

# MAPPING OF THE MAIN TOPICS FOR QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES WITHIN EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS (ESC)

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The findings included in this document are results of a mapping study of quality standards in (youth) volunteering. The study included a desk research of existing documents coming from the European Union Programmes and from other volunteering programs and organisations; as well as field research activities: 1 focus group and 5 individual interviews with representatives of National Agencies responsible for implementation of the European Solidarity Corps Programme and other relevant stakeholders. The task of the research was not to produce a quality standards document, but rather to identify and cluster key elements of quality standards that appear in various documents, or that are deemed important by various stakeholders. Hence, the document also includes a list of aspects that should be further explored and clarified in a further process of creating the quality standards for volunteering activities with the ESC Programme.

The desk research consulted the following documents:

1. **National Agencies:** Standards and other documents prepared by National Agencies, shared with the team within this research.
2. **Volunteering Charters and Frameworks:** Existing documents that are, or that have been in use, both within the European Solidarity Corps and other programs.
3. **Volunteer Organizations:** Policies and practices from leading organizations and policy documents in the field of volunteering.

A draft of the mapping report was prepared based on the desk research, and was used as a basis for conducting interviews. The feedback received from the interviews was integrated in this final version.



## *Quality Standards related to the main elements of European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Volunteering Activities*

### **Role of Organisations**

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for lead, hosting and supporting (sending) organizations. More specific guidelines to be provided because the Programme is flexible and there is no clear division of tasks between organisations.
- Organisations should be aware of their own work, youth non-formal education, volunteering and the ESC Programme.
- Organisations should be aware of the EU values and Programme aims, priorities and principles.
- Organisations should have regular activities in the community.
- Organisations' strategy and activities to be clearly linked with the ESC goals.
- Number of volunteers to be in line with organisations' capacities and their previous experience with the Programme.
- There are a sufficient number of organisations' staff with enough knowledge about the Programme, open to intercultural experience and with sufficient understanding of foreign languages.
- Having structured volunteer agreements outlining tasks, living arrangements, and financial support in a clear and explicit way.
- Organisations have openness and provide support for integrating volunteers in their teams and in the local community.
- Organisations provide sufficient visibility for the ESC Programme, dissemination of results and promotion of volunteering.
- Organisations have sufficient financial resources and sustainability.
- Organisations' work does not depend on volunteers and their regular activities can continue without volunteer's contribution.
- Organisations are motivated to be part of ESC, clearly understanding the benefits of the Programme for them, for the volunteers and the local community.
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are aligned with ESC program criteria.
- Organisation should ensure a safe environment for ESC volunteers and should have a safeguarding policy in place that is also taking in consideration volunteering.
- In specific, the lead organisation should guarantee in an efficient way the management of the administrative part of the overall project.
- The lead organisation ensures fair treatment and adequate support to all organisations involved in the project, according to their roles, in accordance with the rules and principles of the Programme.



**Example from Volunteering Charter:** Volunteers contribute to organizational objectives with clear links to solidarity, while avoiding core organizational tasks.

**Example from Estonian NA:** Presentation to organisations clearly defining the roles and tasks of different actors.

## Service of the Volunteer

- **Task Clarity and Meaningfulness:** Volunteers are provided with a clear set of varied and meaningful tasks, contributing directly to the organization's goals without being responsible for core functions. This includes:
  - Volunteers are involved full-time on activities directly linked to solidarity objectives.
  - Volunteers are informed about their role and responsibilities, rules of the program and the expectations of them.
  - Volunteers should have the possibility to be active and contribute directly to the achievements of the organisation's objectives.
  - Tasks should include personal learning, project support, community engagement, or developing personal initiatives with guidance.
  - The volunteer has an adequate and safe working place (space, materials, means of communication etc.), including equal treatment to all ESC volunteers from the side of other ESC actors (Lead organisation, Supporting and Hosting organization). Those conditions should be coherent with the hosting organisation possibilities and context related situation.
  - Tasks should contribute directly to the objectives of the organisation.
  - Online volunteering and digital transformation should be fostered (when possible) in accordance with the overall context, so that volunteering projects can include online-based activities and the use of digital tools as part of the overall service implementation.
  - Volunteers should be able to make a contribution to participation in democratic life.
  - Volunteering activities proposed should take in consideration all the sustainability aspects and should also try to meet green policies aspects.
  - Volunteering activities should display a long-term perspective, trying to make an influence and improve systems that create injustice, exclusion, human rights violations etc. The volunteers should be aware of the value of the programme they are part of.
  - Volunteering activities, especially in long term projects, should also guarantee, beside the routine of the daily tasks, a variety of possibilities with specific learning elements.



