

Good Practices



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Education and Culture
Tools for Learning

Impact Study:

EVS accreditation process in South-Mediterranean countries and its impact on organisations and projects

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2016.

Executive summary

The main **aim of this study** was to picture the impact¹ of the EVS accreditation process on the work of the organisations and quality of their projects after the first two years of its implementation in South Mediterranean countries.


The study has covered **42 accredited EVS organisations** from **8 South Mediterranean countries**: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. It has also included **50 received EVS volunteers** in South-Med region and **30 sent EVS volunteers** from South-Med. The major part of the study has been conducted from **September-November 2015**. It has been amended with the findings for outgoing volunteers gathered from **May-July 2016**.

The key results show that ***accreditation process for EVS has multiple benefits for the accredited organisations and its impact goes beyond EVS projects***. The EVS accreditation contributes to a better visibility of the organisations from the South-Med and gives them an international profile. The EVS accreditation positively impacts the quality of their EVS projects, but also other organisational practices, such as: project management or local volunteer management.

The study has also indicated the areas for further reflection amongst the stakeholders involved in the process, as well as spaces for further quality development. Finally, it has brought a list of specific recommendations for future.



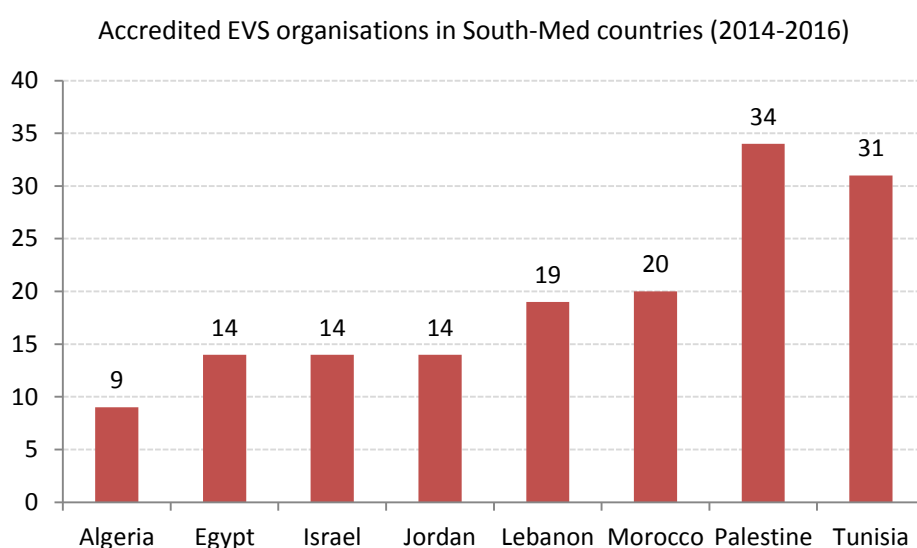
¹ In this study the impact has been addressed at the organisational level (e.g. in terms of positive changes in organisational practices and awareness), not at the community or societal level.



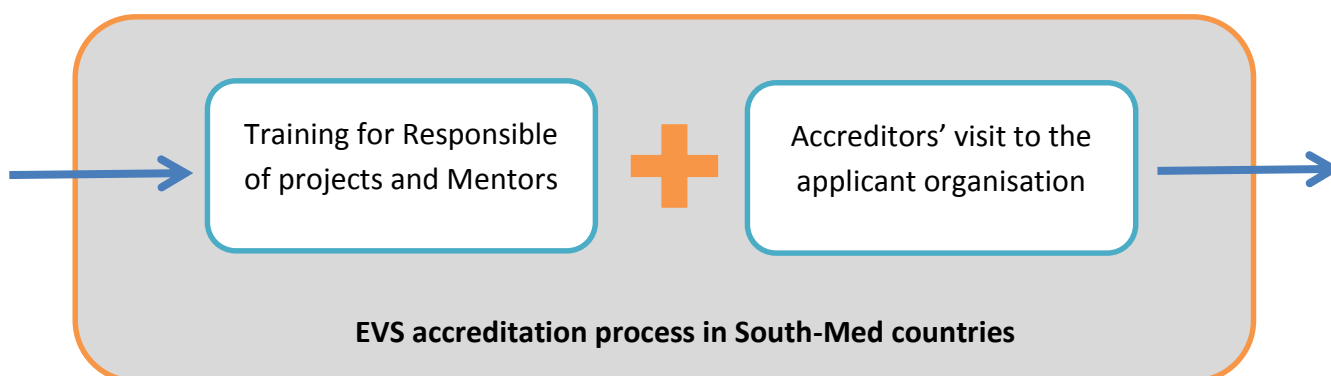
About the impact
study: the
background,
aims and
methodology

EVS strategy and accreditation in Euromed context

As part of the overall strategy *of ensuring the quality of European Voluntary Service (EVS) projects with South Mediterranean countries*, the European Commission has taken the formal decision to introduce the EVS accreditation procedure in July 2013. Previously, in a similar manner, the EVS accreditation system had been established in other partner regions, namely South East Europe (SEE) and Eastern Europe and Caucasus (EECA). The implementation of the EVS accreditation process in South Mediterranean countries has been entrusted to SALTO Euromed Resource centre, supported by Erasmus+ National agencies from Austria, France, Italy, Finland and Turkey. The official start of the process has happened in the Kick-off meeting in January 2014. During the first three years of the implementation **155 organisations** from **8 South-Med countries** have been accredited (as shown in the graph below).

