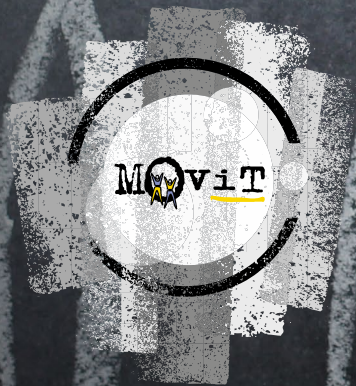


**‘LEARNING SUPPORT WITHIN VOLUNTEERING
PROJECTS IN SLOVENIA AND THE WESTERN BALKANS:
PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS FOR
DEVELOPMENT’**



SALTO-YOUTH
SOUTH EAST EUROPE
RESOURCE CENTRE



**SURVEY
REPORT**

Title:
**'Learning support within
volunteering projects in
Slovenia and the Western
Balkans: practices,
challenges and needs for
development'**

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INTRODUCTION



BACKGROUND OF THE SURVEY

Ever since its very foundation as a pilot programme in 1996, the European Voluntary Service (EVS) has been designed to provide a *'genuine educational experience'*¹ for young people taking part in international voluntary service projects. Over the years, a number of research studies have proven the educational value of EVS. The most recent European Commission's impact study has confirmed its *'measurable impact on the volunteers' learning and competence development'*, showing that *'three out of four volunteers stated that the EVS helped them to improve their inter-personal and social competences'*². In the same line, the Ongoing research-based analysis and monitoring of the EU youth programme (RAY) indicates that through their participation in the EVS, *young people can significantly increase their foreign language competence, intercultural competence, entrepreneurial thinking, team work skills, develop solidarity and develop their European awareness'*³ Another study has demonstrated the relevance of the competences gained in the EVS for the area of work, thus strengthening the employability of former EVS volunteers⁴.

It seems that the 'learning dimension' in the EVS has always been there, along with the 'service dimension' focused on making a difference in local communities. Such combination made the EVS projects unique experiences of 'giving and receiving', contributing and learning. However, following the stronger calls for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in youth work in Europe, the introduction of Youthpass in 2007 has brought a major shift in dealing with learning in European youth projects, including EVS. The implementation of Youthpass has brought the learning dimension more into the spotlight, with the demand to make it more explicit⁵ both in terms of the process and its outcomes. At the same time, the EVS organizations have been confronted with their own learning curve, in terms of how to provide the quality and competent support for the volunteers' learning. Such support should have become *more intentional, reflected and organized*, including the redefining of the support roles within the organization and the application of learning support tools. To support the organizations in this development process, the network of Erasmus+ National Agencies has implemented a number of training courses for EVS support staff⁶ and developed support tools (e.g. handbooks, learning reflection tools, etc.).

Building on these developments, as part of its regular role to support quality development, MOVIT (Erasmus+ YIA National agency in Slovenia and SALTO-YOUTH SEE RC) has decided to have a closer look at the state of learning support within the organizations in Slovenia and the Western Balkans. The survey was conducted during June 2018.

AIMS OF THE SURVEY

The main aim of the survey was to explore the existing practices in supporting the volunteer's learning within the EVS/E+ volunteering projects in Slovenia and the Western Balkans. The survey also aimed at identifying the developmental needs amongst the organizations in terms of their capacities (and competencies) to support the volunteer's learning in the most effective way. The results of the survey have provided guidelines and recommendations for MOVIT (E+ YIA National agency and SALTO-YOUTH SEE RC) for further investment in capacity building in this area.

More specifically, the survey aimed at answering the following **research questions**:

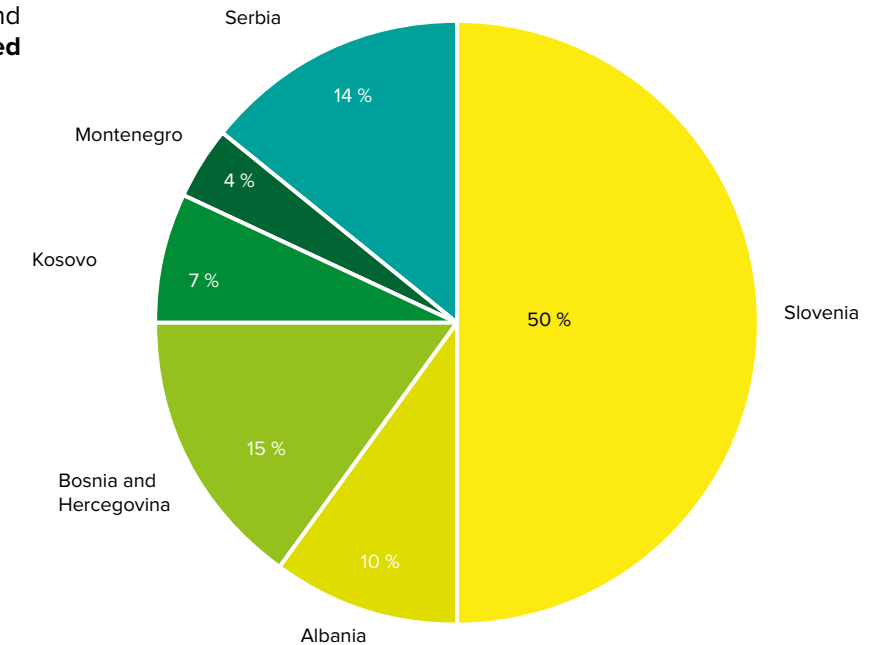
- ➔ What were the trends in terms of practices and approaches to learning support?
- ➔ What was the level of competence for learning support amongst the participating organizations?
- ➔ What were the needs and areas for the further development of competences in this area?
- ➔ What were the main challenges for organizing effective and quality learning support?
- ➔ What are the organizations' suggestions for capacity building measures in the future?

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The data in this survey was collected through an online questionnaire, during June 2018. The invitation was sent to all currently accredited EVS/E+ organizations and the ones that had been accredited in 2017 coming from Slovenia and the countries of the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. The response rate was more than satisfactory. The survey was responded by 138 organizations, out of which **106 organizations** (105 currently accredited and 1 previously accredited) **completed the survey in full**.

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the conclusions from the survey, only the 106 completed ones were taken into account in the analysis. *Considering that this sample includes almost 47% of currently accredited organizations in the surveyed countries, it gives a good basis for relevant conclusions regarding the main research questions and developing relevant recommendations for further capacity building measures.* The analysis of the given data was conducted separately for Slovenia and for the Western Balkans, with a separate set of recommendations. In addition to that, a short comparative analysis was also included in the joint conclusions at the end of this report.

▶ Your organization is coming from



LEARNING
SUPPORT
WITHIN THE
VOLUNTEERING
ORGANIZATIONS
IN SLOVENIA

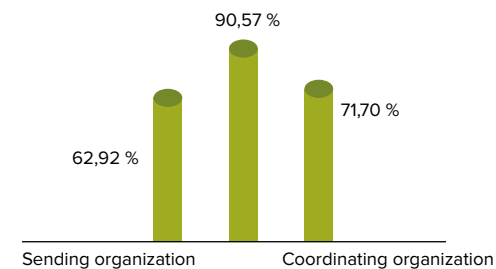


ORGANIZATIONS FROM SLOVENIA IN THE SURVEY

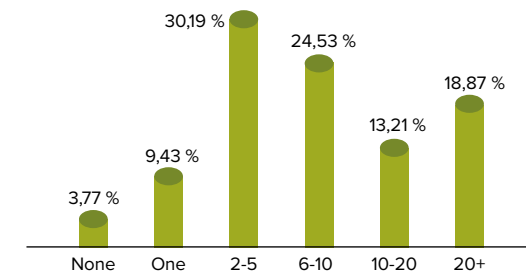
This survey covered **53 EVS/E+VOL organizations** from Slovenia, which makes 40.76% out of a total of 130 accredited organizations at the time of conducting the survey. All of the organizations in the sample held valid accreditation for the EVS/E+VOL, including **36 sending organizations, 48 receiving organizations and 38 coordinating organizations**. In the sample there was a good distribution in terms of the previous experience with the EVS/E+VOL: more than half of these organizations had been involved in the EVS/E+VOL for more than 5 years, 22 organizations had had experience between one and five years and only 5 organizations were newcomers to the EVS/E+VOL.

In terms of the EVS/E+VOL experience, **there was a much stronger hosting (receiving) interest and experience than sending**. The majority of organizations had had a lower to medium hosting experience, with more than 50% of them who had received between 2 and 10 volunteers, while more than 30% of organizations had a large or very large amount of hosting experience. In terms of sending volunteers abroad, almost half of the organizations had no interest and/or experience in taking on this role in the EVS/E+VOL.

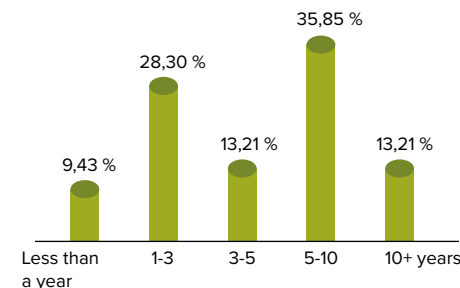
► **What type of accreditation does your organization have?**



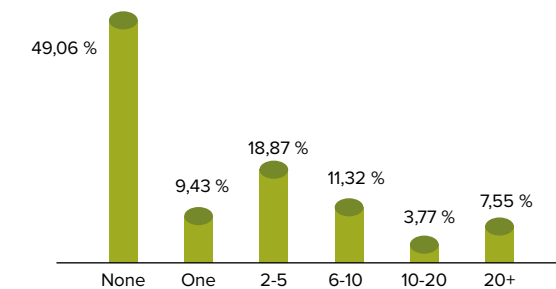
► **How many EVS volunteers have you RECEIVED so far?**



► **For how many years has your organization been involved in Erasmus+ volunteering projects/EVS projects?**



► **How many EVS volunteers have you SENT so far?**



PROJECT COORDINATORS AND MENTORS IN THE SURVEY

Taking into account one of the main aims of the survey; to explore the trends in the practices of learning support, it was very important to identify who were the people responding to the survey - what roles did they play in the support system around the volunteer. As the chart below shows, when asked to choose, **almost ¾ of the respondents were project coordinators and a little more than ¼ were mentors for the volunteers.** 5 respondents emphasized that they were carrying out both roles in their organizations.

Quite often in the EVS/E+VOL organizations there was a certain confusion and ambiguity in relation to these roles, so we were curious to see what was their perception and understanding of them. As the word cloud shows, the **Project coordinators** tended to see their role mostly in terms of their overall coordination and management of the project, and the work and tasks for the volunteers. It also includes arranging all the practical and administrative arrangements for the project to happen. To some extent they were also responsible for mentoring the volunteer's learning as part of their role or mentoring the mentors.



The second word cloud shows that the **Mentors** use most frequently the words 'support' and 'mentor' to describe their role towards the volunteers. In most cases, it was primarily about providing personal support and supporting the volunteer's integration in the new environment. It is also about mediating in case of any conflicts between the volunteer and the staff from the organization. However, the word 'learning' was not explicitly mentioned.



► What describes best your role in the EVS/Erasmus+ volunteering projects?

