

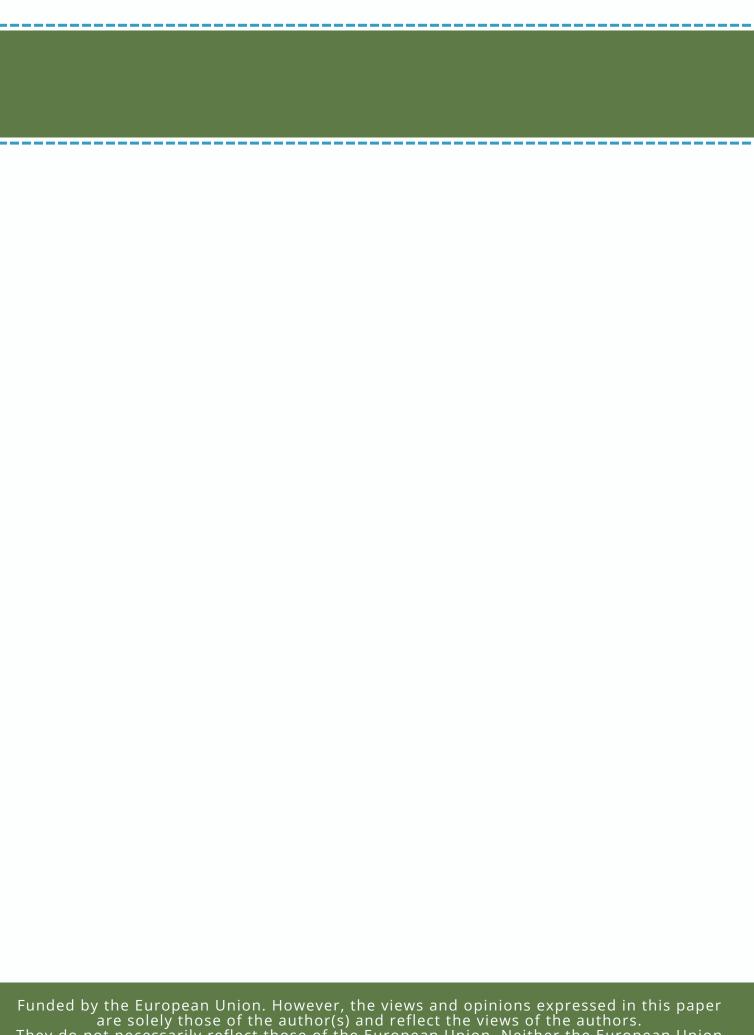
ACTION PLAN REGARDING PARTICIPANTS' MENTAL HEALTH

Projekt Nr.: 2023-1-DE04-KA210-YOU-000155905









1. Introduction

A stay abroad is an exciting time with many new challenges. Not only for the participants themselves, but also for the parents in the case of minors, whose role and intervention options change during this time. Parents and legal guardians are part of the system when minors spend time abroad, e.g. on student exchanges. This role has a special significance, as they finance the stay abroad on the one hand and are in the new situation of not being at the location themselves on the other. Expectations and uncertainty are simultaneously part of their new role.



Parents and legal guardians play a subordinate role for adult participants in the European Solidarity Corps. The circle of friends that is left behind for the duration of the stay abroad has a greater influence here.



For participants, a stay abroad is a phase of personal development that is associated with many new experiences and sometimes also difficulties. We have already highlighted and explained the characteristics of a stay abroad and important key data on mental health in our Educational Paper 1.

The purpose of this paper is to review the measures taken by our organizations with regard to points for the quality assurance of stays based on the findings of our research, the survey and the workshops that took place - and to develop an action plan.

This action plan should contain possible changes and key Points to secure the Quality of stays abroad. This can subsequently also be used by other organizations that deal with the topic of mental health during a stay abroad.

To make our recommendations easier to understand, we would like to highlight the main factors here once again:

a) Ensuring that basic psychological needs are met

In order to successfully master the challenges of a stay abroad and remain mentally healthy, it is important for participants to recognize and meet their own basic needs. This can be done, for example, on the basis of scientifically defined core areas:

The basic psychological needs according to Grawe:

1. orientation and control: The feeling of being able to understand and influence your surroundings and your own actions.

2. gaining pleasure and avoiding displeasure: The pursuit of positive experiences and the avoidance negative experiences.