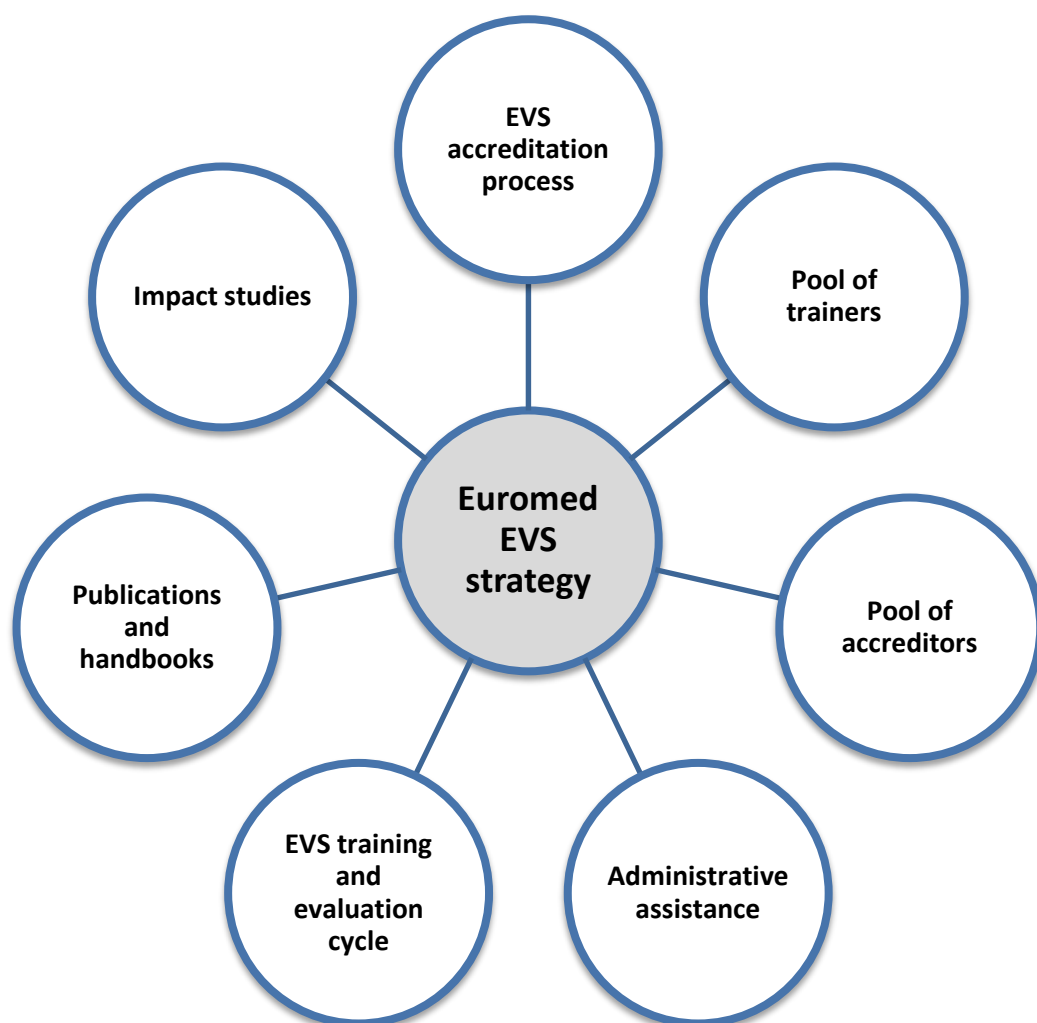


Like in all Programme countries and other partner regions of the Erasmus+ programme, the initial step into EVS for an organisation coming from South-Med assumed filling in and submitting the application form for the EVS accreditation (in this case to SALTO Euromed). However, instead of waiting for the accreditors' visits and the checking the quality of their application, in the context of Euromed a specific approach has been developed. In this context the EVS accreditation process implies the participation of two persons from each organisation (one of them being responsible for the coordination of the future EVS project and second responsible for mentoring of the volunteers) in four-day training course.



The training programme for ROPs and Mentors is an opportunity for candidate organisations to get more information and better understanding of EVS and its requirements, including the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved. Only after the participation in the training, the organisation would receive an onsite visit by the two accreditors. One could say that the *EVS accreditation process in South-Med is both quality check and capacity building for the candidate organisations.*

In addition to setting up the EVS accreditation system, a number of other elements in the overall **Euromed EVS strategy** had to be put in place, complementing the accreditation efforts to ensure the quality and sustainability of EVS with South-Med countries. As shown in the graph below, the strategy included: creating pools of EVS trainers and accreditors, implementation of the EVS volunteer training and evaluation cycle, ongoing administrative assistance with PIC number and application forms, publishing the useful practical handbooks, as well as conducting impact studies along the way.



The very first study (Garcia Lopez, 2015) has been conducted after the first year of the implementation and have served for monitoring purposes of the implementation of the EVS strategy as a whole. The study in this report is covering the period 2014-2015 and had a more specific focus on the impact of the accreditation process on South-Med organisations and quality of their projects.

About the Study: aims, methodology and target groups

The main **aim of this study** was to picture the impact² of the EVS accreditation on the work of the organisations and their projects after the first two years of the accreditation process being implemented in South Mediterranean countries.




More specifically, the study aimed at gaining more insights about:

- The value of the EVS accreditation for South-Med organisations
- Level of engagement in EVS projects after the accreditation
- Key challenges for the implementation of EVS projects in South-Med
- The specific impact of the Training for responsible of projects (ROPs) and mentors
- Organisations' understanding of the concept of EVS and related quality requirements (e.g. the essential types of support needed to be provided to EVS volunteers)
- Main challenges for outgoing and incoming EVS volunteers in Euromed context


Finally, the study aimed at collecting recommendations and ideas for dealing with the identified challenges and further improvements of the EVS accreditation process in South Mediterranean countries.

The initial study has been conducted from **September-November 2015**. It has been amended with the findings for outgoing volunteers gathered from **May-July 2016**. The study has covered **8 South Mediterranean countries**: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. The methodology applied was a *combination of quantitative and qualitative methods* and included: three online surveys for organisations and volunteers, seven in-depth interviews, two on-site visits and desk research.

The study has covered **three main target groups**: accredited EVS organisations from South-Med, received EVS volunteers and outgoing EVS volunteers. The data for these groups in this report are presented following the colour code below:

	EVS organisations from the South-Med
	Received EVS volunteers in the South-Med
	Sent EVS volunteers from the South-Med

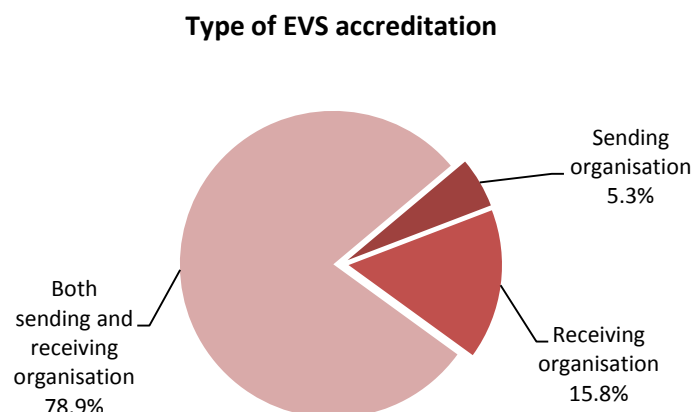
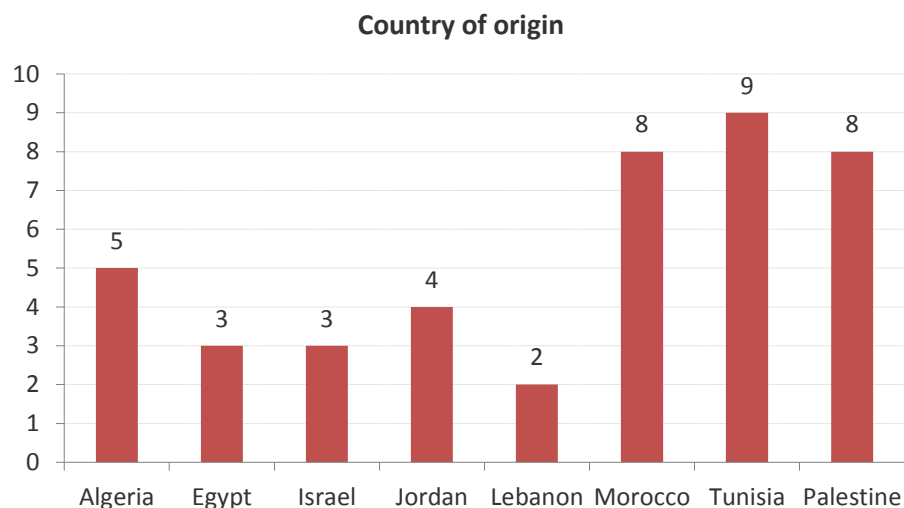
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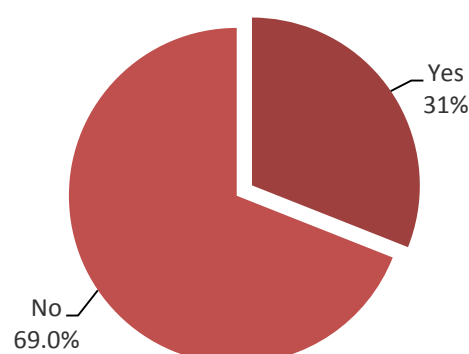
Target groups in
the study: EVS
organisations
and volunteers

EVS organisations in the study

42 accredited EVS organisations, coming from all **8 South-Med countries**, have responded to the survey (response rate: 65.62%). Large majority (78.9%) of the organisations have been accredited for both sending and receiving EVS volunteers, while minority of them holds only one type of EVS accreditation. It is interesting that nearly **1/3 of the organisations in the sample have been involved in EVS before** the start of the accreditation process in 2014, while the other **2/3 can be considered as 'newcomers' in the programme**.