Mentor for the volunteers
0.2642



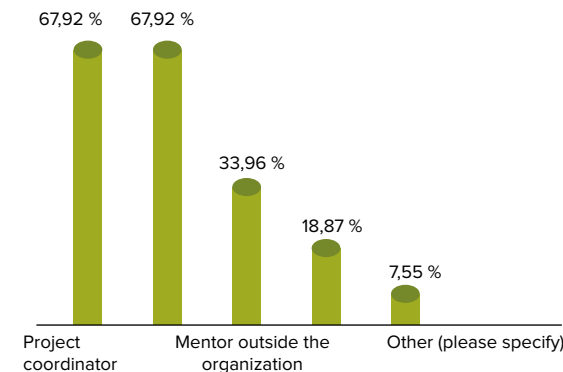
Project coordinator
0.7358

LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: WHO DOES IT?

How was learning support organized in the EVS/E+ VOL organizations in Slovenia? Who provides it to the volunteers? These were the questions we were looking for in this segment of the survey.

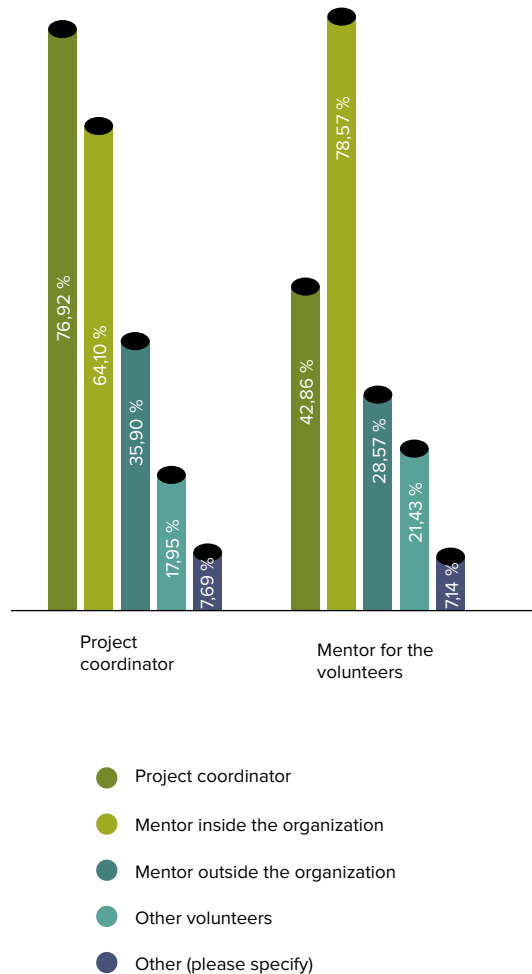
As the graph below shows, the **large majority of organizations in the survey placed the responsibility for the learning support inside the organization (giving it to the project coordinators and mentors from the organization)**, while in only one out of three cases would they look for the option of engaging an external mentor. It was also interesting that 18.87% saw the other volunteers as responsible for learning support and to a lesser extent 'the others' (other co-workers in the project or language course teachers).

► Who is responsible for supporting volunteer's learning in your organization? (select all that apply)



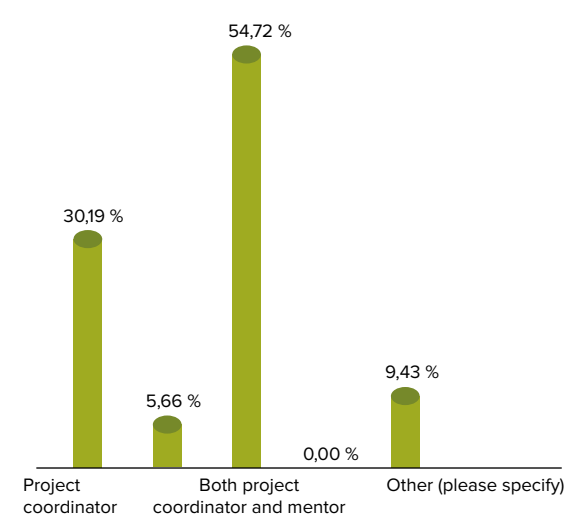
An interesting new insight regarding this question appeared when we focused on the comparison between the project coordinators and the mentors in the survey. It seems the answer about this question depended on who you asked. As the comparison graph shows, *the project coordinators tended to see themselves as having the main responsibility for supporting the volunteer's learning, followed closely with the mentors inside the organization.* However, when asked, *11 out of 14 mentors in the survey selected themselves as having the primary responsibility for the volunteer's learning. Only 6 of them selected the project coordinators as co-responsible for learning support.* What did this tell us? Taking into account the self-perception of their role (see above), there might be two reasons for this way of looking at the responsibility for learning support. In some organizations, it was the mentors who did all the work for the EVS/E+ volunteers, and the learning support was just part of the whole package of volunteer's support. In other, less frequent cases in our sample, there was a strong sense of 'mentoring identity' developed in the organization and mentors clearly saw the volunteer's development as their main task.

► Who is responsible for supporting the volunteer's learning in your organization? (select all that apply)



In terms of introducing the Youthpass to the volunteers, all organizations saw that their responsibility was to ensure the volunteers' familiarity with it and support the volunteers about it. None of them would leave it to the volunteers to learn about it on their own. In more than half of the organizations it was the task for both the coordinator and the mentor, in 1/3rd of the organizations the Youthpass support was done only by the project coordinator, and only in a few cases was it done solely by the mentor. In some cases, as one of respondents stated, it could be a flexible task 'it depends ... we tried all those options ... and we are not yet decided what was the best ...' and in the case of the relation between the sending and receiving organizations on their approach, it was: 'the receiving organization that supported them in Youthpass, and we introduce it.'

► Who is introducing and supporting the volunteer in filling in the Youthpass?

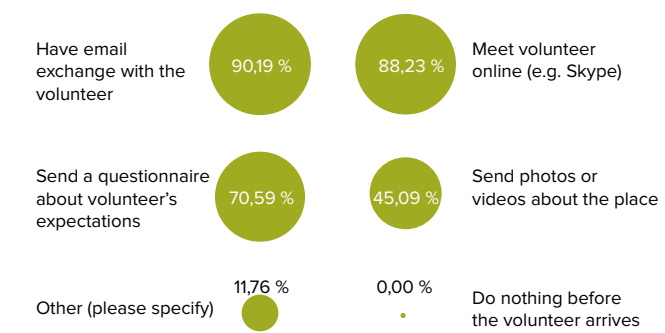


LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE SERVICE

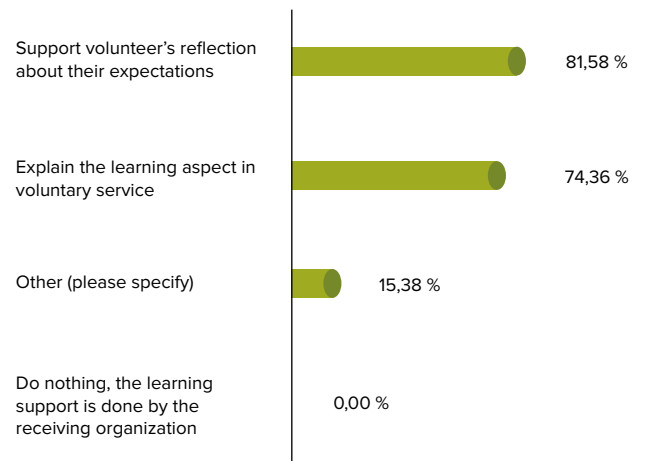
Learning support started before the actual beginning of the voluntary service. This preparation period helps lay down the foundation and prepare the volunteer's mindset for the overall service, including its learning dimension. Therefore, we asked the organizations in the survey about what they did about learning before the service. As the graphs show, **all receiving organizations did something about the volunteer's learning even before the volunteer departed.** The large majority of receiving organizations had an e-mail exchange and had a Skype call with the volunteer. More than 70% of organizations sent a questionnaire to explore the volunteer's expectations and less than half of the organizations in the survey sent photos and videos to the volunteer before. Two organizations mentioned that they sent the Info-pack about the hosting organization and the local community.

In case of the sending role, it was very similar to the receiving role, where they would all do something to prepare the volunteers. **A large majority of the sending organizations set the stage for the volunteer's learning in the project by 'supporting the volunteer's perception of the expectations' and explaining the 'learning dimension of the voluntary service'.**

► Before the hosted volunteer arrives at your organization to start the project, the person responsible for learning support would: (select all that apply)



► Before you send a volunteer to their voluntary service abroad, the person responsible for learning support would: (select all that apply)

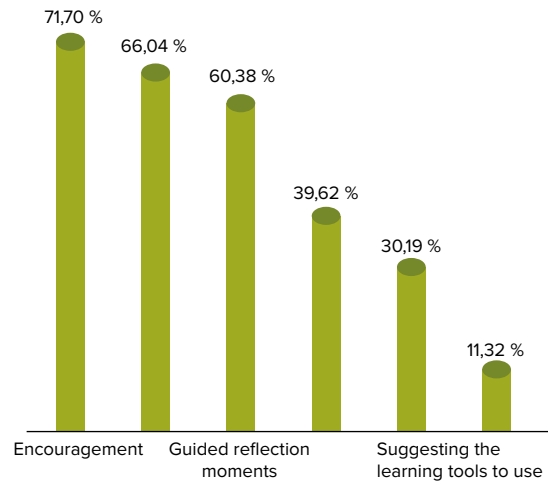


Some 'other' measures mentioned were 'explaining about Erasmus+ and EVS, trying to encourage him/her to explore the country he/she was going to, google the place, the organization, try to build a picture of how it would be and later on ask many questions about it (so you help with a reminder about what may be important)'.

LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: DURING THE SERVICE

Learning support during the EVS/E+VOL service can take various forms and include various types of actions. As the graph below shows, **the most frequently used types of learning support were ‘encouragement’, ‘regular feedback’ and ‘guided moments of reflection’**. Less preferred ways were the ‘adequate level of challenge’ for the volunteer and ‘suggesting the learning tools to use’. In ‘other’ practices, some organizations mentioned specific ‘mentor meetings’, ‘everyday support with different tools and presence’. While in the case of the sending organizations, some of them claimed that they applied ‘occasional moments of reflection during their stay in the volunteer’s visit to the host country’.

► What kind of learning support do you provide to your volunteers?



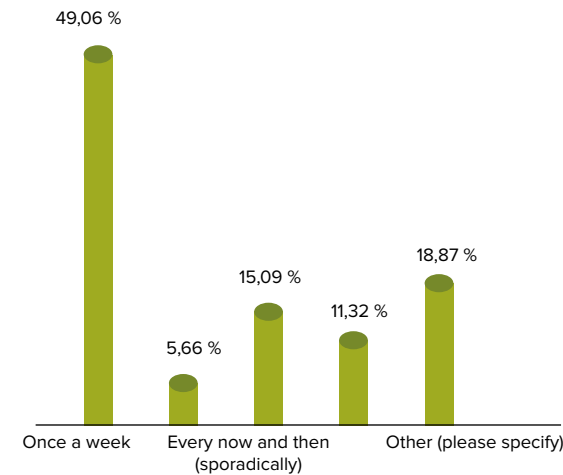
In almost half of the organizations, the **typical frequency of the organized learning support moments was once a week**. It was much less present than ‘practice on an occasional basis’: ‘every now and then’ and ‘in case of the needs of the volunteer’. The least present frequency of learning support was ‘once per month’. In the ‘other measures’, the whole complexity and flexibility of the EVS/E+VOL learning support showed up. It is clear that **the actual learning support strategy needed to be adjusted to the specificities of each volunteer, and the phase in the project or the actual needs that may occur**.

