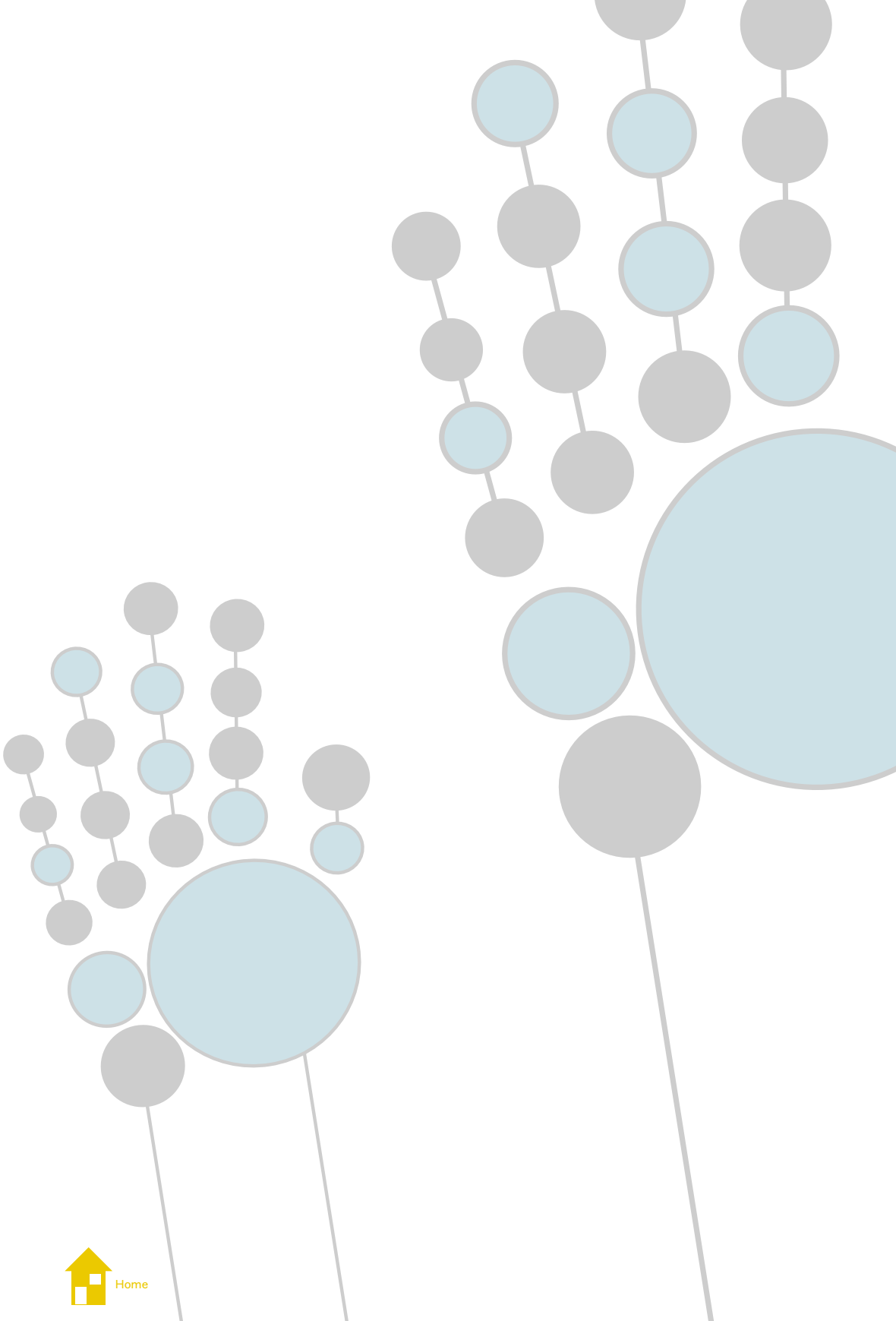
- Be precise in defining your own expectations of a volunteering project in an educational institution;
- Choose a school or a kindergarten in an informed manner, based on your expectations and the needs of the institution;
- Be honest during the recruitment process (be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses, carefully reflect on what you can give and what you can gain as a volunteer).

### **Good practices recommended by the National Agency**

The National Agency recommends that before hosting a long-term volunteer for the first time under the European Solidarity Corps programme, one should contact a similar hosting organisation with experience in implementing this type of projects and make a study visit. It will help verify one's expectations for future volunteers, take advantage of good practices of an experienced school or kindergarten, and see whether a similar initiative is likely to succeed.

Furthermore, the National Agency has observed that volunteers for long-term projects in schools and kindergartens are recruited in accordance with a pattern resulting from the school year: they are recruited in July/August, start in September when the school year begins, and finish in May/June of the following year. The National Agency recommends to go beyond that pattern and not to align long-term projects, especially in schools, with the school year. A good practice tested in several institutions is to recruit in February/March and have the volunteers arrive in April or May. This way, in June, once the grading is done, there is more space and time to introduce the volunteers to the school's life as teachers and the coordinator can devote more time to them. During the summer, the volunteers work in the coordinating organisation (or in the school if summer classes are provided), and in September, when the school year begins, they are fully prepared for work, know the staff, and understand the specific nature of the school.