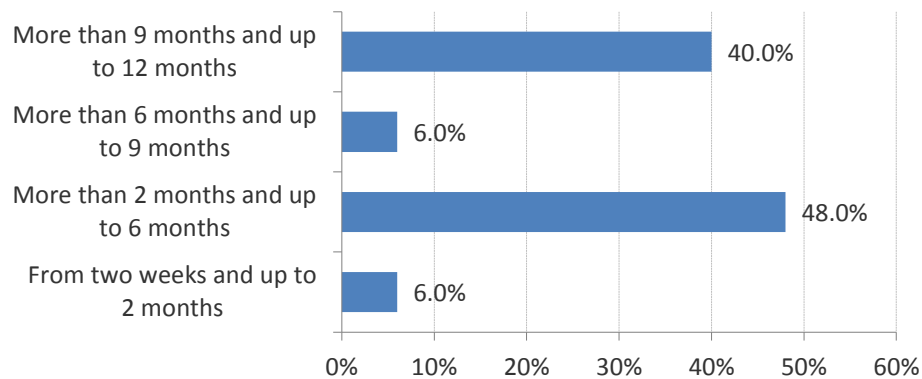
Has your organisation been implementing EVS projects before 2014?



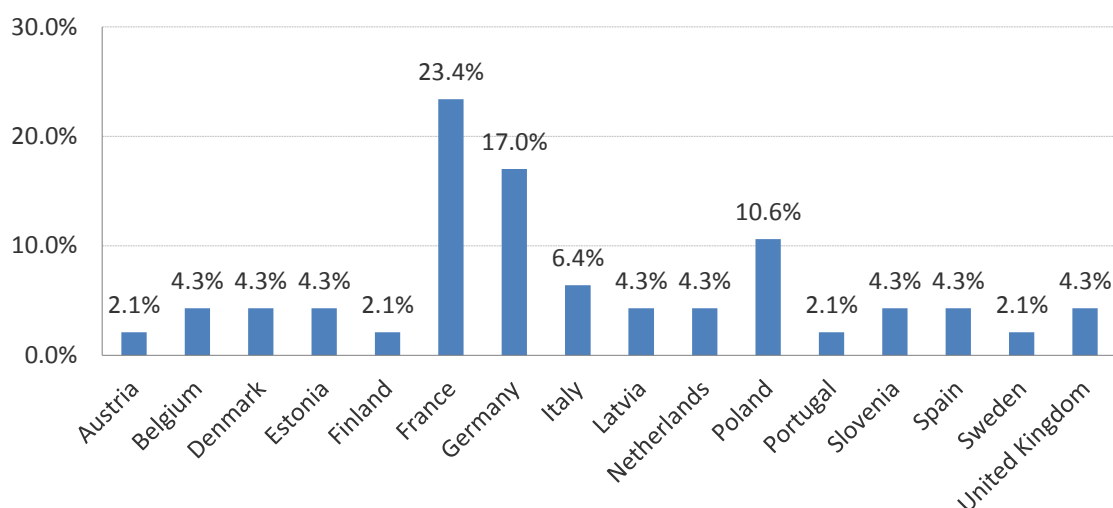
EVS volunteers received in South Med countries

From 111 invited, **50 EVS volunteers** responded to the online survey. In the moment of the survey 74% had already done their EVS service, and 26% were still doing it. 58% of them started their service in 2015, 40% in 2014 and 2% before 2014. In the sample **76% were female** and **24% male**.

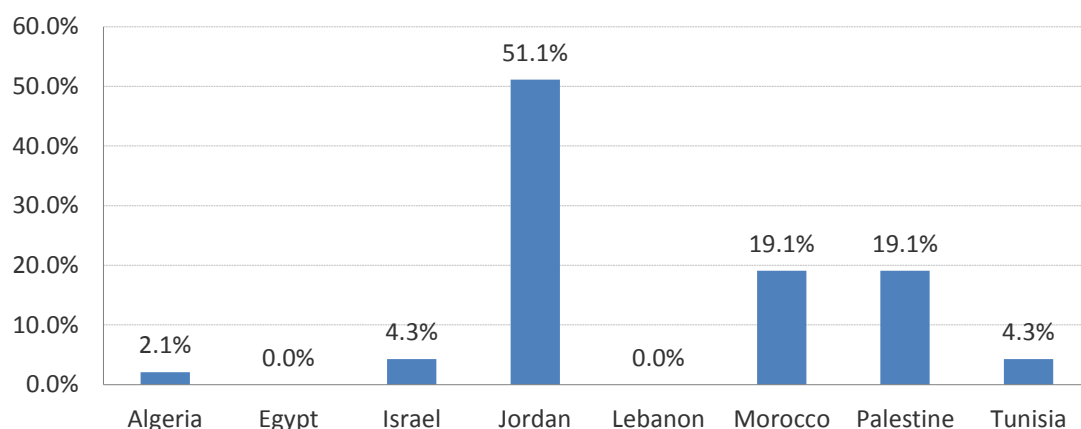
Type of EVS: length of the service



From which country is your sending organisation coming from?

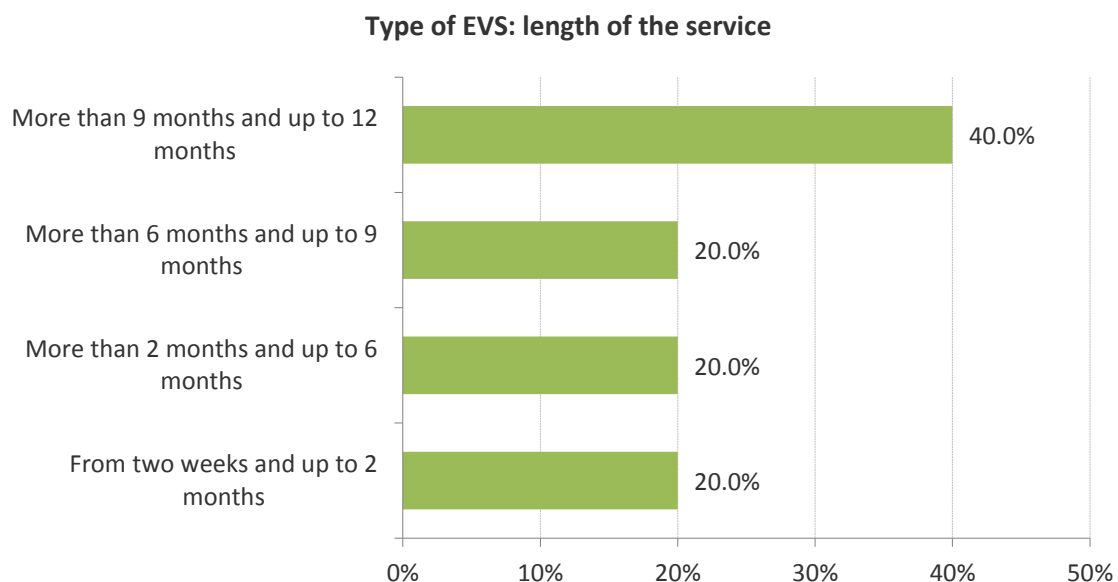



In what country did you do (or still doing) your EVS?



