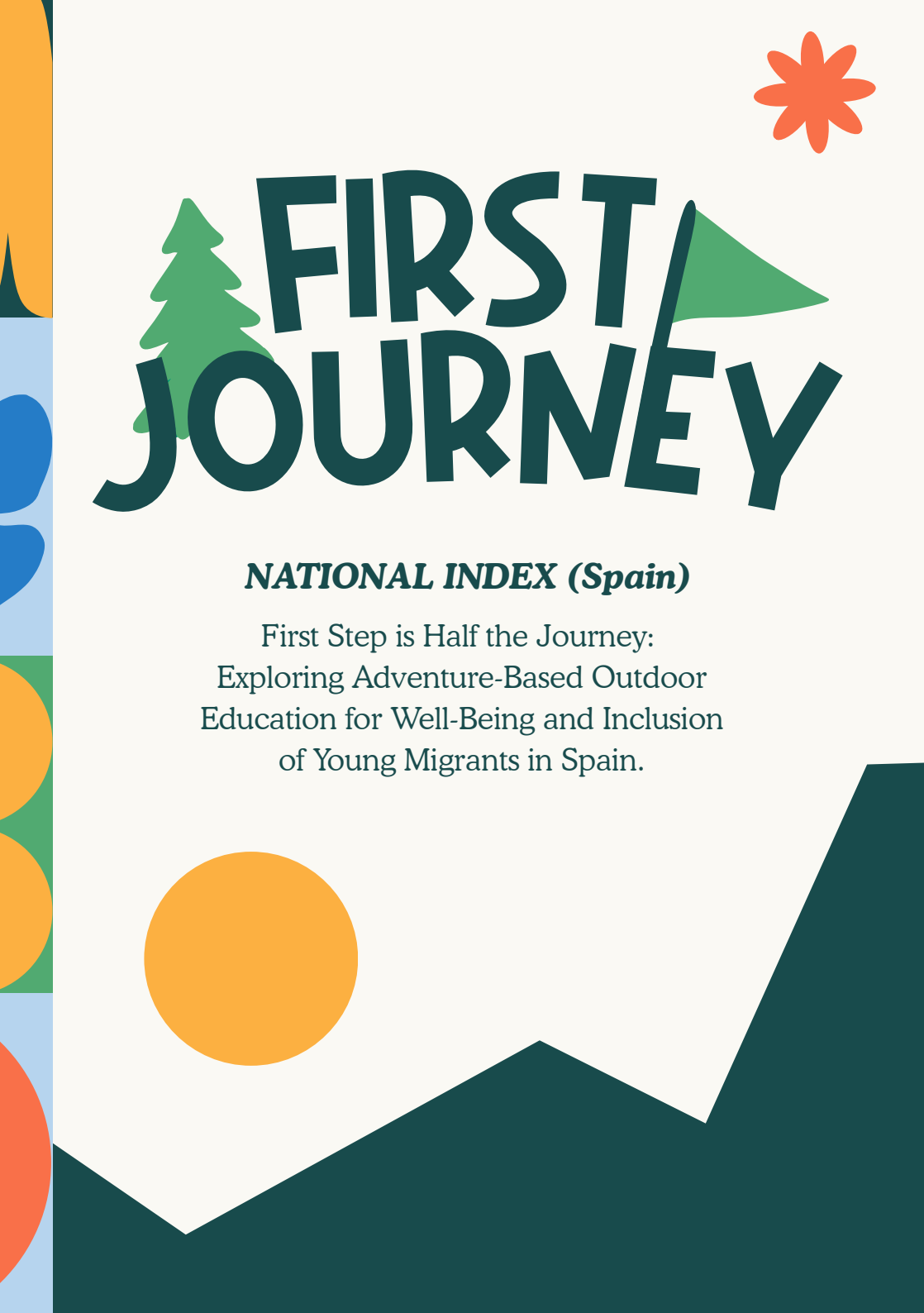




FIRST JOURNEY

NATIONAL INDEX (Spain)

First Step is Half the Journey:
Exploring Adventure-Based Outdoor
Education for Well-Being and Inclusion
of Young Migrants in Spain.



Project: First Step is Half the Journey:

Exploring Adventure-Based Outdoor Education for Well-Being and Inclusion of Young Migrants in Spain.

National Index – Spain

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Introduction



Addressing the critical requirement to facilitate the integration and wellbeing of migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities, our partnership established a project to investigate how adventure education could serve as an integration approach, acknowledging its advantages for promoting mental health, fostering resilience, enhancing adaptability to challenges, cultivating decision-making abilities, teamwork, leadership, and community development.