- **Learning and Growth Opportunities:**

- Use of Youthpass and other recognition tools to track and validate personal and professional development. Youthpass should be an essential part of volunteers' learning process, used during their service and not only provided at the end of it.
- The organisations should have a plan and tools regarding development of volunteers' competences.
- There should be provisions for volunteers to initiate and lead small-scale projects within the organization.
- Volunteer work is varied, and routine tasks are not a primary part of what volunteers do.
- Opportunities are provided for intercultural learning and support to reflect on them.
- Volunteer work should represent a balance between volunteer's learning and service.

**Example from Estonian NA:** Lead organisations are important actors for the volunteering cycle, since they can organise activities for volunteers as they have the budget. In Estonia there is a practice where volunteers that are involved in projects all over Estonia, are being gathered for 1-2 day events for networking and support.

## **National Agencies and SALTOS**

- NAs should develop a better consistency among them about the rules and expected roles when the Programme is implemented: when there is a multinational project when one lead organisation sends volunteers to different countries, sometimes the way of treating specific topics could be different between NAs of the partners involved. This can generate confusion about the project implementation and unequal treatment of volunteers. The European Commission could contribute for better coordination by creating a common communication tool.
- NAs should assist organisations in adjusting the volunteering activities as needed.
- NAs should support the capacity building of organisations at European level in order to help them widen their network.
- The NAs need to explore the possibilities for widening their supporting role to organisations by stimulating them, keeping regular contact with them, providing feedback and possible recommendations for improving the quality of ESC implementation in the organizations holding QL.
- Training is being provided to ESC mentors and a follow up system is established to further the support.

- NAs should encourage the participation of mentors in the OAT or in other trainings organised by lead/host organisations. This should be done to the extent that it is possible in the local context.
- The NA should organise a support system for organisations and provide opportunities for exchange of practices between them.
- The NA should develop supporting materials and resources for organisations.
- Capacity building should be provided to organisations on how to assess the quality and impact of their work - for example by organising trainings for mentors.
- NAs should use data from TEC trainings, on-site visits and reports about the quality of the project running in their own countries.
- NAs should establish minimum quality standards for TEC training and implement a monitoring mechanism to ensure consistency. They should strengthen the European dimension by ensuring that volunteers understand their role within a broader European project and narrative. Additionally, NAs should develop a common curriculum that highlights the importance of EU values and European solidarity, fostering a shared understanding and commitment among participants

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## *Preparation and support of Volunteers*

### **Selection of volunteers**

- Organisations should advertise their projects to potential volunteers accurately and realistically, describing clearly what volunteers should expect in terms of housing, tasks, support structure and other relevant aspects.
- Organisations shouldn't select volunteers based on specific qualifications or special skills. The advertised volunteering projects should not include specific requirements, as it is important to guarantee accessibility.
- Organisations should take care to respond to and follow up with volunteers that haven't been selected.

### **Pre departure preparation**

- The pre-departure training is essential for a good and successful project and provides the frame in which it is being implemented, for example by covering European dimension and the core values.
- Essential components of the preparation include cultural orientation, language skills, crisis management; volunteer motivation and expectation from the project; information about volunteers' rights and duties; and sharing information about the hosting organisation and their ESC activities.
- All organisations involved in the project should work together to ensure that the volunteer is well prepared. This includes the common effort of organisations to

ensure that young people join the project early enough so that there is enough time for adequate preparation and pre-departure training. This could also allow better risk management in case of last-minute cancellations and replacements.