Outgoing EVS volunteers from South Med countries

From 71 invited, **30 sent volunteers** responded to the survey. 27 volunteers had done their EVS already and 3 were still doing it. 21 (70%) started their EVS in 2014. and 9 (30%) volunteers started in 2015. **21 of them (70%) are male** and **9 (30%) are female** (which represents the *inverse gender distribution compared to the received volunteers in the South Med!*).





Results of
the study

Perceived value of EVS accreditation

Perceived value of the accreditation	'Newcomers' to EVS	Experienced EVS organisations
It brings more visibility to our organisation	62.50%	33.33%
It gives us more international profile	58.33%	33.33%
It helps us improve the way we do other projects in our organisation	45.83%	41.67%
It influenced the way we work with local volunteers	25.00%	66.67%
It helps us in partner finding	29.17%	25.00%
It helps us look more reliable and trustworthy as an organisation	20.83%	25.00%
It gives us access to another funding opportunity	16.7%	16.67%
Other (please specify)	8.33%	0.00%

The results of the study show that the accreditation for EVS has **multiple benefits** for the accredited organisations and its **impact goes beyond EVS projects**. The EVS accreditation positively impacts not just the quality of EVS, but also the quality of **other organisational practices, such as project management or volunteer management**.

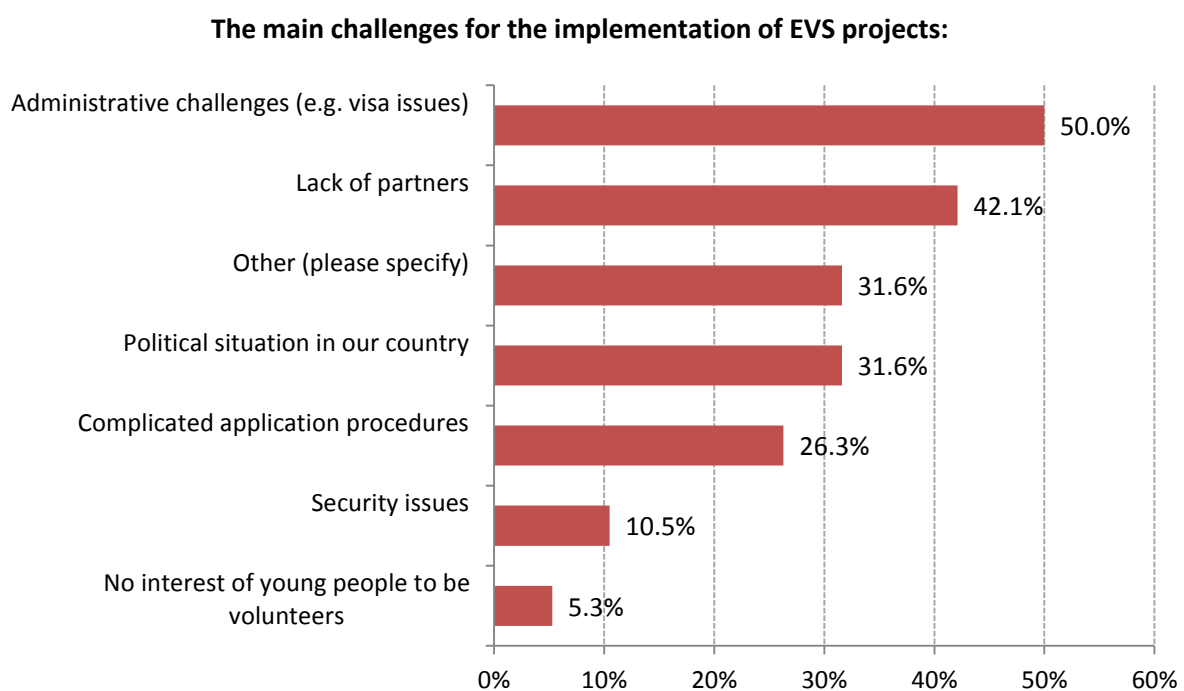
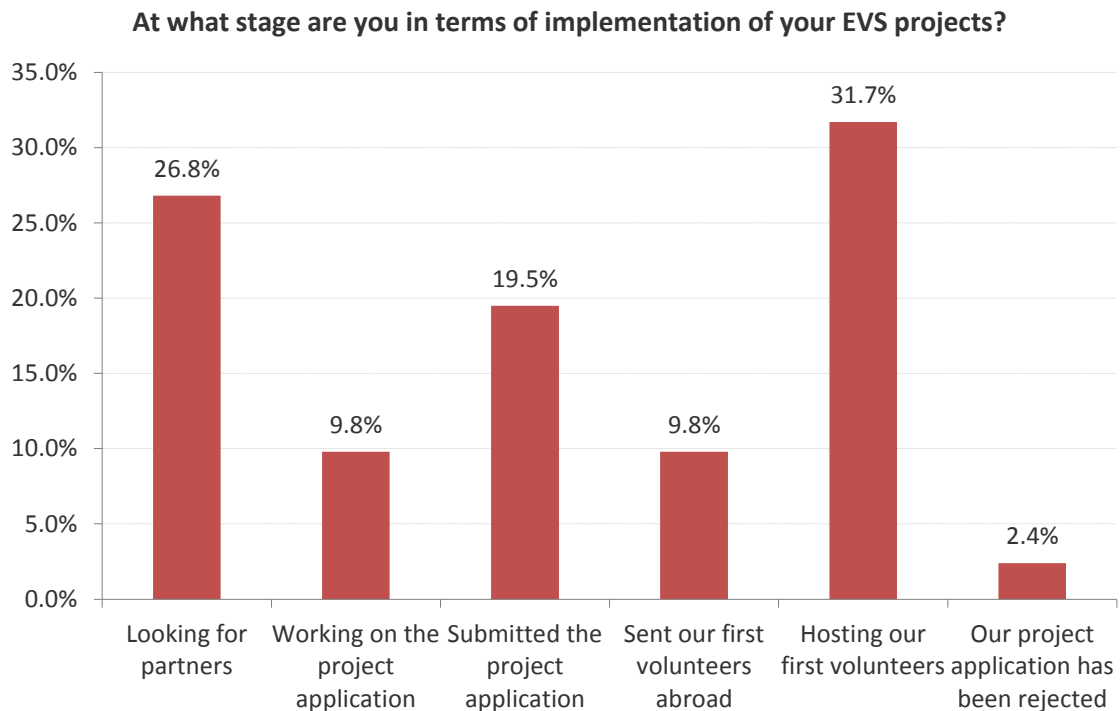
However, there is a clear difference in perceived value of the EVS accreditation between the 'newcomers' to EVS and the organisations who have been involved in EVS even before the EVS accreditation process started in South-Med. For more than 60% of 'newcomers' to EVS, the EVS accreditation helps them increase their **visibility** and gives them a more **'international profile'**.