The objective of this project is to reinforce partnerships with local educational and integration bodies and services, thus creating collaborative strategies to assist migrants in engaging with the environment.

The project's target audiences comprise young people in NEET circumstances, particularly migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; educators and integration service practitioners; and formal and informal civil society organisations supporting migrants.

The project's emphasis is directly rooted in the Spanish, Norwegian and German contexts, where our partnership operates.



The subsequent report encapsulates the research undertaken and findings collected in Spain through interviews with an youth worker, a specialist in outdoor education trainings and a local outdoor activities informal leader; via distribution of online questionnaires for integration service practitioners, civil society organisations and young migrants.



Chapter 1: Focus Group with Young People

Methodology

To gather opinions and understand the views of our target audience, an online survey was administered to migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities.

Researchers first developed a set of questions through collaborative discussion, and then a representative sample of these questions was administered to a group of 13 migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities aged 18 to 30 and another group of 8 migrants over 30 years old.

The survey addressed several topics, including the meaning and diversity of outdoor activities, the benefits of outdoor activities, barriers to participation, the support needed for participation, and the contribution of outdoor activities to achieving life goals.



Key Findings:

1. Participation in adventure-based outdoor activities

The responses of survey demonstrate that outdoor education activities generate substantial positive emotional and psychological outcomes.

The consistent themes of stress reduction, social connection, environmental engagement.

Survey participants demonstrate remarkably strong and nuanced belief in outdoor education's capacity to improve mental health and reduce stress and anxiety. Their explanations reveal sophisticated understanding of multiple therapeutic mechanisms, including nature connection, cognitive relief, social integration, and stress management.

Importantly, participants identified several mental health challenges specific to the migration experience loneliness, grief, need for acceptance that outdoor activities appear well-positioned to address.

The near-unanimous positive response, even amongst those with limited experience, suggests outdoor education aligns with intuitive understanding of human psychological needs and nature's restorative properties.



2. Barriers to participation

The barriers to participation identified by migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities reveal systemic obstacles that extend beyond individual circumstances to encompass information gaps, economic constraints and geographic limitations (remote areas of residence).

3. Preferred activities

Migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities express diverse, sophisticated preferences for outdoor education activities spanning water-based experiences, hiking, nature education, climbing, camping, and team challenges. Water activities and hiking emerge as most popular, though substantial interest exists across all categories.

However, many desired activities face the same barriers: cost, transport, information, previously identified.

4. Implications for Practice

The sophistication of some responses, incorporating reflection, learning, and explicit mental health objectives, reveals opportunity for programmes that transcend mere recreation to offer genuine personal development and integration support.

By offering diverse activities, clear progression pathways, educational components, and collaborative experiences within accessible frameworks addressing known barriers, outdoor education programmes can align with target population preferences whilst delivering the mental health and integration outcomes all stakeholders seek.

These preferences provide clear guidance for programme development enabling locally tailored approaches reflecting both universal interests and geographic specificity.

The challenge lies not in identifying appealing activities but in structuring accessible, sustainable programmes that transform expressed interest into consistent participation and meaningful outcomes for migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities.



Chapter 2: Perspectives from Youth Workers and Educators

Methodology

The survey sought to collect insights from organisations and services working with migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities.

The questions addressed various topics, including the types of services offered, their frequency, outreach approaches, difficulties faced, partnerships with other organisations, experience with outdoor education, possible outdoor educational activities, perceived advantages, obstacles, and interest in discovering more about outdoor education methodology.

During our survey, we discovered that there are few organisations in our area working specially with migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities, or information about such organisations is not widely available. We collected information from organisations and providers visible to the audience and with whom we were able to establish contact.



1. Main Challenges in Engaging Young Migrants and Refugees

The answers to survey reveal several interconnected challenges faced by organisations when including young people in NEET situations, migrants or refugees in educational or community programmes.

The most frequently cited obstacle is the lack of team members to support participants, with particular emphasis on the shortage of staff possessing specific knowledge and skills required to work effectively with this demographic.

Resource constraints emerge as a central theme, manifesting in three key areas:

- insufficient staffing;
- inadequate physical space to host events;
- shortage of materials necessary for programme delivery.

These practical limitations directly impact organisations' capacity to engage with young migrants and refugees meaningfully.

2. Proposed Approaches to Address Identified Challenges

According to survey participants, these problems could be solved through cooperation with other organizations to exchange experiences and improve knowledge, allocation of additional funding for programs aimed at adventure non-formal education.