3. attachment and relationship: The desire for emotional ties and social contacts.

4. self-esteem enhancement: the need to feel valuable and competent

All four points are factors that are more or less subject to personal influence in different situations. Although participants can make an effort to socialize or undertake activities for personal pleasure, there may be phases of lack of clarity and control, which are due to organizational circumstances and cannot be directly changed by them.

These situations can unsettle the participants and contribute to their discomfort. Possible changes require the ability to recognize and name the underlying problem.

It can therefore be beneficial for the overall satisfaction of participants if organizations and their employees are aware of these basic Needs, take them into account and address them specifically in their work. This and support during difficult phases can already ease many problems and support participants.

The extent to which this happens is then again subject to the work assignment and the financial resources of the measure. It is important to know that even measures that require little time and money can have a major impact on the mental health of participants. Suggestions can be found in the following action plan.

b) Mental resilience and coping skills

Auf Seite persönlicher Kompetenzen spielen psychische Widerstandsfähigkeit (Resilienz) und die Fähigkeiten auf spezielle Situationen einzugehen (Coping-Skills) eine zentrale Rolle. Diese Kompetenzen sind von Mensch zu Mensch unterschiedlich ausgeprägt.

Particularly difficult situations can demand a lot from our coping skills, but we can also grow particularly strongly at precisely these points. For a better understanding, it can be helpful to imagine that growing from an old state into a new one, with more skills and a broader perspective can be exhausting and sometimes painful - similar to passing through a birth canal. In psychology, this is known as transition.

Important resilience factors for mental health abroad and in such transition phases are:

1. social network:

Friendships and contacts locally and/or at home that offer support.

2. sense and values:

A clear idea of personal goals and values and to what extent they are in harmony/discrepancy with my environment

3. self-regulation:

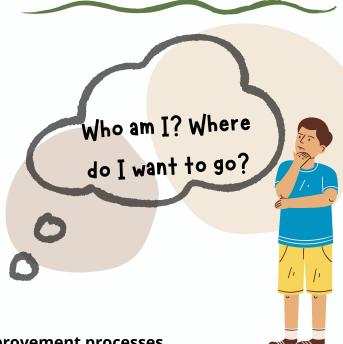
The ability to control your own emotions and reactions. Impulse control.

4. self-efficacy and optimism: confidence in one's own abilities. Ability to overcome challenges and a positive outlook for the future. This is also about autonomy and the ability to set boundaries.

A lot can be done to improve these skills, both on the individual side and on the organizational side, by promoting them and providing incentives.

It also makes a huge difference whether a stay abroad is undertaken on the recommendation and at the request of others, or whether someone deliberately faces challenging situations in order to build up psychological resilience and grow as a result.

Depending on the work assignment and financial resources of the measure, such incentives can range from the provision of information material in various formats and geared to the needs of the target group to welcome and interim workshops to promote contacts among the participants.



c) Recommendations for internal organizational improvement processes

To ensure that changes are supported and implemented, the following points should be observed:

All stakeholders should be involved and be able to contribute their experience.

To ensure this, it is advisable to map out the participant's path from the initial contact to the last interaction in advance in order to identify all those involved and show the points of contact. Only in this way can the needs of all participants be taken into account.

For example, those of parents and guardians.

It is also essential to involve the decision-makers of an organization in order to take the decision-making authority on board. This is also about ensuring feasibility within the organization.



The challenges are clearly identified...

to enable a search for solutions and ensure that everyone is communicating about the same thing.

The new measures...

should be presented in a comprehensible manner with regard to their meaningfulness and benefits in order to be understood by everyone.

For a more constructive implementation of changes and the orientation of those involved, the measures discussed can be categorized into **short-term**, **medium-term and long-term implementable changes**. This also makes it possible to create a to-do list with deadlines, which then also allows a better review of the schedule.

Short-term measures are understood as "quick fixes". In a short period of time and with simple means, challenges can already be accompanied or, if necessary, countered preventively.

Particularly in the case of long-term measures, emphasis should be placed on the methodology. The development can be based on the following steps

- a) Classification of the challenges in (psychologically-based) theories - to better understand challenges
- b) Creation of personas and empathy mapping - so that employees can better empathize with the Situation of the target groups



Depending on the extent of the problem, additional tools can be helpful in identifying the problem and taking into account the needs of the various people affected. Here is an example of such a method.