At the same time, 2/3 of experienced EVS organisations in the study state that the accreditation influenced 'the way they work with local volunteers'. The question here is if this perceived impact is solely due to the accreditation process or rather the consequence of their overall involvement in EVS?

Both of these two groups state to a similar degree that the EVS accreditation have helped them improve the way we they approach not only EVS, but also other projects in their organisations.

Practical impact: level of engagement in EVS projects after the accreditation and key challenges for the implementation of EVS projects in South-Med

As the graph below indicates, it seems that *there is strong motivational boost to get engaged in EVS projects after the accreditation*. The results show that 41.5% of the organisations are in the implementation stage and 56.1% in the preparation stage of their EVS projects.



However, getting involved in EVS is not without challenges. As the main obstacles in the implementation of EVS projects, half of the organisations point out the administrative challenges, such as visa procures. This was also conformed and emphasised in the interviews. This challenge is followed by the lack of partners and to a lesser degree challenges related to political situation and complicated application procedures. Under the category of “other” some respondents indicate: financial challenges, linguistic obstacles and not being in a position to be the applicant in a project.

When asked about **suggested solutions** to the identified challenges, the representatives of the EVS organisations have come up with the following list of proposals:

- There is a need to have more **partnership building activities**, networking events and more international **training opportunities** for sending and hosting organisations,
- The good practice shows that the **long-term partnerships** pay off; organisations who have cooperated successfully with the foreign partners on other projects before have an easier access to EVS
- There is a need to strengthen the **promotion of EVS and its benefits**
- If possible, there is a need to allocate **more money for the administrative costs**,
- Advocate for the **new visa type for Erasmus+ volunteers**,
- Work on development of **handbooks and tools for volunteer support**,
- Check **co-financing possibilities in sending country** of the volunteer,
- Check **possibility to use host families** (easier with female volunteers) for accommodation, social integration, etc.

Impact of the Training for Responsible of projects (ROPs) and Mentors

Perceived impact of the Training for ROPs and mentors	'Newcomers' to EVS	Experienced EVS organisations
Better overall understanding of European Voluntary Service and how it works	84.00%	61.54%
More clarity on the roles and responsibilities of mentors and ROPs	56.00%	61.54%
Understanding of the learning process in EVS	48.00%	30.77%
Awareness of what kind of support needs to be provided for EVS volunteers	24.00%	53.85%
Increase of motivation to get involved in EVS projects	32.00%	30.77%
Awareness of challenges EVS volunteers may face in their projects	36.00%	15.38%
Other	0.00%	0.00%

The training course for ROPs and mentors is an integral part of the EVS accreditation process in Euromed context and is a prerequisite for accreditors' visits.

When asked about the most prominent impact that this training had on their practice, *84% of 'newcomers' and more than 60 % of experienced organisations point out that the accreditation training had a significant impact on their overall understanding of EVS and how it works.* Both of these two groups state the training has helped them get more clarity on the roles and responsibilities of mentors and ROPs within an EVS project. In addition to that almost half of the new organisations report that the training has grown their understanding that there is a learning process in EVS.

One interesting difference between these two groups appeared in relation to the impact of the training on their 'awareness of types of support needed to be provided for EVS volunteers', where it has been reported as much more significant in the group of experienced organisations. This brings us to the idea of possible deeper level of reflection about the quality in EVS that can happen only when some basic knowledge is already established and some first experiences with volunteers have already happened. One could say that this underlines two different training needs: level 1 that is more focused on understanding of the concept of EVS and the level 2 that is more oriented to further quality development. This could indicate that, *besides the current Training for ROPs and mentors, there is a need for development of another training format that comes after the accreditation which can stimulate further reflection and quality development.*

Understanding of the concept of EVS

As stated above, the organisations in the survey have claimed that the training for ROPs and mentors have significantly impacted their understanding of EVS. This is especially interesting, knowing that EVS with its 'learning dimension' differs from other international voluntary schemes that are present in the region. In addition to that, the working context of the organisation involved in EVS often 'colours' the way they approach it in terms of values, principles and priorities. To test all these assumptions, we have asked the organisations to choose aspect of an 'ideal EVS volunteer' for them. Later it was contrasted with the results of the same exercise done by the volunteers.

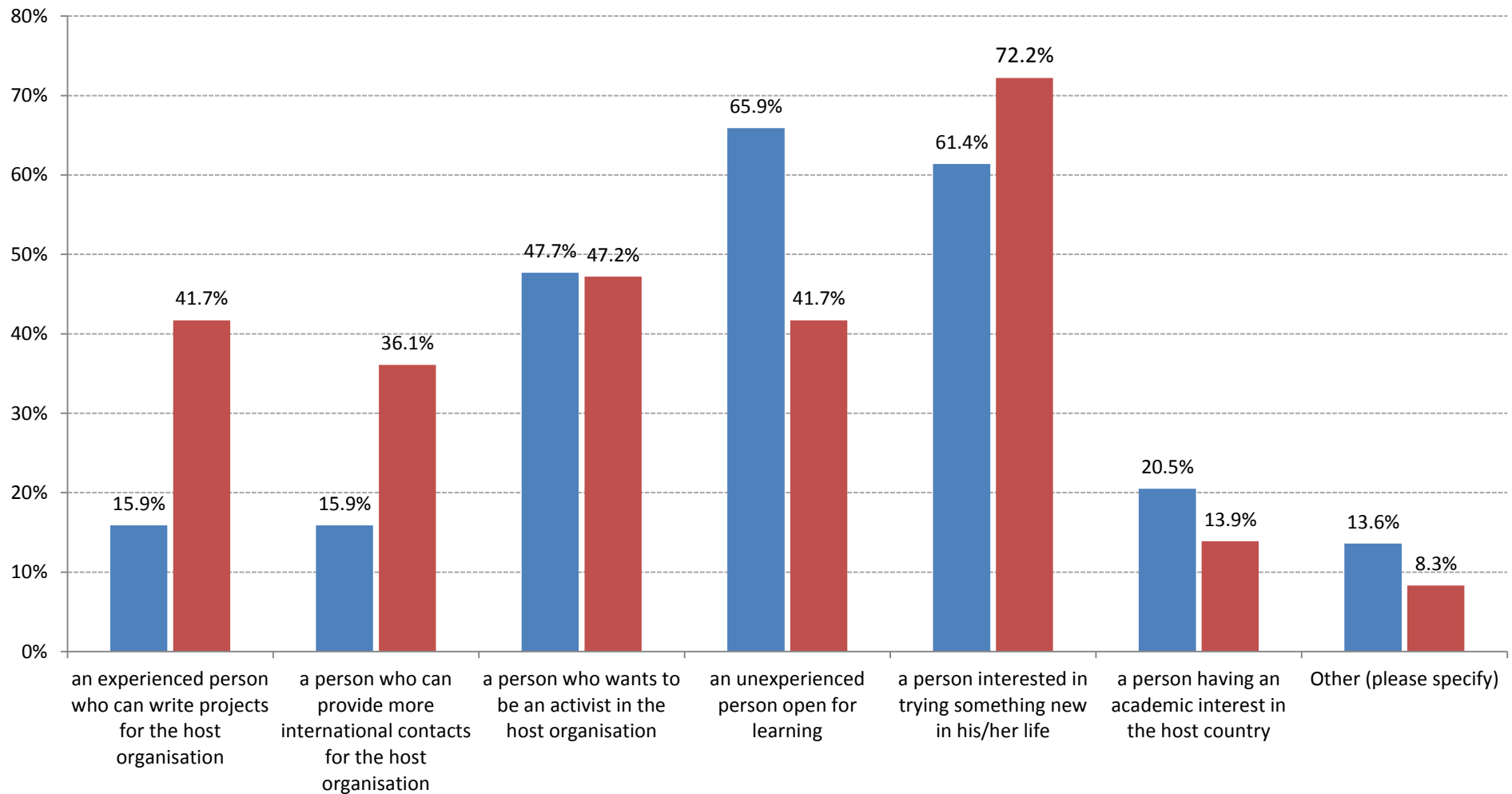
As the graph below shows there is a clear mismatch of understanding and related expectations towards EVS volunteers by the organisations on one side and the volunteers themselves, on the other. *They both are in agreement to a similar degree that the ideal volunteer has to have an 'activist motivation'.* This was also conformed in the onsite visits and the interviews and to some extent can be treated as a region-specific tendency in comparison to other regions involved in the programme. They also agree that the ideal volunteer should be a person ready to try out something new in his/her life.