- Cooperation between the NA and the supporting (sending) and lead organisation is important in order to support the volunteer in preparation.
- The training should be adapted to suit the diverse realities of participating organizations and countries, but it should nonetheless cover the most essential topics, which are to be further defined.
  - **Example:** National Agencies provide tailored training cycles based on organizational needs and volunteer profiles.
  - Lead organizations are providing tailored training based on the departures of the volunteers in their projects. The training should be done in cooperation with supporting (sending) and hosting organizations and it will allow volunteers to have a clear picture about the actors involved and their responsibilities in the volunteers' projects.

## Support Structures

Each volunteer has designated support, which includes:

- A mentor who facilitates and assists with integration, supports the volunteer during one's stay in the hosting organisation and if needed, acts as a mediator between the volunteer and the organisation. The mentors should be present during the whole duration of the project. Hosting organizations could supplement the main mentor with peer mentors or shared functions of mentorship provided by multiple persons.
- A coordinator that is responsible for the project in the hosting organization, setting aims and meaningful tasks for the volunteer and providing ongoing work-related support in the hosting organisation.
- A coordinator who addresses logistical and administrative needs, including support of volunteers in their involvement in activities.
- There should be consistency in terminology related to the supporting roles, as some NAs/organisations use mentors and others use tutors; some use coordinators and others supervisors.
- The organisations should be able to provide adequate support in all aspects, while organising the support structure in accordance with their abilities and the local context, while also ensuring that different people are responsible for different aspects of support.
- The lead organisation should be part of the overall design and implementation of the project, and the project should be run keeping in mind the 3 main actors (lead, hosting and supporting organisation, as well as the volunteer). The support provided by the lead organisation should be particularly well defined if the organisation is not based in the same country/region where the project is taking place.



- Volunteering-related support is provided to enable the volunteer to carry out the project tasks.
- The support provided to volunteers is tailored to their individual needs.
- The activities of the training cycle for ESC are a supporting factor in the learning process.
- There is a wider support for integration through leisure time and socialisation opportunities.
- There is a support system and coordination for volunteer service done in different locations.
- Volunteers have the possibility to quit service through a clear process that raises their awareness of the consequences on the mission and on the organisation. The process should be accompanied, and it should be ensured that it is also part of the learning process.
- Organisations have systems for supporting volunteers in crisis/difficult situations.
- Organisations involve local volunteers in providing additional support to ESC volunteers.

## Reintegration

- The supporting (sending) organisation should appoint a person responsible for providing support to the volunteer before, during and after volunteering service.
- Upon volunteers' return, support is provided for evaluation of the volunteering experience and reintegration in the local community.

## Support Tools and Guidelines

- Integration of tools like Youthpass to document and recognize learning outcomes.
- Appropriate guidelines related to prevention and responding to sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment and gender-based violence. This should also include specific reference to online aspects such as hate speech, bullying and everything else in the digital sphere.
- There should be guidelines on what organisations and volunteers should post online about the volunteering project, making everyone aware about balancing freedom of speech with the EU values and privacy issues.
- Language support should not be limited only to the online language course, but to keep other learning support as well. Learning the language of the hosting country is very important for better understanding of the local community and local integration.
- Inclusion of mentors and external advisors to ensure holistic volunteer support.
  - **Example from ICYE:** Mentors serve as mediators and support volunteers' learning processes, while external advisors address conflicts impartially.





- **Example from CZ NA:** A psychologist was hired for specific crisis problems in EVS projects in the past (related to volunteers, hosting organizations, but also for supporting trainers organising PD, OA and MT training in cases where they discovered some psychical problems or crisis with ESC volunteers). The practice is not in place anymore.
- **Example from Germany:** external staff living in different parts of the country, present in the TEC trainings and going to on-site visits, also available to be contacted for troubleshooting in case of problems, both by organisations and volunteers.