Primary target group

Secondary target group

Psychological classification

Why?

Existing concept Short term Long-term

What?
Measure
How / Method

Who?

When?

Example from our everyday life to illustrate how such a worksheet could look with regard to an identified challenge:



In various ways (Instagram, information events, consultations), we repeatedly

encounter the question whether the language is a major challenge in the host country.

This shows us that the language aspect is a major source of uncertainty during the preparation period. Participants report that this fear of the challenge is rather unfounded. Nevertheless, it is important that this uncertainty is addressed qualitatively during the preparation period.

Primary target group	Participants	
Secondary target group	Parents	
Psychological Classification	Restriction of the basic psychological needs: ControlSelf-esteem enhancement	
Why?	We would like to offer the pupils 1. Provide security 2. Giving self-confidence in their ability 3. Providing tools	

	Existing concept	Short term	Long-term
What? Measure	Language course: has already been developed and tested. Current evaluation and revision based on feedback forms (e.g. content, materials, etc.)	Overview: helpful vocabulary, phrases for challenging situations and youth words	Language course offer (see existing concept)
How / Method		Handout	Course format, Playful
Who?		Main responsibility: Employee xy in collaboration with: Employee z and former participants	Main responsibility: Employee xy in collaboration with: Employee z and former participants
When?		Start: Day XY Deadline: Month X-Z	Start: Day XY Deadline: Month X-Z

2. Concrete measures to promotion mental health during stays abroad

Our survey and the development of psychological principles on the challenges of stays abroad have revealed three critical main topics for supporting mental health and avoiding discomfort:

1. The need for orientation:

During the preparation and all phases of the stay abroad, orientation should be ensured for everyone involved, as a lack of orientation can cause discomfort and this should be avoided.

Of the three points listed here, this seems to be the easiest to implement at first glance. Almost all organizations have certain rules and work assignments.

On closer inspection, however, there may be room for improvement both in terms of clarity (is it understandable?) and often also meaningfulness (is it comprehensible?).

Sometimes things can become outdated due to changes in personnel, legislation or company policy and should therefore be constantly checked to ensure that they are up to date.

2. Social integration, the fun factor and the level of support provided:

Social contacts and positive experiences are basic needs for maintaining mental health. Both can be difficult during a stay abroad, especially in the initial phase.

Participants may need support from the organizations involved in order to meet their needs.

The degree of support offered in this regard is usually defined by the work assignment and the financial resources of a measure.

Measures for minors will naturally include more support services, while young adults are expected to show more initiative.

The fact is that the factors are decisive in determining whether participants feel comfortable and find integration easier or more difficult.



3. The need for development:

Even if the development opportunities vary depending on the goal of the measure (student exchange, volunteer work, study visit, work-away), awareness of the learning opportunities and achievement of the learning goals is of great importance for a positive future perspective and a sense of self-efficacy.

Recognizing the meaningfulness of the measure increases the resilience of the participants. Organizations can use appropriate tools (e.g. learning diaries, documentation of volunteers' cooperation/learning and development opportunities, reflection meetings, etc.) to support the recognition of progress.

In the following list, we try to go into more detail on **three main topics**, possible allocations of responsibilities and recommended quality assurance measures and present them in a grid. The following table also breaks down into **sending organization** and **host organization** in order to to provide orientation on what is happening in the participants' home country and what is happening in their host country.



We would like to point out that these are **recommendations** which, as previously mentioned, may vary depending on the work assignment and the funding of the measure.

a) The need for orientation

Due to the challenges in a foreign environment, orientation is particularly important in all phases of the stay abroad. Accompanying and preparatory information about the upcoming stay abroad is particularly helpful in the preparatory phase, when those affected do not yet know what to expect, and can help to alleviate uncertainties and prepare those involved accordingly.

The scope and extent - in the sense of how this information is provided (one-to-one meetings, seminars, information packs, videos, etc.) are related to the funding of a project, but should always be considered in terms of their importance in order to avoid negative effects later on. In addition to the presentation of the course of the programme, time frame and organizational steps, expectation management also plays an important role in the orientation of participants.