However, while organisations would be glad to get someone with experience who can write projects for them and help in getting more international contacts, the volunteers would rather expect the that space is created for an unexperienced person open for learning.

This mismatch of expectations that can potentially lead to conflicts within the EVS projects is something to be addressed and reflected during the training for ROPs and mentors, as well as during the accreditations visits.

Interestingly, the pattern made by the outgoing volunteers from the South Med countries is very similar to the image the 'ideal volunteer' created by the incoming volunteers. Therefore, we might conclude that the *difference between the organisations' and the volunteers' perceptions does not appear due to 'cultural' or 'societal' factors, but rather due to organisational working contexts (and related needs) and challenges the organisations in South Med are confronted with.*

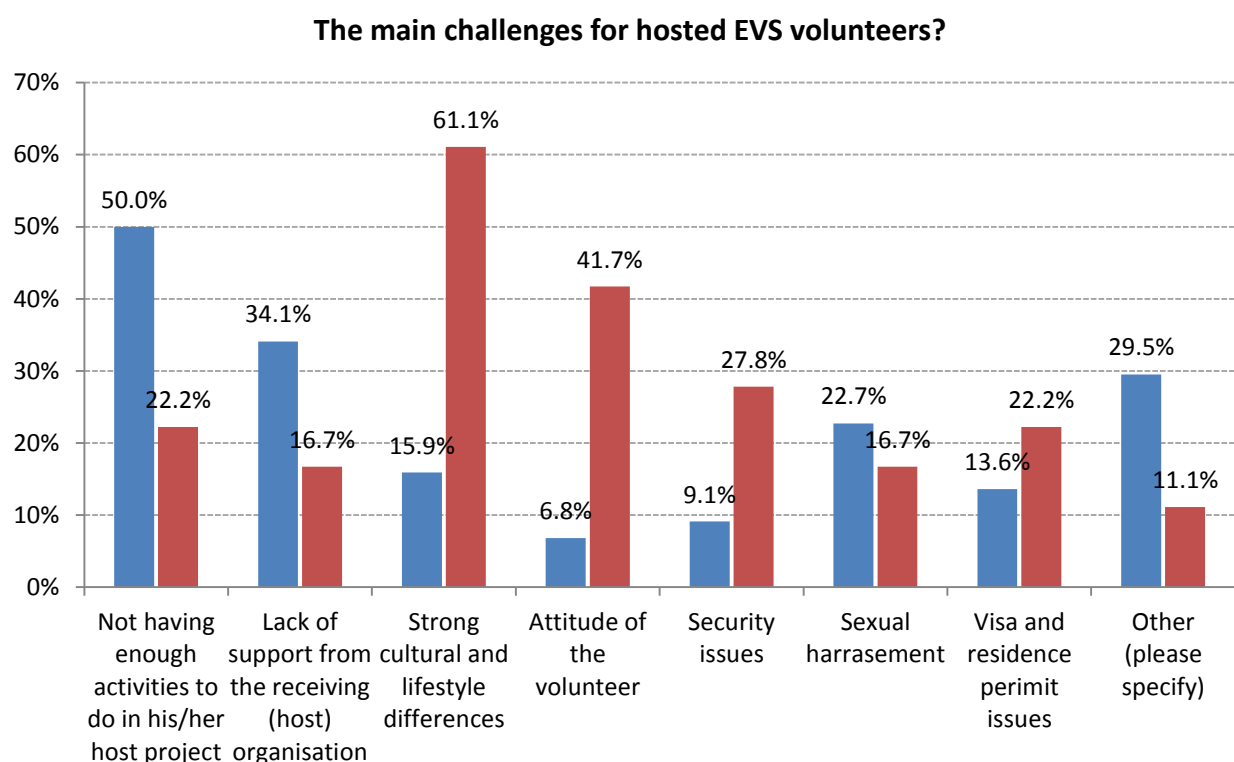
The ideal EVS volunteer is:



Awareness of the main challenges for received EVS volunteers in South-Med

A good understanding of potential (and actual) challenges that volunteers might face in South-Med countries may indicate the experience with hosting EVS volunteers, as well as readiness to reflect about it. For the other ones, who are just in the beginning of starting their first EVS projects, this might be a rather theoretical question, thus inviting to express their assumptions. On the other hand for the volunteers hosted in South Med organisations, this question is about their felt daily realities.

The graph below indicates that *there is an obvious mismatch of perceptions of the main challenges of EVS volunteers hosted in South-Med*. There is phenomenon of ‘mutual blaming’: while the volunteers criticise the organisations for ‘not having enough tasks to do’ and ‘lack of support from the host organisation’, the organisations are pointing out the ‘attitude of the volunteer’ as the main challenge. Perhaps, in order to explain this challenge to themselves this is to overemphasise ‘strong cultural and lifestyle differences’?! Nevertheless, this is an important point for mutual reflection and learning and can be included in both training for the organisations and training sessions for the volunteers.



Following the information received in the interviews, as well as in the desk research, it was important to check if there is any gender differences at play in the perception (and experiences) of these challenges in EVS. As seen in the table below, *our survey indicates a significant difference between male and female EVS volunteers, especially in relation to the issue of sexual harassment during the service. In this case 30% of female volunteers point it out as a challenge, and none of the male volunteers does it.*

This is indeed a sensitive topic that has to be treated with care and host organisations need to create means and conditions to ensure safety and preserve dignity of their EVS volunteers.

Volunteer's challenges	Female	Male
Not having enough activities to do in my host project	48,48%	54,55%
Lack of support from the host organisation	36,36%	27,27%
Strong cultural and lifestyle differences	12,12%	27,27%
My own attitude	6,06%	9,09%
Security issues	9,09%	9,09%
Sexual harassment	30.30%	0,00%
Visa and residence permit issues	12,12%	18,18%
Other (please specify)	30,30%	27,27%

When asked to propose the **solutions to identified challenges**, the organisations emphasise the need to have better preparing of the volunteers before arriving, better coop, better cooperation with the sending organisation, better selection of volunteers to ensure their motivation, work on better integration of the volunteer in the local community, establish trust, ensure more transparency in procedures, etc.