## Feedback Insights

- Emphasis on capacity building for organizations.
- Importance of specific guidelines for complex scenarios (e.g., conflict resolution).
  - **Example:** Feedback from Magda underscores the need for EU-value-oriented guidelines in complicated situations.

## Financial and Structural Issues

### Clarity in Task Division

- Defined roles between lead, hosting and supporting (sending) organizations as well as rights and responsibilities of involved actors, in accordance with the Programme Guide and in connection with their responsibilities.
- Mechanisms for fair remuneration and financial transparency between organisations.
- Organisations efficiently communicate and cooperate with the others involved in the partnership.
  - **Example:** Estonian NA's delegation of administrative tasks ensures efficiency and clarity in partnerships.

### Financial Guidelines

- Recommendations for flexible, yet standardized funding structures.
- Guidelines for how to distribute funds between organisations.
- Funds from the ESC project budget to be properly accounted for.
- Balancing quality expectations with available resources.
- Making clear and explicit if volunteers should cover part of the costs with their own funds.
- Any guidelines on whether and how to pay mentors should be adjusted to the national context.
  - **Example:** Latvian NA's guidelines suggest fair payment structures for mentors while maintaining organizational sustainability.



## Practical Considerations

- Provision of basic needs, such as housing and allowances. Making clear what the project can offer taking in consideration the budget available and the local conditions. It is important to manage those agreements and to reach clarity about the provisions that will be offered to the volunteer.
    - **Examples:** Volunteers are guaranteed private bedrooms and allowances for healthy meals as outlined in practical guidelines. In some countries, there is a recommended minimum allowance (daily/monthly) for food.
  - A differentiation should be made between the minimum practical conditions to be provided to short-term vs. long-term volunteers.
  - Timely registration and agreement formalization for volunteers.
  - Flexibility in program delivery to address local contexts.
  - Volunteers should receive a meal allowance that enables them to buy sufficient and healthy food.
  - Volunteers are ensured a regular payment of pocket money.
  - Adequate accommodation in a safe environment and safe living conditions are provided; long-term volunteers have their own bedrooms.
  - Volunteers have adequate health insurance plans. Important to ensure that mental health support is also covered under the insurance.
  - Volunteers are entitled to leave and days off.
  - Local regulations regarding visa and registration of the volunteer are respected. The organisations coordinate between each other to provide the volunteer with adequate support for the visa process.
  - Volunteers are enabled to be mobile according to the standards of the hosting place.
  - Local transport needs to be covered in case the ESC volunteers need it for activities they are involved in. Local transportation should be adequate to the local context conditions and offers.
  - The practical aspects can be provided in various ways, depending on the local context and in line with volunteers' needs. This means that more attention should be paid when assessing quality labels to ensure that the organisations have adequate capacities to manage different types of projects.
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## Core principles

### Inclusion and diversity

- Promotion of inclusion across socio-economic, cultural, and ability dimensions. Have a better understanding about what inclusion and accessibility mean, support the quality of the project and allow for better reinforced mentorship.
- There should be sufficient opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to find volunteer positions.
- Support building European networks of organisations that are prepared to host volunteers with fewer opportunities.
- Organisations are aware of their possibilities to support volunteers with fewer opportunities and adjust their offer and recruitment accordingly.
- Where necessary and possible, use is made of the financial instruments of the Programme for supporting young people with fewer opportunities.
- The selection process is open and transparent.
- Commitment to providing equal opportunities and tailored support for disadvantaged youth.
  - **Example:** ICYE's ethical code promotes inclusion regardless of geographical location, gender, or socio-economic background, in accordance with their Code of Ethical Practice.