3. Perceived Contribution of Adventure-Based Education

The responses demonstrate a strong consensus that adventure education offers significant potential for supporting the integration, well-being, and personal growth of young migrants and refugees, with respondents identifying several key mechanisms through which this occurs.

Building connections and community emerges as the most prominent theme.

Multiple respondents emphasised that adventure education facilitates meaningful relationships by bringing together locals with migrants and refugees, helping participants meet new friends, and creating bonds through shared experiences.

This social dimension is seen as crucial for reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging in a new environment.

Breaking down barriers is another significant benefit highlighted.

Respondents noted that outdoor activities create a natural, low-pressure environment where language and cultural barriers can be overcome more easily than in traditional settings.

The hands-on, experiential nature of adventure education allows participants to connect and communicate beyond verbal language.

Personal development features prominently, with respondents observing that adventure education helps participants build confidence, feel more open, and develop self-belief through trying new activities and overcoming challenges.

The combination of challenge and support inherent in adventure education is seen as particularly effective for personal growth.

Creating a supportive atmosphere is valued, with mentions of friendly environments, nature-based experiences, and opportunities for trust-building.

The responses suggest that adventure education is viewed as a holistic approach that simultaneously addresses social integration, emotional well-being, and personal development through shared outdoor experiences that transcend traditional barriers.



Interim Conclusion

The survey responses reveal a significant paradox in supporting migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities through educational and community programmes. While organisations recognise the profound potential of adventure education to facilitate integration, well-being, and personal growth, they face substantial barriers that prevent them from fully realising this potential.

Respondents demonstrate a clear understanding of how adventure education can benefit this demographic—through community building, confidence development, and the breaking down of language and cultural barriers in natural, low-pressure environments.

However, the challenges identified suggest that many organisations lack the fundamental resources to implement such programmes effectively.

The shortage of trained staff with specialised knowledge, inadequate physical spaces and materials, time constraints, and crucially, insufficient organisational motivation create a situation where the recognised benefits of adventure education remain largely untapped.

Chapter 3: Insights from the Expert Interviews

Methodology

In addition to the survey for migrant and refugee youth and young people with fewer opportunities, our research delved into interviews with trainers and youth worker from organizations related to outdoor education, local community.

This chapter synthesizes the key insights gathered from these interviews, offering valuable perspectives on the benefits, challenges, and best practices in implementing outdoor education programs.



Interview 1: Javier Morales Calvillo

Association Amigos de Europa in Andalucia

Javier Morales Calvillo is the founder and president of the Association Amigos de Europa en Andalucia, Spain since 2015. The organisation works with various municipalities, but focuses primarily on rural areas because these are where there are fewer opportunities.

The Association Amigos de Europa is located in Cortes de la Frontera, in a natural park.

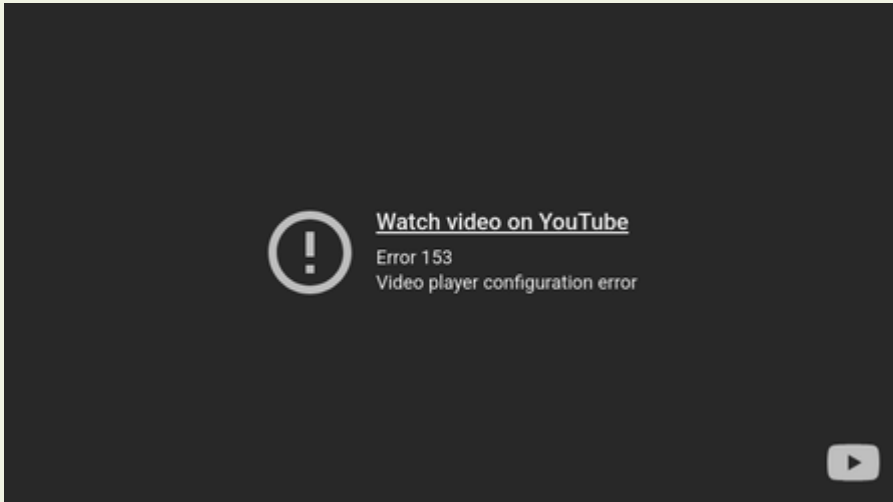
Many years ago, they took on the task of renovating an abandoned campsite, which the local council had no idea what to do with since it wasn't economically viable. But Javier's organisation saw great potential in this abandoned site for creating a social space. They received a grant and restored the abandoned campsite, turning it into a youth centre for non-formal educational programmes.

In its activities, it always includes some hiking, or collaborates with many local enterprises which specialise in outdoor leisure activities, or goes to the river for swimming. It also partner with people who have horses to organise routes.