Some learning support practices reported were:

- *Once a week, if the need shows up more often*
- *It depends: for some volunteers on a daily basis, for others once per week*
- *A few times a month*
- *Once per month for the whole group; when needed individually*
- *We had it every day (the mentor inside the organization was always present)*
- *Guided moments of reflection are foreseen once a month, but usually it is realistically doable only once every two months. Regular feedback took place all the time, during and after the activity they were involved in. The same goes for encouragement and an adequate level of challenge*
- *Every now and then: at the beginning of every week, then when he/she is on track, more likely monthly or after the projects, events, etc.*
- *Once every 1-2 months we had a big evaluation meeting, but in the time between, the coordinator gave feedback, encouragement, and challenges to the volunteer when needed.*

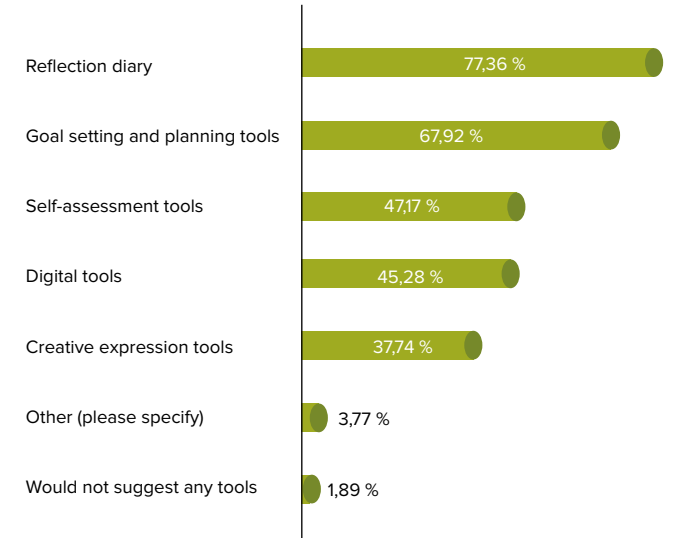
- *Prior to the EVS activity and on their return, as we are a sending organization and have monthly Skype talks to check how the volunteer is doing, how he/she feels and how he/she evaluates their experience up till then.*

► How often does this learning support take place?



In terms of learning about support tools, **almost every organization in the survey suggested some learning support tools to their volunteers**. 3 out of 4 organizations would suggest that the volunteers use some kind of form of a ‘reflection diary’ and 2/3rds of the organizations suggested ‘goal setting and planning tools’. Less than half of the organizations would use self-assessment, digital tools and creative expression tools. Only one organization did not suggest any tools. In the ‘other’ section, we may also find some other types of suggestions, like ‘taking photos of the days, inspirations, taking video logs’.

► What type of learning support tools, if any, would you suggest to the volunteer to use? (select all that apply)



Finally, regarding the use of tools for learning support, one representative of the organization rightly pointed out the need to stay sensitive to the specific requirements of each volunteer:

‘This largely depended on the volunteer. The person who was more of an analytical type would perhaps benefit more from goal setting and planning and using digital tools, and people who were more creative would use more creative expressive tools, but we do not stick to just one fits all.’

LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: AFTER THE SERVICE

When the service was over, **as a receiving organization**, almost all the organizations would stay in touch with the volunteers for at least six months after the project ended. Some of them would provide their support in terms of goal setting and organize a follow up moment of reflection about the whole process and ask for the volunteer's feedback. In some cases, they may provide further informational support or support a volunteer's future projects and actions. They remained open for future cooperation and visits by the former volunteer. When it comes to recognition, apart from Youthpass, some organizations also provided a Europass mobility document and a Europass language passport for their volunteers.

In the case of the **sending organizations**, most of the organizations organized a follow-up mentoring meeting and a final evaluation with the volunteer in order to reflect on the volunteer's experience and collect any feedback. Some organizations would offer other possibilities for engagement within their regular activities, while several organizations provided space for the volunteer to present his/her experiences with the organization. Some other follow-up measures included assist-

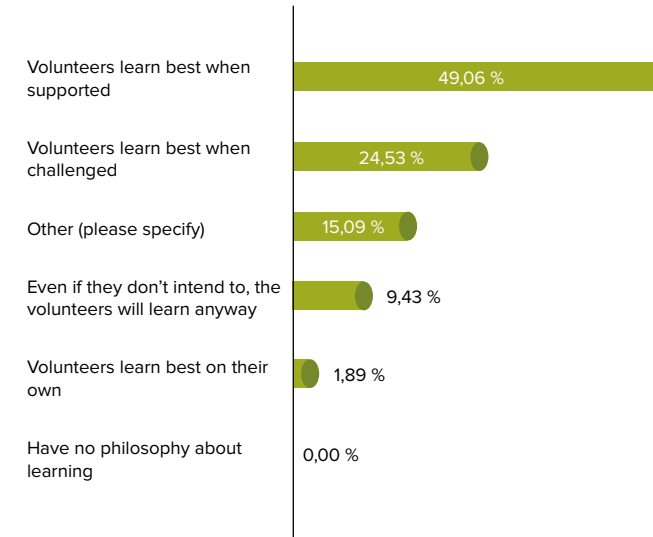
ing the volunteer in their re-integration by providing relevant information, and helping them use their voluntary experience in their future career and/or life choices. A few organizations reported that they would write a letter of recommendation for the future employers of the volunteer.

In the same situation, the **coordinating organizations** stayed in touch with the volunteer and collected feedback about the project. They offered further administrative support and ensured that they had received a Youthpass, in some cases a Europass as well.



UNDERSTANDING THE VOLUNTEER'S LEARNING AND LEARNING SUPPORT IN THE EVS/E+ VOL

► What describes best your philosophy about (approach to) the volunteer's learning?



The way you think about learning will largely guide your decisions and your actions in terms of providing learning support to other people. Therefore, we decided to ask the support persons in the survey what was their 'philosophy' about volunteer's learning. As shown in the graph, **almost half of the organizations in the survey believed that 'volunteers learnt best when supported' and one out of four 'believed that volunteers learnt best when challenged'**. One out of 10 believed that 'learning will happen anyway' and just one person believed that 'volunteers learnt best on their own'. In the category of 'other' approaches to volunteer's learning,

we may find the approaches that are rather a combination of the above mentioned or that it depended on each individual case.

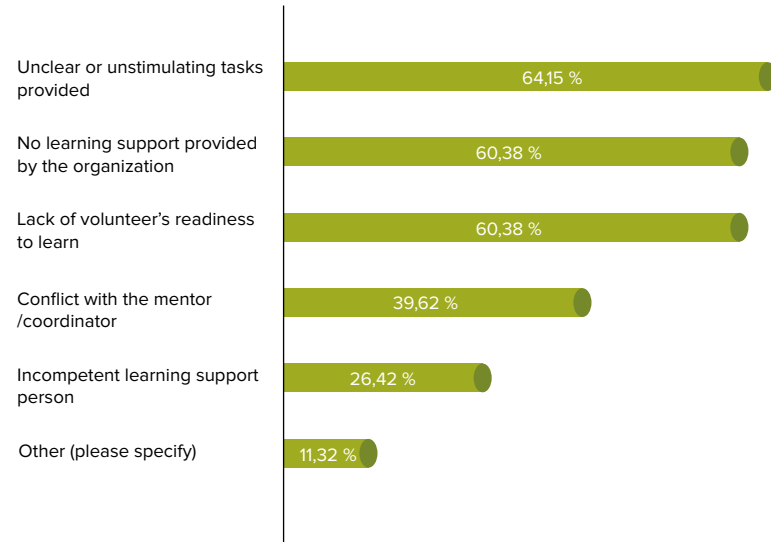
Some of the statements were:

- *It depended from volunteer to volunteer- some learnt best when they were challenged, and some when they had a lot of mentorship.*
- *Volunteers learnt best when supported and they learnt even if they didn't intend to*
- *Volunteers learnt best when supported and challenged*
- *They learnt if they are motivated to learn, accompanied with support and challenges*
- *Prepare them, empower them (so they will believe that they can do it) and delegate (so they are in charge of things, where they can do them how they see fit)*
- *It depended on the volunteer themselves (their needs, wishes, eagerness, etc.).*
- *You need to give them space to learn, but you always need to be there at the back and monitor them if they need help*
- *All of them applied based on previous experience, and the style of learning depended on the volunteer, so we try to support all these possibilities*

Understanding the learning processes in any context, also in the EVS/E+ VOL projects, implies an understanding of what can block the learning process and what needs to be there to support it. The two graphs below show that **more than 60% of the surveyed EVS/E+ VOL organizations from Slovenia considered that unstimulating tasks for the volunteers and a lack of adequate learning support can block a volunteer's learning.** At

the same time, **more than 60% of the organizations underlined the importance of the volunteer's motivation (readiness) to learn for the successful learning process to happen.** A smaller number of organizations selected 'conflicts' and the 'incompetence of the learning support persons' as potential sources of obstacles for the learning process to happen. In the other comments, we also found: *'lack of time of the learning support person. A lack of tasks in which the receiving organization can involve the volunteer according to his/her capacities.'*

► In your opinion, what can block a volunteer's learning in an EVS/volunteering project? (please, select maximum three)

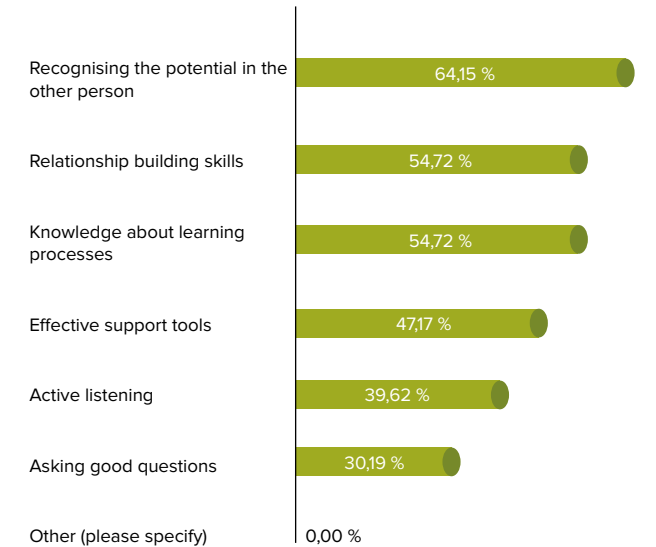


COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT FOR LEARNING SUPPORT IN THE EVS/E+ VOL

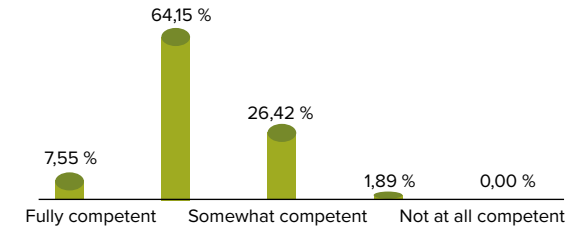
More than 70% of the representatives of EVS/E+ organizations in the survey assessed their level of competence for learning support very highly, either 'very competent' or 'fully competent'. 1 out of 4 representatives assessed themselves as 'somewhat competent' and only one representative as 'not so competent'. None of them believed that they had no competence at all for the learning support for their volunteer. As the second graph below shows, there was also an interesting **tendency to assess the competence of the organization as being better as a whole, counting on the synergetic effect with other colleagues.** Indeed, providing competent learning support in the EVS/E+ VOL projects, **it was rather a collective task to create a support system than an individual effort.**

Addressing the issue of the essential competencies needed for learning support in EVS/E+ VOL projects, the prevailing opinion was that **the essential competencies were an ability to recognize the potential in the volunteer, relationship building skills and knowledge about the learning processes.** This was followed by the competent use of the learning support tools. A little less prioritized were the skills of active listening and asking good questions.