### Ethical Values

- All participating organisations are committed to the principles of solidarity.
- Some of the core values for volunteering include: trust, integrity, inclusion, partnership, quality, appreciation, respect, participation, supporting peace.
- Ensures that everyone respects the shared basic principles of volunteering.
- Organisations should understand the EU values and the priorities of the Programme.
- Respect the ESC volunteers in their different needs and diversity.
- Respect the ESC volunteers in their projects and not to misuse them as substitutes for employees or interns.
- Upholding dignity and safety, especially for vulnerable groups (e.g., safeguarding policies).
- In the delivery of volunteering activities, no harm should come to volunteers and members of the community. Ensuring a special regard when working with fragile groups (dealing also with privacy and caring).
- A safe environment is provided for all staff and volunteers that is free from discrimination and all forms of violence.
- Volunteers are not engaged in acts that abuse, harm or otherwise have a negative impact on children or vulnerable groups.
  - **Example:** "Care to Engage - ICYE's Policy on Safeguarding Children"

- Commitment to respecting the quality standards for volunteering.
- Commitment to sustainability and minimizing environmental impact.
  - **Example:** ICYE's "Greener Together" initiative actively promotes environmental awareness and sustainable practices.
- Commitment of all actors (organisations, volunteers, mentors...) to respect the aims, principles and values of the ESC volunteering program.

## Environmental Sustainability

- Consciousness of the environmental impact of volunteering activities and minimizing the negative impact.
- Promoting sustainability and environmental awareness among all stakeholders.

## Other Programme priorities

- Specific quality standards to be developed for the other Programme priorities.
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## Community

### Hosting community

- Local communities are clearly the beneficiaries of the volunteering activities.
- National realities to be taken into consideration in ESC projects, national legislation is respected, and the local context is also considered (rural, urban, etc).
- Creating sustainable, supportive and mutually beneficial relationships with the host communities.
- Developing volunteering activities jointly with the hosting community, responding to the economic, social, cultural and environmental concerns of the community.
- Stakeholders outside the partner organisations to be involved, especially from the local community.
- Impact of volunteering on the target groups, organisations and the local community.



## Volunteering for Development

- Ensuring activities align with community needs and consider if and how they can support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Volunteering activities must always aim to be impactful in the local community.
- Volunteers do not engage in profit-making that aims to provide income for the stakeholders. Volunteers can be engaged in fundraising activities for their projects, local communities and so on, in line with the local legislation.
- Avoiding harm to communities and promoting mutual benefits.
  - **Example from Global Volunteering Standard:** Activities are co-designed with host communities to ensure responsible and impactful engagement.

## Tools to Assess Quality

### Quality Assurance Practices

1. **Tools of NAs:** checklists for visits of organisations, monitoring and evaluating projects, including specific guidelines for specific complicated situations, forms for gathering feedback during TEC activities for volunteers and organisations, and from volunteers throughout service.
  - **Example:** SALTO EECA has developed an Evaluation questionnaire which is sent to ESC volunteers to assess the quality of projects and the support received from organisations.
2. **Self-Assessment Tools:** Encouragement for organizations to engage in self-assessment while maintaining transparency and avoiding punitive measures, not necessary to be shared with NAs. A proposal to develop a multiple-choice questionnaire (awareness test) that organisations can do to check how aware they are of the most important aspects and issues of ESC.
  - **Example:** The assessment grids for quality label applications and progress reports provides structured benchmarks – see if these could be adapted to be used for self-assessment.
3. **Partner's Agreements:** Use of formal agreements to clearly define roles and responsibilities of the dead, hosting and supporting (sending) organisations.
  - **Details from Estonian NA:** Agreements specify tasks, living arrangements, and allowances to ensure clarity and compliance.
4. **Volunteers Agreement:** Use of a formal agreement between the volunteer and the organisations to outline the most important aspects of the project and the roles and responsibilities of all sides.
5. **Prevention and Crisis Management:** Setting of prevention, how to avoid crisis situations. Provisions for robust frameworks to handle emergencies and conflicts. A requirement from organisations to conduct a formal risk assessment, so that they are prepared when something happens.