On the other hand the volunteers are mostly focused on themselves; suggesting staying positive and proactive, show assertiveness, have good communication with the host organisation, increasing the age of volunteers coming to South-Med countries, but also calling for better involvement by the mentors and more support from the host organisations.

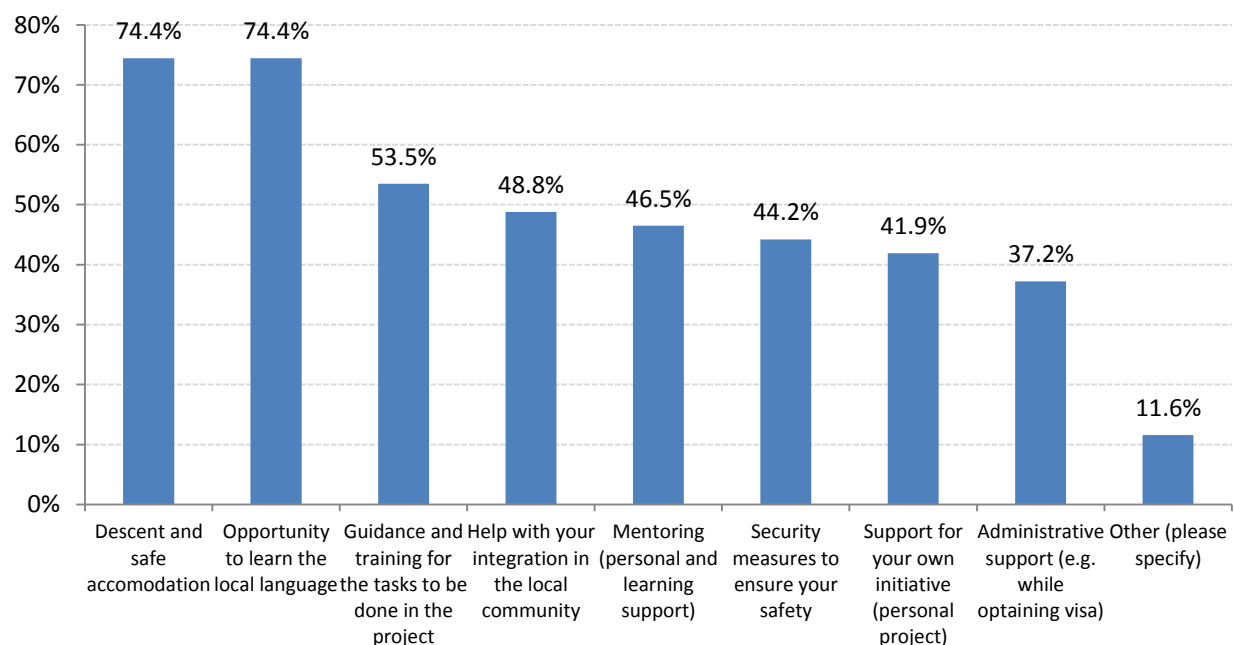
Quality of support provided to received EVS volunteers

As stated above in the section about the impact of the Training for ROPs and mentors, only 1/4 of the 'newcomers to EVS' indicate their increased awareness of types of support needed to be provided to EVS volunteers. This percentage is much higher in the group of experienced EVS organisation.

In the survey we have asked the EVS volunteers in the South-Med about what kinds of support have been actually provided to them in reality. When asked to tick ALL aspects of support that apply to their situation, 3 out of 4 volunteers claim that they have decent accommodation and language learning opportunities and 1 out of 2 volunteers has enough guidance and support in project tasks. *However, more than 50% of the volunteers claim lack of support in the local integration, mentoring, support with security issues, support to volunteer's initiative and administrative help.*

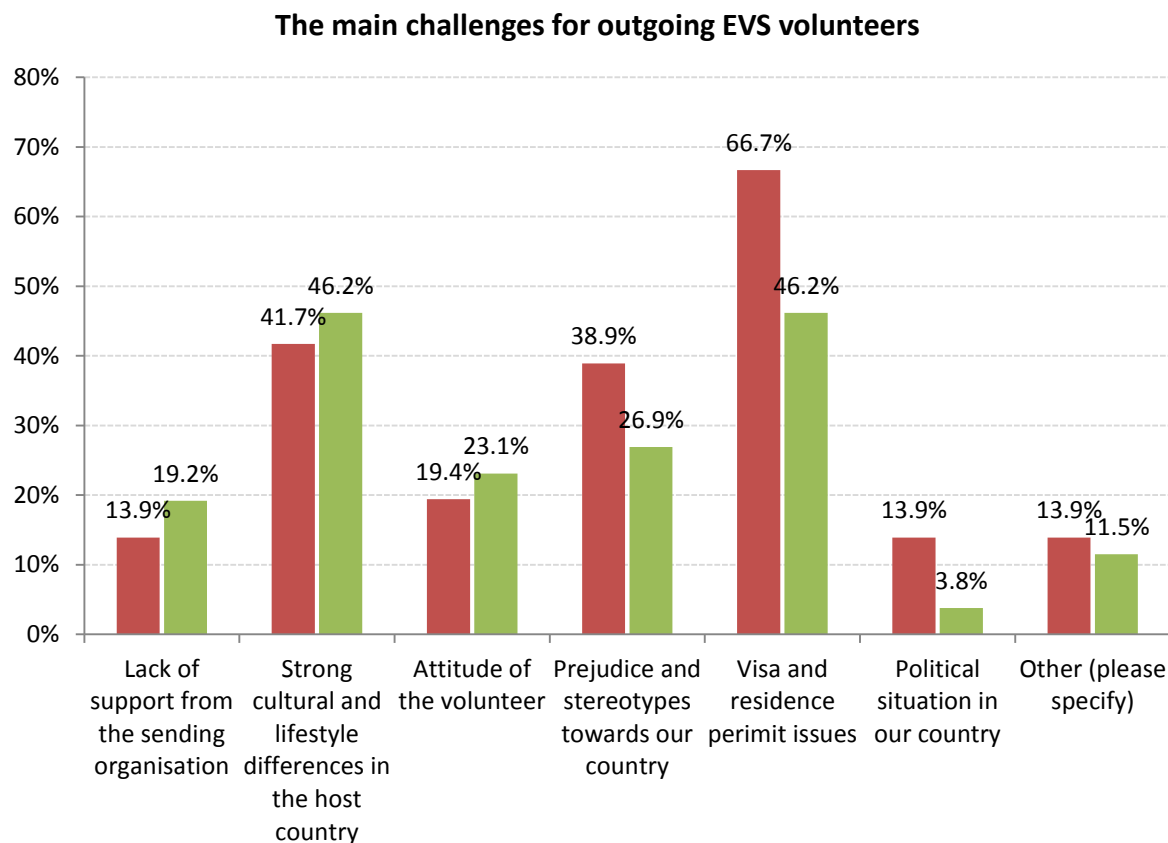
Obviously, there is a space for further quality development and strengthening the capacities of the host organisations in this area. This is again something that could be further addressed in the training and the accreditors' visits, but might require a longer term strategy and variety of measures and tools that can help the host organisations to address these challenges.

Support provided by your host organisation?