Communication of organizational structures, work assignments and responsibilities in all phases of the of the stay abroad. This includes, on the one hand, ensuring that everyone within the organization is aware of the scope and nature of the work assignment. On the one hand, this means that it must be ensured within the organization that all knowledge about the scope and nature of the work assignment, theorganization measures and contact persons, but also that the responsibilities between the organizations must be clearly defined and implemented accordingly.

The relevant models vary depending on the company and program. In most cases, however, it involves cooperation between the sending and host organizations. In addition, other organizations, such as a school and host family, can also be involved, for example in a student exchange.

The roles may be defined differently depending on the measure, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into this in detail. What all forms have in common is that there must be a clear definition of roles and delimitation of responsibilities that is known to all those involved. Otherwise, any gray areas, ambiguities and blurred boundaries can lead to misunderstandings and omissions.

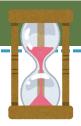
However, we would also like to mention two other key influencing factors in the area of orientation here:

Language barrier and communication:

Language is a key lever for solving challenges. Uncertainties or barriers lead to communication problems in the social environment. Translators and translation aids can help to overcome challenges, but can never replace direct person-to-person contact and mutual exchange, as such aids usually only cover the bare essentials...

Cultural differences:

Different characters, different living conditions, different rules and requirements, misunderstandings based on different cultural circumstances can pose major challenges. Participants can be prepared for cultural differences in discussions, but generalizations are always on the verge of stereotyping.



Organizational management

Field of action and objective

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

Program conditions and -process

(e.g. components of a student exchange, contract, guidelines for an ESK stay)

- Avoidance of missunderstandings
- Transparency and building trust
- Legal coverage
- Financial planning
- Preparation

Presentation of program conditions

Verbal explanation of program conditions

Presentation of local program process

for

example,

ESK,

accommondation, working conditions and times, leisure possibilities) It may be that the host organization itself conducts а selection interview with the participants, or that this information is provided sending by the organization.

Personal interview

- Training of the site employees on contract management and conditions
- Ensuring that content is understood by young people and, in the case of minors, their parents
- Close cooperation between the sending organisation and the host organisation to ensure consistent information

Organizational process and supporting services

(for example smooth preparation, visa, overcoming language barrier, information about host country)

- Planning ahead
- Stress reduction through administrative support
- Ensuring correct and timely completion

Ablaufinformation und Unterstützungsleistungen

- Planning ahead
- Stress reduction through administrative support
- Ensuring correct and timely completion

Reception organisation usually only involved after arrival

- Regular review of time schedules
- Continuous updating and review of information materials
- Involvement of experts (can also be part of the organization)
- Training of employees



Field of action and objective

- Support in overcoming the language barrier
- Giving out general information about the host country (countryside, culture and people)

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

- Mentioning language courses and Workshops
- Tandemprograms
- Using language learning apps
- Lists with vocabular
- Informational material
- Creating infographics and Videos for sensitization

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

- Checking the language learning progress
- Mentioning qualified Langauge trainers and programs
- Using interactive learning methods
- Permanent updates of data
- Caution: Stereotyping



Expectation management before the measure

Field	of	action	and
objective			

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

General information concerning the stay abroad

- setting realistic expectations
- avoid stress and disappointments,
- Promote adaptability and resilience
- Optimize learning experience

Personal interview or preparational workshop

- Realistic simulations/ role-playing games
- Reviews
- Interactive Seminars
- Transparent information materials
- Ensure clear communication

In the case of the host organisation, this only takes place during the stay

- Interview guidelines for employees or seminar schedule
- Close exchange between sending and receiving organisations
- Interview protocol or seminar handouts
- Training of employees (detailed understanding of the program by the employees)

Developing an understanding of cultural differences

- Promoting cultural sensitivity and openness
- Reduction of cultural stress through understanding and acceptance of cultural differences
- Preventive support for successful integration and adaptation
- Learning and application of methods for dealing with cultural differences

Personal interview or preparatory seminars

- Cultural Workshops
- Interactive, intercultural seminars
- Experience reports, e.g. by former participants or case studies
- Roleplays and Simulations
- Videos
- Infographics

In the case of the host organisation, this only takes place during the stay

- Interview guidelines for employees or seminar schedule
- Continuous updating of the program materials
- Training of employees (detailed knowledge of the host country of the employees)
- Beware of stereotypes
- Possible involvement of intercultural experts
- Involvement of former participants