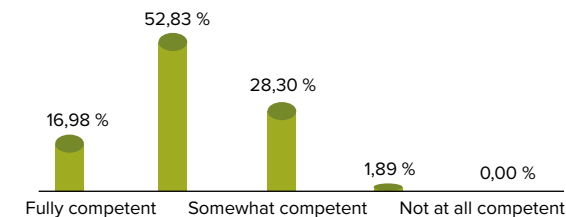
► What are the key competencies needed for an effective learning support in the EVS? (select maximum three)



► How would you rate your personal level of competence for effective learning support?

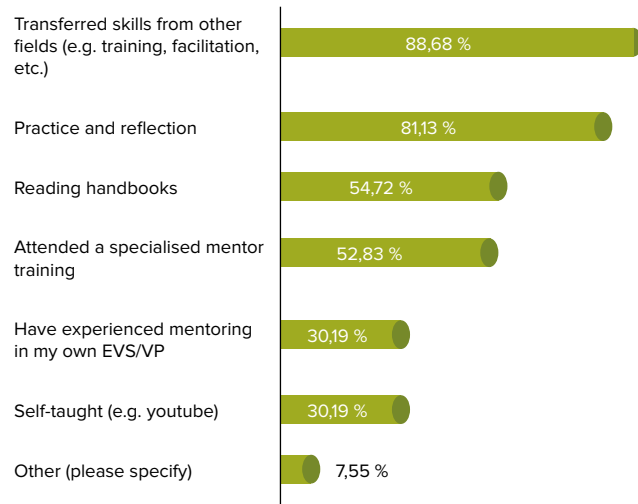


► Overall, how would you rate the level of competence for effective learning support in your organization?



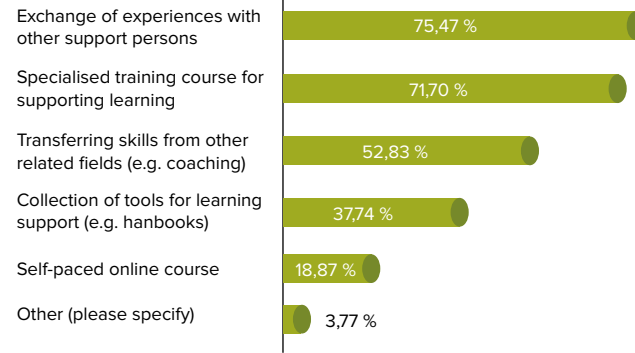
For a large majority of organizations, **the dominant ways of developing the competencies needed for learning support were 'to transfer from other related fields (e.g. training, facilitation, etc.) and through 'practice and reflection'**. Secondary ways of developing these competencies were through 'reading handbooks' and attending 'specialized mentor training'. For 30% of them it was also about having their own experience as EVS/E+ volunteers and self-study. Some other learning paths included trainings for youth workers, exchanges with other mentors and job shadowing.

► **How did you develop your competence in learning support? (select all that apply)**



When thinking about their future development, **more than 70% of organizations in the survey liked to 'exchange with other support persons' or to take part in a specialized training course for learning support'**. As the 'second preferred way of competences' development would be 'transferring skills from other related fields (e.g. coaching). This was followed by providing them with more tools (e.g. handbooks). **The least preferred option was a self-paced online learning course.**

► **What would help you increase your learning support competencies? (select maximum three)**



Specifically, with regard to future learning opportunities, **the main area for competence development was related to understanding and supporting 'the volunteer's motivation to learn'**. This was followed by the ability to 'guide high quality moments of reflection' and improve their 'knowledge about learning theories and processes'. Less than half of the support persons in the survey wanted to improve their competences in relation to the use of the learning support methods, giving feedback, setting learning goals and dealing with change.

► **Specifically, what were the topics that you would need to improve in order to increase your competencies for learning support? (select all that applies)**



THE MAIN CHALLENGES FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

When asked to list three main challenges that they faced in their organization, taking into consideration the learning support of their volunteers, the most frequent ones that appeared were as follows:

Volunteer's motivation: how to keep volunteers motivated for learning within the project and how to encourage their self-initiative; how to make them really aware of what they wanted to get out of their EVS/E+ VOL service

Tasks for the volunteers: How to organize challenging tasks for the volunteers; How to adapt existing activities to the level of the volunteer's competence

Finding, keeping and motivating mentors: How to find, develop and recognize the work of the mentors; How to provide incentives to good mentors in order to keep them for a longer time

Lack of time for learning support in the organizations

Insufficient funding for the learning support

Lack of staff in the organization to deal with the learning support

The integration of volunteers in the organization; How to make them become part of the team

Proper selection and preparation of volunteers by the sending organizations

SUGGESTIONS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING MEASURES

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked what specific recommendations and suggestions they had for Institute MOVIT for future capacity building measures for the development of learning support competences within the EVS/Erasmus+ volunteering organizations.

The most frequent suggestions were:

- Organizing more **networking and good practice exchange events** with other organizations. These should include the exchange of experiences about how to organize an effective learning support system for the volunteers and what should be the role(s) of the support persons, as well as the sharing of good practices in mentoring within EVS/E+VOL projects
- **Specialized training courses** for coordinators and mentors about learning processes in EVS/E+VOL projects. These courses should include learning about new tools for the learning support as well as skills' development for mentors/coordinators about how to coach their volunteers and facilitate their learning.
- Providing **mentoring/coaching for coordinators and mentors**; this can also take the form of supervision or inter-vision groups for mentors and coaches to share their cases and learn from them.

These were followed by less frequent proposals:

- Make a **handbook for volunteers** – that included self-evaluation, a log, a week plan, and all the necessary forms and methods, that he/she can work on with the mentor
- **Raise awareness among the volunteers**, that they are also responsible for their own projects and need to show the right motivation for changing something, and to do something.
- **More financial support and the recognition** of project coordinators and mentors.
- **Online training courses** on specific topics, webinars etc.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey clearly showed that a *large majority of Slovenian EVS/E+VOL organizations were aware of the 'learning aspect' in the voluntary service and the role they needed to play.*

In addition to this, an overall impression was that *EVS/E+VOL organizations in Slovenia prefer to work closely with their volunteers.* For the majority of organizations, the learning support function was placed *inside* the organization and had to be delivered by the project coordinators and/or mentors recruited from the organizational staff. A minority of organizations opted for engaging external mentors.

The results also showed that there were more competences for effective learning support within the organization as a whole, rather than in each single support person. This brought us out of the usual dichotomy in EVS/E+ projects: whether it was the mentor or the coordinator who was responsible for the learning support? It seems that *this issue requires a different, more systemic approach, allowing organizations to design a learning support system that works in their context, rather than trying to delegate this function to individuals.*

Regarding the existing practices in learning support; all sending and receiving organizations should do some preparatory measures before the actual service starts. *During the service, the most typical forms of organized learning support were 'encouragement', 'regular feedback' and 'guided moments of reflection' with the most typical frequency being once a week.* After the service, the receiving organizations tend to stay in contact with their ex-volunteers, while the sending organizations tend to support post-service reflections and the re-integration processes. Apart from issuing a Youthpass certificate, the organizations from Slovenia also use the Europass and offer recommendation letters to their volunteers.

Almost half of the organizations in the survey believed that *'volunteers learnt best when supported'* and one out of four believed *'that volunteers learnt best when challenged'*. As the major factors blocking the volunteering process of learning, they emphasize the *unstimulating tasks for the volunteers and a lack of adequate learning support.* At the same time, they also *underline the importance of the volunteer's motivation (readiness) to learn for the successful learning process to happen.*

In terms of competencies needed for learning support in EVS/E+VOL projects, they see as the most important: the ability to recognize the potential in the volunteer, relationship building skills and knowledge about the learning processes. So far these competencies had developed mainly by *'transferring them from other related fields (e.g. training, facilitation, etc.) and through 'practice and reflection'.*

The main area for competence development was related to understanding and supporting 'the volunteer's motivation to learn'. This was followed by the ability to *'guide high quality moments of reflection'* and to improve their *'knowledge about learning theories and processes'.*

When thinking about opportunities for future development, *more than 70% of organizations in the survey would like to have 'exchanges with other support persons' or to take part in a specialized training course for learning support'.* The least preferred option was a *self-paced online learning course.*

In terms of *the main challenges for learning and learning support in EVS/E+ projects*, the survey identifies 8 areas, including: volunteer's motivation, tasks for the volunteers, finding, keeping and motivating mentors, lack of time for learning support, insufficient funding, lack of staff, integration of the volunteers and the selection and preparation of the volunteers.

The most frequent *suggestions for further capacity building measures*, the organization from Slovenia mentioned:

- Organizing more **networking and good practice exchange events** with other organizations. These should include the exchange of experiences about how to organize an effective learning support system for the volunteers, and what should be the role(s) of the support persons, as well as the sharing of good practices in mentoring within EVS/E+VOL projects
- **Specialized training courses** for coordinators and mentors about the learning processes in EVS/E+VOL projects. These courses should include learning about new tools for the learning support, as well as skills' development for the mentors/coordinator about how to coach their volunteers and facilitate their learning.
- Providing **mentoring/coaching for coordinators and mentors**; this can also take the form of supervision or inter-vision groups for mentors and coaches to share their cases and learn from them.

These were followed by less frequent proposals:

- Make a **handbook for volunteers** – that should include self-evaluation, log, week plan, and all the necessary forms and methods, that she/he can work on with their mentor
- **Raise awareness among the volunteers** that they are also responsible for their own project and need to show the right motivation to change something, and do something.
- **More financial support and the recognition** of project coordinators and mentors.
- **Online training courses** on specific topics, webinars etc.



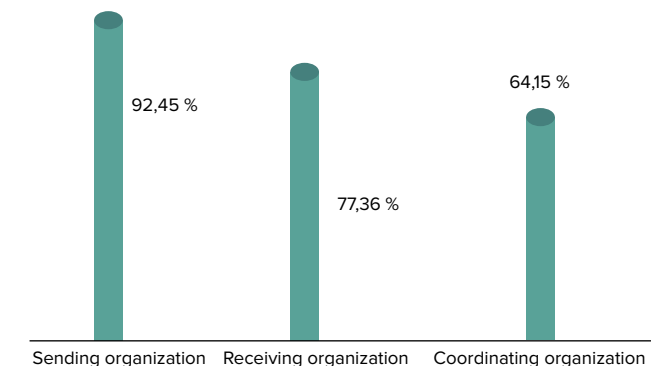
LEARNING SUPPORT WITHIN THE VOLUNTEERING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

ORGANIZATIONS FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE SURVEY

In this survey we managed to get replies from **53 representatives of EVS/E+VOL organizations from the countries in the Western Balkans**. 52 respondents came from organizations that held a valid EVS/E+VOL accreditation at the time of the survey, and one came from an organization that used to be accredited before. As the table below shows, the overall response rate for the Western Balkans as a whole was almost 50%, with a greater interest amongst the organizations in Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo and a little less interest in Albania and Serbia. Nevertheless, the overall response rate leads us to assume with a high level of certainty of the validity of the collected data in the survey and the relevance of its conclusions and recommendations for the Western Balkans.

