



Why does volunteering matter in achieving the SDGs? (Sustainable Development Goals)

*"Volunteers are not paid not because they are worthless, but because they are invaluable." -
Sherry Anderson*

To always be, even to become during one's lifetime, a responsible, aware, active and committed European citizen in order to sustain a vigorous Europe in all respects, is a necessary, permanent and valuable desideratum for all the component countries of this continent, as well as for all types of communities that are part of them.

This objective can be supported and encouraged, on an ongoing basis, both through the use of resources, instruments, policies and programmes specific to European countries and through the implementation of common and generally valid strategies and programmes for all, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals (abbreviated to SDGs) in the common European area.



The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. One of the most important factors contributing to achieving these goals is education for citizenship.

Through the European Solidarity Corps' programmes, volunteering actions with both immediate and long-term positive results are promoted, initiated and supported, highlighting the sustainable development objectives to which these volunteering actions contribute. Thus, ESC volunteers are a particularly valuable resource in impacting the communities in which they work by creating various bridges between European countries, i.e. overcoming language or cultural barriers, through constructive and mutually beneficial inter-human interactions, changing or improving mindsets, prejudices and attitudes, while supporting the objectives of the SDGs. Through non-formal and informal education activities, participants recognise the values of all stakeholders, show openness to learn from each other and to teach others.

The benefits of volunteers' activities are reflected in many ways, including that they themselves add value through what they learn, discover, experience or develop. Their added value will be reflected and benefits both the European community environments in which they volunteer, and afterwards the organisations from which they come and to which they return after their volunteering assignment. In this way, ESC volunteers become true role models of valuable, active and responsible European citizens.

"We ourselves feel that what we do is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop." - Mother Teresa

Volunteering through the European Solidarity Corps programme is based on elements of safety but also of awareness of the challenges faced by the community where the volunteering placement will take place. Knowledge of these aspects before the start of the assignment or from the moment of integration into the local community of the participants carrying out such tasks ensures that the targeted SDGs are effectively achieved. The structure and implementation of European projects within the European Solidarity Corps help to understand and subsequently overcome more easily some of the barriers or bottlenecks inherent in this type of volunteering activity.

In order to provide a complete and clear picture of volunteering initiatives, a European consortium of organisations from Spain (Formative Footprint), Portugal (Federation of Youth Associations of Braga) and Romania (TEAM4Excellence Association) led by the Spanish Deses3 Association is implementing the SIV ([Safe@Informed Volunteering](#)) project, a cooperation project through the Erasmus+ educational programme. By documenting and consulting organisations that want and host volunteers they have defined and made available the innovative SIV application.



The SIV app is designed to help all volunteers easily integrate into their community by providing a detailed framework of information about the projects they will be involved in. In this way, with solid support of information and guidance, volunteers will subsequently be able to support the faster achievement of one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals targeted in their working environment.

Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1:	Eradicate poverty in all its forms from the world.
Goal 2:	Eradicate hunger, ensure food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3:	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
Goal 4:	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
Goal 5:	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6:	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7:	Ensuring affordable, secure, sustainable and modern energy access for all
Goal 8:	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9:	Build resilient infrastructures, promote sustainable industrialisation and encourage innovation
Goal 10:	Reducing inequalities within and between countries
Goal 11:	Development of inclusive, safe, strong and sustainable cities and human settlements
Goal 12:	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13:	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14:	Conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15:	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable forest management, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss
Goal 16:	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, facilitate access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17:	Strengthening means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development

Although these objectives require a global approach that goes beyond the area that can be significantly impacted by individual volunteer actions, many of the organisations working in the European Solidarity Corps programme assume the role of facilitator:

- raising awareness and mobilising people who provide technical expertise in thematic areas
- shaping behaviours and attitudes, helping to create a truly transformational agenda
- encouraging knowledge and willingness to contribute locally to the SDGs
- developing skills across different areas
- collecting data, assessing progress on the SDGs and making the most of local expertise

In this way, volunteers successfully promote and contribute to promoting and raising awareness of lifelong and inclusive education, well-being at all ages, poverty eradication, the removal of interethnic-intercultural-intergenerational barriers, the protection of the environment and the wise use of its resources, as well as supporting the restoration of natural ecosystems.

This context creates the prerequisites for better and faster achievement of the objectives pursued, bearing in mind, at all times, the slogan of the European Solidarity Corps for a united Europe: "Together We're Better".

As immediate effect, volunteers positively impact their host community and successfully represent the organisation they work with by effectively meeting the requirements of the project they are involved in. In doing so, they enhance their human sense and ability to adapt easily to change,



develop and use their creativity and encourage it and that of others, feel their self-esteem increased and instil it in others. In short, they get the satisfaction of a job well done through the results they achieve. Moreover, there is a mutual and constructive exchange of experiences, volunteers cooperate and communicate easily with all those involved in the process, they are supportive and empathetic in receiving and providing information and support, and they develop personally both themselves and members of the local community. At the end of the internship, through all that they learn and experience both from exchanging ideas with others and from the failures that would occur, they improve their problem-solving skills. With these new skills, they will be able to manage situations in the future, seeing the volunteering experience as a starting point for great and immediate progress and success, but also with long-term effect.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."- Mahatma Gandhi

On the long term, volunteering creates lasting benefits for all parties involved - ESC participants and beneficiaries - including good practices that are learned & applied in projects, and then multiplied by the local community. Quality and long-lasting inter-human/inter-generational/inter-cultural/inter-ethnic relationships are initiated and fostered, and positive changes occurring locally as a result of volunteers' activities are maintained or developed. Their participation in the community overcomes language barriers, prejudices and exclusions of any kind, encourages the model of charity and community service. By this approach, it creates the conditions for future commitments and partnerships that are useful to all, but also for the continuous exchange of ideas and constructive actions for both the local and the wider European framework.

After taking active part in such projects, volunteers will have the long-term personal benefit of a valuable amount of information, experience, skills and specific competences which, together with the recommendations of the host organisations and local community and institutions. These assets will increase their chance and ability to be employed in suitable places and fields and to achieve outstanding results through personal motivation about what they want to do, which will be clearer at the end of their volunteering. Often, the field of activity in which they have volunteered remains in their area of interest and they choose or are invited to work in such a system.

By their involvement for the social well-being and through their attitudes as contributors to the welfare of all parties, they will remain social role models of active European citizens. Their results cover the SDGs targeted by the host organisation through non-formal and informal education actions. Direct participation contributes to the creation of stable and barrier-free European communities, to unity in European diversity, and to the creation and strengthening of a united Europe.