- **Example:** The "Safer Together" policy addresses safeguarding and sexual violence prevention.

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## Conclusions and Recommendations

The list above is a summary of the main elements collected through desk and field research that can serve as a basis for preparing quality standards related to volunteering activities in the European Solidarity Corps.

The level to which various aspects were elaborated in the studied documents depended on the type of papers: from general policy documents such as strategies and policy recommendations, to specific tools such as checklists. Some elements came from various reflection processes (online consultations, workshops) and others were identified from feedback received verbally, in individual conversations and a focus group. Hence, some aspects are much more detailed, while others were barely mentioned. As authors of this paper, we tried to provide equal attention to each of them, thus creating a wide map of elements grouped in clusters. Hence, some of the elements are much more elaborated in the referenced materials than they appear in this document.

The appearing elements were clustered in broader categories for the sake of simplicity and clarity; however, they could also be organized differently. In addition, some aspects appear in more than one category, so there is significant overlap that needs to be addressed. One group of findings are directly linked to volunteering under the European Solidarity Corps, while others are more general and may come from quality standards of other international volunteering schemes. The desk research found a relatively high level of agreement between quality elements in different contexts and thus merging them made sense. However, it is possible that there are significant differences between how various elements are understood in different programs and contexts. In some cases, a reference is made to specific documents and examples coming from different sources.

The key findings of the desk research can be summarized as following:

## Quality standards related to the main elements of European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Volunteering Activities

Greatest chunk of the quality aspects of ESC are directly related to the **profiles, role and tasks of the involved organisations**. Some of those aspects concern organisations themselves, including their motivation, capacity, resources,



understanding of the Programme rules and priorities, and in general, their preparedness for hosting volunteers. Other aspects have to do with the clarity of division of roles and tasks between the different organisations involved in the project, and the relations between them. The first group of criteria is well elaborated in various assessment tools used for evaluating organisation's ability to participate in ESC, but the second group are much less defined, due to the increased flexibility and the lack of clear guidelines within the Programme. Hence, newly developed tools and guidelines often refer to documents that were valid in the previous EU volunteering programs, such as the Volunteering Charter under European Voluntary Service. Existing tools and guidelines, including those adapted from previous EU volunteering programs like EVS, remain relevant but require updates to reflect the evolving dynamics of ESC and other volunteering schemes. For instance, expanding guidelines to address digital volunteering and sustainability would align them with contemporary challenges and opportunities.

Another large category is related to **volunteering service** within ESC. There are various quality criteria that define how the service should look like and what volunteers should or should not do as part of their projects. Particular attention is paid to the volunteering tasks and their relation to the overall work of the organization and the needs of the local community. There is a highlighted attention to the solidarity dimension of ESC projects, even though there is also focus on the learning aspect for volunteers. There are quality aspects regarding support structures for the volunteer, covering different dimensions of support: work-related, personal, learning, language, intercultural etc. Different documents also define the minimum capacities and competences organisations should possess to be able to provide adequate support under each of those aspects. The findings emphasize the importance of volunteer-focused design, where solidarity and learning are balanced with adequate support mechanisms. This ensures not only the achievement of program goals but also the meaningful engagement and development of the volunteers themselves.

Finally, some elements of the quality standards are related to **the work of National Agencies** and their link with organisations. In various documents, NAs commit to providing training and support, developing resources, keeping ongoing communication, and other measures so that they can fulfill a stimulating and advisory role, even though there is a lack of clarity and agreement on how far that role should go. National Agencies play a critical role in setting the stage for quality volunteering experiences by offering resources, training, and advisory support. However, the desk research points to variability in how these responsibilities are carried out, suggesting the need for common understanding of the active role that NAs should have in the whole process, as well as for standardized benchmarks for NA approach to ensure equitable volunteer experiences across.