Javier believes that outdoor activities allow for young migrants to socialize, which is a powerful tool for building social connections.

The organisation has many ideas and is always looking for opportunities to implement them. It tries to pursue these ideas whilst paying attention to all the grants and funding that it can obtain. So it is always checking what it can do and tries to secure as much as possible. If it manages to obtain a grant, it implements its ideas in the best possible way.

Watch the interview with Javier Morales Calvillo here:



Scan QR Code to watch the interview

Interview 2: Eliza Bozeskova

Organizer holiday and kites camp in Tarifa

Eliza Bozeskova more than five years organizes outdoor activities in a remote village Tarifa located in a national park on the ocean shore.

Her activity programs are designed for children and adults, most of whom are migrants.

The activities include main areas: wellness, children's camps and kitesurfing lessons.

Eliza incorporates elements of yoga, general fitness, and water sports such as kitesurfing and surfing into her programs. She collaborates with a local equestrian school, utilizing the positive impact animals have on people in her programs.

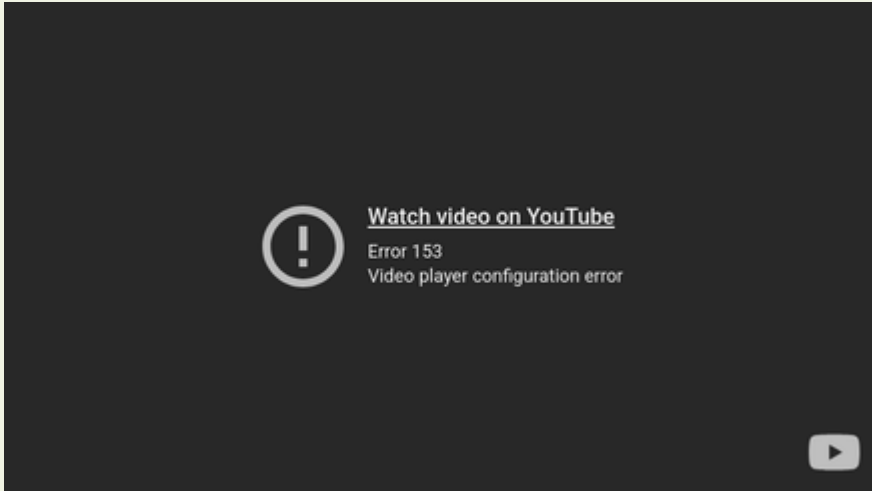
Based on her experience working with migrants, Eliza notes that the biggest challenge for integrating migrants into the local community is cultural differences and the language barrier.

She emphasized, that outdoor activities give people self-confidence, communication skills, and develop teamwork skills. Working with children, she notices that it's difficult for them to engage in outdoor activities because they typically spend a lot of time at home on computers or devices. During outdoor activities, children become more engaged and reduce their screen time.

She believes this positively impacts interactions between children and, as a result, develops communication skills, which helps migrant children adapt to their new environment.

Eliza believes that sharing experiences and communication between organizations providing non-formal education can be useful for youth workers. to discuss cases and determine the optimal way to resolve situations that arise during activities.

Watch the interview with Eliza Bozeskova here:



Scan QR Code to watch the interview



Interview 3: Luca Lorenzo Di Martino

Local outdoor activities leader in Benalmadena Pueblo

Luca Lorenzo Di Martino is a foreigner living in Benalmádena Pueblo who transformed personal isolation during COVID-19 lockdowns into a thriving community initiative.

Luca beginning as a solitary walker seeking therapeutic relief from pandemic stress, this individual developed deep knowledge of local trails, wildflowers, mushrooms, and the historical significance of paths. Now serving as the informal leader of a multicultural hiking group, they facilitate regular outdoor activities.

This grassroots hiking initiative in Benalmádena demonstrates how informal, community-led activities can effectively foster migrant integration and well-being without requiring significant institutional infrastructure. What began as one person's therapeutic response to pandemic isolation has evolved into a multicultural support network of up to 24 members from diverse backgrounds including Senegal, the Netherlands, the UK, and the Basque Country.

The model's strength lies in its simplicity and authenticity—minimal barriers to entry, flexible scheduling driven by participant suggestions, and a focus on shared experience in nature rather than formal programming. By keeping requirements basic (proper footwear, water, transportation to trailheads), the group remains accessible while the casual structure allows it to adapt organically to participants' needs and interests.

The activities extend beyond simple hiking to create deeper connections with both place and people.

Participants engage in language exchange across Spanish, English, Senegalese, and Dutch, learn the historical significance of trails used by Phoenicians, Moors, and Romans, and develop practical navigation skills with GPS apps and trail maps.