Field of action and objective	Tasks of the sending organization and methods	Tasks receiving organization and methods	Quality assurance
Reduction of intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts			 Close exchange between sending and receiving organisations (possibly involving people from the host country) Interview protocol or seminar handout
Presentation of the challenges and phases of a stay abroad • Identification of challenges • Reduction of surprise effects and uncertainties • Promoting resilience and skills to develop adequate solutions to problems • Explanation of the importance of leisure activities • Raising awareness of the use of preventive and acute support services	Personal interview or preparational workshop Realistic simulations/ role-playing games Reviews Transparent information materials Ensure clear communication	In the case of the host organisation, this only takes place during the stay	 Interview guidelines for employees or seminar schedule Continuous updating of the program materials Training of employees (detailed knowledge of the psychological challenges and phases of a stay abroad of employees) Involvement of former participants Close exchange between sending and receiving organisations (possibly involving people from the host country) Interview protocol or seminar handout

Explanation of roles



Field of action and objective

Clear definition and communication of responsibilities and contact persons

Precise delimitation of responsibilities between the organisations involved

Clarity of responsibilities and contact persons on site for the participants

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Clarify to what extent the sending organisation is still the contact person during the stay (e.g. only if things cannot be arranged locally, or for example for specific questions of the participants or their families)

Tasks receiving organization and methods

- If several organizations are involved, clearly define and communicate who is responsible for what (e.g. overview, division hosting, organization, school, host family)
- Communication of responsibilities in the team so that participants know what they can contact and for whom – if several people have handouts or structural plans

Quality assurance

Organizational chart of the structures (these should be known to the employees to avoid role conflicts) and the participants (so that they know who to turn to)

Expectation management during the measure



Field of action and objective

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

Clear communication fromExpectations of participants

(e.g. rules, integration in the host family/in the accommodation/at school/at work)

- Clarity and Transparency
- Promoting successful integration and adaptation
- Reduction of conflicts and misunderstandings
- Adaptation support

Normally, this should take place during the measure in the host country.

At the beginning: Welcome talk with expectation holders or orientation workshop

Ongoing feedback talks

- Exchange with participants on organizational topics on site (e.g. work goals, learning goals, leisure activities, absences, vacation, illness)
- Rules overview (e.g. house rules host family or host organization, work organization, school)

Training of employees (everyone should be familiar with the procedure)
Uniform communication schemes in the organization

Conclusion



Field of action and objective

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

Planning the return journey and final steps

 Clarity for the participants and their familiesKlarheit für die Teilnehmenden und deren Familien Clear communication of the final steps and which of them will be taken by which organization/person Clear communication of the final steps and which of them will be taken by which organization/person

IIn the case of ESK, for example:

- Booking Return flight
- Cancellation at
- place of residence

Ensuring timely completion by the responsible persons



b) Social integration, the fun factor and the extent of support in this regard

The social network is a key factor for individual well-being. It serves as a pillar of support and helps people to cope with challenging situations. However, this can only be supported by the organization to a limited extent. Offers and impulses must be actively accepted by the participants

Social integration:



Support from organizations, assigned buddies, participation in social activities and ventures as well as self-initiative in establishing contacts and maintaining social relationships help young people to integrate better.



Leisure activities:

Activities outside the accommodation are important for mental health. External support is very helpful here. However, self-help and personal initiative also help to make leisure time meaningful. As part of the project's mission and funding, it must be clear to everyone involved to what extent the organization or the participants themselves are responsible for such activities.

Reintegration:



Challenges also arise when reintegrating into the home society. The fear of losing contact with friends and family disagreements (often exacerbated by COVID-19 in the past) lead to homesickness and the fear of missing out.

Discussions with colleagues, mentors, family and friends, conveying the meaningfulness of the stay abroad to family and friends as well as regular communication and support from the organization are important measures for overcoming these challenges and ensuring that the stay abroad is a success. to enable successful reintegration.

But here, too, the work order and the financing of a project must be considered.