*Questions for further exploration:*

- More guidelines are needed to clarify the quality standards for ensuring fair, trustful, long-term partnerships between organisations that have different roles in the ESC projects, particularly having in mind the loose programme rules and the unequal position of organisations from different countries and regions within the programme.
- Reflect more on the role of National Agencies in relation to supporting, motivating and advising organisations, the extent to which this role can be taken and how it should look in practice.
- Further discuss the need for greater coordination and cohesion between different National Agencies, and the potential tools that can be used for more effective communication within the network.

## **Quality standards related to preparation and support of volunteers**

Significant attention was paid to quality standards related to adequate preparation of volunteers before the service, and their support during volunteering. The preparation is usually divided into categories – work (task) related, cultural preparation, language, expectations and motivation for ESC, information about the ESC volunteer’s activities and personal support, support for integration etc. According to who provides the support, the documents refer to support from National Agencies/SALTOs and support by the organisations implementing the volunteering projects. In all cases, the need is highlighted for tailored support, based on the specific needs and circumstances of the volunteer, as well as the context, such as in complicated and crisis situations.

The documents also deal with the capacities and human resources that organisations need to be able to support volunteers. It is often stated that different types of support need to be provided by different individuals, each specialized in their field of work being in a position that enables them to provide support – for example, the need for personal mentors to be impartial and as much as possible, independent from the organisations where the volunteer completes their tasks.

The mapping found less guidelines and resources on support prior to and after volunteering (reintegration), hence these are elements to be further expanded. The documents also insist on the organisations applying appropriate tools that can be used to provide ongoing support and create appropriate space for their feedback.



*Questions for further exploration:*

- More guidelines are needed on how to adequately promote ESC projects to potential volunteers and how to conduct a selection process that is open and fair to young people.
- More specific guidelines should be developed regarding the pre-departure training and support for volunteers, including a set of topics that should be covered at the minimum.
- There should be more synchronisation and guidance on how volunteers should be supported, both in terms of terminology (mentor vs. tutor, supervisor vs. coordinator, ESC sending coordinator vs. ESC sending mentor), and in terms of functions (who is doing what).
- There should be more clarity and synchronisation about the profiles and roles of different persons involved in providing support to the volunteer (for example, whether the mentor should be paid or not, whether mentors should be professionals or also young volunteers from the organisation etc.)
- More quality standards to be developed regarding the reintegration and overall support for the volunteer after the ESC service.

## **Quality standards regarding financial, structural and practical issues**

The quality standards related to financial issues are primarily considered with the distribution of grant funding between partners in ESC projects. The need for this seems to emerge from the lack of specific rules by the Programme. The examples studied in the desk research include guidelines that should help organisations make fair and efficient division of funding, ensuring that all needs of the volunteer are met. Similar guidelines exist on the division of roles and tasks between the partners. Since the Programme is flexible on this matter as well, there is a need for quality standards that would help organisations plan their involvement in the volunteering project appropriately and equally.

This area of standards related to practical issues is generally relevant for the ESC Programme and is primarily concerned with the practical conditions provided to ESC volunteers. In various documents, NAs and SALTOS have made an effort to define in more detail the general Programme rules, thus supporting organisations to be able to provide adequate accommodation, meals, local transport and other logistical aspects to volunteers. Organisations should also have guidance on how to provide adequate mental health support and a safe environment for the volunteers.

*Questions for further exploration:*

- More specific guidelines are needed on how the decision of funds between organisations could be done in a fair and adequate way.
- More specific guidelines to be developed regarding the practical aspects of different types of projects (individual vs. group, short-term vs. long-term).

## **Quality standards on the core principles**

This aspect of the quality standards is present across different volunteering programs and resources developed by various volunteering organisations, however each focusing on specific dimensions. Within ESC, there is a strong focus on inclusion and accessibility. The purpose of these standards is to ensure that volunteering is accessible to all young people, regardless of their backgrounds and abilities; and that volunteering tasks are adapted to their needs. Special attention is paid to the selection process and to the use of funding support applicable for inclusion projects.