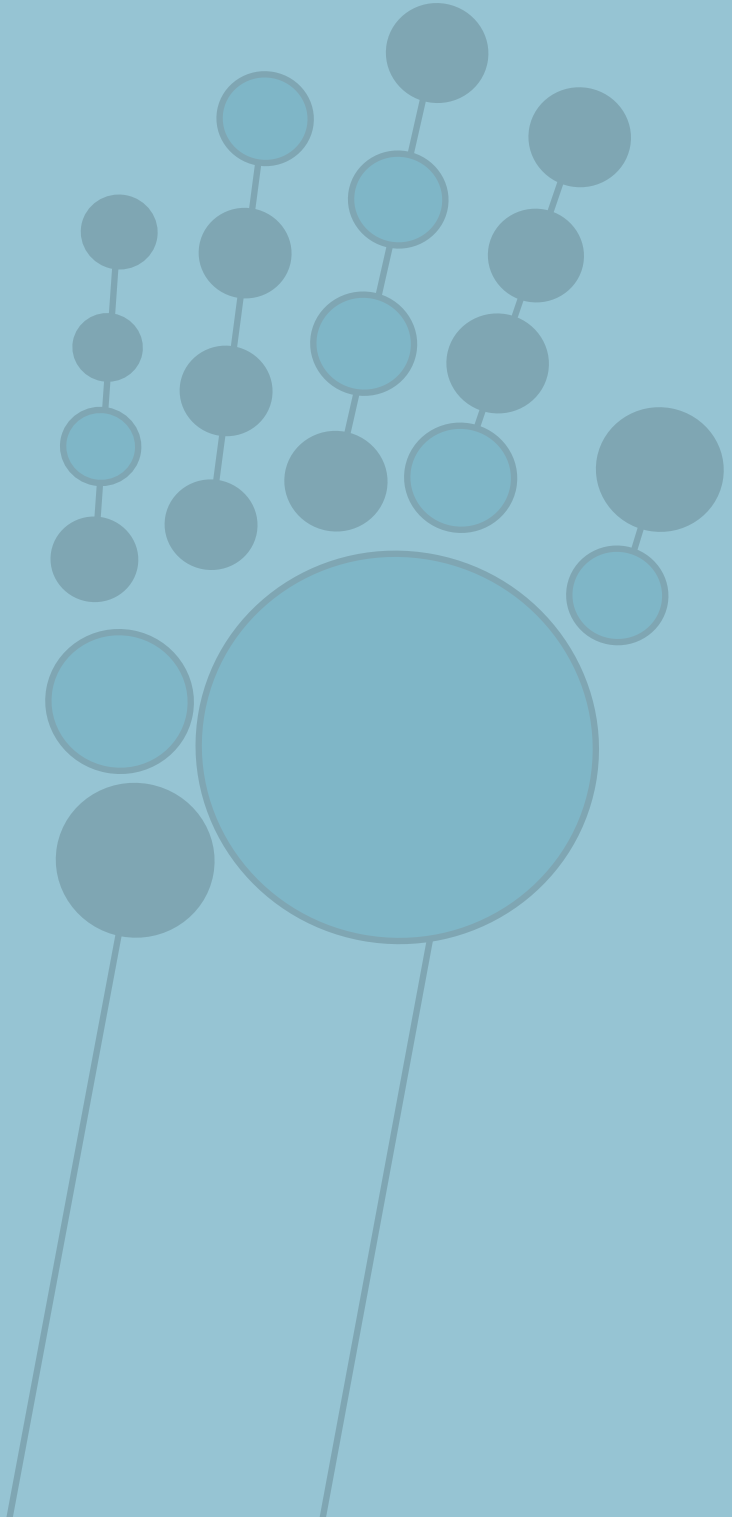




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- Foundation for the Development of the Education System, [www.frse.org.pl](http://www.frse.org.pl)
- Erasmus+ Programme, [www.erasmusplus.org.pl](http://www.erasmusplus.org.pl)
- European Solidarity Corps, [www.eks.org.pl](http://www.eks.org.pl)





Polish schools and kindergartens have hosted an increasing number of international volunteers involved in the Volunteering Erasmus+ projects (currently, the European Solidarity Corps). Although more and more popular, it is, however, a new experience for the domestic educational institutions. This report presents reasons for inviting volunteers, as well as their everyday tasks and duties. It also analyzes the impact of these international guests' work on pupils, teachers and schools in Poland.

The publication is a part of the series FRSE Research Reports.

Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) operates since 1993 and is the Polish National Agency of the Erasmus+ Programme implemented in the years 2014–2020 as well as the Polish National Agency of the European Solidarity Corps. FRSE is also responsible for other European educational and information initiatives in Poland, such as eTwinning, Eurodesk, Eurydice, Europass, ECVET and EPALE. The Foundation also supports cooperation with countries in the East via the Polish Lithuanian Youth Exchange Fund, the Polish Ukrainian Council of Youth Exchange, SALTO-EECA Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre. Since 2014, FRSE has been involved in the implementation of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development.