Out of 53 organizations in the sample, **49 were accredited as sending organizations, 41 as receiving organizations and 34 as coordinating organizations**.

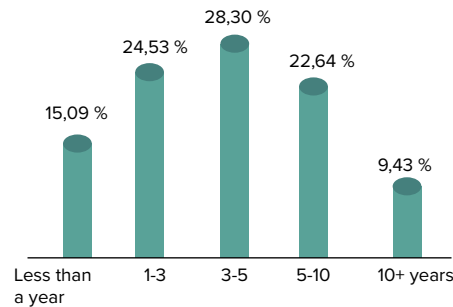
► **What type of accreditation does your organization have at the moment or had it before? (select all that apply)**



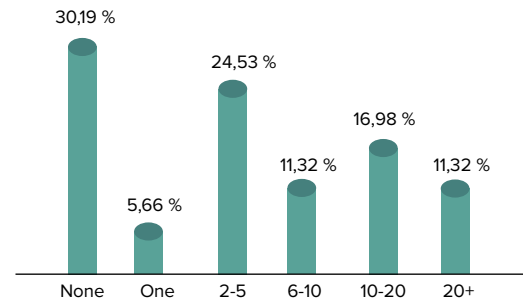
Country	Accredited organizations (June 2018)	Respondents in the survey
Albania	21	11
BIH	25	16
Kosovo	12	7
Montenegro	4	4
Serbia	46	15
Total	108	53

In the sample, there was good distribution in terms of the level of previous experience with EVS/E+VOL projects: the majority of organizations (40) had been involved for more than one year and less than 10 years, 8 organizations were 'newcomers' with less than 1 year of experience and 5 organizations had been involved in the EVS/E+VOL for more than 10 years. This brought additional value to the sample and ensured that the collected data was based on the actual experience with the EVS/E+VOL and covered various perspectives that resulted from the different levels of previous engagement with such projects.

► For how many years has your organization been involved in Erasmus+ volunteering projects/EVS projects?

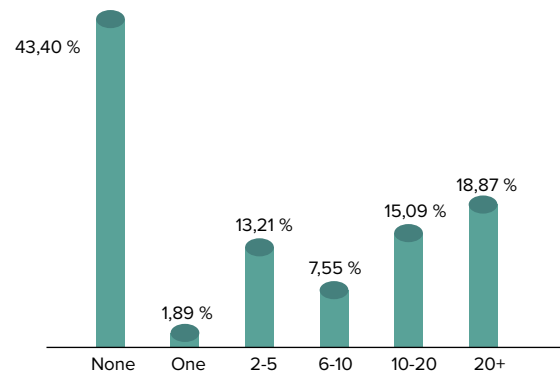


► How many EVS volunteers have you SENT so far?



In terms of the type of the EVS/E+VOL experience, as the two graphs below show, **there was a much stronger experience in sending volunteers abroad than receiving them.** A large majority from 70% organizations had sent volunteers already, while a little more than half of the organizations had received the volunteers so far. *This might imply that some of the findings presented in this survey will be focusing more on the sending organizations' perspective. It is worth mentioning here, that there was a large percentage of inexperienced organizations, which so far had had no sending (30.19%) or hosting (43.40%) experience yet.*

► How many EVS volunteers have you RECEIVED so far?



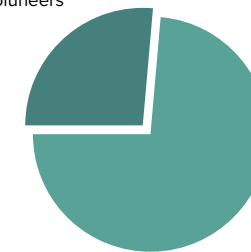
PROJECT COORDINATORS AND MENTORS IN THE SURVEY

Taking into account one of the main aims of the survey, i.e. to explore the trends in practices of learning support, it was very important to identify who were the people responding to the survey: what roles did they play in the support system around the volunteer. As the chart below shows, when asked to choose, *almost 70% of the respondents were project coordinators and a bit more than 30% were acting as mentors for the volunteers.*

of the respondents said). In some others, it was about finding partners for the projects, preparing the project application and maintaining communication with them. In some other cases, it was also about providing the necessary information for the volunteer and preparing them for their service. In the minority of cases, the project coordinators mentioned that they were responsible for supporting the volunteers' learning process.

► What best describes your role in the EVS/Erasmus+ volunteering projects?

Mentor for the volunteers
30 %



Project coordinator
70 %



The second word cloud shows that the **Mentors** most frequently use the word 'support' and 'preparation' to describe their role towards the volunteers. However, the types of support as mentor's tasks vary among the respondents. For the majority of them it was about ensuring the volunteer's wellbeing and their integration into the local community, including attending to the volunteer's socializing needs. It often included providing information about the community and the EVS/E+ VOL programme in general. It was interesting that in several cases the mentors felt responsible for managing the tasks of the volunteer during their service. *However, providing learning support for the volunteers is barely mentioned in words as one of the key tasks of the mentors.*

Very often in EVS/E+VOL organizations, there is a certain confusion and ambiguity in relation to these roles, so we were curious to see what was their perception and understanding of them.

As the word cloud shows, there was a quite diverse perception among **Project coordinators** about their major role. Apart from the coordination activities, in the majority of cases it was mostly an administrative support for the volunteers (acting as 'administrative mentor', as one



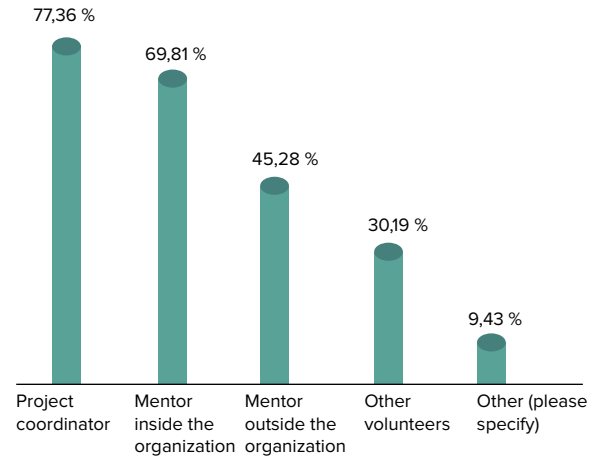
LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: WHO DOES IT?

How was learning support organized in the EVS/E+VOL projects in the Western Balkans? Who was providing it to the volunteer? These were the questions posed in this segment of the survey. As the graph below shows, the **majority of organizations in the survey placed the responsibility for learning support inside the organization, primarily connected to the role of the project coordinator, followed by the mentor inside the organization. However, 24 out of 53 organizations considered using 'external mentors'** and almost 1 out of 3 organizations considered 'other volunteer's responsible for the learning support of the volunteers in the EVS/E+VOL projects.

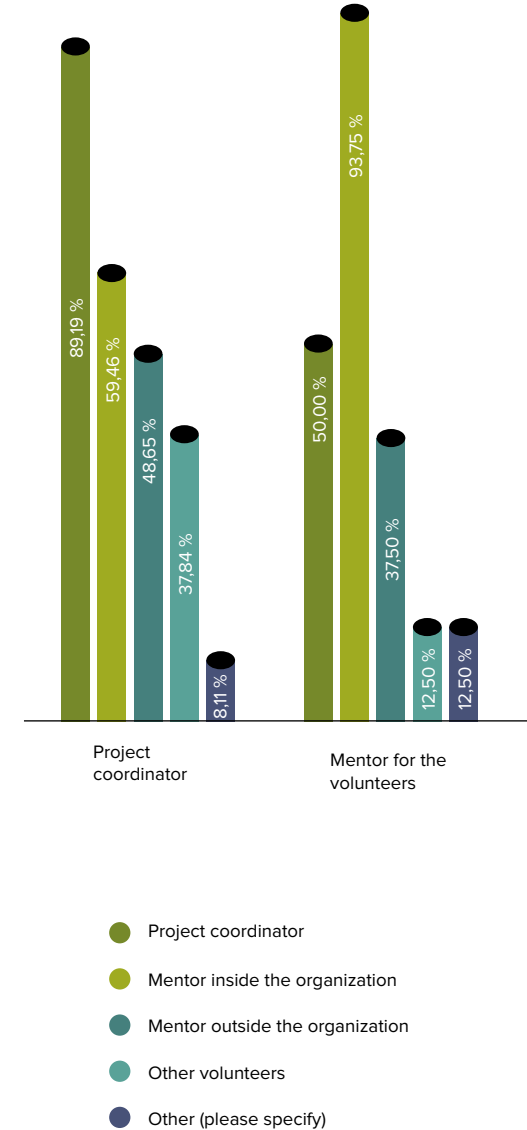
An interesting new view appeared when we looked closely into the comparison between the project coordinators and the mentors in the survey. It seems the answer to this question depended on whom you asked. As the comparison graph shows, *project coordinators tend to see themselves as the main persons responsible for supporting the volunteer's learning. At the same time, almost all (15 out of 16) mentors in the survey selected themselves as primarily responsible for the volunteer's learning. Only half of them selected the project coordinators as co-responsible for learning support.*

What does this tell us? Taking into account the self-perception of their roles (see above), there might be two reasons for this way of looking at the responsibility for learning support. In some organizations, it was the mentors who did *all* the work for the EVS/E+ volunteers and learning support was just part of the whole package of the volunteer's support. In other cases, it was the project coordinators who undertook the whole responsibility for the volunteer's support. This might depend on the size of the organizations and their internal division of tasks, but also the prevailing 'sending perspective' in the sample of Western Balkans' organizations.

► Who is responsible for supporting volunteer's learning in your organization? (select all that apply)

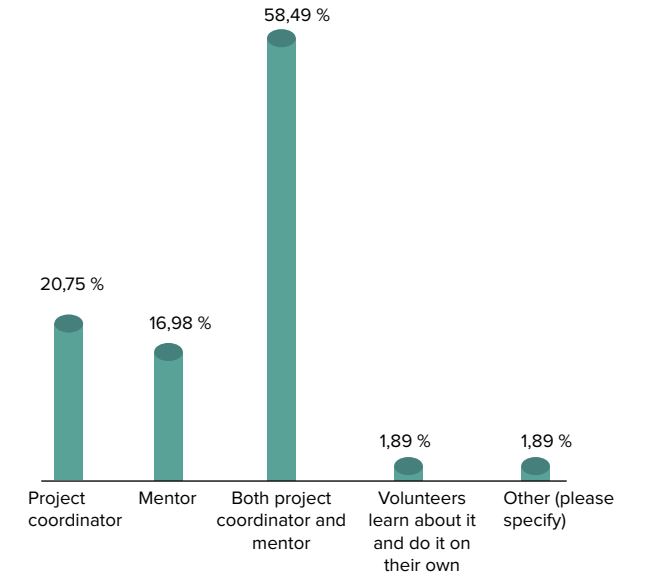


► Who is responsible for supporting the volunteer's learning in your organization? (select all that apply)



In terms of introducing the Youthpass to the volunteers, only one organization left it to the volunteer to become acquainted with it on their own, all others would see this as part of their responsibility. More than half of the organizations considered it as a task for both the coordinator and the mentor, in 11 organizations the Youthpass support was done by the project coordinator only and in 9 organizations this was done solely by the mentor.

► Who is introducing and supporting the volunteer in filling in the Youthpass?