Supplementary activities like foraging, traditional crafts such as esparto weaving, photography, and camping build a rich, multifaceted relationship with the local environment.

This approach facilitates integration by helping migrants develop geographic and cultural knowledge of their adopted home while building trust, personal responsibility, and meaningful social bonds.

The organizer's confidence in using adventure for integration stems from observable outcomes - nature genuinely "levels the playing field" and provides common ground for people from vastly different backgrounds.

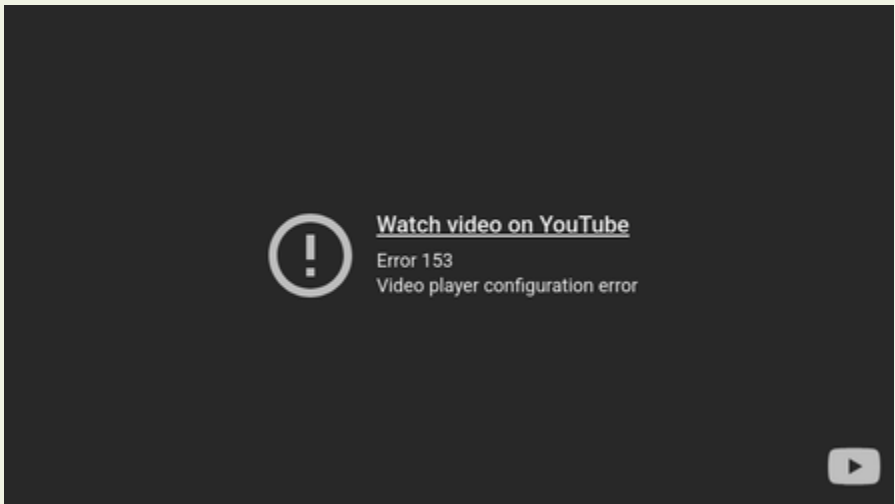
However, the initiative's future sustainability presents questions about balancing organic authenticity with potential growth or formalization.

While the word-of-mouth recruitment and WhatsApp coordination have worked well, the organizer acknowledges openness to institutional collaboration tempered by concerns about liability, insurance, and losing the community's informal essence.

The minimal need for formal training or resources is valuing lived experience over credentials: reflects both a strength and potential limitation. Establishing donation points for basic gear and creating simple checklists could enhance accessibility without compromising the model's grassroots character.

Ultimately, this case illustrates that effective migrant integration programs need not be complex or heavily resourced; sometimes the most powerful interventions emerge from genuine human connection facilitated by shared experiences in nature.

Watch the interview with Luca Lorenzo Di Martino here:



Scan QR Code to watch the interview

Recommendations for Youth Organisations and Practitioners

These recommendations emerge from three distinct but complementary approaches to using outdoor activities for migrant integration in Spain.

Together, they demonstrate that effective integration programming can take many forms, from formal organisational structures to informal community-led initiatives and that the most successful approaches share common elements: accessibility, authenticity, responsiveness to participant needs, and genuine commitment to using nature as a vehicle for human connection and community building.

The diversity of these models suggests that communities should develop approaches suited to their specific contexts, resources, and populations rather than seeking a single "best practice" to replicate.

What matters most is not the particular structure but the underlying principles: meeting people where they are, reducing barriers, creating shared experiences in nature, building genuine relationships, and facilitating integration through engagement rather than instruction.

Conclusion


This National Index examined the role of adventure-based outdoor education in supporting the well-being and social participation of young migrants in Spain.

The opportunity before the sector is clear: outdoor activities and adventure education offer powerful for facilitating migrant and refugee youth integration.

The principles that make these approaches effective are well understood, the target population's preferences are documented, and successful models exist that can inform though not dictate new programme development.

What remains is to bridge the implementation gap through strategic investment in funding and collaborative infrastructure that enables diverse organisations to develop contextually appropriate outdoor integration programmes. By supporting both formal and informal approaches, facilitating knowledge exchange across organisational boundaries, reducing barriers to programme implementation, and maintaining focus on the core principles of accessibility, authenticity, and genuine human connection in nature, the sector can transform recognised potential into widespread practice.



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The goal is not to create uniform programmes but to cultivate an ecosystem of diverse outdoor integration initiatives that share common principles whilst reflecting local contexts, resources, and communities.

In doing so, we can ensure that more young migrants and refugees experience what participants in Andalusian programmes already know: that shared adventures in nature build bridges across differences, create belonging, develop confidence and skills, and facilitate integration in ways that formal instruction alone cannot achieve.



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