Awareness of the main challenges for the outgoing EVS volunteers

Unlike the mismatch of perceptions between receiving organisations and incoming volunteers, *there seems to be more empathy and a common pattern in perceptions of the main challenges of EVS volunteers by the organisations and the volunteers sent from the South-Med.* Still the sending organisations amplify a bit more the administrative challenges with visa and the residence permit, as well as the role of stereotypes against the country of origin and the political situation



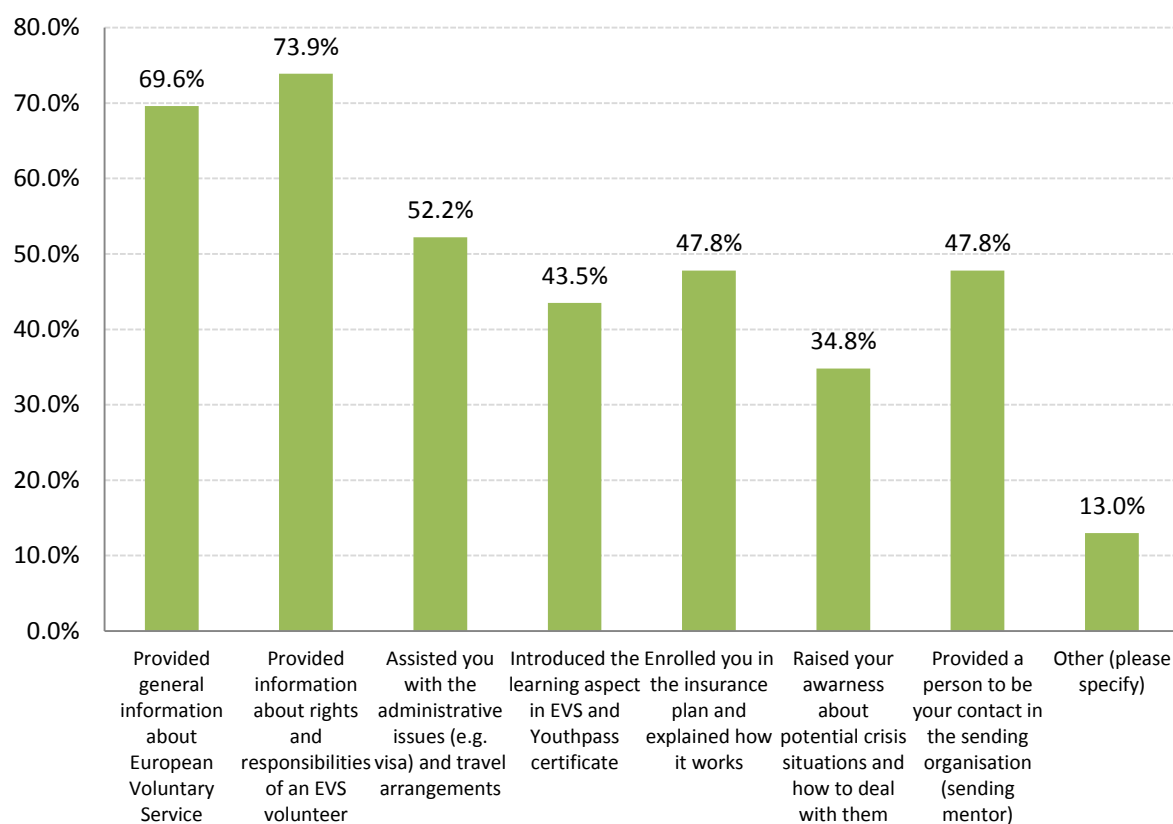
Suggested solutions by the organisations include: Stronger intercultural learning preparation of the volunteer, one to one coaching, more information about the partners and their project through field visits, support with administrative procedures, and work on more recognition of Erasmus+ towards the embassies.

On the other hand, **the volunteers' suggestions** are: get more knowledge about the host community and the challenges in adaptation before leaving, better support with visa procedure, in case of problems involve the volunteer in the communication, develop the 'right' attitudes of the volunteers (e.g. open-mindedness, flexibility, patience, readiness for learning, etc.), receive a face to face language course instead of the online E+ language tool, Use EVS as an opportunity to breakdown the stereotypes about home country and the region, equip volunteers with the right tools for communication and project development, and provide a real pre-departure training rather than just a meeting.

Quality of support provided to the outgoing EVS volunteers

When asked to tick ALL aspects of support that apply to their situation, 7 out of 10 volunteers have received enough information support about their rights, responsibilities and EVS. The other types of support by sending organisations are significantly lower, *almost every second volunteer report lack of assistance with administration, enrolment in the insurance plan and receiving a contact person in the sending organisation. Only one third of the volunteers have received information about how to deal with challenging situations and crisis.*

What kind of support has been provided to you by your sending organisation before you left to your voluntary service?



Before leaving the **volunteers would need more:** information about the host country and how to deal with differences, Meeting with ex-EVS volunteers as part of preparation, More information about the learning process and Youthpass, Clarity on how to deal with challenges in the host organisation, Connection with the host organisation (and their mentor) before leaving, Assigned and available contact person in the sending organisation and a real pre-departure trailing instead of just a meeting.

When asked about the **support by sending organisation during EVS**, 50% of volunteers report about having the close contact with the sending organisation, with regular check-ups and support and 1 in 4 volunteers had no support at all and contact with the sending organisation during the service

abroad. Some specific types of support reported by the volunteers are: problem solving, administrative help, information support and financial support.

Regarding the **support by sending organisations after EVS**, 25% volunteers report no support at all. Other volunteers point out different forms of follow-up support by their sending organisations, such as: a review meeting with my sending mentor, presentation of volunteer's experience in order to motivate other young people to participate in EVS, investing volunteer's experience in the organization's projects, reintegration in the home country, training to become a mentor, support with Youthpass and closing the project.



Lessons
learnt &
Recommend-
actions

Lessons learnt and Recommend-actions for the future

The impact study has clearly shown that there is a significant impact on the organisations and the increase of quality of their EVS practices. It is clear that it was a good decision to opt for the combination of capacity building and quality assurance in the accreditation process in South-Med countries. However, in parallel with increasing the numbers of accredited organisations, it is important to create opportunities for further development of quality.

Some specific **recommendations for action** may include:

- Create more partnership building opportunities for EVS organisations from the South-Med countries and the Erasmus+ programme countries
- Develop new training formats for further competence development and improvement of quality of projects after the accreditation
- Enhance the skills of the ROPs in volunteer management, in terms of creating more and better activities for the volunteers and encouraging their own initiative
- Encourage reflection about the safety of the volunteers and ensuring the volunteer's wellbeing, especially in relation to the prevention of sexual harassment
- Create spaces for further reflection about EVS principles and practices and experiences among the experiences organisations and mentors
- Disseminate the results of this study and use them in a training context as a starting point for reflection
- Consider enhanced role of the sending organisations and ensure effective preparation means for both incoming and outgoing EVS volunteers
- Reflect on the ways how to encourage more female volunteers from the South-Med countries to take part in EVS
- Capitalize on the motivation and skills developed by ensuring a proper follow-up opportunities for the returning EVS volunteers
- Use the future Online course for EVS to stimulate exchange between the EVS practitioners from South-Med with their peers from other regions
- Further promote the value of EVS and its benefits within the local context and the programme countries embassies in order to gain better recognition



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