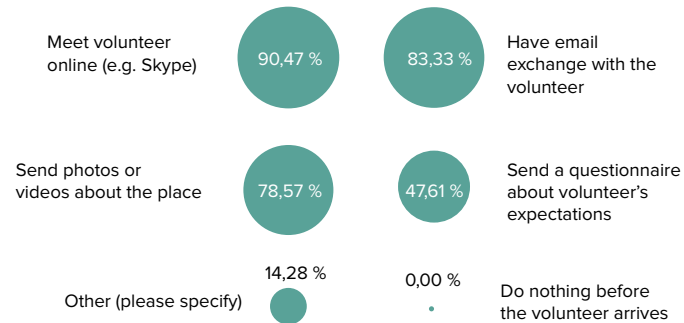


LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE SERVICE

Learning support starts before the actual voluntary service starts. This preparatory period helps lay down the foundations and prepares the volunteer's mind-set about the overall service, including its learning dimension. Therefore, we asked the organizations in the survey what they did about learning before the service.

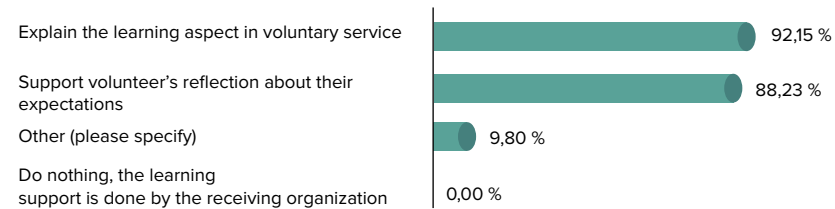
As the graphs show, **all receiving organizations would actually do something before the volunteer arrived to set the stage for learning in the service.** More than 90% of receiving organizations would have a Skype call with the volunteer before their arrival. A large majority of organizations would have an e-mail exchange and/or send pictures/videos about the hosting place to the volunteer. Less than half of the receiving organizations considered sending a questionnaire to explore the volunteer's expectations. Four organizations reported that they had sent some form of Info pack to the volunteers. One organization went beyond this and *'provided them with info about their mentor, about their concrete tasks, the conditions of work and learning. We also shared with them our EVS blog where they can read what other EVS have experienced in our project.'*

► **Before the hosted volunteer arrives at your organization to start the project, the person responsible for learning support would: (select all that apply)**



Similarly, as in the receiving role, **before sending the volunteer, all the sending organizations would take some measures to prepare their volunteer for learning during the service.** A large majority of organizations set the stage for the volunteer's learning in the project by 'explaining the learning dimension in the volunteering projects' and 'supporting the volunteer's reaction regarding their expectations.'

► **Before you send a volunteer to their voluntary service abroad, the person responsible for learning support would: (select all that apply)**

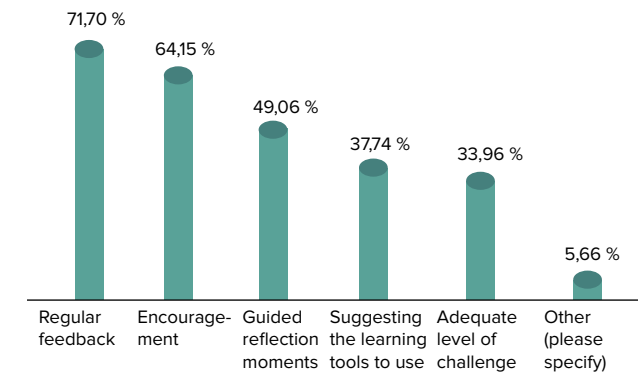


Some 'other' measures mentioned include the 'Discuss EVS programme and share the EVS practices of volunteers in our country', 'make them aware of the group development stages, and provide them with intercultural learning competencies, establish a good communication channel and trust' and 'conduct the relevant training'.

LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: DURING THE SERVICE

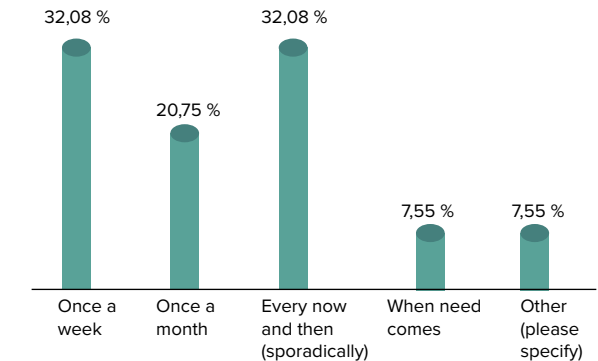
Learning support in the EVS/E+ VOL can take on various forms and include various types of actions. As the graph below shows, the most frequently used type of learning support in the organizations from the Western Balkans was providing feedback to the volunteers, followed by providing encouragement. It was much less preferred to organize guided moments of reflection, as less than half of the organizations considered this as part of the practice. Other less preferred ways were 'suggesting what learning tools to use' and the least popular option was to consider 'the adequacy of the challenge in the tasks provided to the volunteers'. It seems that the **prevailing style of learning support in the Western Balkans organizations was more directive and included more 'quality of providing' (information, feedback, encouragement) than 'quality of asking' (supporting the volunteers' reflections).**

► **What kind of learning support do you provide to your volunteers?**



As the graph below indicates, **more than half of the organizations organized the learning support moments on a regular basis: 1 out of 3 organizations did it once a week, while 1 out of 5 did it monthly.** At the same time, **almost 40% of the organizations showed a trend of a lower frequency and less structured approach to learning support** - it was organized on an ad hoc basis, 'sporadically' and 'when the need arose.'

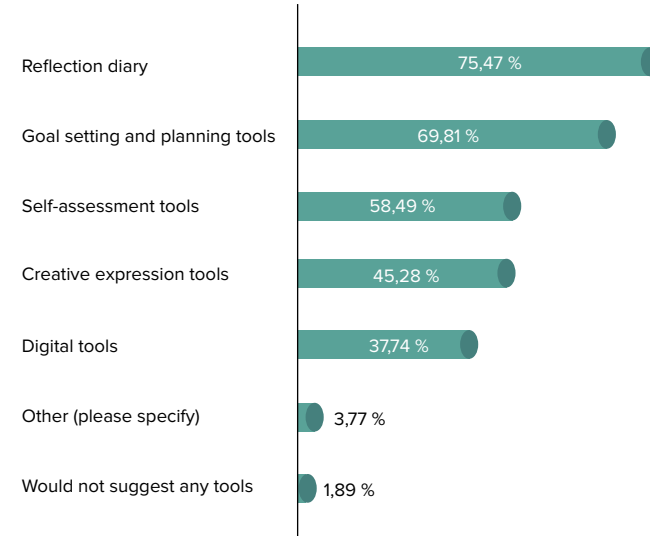
► **How often does this learning support take place?**



In terms of learning support tools, **almost all organizations in the survey suggested some learning support tools for their volunteers.** 3 out of 4 organizations suggested that the volunteers should use some kind of form of a ‘reflection diary’ and 2/3rds of the organizations suggested ‘goal setting and planning tools’. More than half of the organization used some ‘self-assessment tools’. Less than half of the organizations suggested using ‘creative expression tools’ or ‘digital tools’.

Finally, regarding the use of tools for learning support, one representative of an organization rightly pointed out: *‘besides the above mentioned tools, I always check with the volunteers what they prefer to use’.*

► **What type of learning support tools, if any, would you suggest to the volunteer to use? (select all that apply)**



LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES: AFTER THE SERVICE

When the service was over, most of the **receiving organizations** stayed in touch with their former volunteers. Sometimes it was just an e-mail exchange or Facebook friendship, while in other cases it was also about asking for feedback and supporting the volunteer’s reflection on the overall experience. Several organizations continued to send some useful information for the ex/volunteer’s future involvement (e.g. projects, education or jobs). Apart from ensuring the issuing of the Youthpass, a number of organizations offered the possibility of writing a letter of recommendation, if requested by the volunteer.

In the case of the **sending organizations**, most of the organizations organised a follow-up meeting and a final evaluation with the volunteer in order to reflect on the volunteer’s experience and collect any feedback. It was common practice in the organizations to encourage the volunteer to share their experience within the organization or in the community. Some organizations would offer other possibilities for engagement in other projects that they ran, while several organizations used ex-volunteers as mentors for future EVS volunteers. It was also common practice to ‘use’ ex-volun-

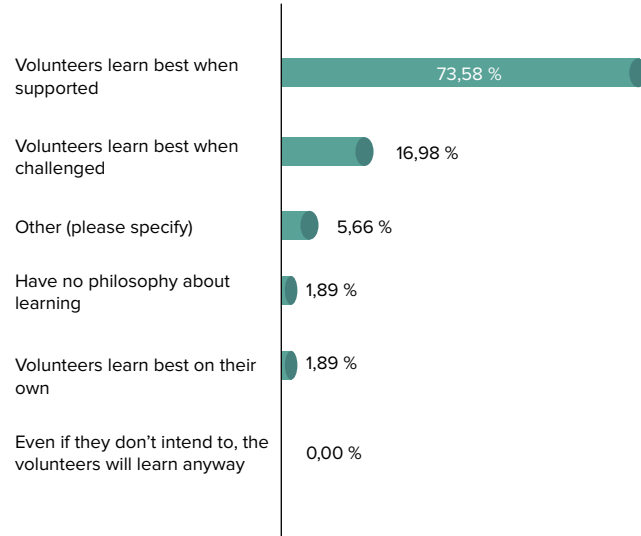
teers to promote the EVS among young people. Some other follow-up measures included assisting the volunteer in their re-integration by providing relevant information and helping them use their voluntary experience in their future career and/or life choices.

In the same situation, the **coordinating organizations** stayed in touch with the volunteer and collected feedback about the project. They offered further administrative support and ensured that they had received the Youthpass. In some cases, they offered the possibility of preparing a recommendation letter for the volunteer.



UNDERSTANDING THE VOLUNTEER'S LEARNING AND LEARNING SUPPORT IN THE EVS/E+ VOL

► What describes best your philosophy about (approach to) the volunteer's learning?



proaches that are rather a combination of the above mentioned philosophies. Some of the statements here were:

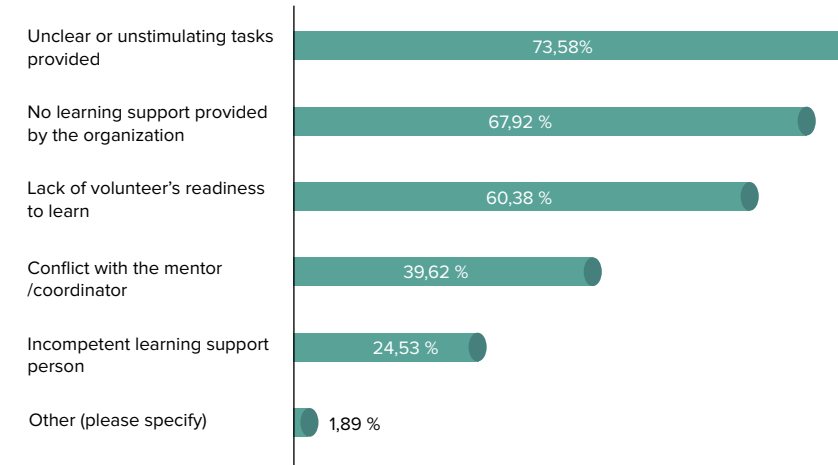
- *Volunteers learnt best when they were supported to work on their own and have clear tasks, but the best was if we motivated them to create something new*
- *We provided both challenges and support for the volunteers in order to increase their knowledge and skills*
- *All of these!*