Social Integration



Field	of	action	and
objective			

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

Assistance for social integration in everyday life by the organisations

Infomaterial: General opening hours Health service Public transport

<u>Support:</u> Official channels and visits to the doctor (clarify responsibilities)

Access to support and advice

Promotion of the feeling of safety and security
Building a foundation of trust
Raising awareness of the importance of social inclusion for mental health

Introductory workshop and ongoing support

Infographics and Plans Accompaniment at the beginning but promotion of self-efficacy so that participants are more and more able to act on their Mental health (what if things don't go your way) Contact persons regular discussions or a 24-hour emergency contact? Tips for dealing with challenging situations; Strengthening coping strategies

Workshop-Curriculum

Get feedback
Training of employees,
especially with regard to
psychological first aid and
conversational skills
Training of employees,
especially to support
integration processes
Exploring according to
state of mind (fixed
rhythm, if not ongoing
contact)

Support through peers

Promotion of the social network and support from peers Reduction of loneliness and isolation

Raising awareness of cultural differences

Mentors/Buddys

arouse the curiosity to get involved with differences to the home country. Constructive communication and the promotion of understanding contribute to coping with new situations. Organizations and friends can support this.

Ilnitiation by and, if necessary, moderation and support by trained employees

Leisure time



Field of action and objective

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

Importance of leisure time for mental health

- Information about leisure activities
- Support for leisure activities and excursions
- Promoting personal initiative

- Offer of joint group activities
- Suggesting personal initiative of the participants

Reintegration

Field of action and objective

Preparing the return

- Successful Reintegration
- Reduction of Reintegration stress
- Supporting a positive Transfer

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Retournee-Workshop and/or personal talk

- what happens now
- does the young adult need anyhting else from our side
- short reflection ESK

Tasks receiving organization and methods

- Preparing the return
- Planning next steps, e.g. job integration or study orientation
- Mentioning of possible supporting programs and measures inhouse

Quality assurance

- manual or Workshop curriculum
- Employee training



c) Development opportunities for participants/question of meaning

For many people, participating in stays abroad offers an outstanding opportunity for personal and professional development. Such stays are not only an adventure and an opportunity to discover new cultures and languages, but they also promote profound development on an individual level.



Strengthening resilience in particular is an important aspect that goes hand in hand with the challenges and experiences abroad.

A central element of strengthening resilience is the ability to recognize and answer the question of meaning in one's own experiences.

Stays abroad often confront participants with unfamiliar and sometimes difficult situations. They have to find their way in new social and cultural contexts, overcome language - barriers and often also deal with homesickness and isolation.

These challenges promote the development of problem-solving skills, adaptability and emotional strength - all key elements of resilience. The ability to adapt and move forward despite difficulties is significantly strengthened by such experiences.



Recognizing and answering the question of meaning is another, often underestimated aspect of resilience. Finding meaning in one's own actions and experiences gives people an inner compass and a source of motivation. When participants in stays abroad recognize the meaning in their experiences, be it through learning new skills, immersion in foreign cultures or personal development, this strengthens their inner stability and satisfaction. They see their experiences not just as a series of challenges, but as valuable steps on their life's journey.

Recognizing one's own sense of purpose during a stay abroad can have practical effects on the participants' well-being and future plans.

They are better able to overcome setbacks and focus on their long-term goals. In addition, the awareness of the meaning of their experiences promotes a higher level of self-confidence and satisfaction.

People who understand the meaning of their experiences are often more committed and motivated to pursue their goals, be it in education, career or personal life.

The recognition of meaning can be promoted through various measures by the organizations involved, such as the precise definition and communication of learning content, through reflection discussions, but also through learning diaries.

Acquiring new skills



Field of action and objective

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

Definition of learning objectives and tasks

- Information about learning opportunities
- Influence of one's own interests
- Making learning progress visible
- Letting self-efficacy be experienced and reflecting (strengthening resilience)
- Addressing problems (increasing problemsolving skills)

EIntroductory workshop and ongoing support and reflection

Identification of possibilities and responsibilities Contacts Accompaniment at the beginning but promotion of self-efficacy so that participants are more and more able to act on their own Mental health and improved coping strategies

Infographics and Plans

Training of employees

Acquiring new skills

Field of action and objective

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Quality assurance

Validation of stay

- Strengthening the sense of accomplishment and success
- Promoting self-esteem

Depending on the responsibility in the

specific program

Provision of certificates and evidence

Depending on the responsibility in the specific program

 Provision of certificates and evidence in the case of ESC Issuance of the Youth Pass







Field of action and objective

Tasks of the sending organization and methods

Tasks receiving organization and methods

Reflection meetings and

feedback sessions

Quality assurance

Definition of learning objectives and tasks

- Sense and Understanding values
- Strengthening resilience





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