Values and ethical principles are a topic that also appears in different volunteering programs and resources. ESC documents are primarily concerned with the EU values and priorities of the Programme, in particular solidarity, even though some refer to organisations understanding principles such as participation and non-formal education. Documents from other programs and volunteering organisations go much more in depth on this subject and include an expectation that all involved parties have mutual understanding of the core values of volunteering, as defined within the program.

Another major category that is not covered enough in ESC is quality standards on safeguarding policies and protection of volunteers, which also includes protection from sexual violence and harassment. A subcategory is the aspect of “do no harm”, which aims to protect others, especially children, from harm caused by volunteering and other acts of volunteers. There are many examples that can be used as a basis if this aspect is to be included in ESC quality standards.

The relations with the local community and the link with national policies are somewhat tackled in the ESC related documents, particularly in relation to respecting national legislation (such as about visa and residence permits). Other volunteering programs address this question much more extensively, calling for building sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships with the local community and planning activities that respond to their needs and concerns. In a wider sense, the documents produced by other volunteering programs and organisations also define what volunteering for development is, and they aim to establish a link with the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainability and environment protection is another aspect that is not covered extensively in ESC documents, but receives wide attention otherwise. Considering the

level of importance that this subject is given in other programs, it is worth exploring its potential integration in ESC quality standards. This is true particularly because there is a Programme priority related to climate action, but there is no concrete guidance provided about it.

*Questions for further exploration:*

- Quality criteria should be developed in regards to all programme priorities to the equal extent and depth. Currently, there is a lot more on inclusion compared to digital transformation or environmental sustainability. The standards should include more specific quality elements on how to implement those quality criteria in practice.
- To be explored whether the quality standards need more quality elements on the core values and principles of volunteering as such.
- More quality standards are needed on safeguarding, protection of volunteers, and “do no harm” policies, which also includes protection from and prevention of sexual violence and harassment. Resources on these topics exist in other frameworks and could be used as positive examples.
- Guidelines and quality criteria are missing on aspects related to visibility of projects and dissemination of results, and their link with privacy of volunteers and the beneficiaries of the ESC activities.
- The need for more standards regarding sustainability and working with the local community to be further explored.

## **Quality standards related to tools for assessing quality**

Various documents point out to the need for having quality assurance tools and mechanisms for assessing quality of volunteering projects. A few different types of tools appear: tools developed and used by NAs for assessing organisations, monitoring and evaluating projects; self-assessment tools to be used by organisations themselves; and tools created with the purpose of mutually agreeing and guaranteeing quality in projects, such as volunteer and partner’s agreements. The desk research found several examples of tools for assessing quality, developed and used by various stakeholders, though primarily within the framework of the European Solidarity Corps Programme.

## *Resources Consulted*

### 1. **Volunteering Charters**

- EVS/ESC Charter: Rights and duties for hosting, sending, and coordinating organizations.
- ICYE Code of Ethical Practice: Safeguarding, environmental sustainability, and inclusion.

### 2. **National Agency Documents**

- Estonian NA: Guidance on roles, responsibilities, and quality standards.
- Latvian NA: Financial guidelines and remuneration practices.

### 3. **Global Volunteering Standard**

- Best practices in volunteer diversity, safeguarding, and environmental sustainability.

### 4. **Other Key Documents**

- "Safer Together" by ICYE: Addressing sexual violence in international volunteering.
- "Greener Together" by ICYE: Promoting sustainability and environmental awareness.
- Assessment Grid for Quality Label Progress Reports.
- Checklist for Team ESC Projects.
- European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams Time2Team Guidelines.

### 5. **Irish Volunteering Strategy:** Inclusion policies and focus on disadvantaged youth.

### 6. **Online Resources**

- [Volunteering Charters and Frameworks.](#)
- [National Agency Presentations.](#)
- [ESC Project Checklist.](#)

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