Understanding learning processes in any context, also in the EVS/E+ VOL projects, implies understanding what can block the learning and what is needed to be there to support it. The two graphs below show that **more than 73% of the EVS/E+ VOL organizations in the Western Balkans considered that 'unstimulating tasks for the volunteers' and almost 70% a 'lack of adequate learning support' were the main factors that can block the volunteer's learning.** At the same time, **more than 60% of organizations underlined the importance of the volunteer's motivation (readiness) to learn for the successful learning process to happen.** A smaller number of organizations selected 'conflicts' and the 'incompetence of the learning support personnel' as potential sources of obstacles for the learning process to happen. In the answer option "other", we also found this comment: *'poor communication with the mentor'.*

The way you think about learning will largely guide your decisions and actions in terms providing learning support to other people. Therefore, we decided to ask the support personnel in the survey what was their 'philosophy' about the volunteer's learning. As shown in the graph, **almost 3/4 of the organizations from the Western Balkans believed that 'volunteers learnt best when supported' and less than 1/5 believe 'that volunteers learnt best when they were challenged'.**

None of them believed that 'learning would happen anyway' and just one person believed that 'volunteers learnt best on their own'. In the category of 'other' approaches to the volunteer's learning, we may find ap-

► In your opinion, what can block a volunteer's learning in an EVS/volunteering project? (please, select maximum three)

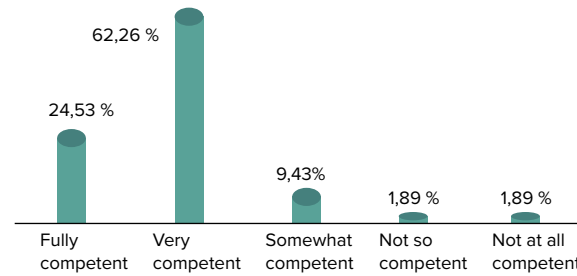


COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

FOR LEARNING SUPPORT IN THE EVS/E+ VOL

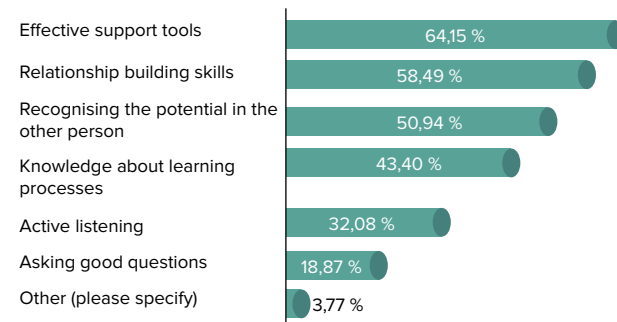
More than 75% of representatives of EVS/E+ organizations in the survey assessed their level of competence for learning support very highly, either as 'very competent' or 'fully competent'. 1 out of 5 representatives assess themselves as 'somewhat competent' and only two representatives as 'not so competent'. None of them believed that they had no competence at all for providing learning support to their volunteer. As the second graph below shows, there is also an interesting **tendency to assess the competence of the organization better as a whole**, as organizations' competences were assessed either as 'very competent' or 'fully competent' in more than 85% of the replies. This has proven once again that there was greater potential for learning support, if it was taken up at the level of the organization, involving more people. Indeed, **it seems that providing competent learning support in EVS/E+ VOL projects should rather be considered as a collective task to create an effective 'support system' than approaching it as an individual effort.**

Overall, how would you rate the level of competence for effective learning support in your organization?

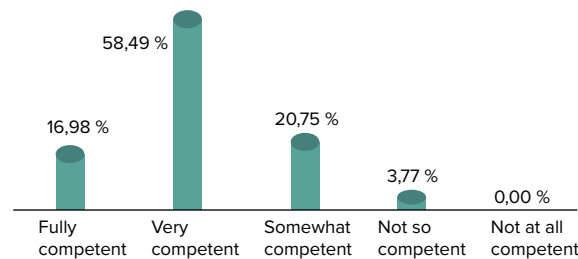


Addressing the issue of the most essential competencies needed for learning support in EVS/E+ VOL projects, **the prevailing opinion was that the ability to apply effective support tools was the key requirement from the support personnel.** This was followed by relationship building skills and the ability to recognize the potential in the volunteer. Less than half of the organizations see 'knowledge about the learning processes' as the essential competence. Fewer organizations prioritized the skills of active listening and asking good questions.

What are the key competencies needed for an effective learning support in the EVS? (select maximum three)

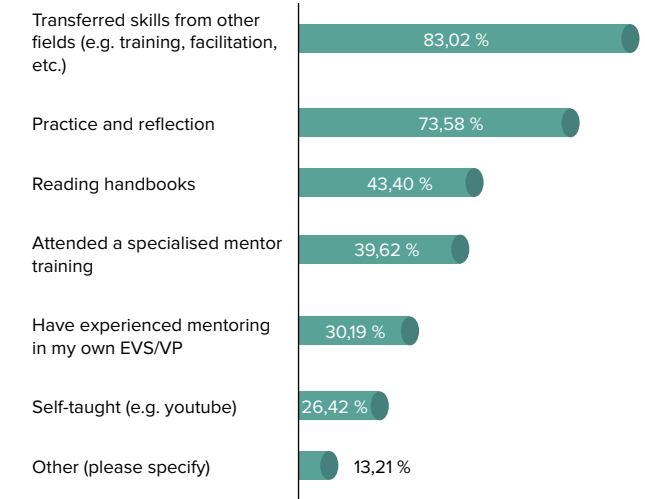


How would you rate your personal level of competence for effective learning support?



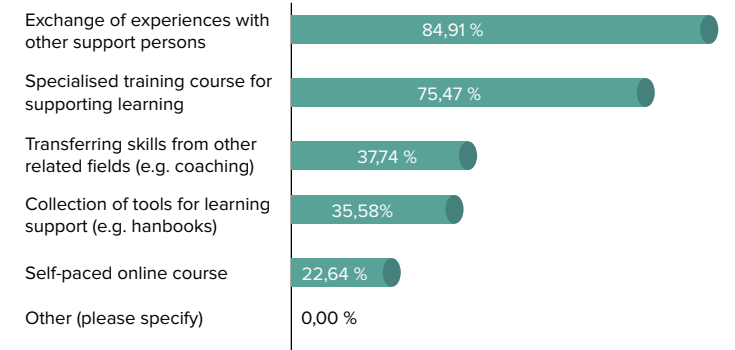
For a large majority of organizations, **the dominant ways of developing the competencies needed for learning support were 'transfer from other related fields (e.g. training, facilitation, etc.) and through 'practice and reflection'.** Secondary ways of developing these competencies were through 'reading handbooks' and attending 'specialized mentor training'. For 30% of them it was also about having their own experience as EVS/E+ volunteers and self-study. Some other learning paths included formal education and professional experience.

How did you develop your competence in learning support? (select all that apply)



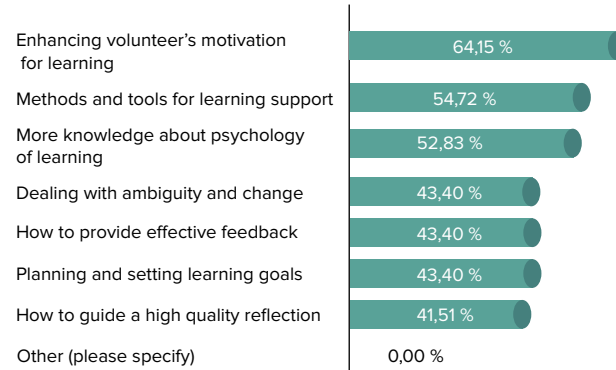
When thinking about their future development, **more than 80% of organizations in the survey liked to 'exchange with other support persons' and more than 75% to take part in a 'specialized training course for learning support'.** The second preferred way for competency development was 'transferring skills from other related fields (e.g. coaching), followed by providing them with more tools (e.g. handbooks). **The least preferred option was a self-paced online course.**

What would help you increase your learning support competencies? (select maximum three)



Specifically, with regard to the future learning opportunities, **the main area for competence development was related to understanding and supporting ‘the volunteer’s motivation to learn’**. This was followed by learning more ‘methods and tools’ and improving their ‘knowledge about learning theories and processes’. Less than half of the support persons in the survey wanted to improve their competences in relation to dealing with change, giving feedback, and setting learning goals. **The least perceived learning requirement was the ability to ‘guide high quality moments of reflection’**.

► Specifically, what were the topics that you would need to improve in order to increase your competencies for learning support? (select all that applies)



THE MAIN CHALLENGES FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

When asked to list the three main challenges that they faced in their organization considering the learning support of their volunteers, respondents most frequently noted the following:

In addition to those, some less frequently mentioned were:

- **The lack of the volunteer’s motivation to learn:** how to raise the awareness of volunteers about the learning dimension in the voluntary service and how to keep their motivation up for learning in the project
- **Integration of the volunteers** in the organization and the community; how to help volunteers to deal with the culture shock and how to make them become a part of the team in the organization
- **Language barrier and communication:** how to communicate when language skills were not sufficient, how to enhance language learning among the volunteers
- **Insufficient funding** for the learning support
- **Finding, keeping and motivating mentors:** how to find, develop and recognize the work of the mentors; how to provide incentives to good mentors in order to keep them active in the organization for a longer time
- **The lack of staff** in the organization to deal with learning support
- **Tasks for the volunteers:** how to organize challenging tasks for the volunteers; how to adapt existing activities to the level of the volunteer’s competence
- **Improper selection and preparation** of the volunteers by the sending organizations
- **The lack of learning support skills and tools:** how to improve the skills needed for learning support and how to gain new and effective tools
- **Administrative challenges:** such as obtaining visas for the volunteers

SUGGESTIONS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING MEASURES

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked what specific recommendations and suggestions they had for the SALTO SEE RC for future capacity building measures for the development of learning support competences within the EVS/Erasmus+ volunteering organizations. Overall, the impression was that there was a need for more support in this area.

The most frequent suggestions were:

- Organize more **specialized training courses** for coordinators and mentors about the learning processes in EVS/E+VOL projects. These should be courses where they can learn more about tools for learning support. These courses should target staff dealing directly with volunteers and ideally involve more people from the same organization.
- Organizing regular **regional networking and good practice exchange events** with other organizations. These should include sharing experience about the role and practices in mentoring within EVS/E+VOL projects and dealing with challenges.
- Develop a good **collection of tools for learning support** that could be provided to newly accredited organizations, as well as to the ones having an accreditation for a longer time.

These were followed by less frequent proposals:

- Provide **ongoing support for coordinators and mentors**; this could take place in the form of supervision or inter-vision for mentors and coordinators, where they can share their cases and learn from them, or create a support network
- **Specific courses for the inclusion of volunteers with a disability**: how to support volunteers so they are able to adjust to the new environment with less accessibility than they were used to
- **More financial support and the recognition** of project coordinators and mentors.
- **Online training courses** on specific topics regarding learning support, webinars etc.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey clearly shows that a *large majority of the Western Balkans EVS/E+VOL organizations were aware of the 'learning aspect' in the voluntary service and the role they had to play.* The survey has shown no significant differences between the 5 Western Balkans countries.

A more than half of organizations in the survey placed the responsibility for the learning support inside the organization, primarily connected to the role of project coordinator, followed by the mentor inside the organization. However, 24 out of 53 organizations considered using 'external mentors'.

The results also show the overall complexity (and often confusion) and diversity of how learning support was being implemented in EVS/E+ organizations. However, one common tendency was to perceive more competences for effective learning support within the organization as a whole than in each single support person. This brings us out of the usual dichotomy in EVS/E+ projects: was it the mentor or coordinator who was responsible for the learning support. It seems that *this issue requires a different, more systemic approach, allowing organizations to design a learning support*

system that worked in their context, rather than trying to delegate this function to individuals.

Regarding the existing practices in learning support, all sending and receiving organizations would take some preparatory measures before the actual service started. Some prevailing methods were more about providing information and explaining the programme, rather than checking with the volunteer about his/her expectations. During the service, *the most typical forms of organized learning support were 'regular feedback', 'encouragement', 'guided moments of reflection' had been selected in less than half of the organizations. These two tendencies indicated that the prevailing style of the learning support in the Western Balkans organizations was slightly more directive and included more 'quality of providing' (information, feedback, encouragement) than 'quality of asking' (supporting the volunteers' own reflections).* There was a trend of a lower frequency and a less structured approach to providing organized learning support moments in the EVS/E+ VOL organizations from the Western Balkans. After the service, the receiving organizations tended to stay in contact with their ex-volunteers, while the sending organizations tended to support post-service reflections and re-integration processes. The volunteers were highly encouraged to share their experiences with the organization and promote the EVS among the interested young people.

Almost 3/4 of the organizations from the Western Balkans believed that 'volunteers learnt best when supported' and less than 1/5 believed that 'volunteers learnt best when they were challenged'. As the major factors blocking the volunteering process of learning, they emphasized the unstimulating tasks for the volunteers and the lack of adequate learning support. At the same time, they also underlined the importance of the volunteer's motivation (readiness) to learn for the successful learning process to happen.

In terms of the competencies needed for learning support in the EVS/E+VOL projects, *the prevailing opinion was that the ability to apply effective support tools was the key requirement from the support persons. This was followed by relationship building skills and the ability to recognize the potential in the volunteer.*

The main area for competence development was related to understanding and supporting 'the volunteer's motivation to learn'. This was followed by learning more 'methods and tools' and improving their 'knowledge about learning theories and processes'. The least perceived learning need was the ability to 'guide high quality reflections'.

When thinking about their future development, more than 80% of organizations in the survey would like to 'exchange with other support persons' and more than 75% to take part in a 'specialized training course for learning support'. The least preferred option was a self-paced online course.

In terms of the main challenges for learning and learning support in EVS/E+ projects, the survey identified 10 areas including the Volunteer's motivation, Language barriers and communication, Finding, keeping and motivating mentors, Tasks for the volunteers, Lack of learning support skills and tools, Integration of the volunteers, Insufficient funding, Lack of staff in the organization to deal with learning support, Selection and preparation of the volunteers and Administrative challenges.

The most frequent suggestions for further capacity building measures, the organization from the Western Balkans mentioned:

- Organize more **specialised training courses** for coordinators and mentors about the learning processes in EVS/E+VOL projects. These should be aimed at providing them with more tools for effective learning support. These courses should target 'real staff' dealing with the volunteers and ideally more people from the same organization.
- Organizing regular **regional networking and good practice exchange events** with other organizations. These should include sharing experiences related to the role and the practices in mentoring within EVS/E+VOL projects and dealing with challenges.
- Develop a good **collection of tools for learning support** that could be provided to all newly accredited organizations, as well as to the existing ones

These were followed by less frequent proposals:

- Provide **ongoing support for coordinators and mentors**; this can also take the form of supervision or inter-vision for mentors and coordinators to share their cases and learn from them or to create a support network
- **Specific courses for the inclusion of volunteers with a disability**: how to support the volunteers to adjust to the new environment with less accessibility than they were used to
- **More financial support and recognition** of the project coordinators and mentors.
- **Online training courses** on specific topics, webinars etc.



JOINT CONCLUSIONS AND COMPARISONS:

LEARNING SUPPORT IN SLOVENIA AND IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE LEARNING SUPPORT

The survey has shown that the organizations in Slovenia (SI) and the Western Balkans (WB) have many things in common. However, the way they dealt with this learning support in EVS/E+ VOL projects might have subtle differences. This might also be due to the different nature of these two sub-samples: while the organizations in Slovenia show a much stronger hosting (receiving) interest, the organizations from the Western Balkans lean more towards sending the volunteers abroad. This might be a pure coincidence, but taking into account that the samples covered a larger portion of the accredited organizations, perhaps it also tells us something about the contextual differences between Slovenia and the Western Balkans, especially in terms of youth mobility. Another difference between these two sub-samples is that on average organizations from the Western Balkans have shorter involvements in the EVS/E+VOL than organizations from Slovenia. Keeping these specifics in mind, the subtle differences and similarities discovered were as follows.

Both organizations from Slovenia and the Western Balkans were aware of the learning dimension in EVS/E+VOL projects. However, there was a slightly stronger aware-

ness of it amongst the project coordinators in Slovenia in comparison to their colleagues from the Western Balkans. When asked about their responsibilities towards the volunteers, the project coordinators from Slovenia explicitly mentioned 'learning support' as one of their key tasks.

Similarly, both organizations from Slovenia and the Western Balkans prefer to place the responsibility for the learning support inside the organization, giving it to the project coordinators or mentors recruited internally. However, the WB organizations would be more open for using the external mentors and other volunteers in the organization as a source of support for volunteers' learning. It also seems that in the majority of cases both in SI and WB, 'mentor' is still considered as a 'helping friend', someone who takes care of the volunteer's wellbeing and not necessarily supporting an active reflection on the learning process.

As the main philosophy for learning support, the WB organization believes more strongly that the volunteers learnt best when supported (3/4) than SI organizations (less than half). The question is if they had in mind the same type of support?

In relation to that, it seems there was a slight difference in the style of providing learning support. *There was a tendency that WB organizations preferred to use a more informing and providing type of support, while Slovenian organizations have a stronger preference for a non-directive and reflective type of support.* For example, in the Western Balkan countries the main tool for learning support was 'providing feedback', while in Slovenia it was more about 'encouragement'. The preference for providing organized guided moments of reflection in the WB organizations was significantly smaller than in the Slovenian organizations. While in Slovenian organizations the number one competency for learning support is the ability to recognize the potential for growth in the volunteer, for WB organizations it was the ability to provide them adequate learning support tools.

In terms of the frequency of providing organized learning support moments, *there is clearly more frequency and regularity in Slovenian organizations. In almost 50% of organizations from SI the learning support happens on a daily or weekly basis, compared to WB organizations where in more the*

60% of cases, the learning support was organized on a monthly basis or sporadically.

In Slovenia, after the EVS, some organizations tended to use the Europass more in addition to Youthpass than organizations from the WB. There was also a slight difference where organizations from the Western Balkans tended to encourage ex-volunteers to present their experiences, while in Slovenia it would be slightly more about supporting the volunteer's reflections after the service.

They have similar views on the potential blocking factors for the effective learning process of the volunteers, being 'unstimulating tasks' and a 'lack of learning support' in first place. They both underline the 'lack of volunteer's motivation' as the third most important blocking factor.

48 *Similarly, for providing effective individual support for the volunteers there was much more perceived competences in the organization as a whole than in a single person; it seemed that creating an effective learning support for the volunteers required a more systemic approach than delegating it to a specific role in the organization. They also had a similar pattern about developing the competencies for the learning support roles; the dominant way was 'transferring the skills from other related fields' (e.g. training, facilitation) and learning from their own 'practice and reflection'.*

They also had similar patterns in their preferred way for further developing these competencies. *Two most preferable ways in both cases were: 'exchanges with other support persons' about their practice and 'attending specialized training courses' about learning support. The least preferred option for both was self-paced online training courses.*

The common development area was learning about how to support and sustain the 'volunteer's motivation

for learning'. At the same time, the WB organizations felt they would also need more tools and methods, while Slovenian organizations would focus more on developing the ability to guide the quality reflections.

They also identified some common challenges for learning and learning support like: volunteer's motivation, finding, keeping and motivating mentors, tasks for the volunteers, integration of the volunteers, integration of the volunteers, lack of staff, insufficient funding for learning support and the selection and preparation of the volunteers.

POTENTIAL FOR JOINT CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Based on the findings above, several **common thematic areas** could be identified for both SI and WB organizations. For example: looking at the learning support as a system, understanding and sustaining the volunteer's motivation, psychology of learning, facilitating the volunteer's learning through reflection, exchange of good learning support practices, developing new learning support tools for volunteers and support staff, recruitment and development of mentors, etc.

The survey also identified several **proposals for common capacity building measures**. It is important to note that while the formats might be the same, some specific priorities for organizations coming from Slovenia and the Western Balkans might differ to some extent. Nevertheless, some activities of common interest to consider are:

- Organizing more **networking and good practice exchange events** with other organizations. These should include sharing the implications of the role and the practices in mentoring within EVS/E+VOL projects
- **Specialized training courses** for coordinators and mentors about the learning processes in EVS/E+VOL projects. These should of course be about where they can learn more tools on learning support training for mentors/coordinators and how to coach their volunteers
- Providing **mentoring/coaching for coordinators and mentors**; this can also take the form of supervision or inter-vision groups for mentors and coaches to share their cases and learn from them.
- **Collection of learning support tools** for the volunteers and for the support staff, possibly in the form of a handbook.
- **Online training courses and webinars** on specific topics.



ENDNOTES

¹ European Commission: EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, Brussels, 23 .12. 1996, COM(96) 610 final

² European Commission: Study on the Impact of Transnational Volunteering, 2017, accessible at: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/01a810b3-3712-11e7-a08e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> European Voluntary Service

³ RAY: Factsheet - 20 years EVS, Ongoing research-based analysis and monitoring of the EU youth programme, 2016, accessible at: <http://www.researchyouth.eu/factsheet-20-years-evs>

⁴ Senyuva, Ozgehan, EVS Competences for Employment, EVS C4E Full Survey Report, 2014, accessible at: <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3037/EVSCompetencesForEmployabilitySurveyReport.pdf>

⁵ Youthpass Guide, p.30

⁶ There have been a large number of international training courses for EVS organizations, with a stronger or lesser focus on the development of competencies for learning support. Some of these courses, like 'SOHO' have been regularly conducted over the years, while some others like 'ABC of Learning in EVS' or 'Facilitating the volunteer's learning' have been organized occasionally.



The SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre promotes cooperation with the Western Balkan countries within the Erasmus+ Programme in the field of youth and the European Solidarity Corps through training and partner-finding activities and various other support measures, tools and resources. It aims to contribute to youth work and youth policy development in the Western Balkan region, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and with the help of pools of trainers and accreditors as well as Contact Points located in Erasmus+ Partner countries of the region.

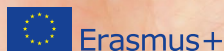
MOVIT has been performing the tasks of the National Agency for EU programmes in the field of youth since May 1999 when Slovenia joined the EU Programme Youth for Europe III, which was succeeded by the Youth Programme (2000–2006), the Youth in Action Programme (2007–2013) and ERASMUS+: Youth in Action (2014–2020). In 2018, Movit became also the National Agency for the newly established European Solidarity Corps programme (2018–2020). In this role, MOVIT manages indirectly centralised EU budget funds and enables support for different forms of learning mobility activities in youth work, while also running activities for the general development of youth work and non-formal education, with special stress on activities contributing with their form or content to the strengthening of European cooperation in the field of youth. European Solidarity Corps programme expanded these fields also to other spheres and actors, such as organisations, institutions, and employers, organising solidarity activities as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity, democracy and citizenship in Europe.



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