



European Solidarity Corps

Volunteering Teams

COMMUNITY-BASED PRACTICE IN EUROPE

EXAMPLES OF EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS VOLUNTEERING TEAMS

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COMMUNITY-BASED PRACTICE IN EUROPA

Since 2021, around **24,500 young people** across Europe and its partner regions have joined European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams. These short-term group projects bring volunteers to host communities abroad, where they live and work together on activities that respond to local needs and **serve the common good**.

Volunteering Teams are defined by their collective and international spirit. Volunteers become part of community life, while their work brings extra capacity, fresh ideas, and motivation to local organisations and municipalities. At the same time, volunteers develop resilience, teamwork, and intercultural skills through shared living and cooperation. Their **"superpower" is connection** — linking people, places, and ideas through solidarity in action.

Together, these stories show how international volunteering supports community development, organisational learning, and social cohesion. Volunteers contribute energy and new perspectives, while host communities gain partnerships and renewed drive.

European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams prove that **solidarity, learning, and cooperation** can strengthen both people and organisations — helping to build a more **resilient, inclusive, and connected Europe**.

This publication presents six examples of European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams:

- **LAG Nouseva Rannikkoseutu**
Finland
- **Vransko Lake Nature Park**
Croatia
- **Ljubljana Pride Association**
Slovenia
- **YEAH — Youth Empowerment & Action Hub**
Germany
- **Curba de Cultură**
Romania
- **Beyond Barriers**
Albania



LAG Nouseva Rannikkoseutu

Finland

Examples of
European Solidarity
Corps Volunteering
Teams





CREATING LOCAL CHANGE TOGETHER — VOLUNTEERING TEAMS IN RURAL FINLAND

LAG Nouseva Rannikkoseutu is a Finnish local and regional development association operating in a rural area along the western coast of Finland. The organisation's European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Team activities have brought international exchange, community engagement, and youth participation to small villages where such opportunities were previously rare.

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About the Organisation — LAG Nouseva Rannikkoseutu

The organisation's Volunteering Team activities are coordinated by Erja Simuna, who is responsible for several European projects within Nouseva Rannikkoseutu. When asked to imagine her organisation as an animal, she chose an **elephant** — not only because Norsu (the Finnish word for elephant) is the organisation's nickname, but also because elephants are known for their strong community bonds across generations. This, she explained, reflects the organisation's values and long-term commitment to its communities.

Erja works closely with local communities and youth organisations. She plans and implements projects, provides guidance, builds networks, and ensures mentoring and support for all volunteers. Her background

in history and event organisation during her university years led her naturally into international cooperation — a red thread that continues throughout her professional journey.

In the rural environment where Nouseva Rannikkoseutu operates, the organisation aims to encourage local people to develop their home region and to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities. Its operations are guided by a strategic development plan that identifies **youth** and **small communities** as the main target groups.

When asked how the organisation became involved in the European Solidarity Corps, Erja explained that Nouseva Rannikkoseutu is a LEADER organisation. The principles of community-led local development match well with those of the European Solidarity Corps.

"We wanted to bring the world to the village."





LAG Nouseva Rannikkoseutu

Finland

The LEADER programme, a European Union initiative for rural development, follows a community-led approach that puts local people at the heart of decision-making. Its aim is to strengthen rural areas by supporting small projects that create jobs, improve local services, and build social connections. Within this framework, Nouseva Rannikkoseutu develops and funds local initiatives, supports micro-companies and associations, and encourages communities to take action. The LEADER principles align naturally with those of the European Solidarity Corps, as both value participation, cooperation, and community empowerment. In addition to this, the organisation coordinates Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects, guides applicants through all project stages, and supports young people through Youth Leader funding.

First steps into Volunteering Teams

Over the years, through cooperation with municipalities and village associations, the organisation began searching for new ways to bring international experiences to small rural communities — or, as Erja describes it, *“to bring the world to the village.”* Volunteering Teams offered the perfect opportunity to make this vision real.

Together with one enthusiastic village, Nouseva Rannikkoseutu launched its first pilot project. The volunteers maintained a local nature trail, organised summer activities for children, and hosted international



evenings for the people in the local communities. The first Volunteering Team activity began slightly later than planned, following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, but its impact is still visible today. Many local children who took part are now teenagers or young adults and have remained in touch with the international volunteers through WhatsApp. Some have even met them again during their own travels in Europe — a clear sign that the project built lasting connections.

Due to its success, Nouseva Rannikkoseutu cooperates today with seven municipalities and hosts around ten volunteers each year. The volunteers task always depend on the local needs and they often include maintaining public spaces, improving nature trails, or organising activities for children. Environmental themes, such as nature protection, play a role in many projects. Accommodation for volunteers is organised by the Nouseva Rannikkoseutu allowing them to live close to their project sites and experience everyday rural life.

Volunteers often share that they enjoy the sense of community in the villages — something many, especially those from urban areas, have not experienced before. For some, the experience is truly transformative. Erja confirmed that there are many highlights in providing space for growth, sometimes they seem not so big but are always empowering. She shared one memorable example from one summer project where a young female volunteer learned to drive a tractor, which she believed she would never capable to do.





LAG Nouseva Rannikkoseutu

Finland

Erja described it as *"empowering and unforgettable."* The Volunteering Teams create a meaningful exchange between local and international participants. For the volunteers, it is an opportunity to gain practical skills, self-confidence, and intercultural understanding. For the communities, it brings new energy, ideas, and friendships across borders. The first project remains a highlight: the volunteers in the team developed a strong team spirit, achieved their goals, and stayed connected long after the project ended. This success encouraged the organisation to continue and expand its European Solidarity Corps activities.

Inclusion and Future Outlook

So far, most volunteers have been young people without major barriers to joining an international volunteering activity. However, the organisation aims to include **more young people with fewer opportunities**, particularly to provide local role models for rural youth who face obstacles to participation. Erja hopes that these inclusion efforts will help young people grow, overcome fears and uncertainty, and experience that **someone believes in them**. Understanding their interests and motivations is seen as an important next step for future projects.

Looking ahead, Nouseva Rannikkoseutu plans to **expand its volunteering activities**, even within limited capacity. Another important goal is to **encourage more Finnish young people to go abroad**, as participation in outgoing projects remains relatively low.

Transferability to Other Contexts

The model developed by Nouseva Rannikkoseutu is easily adaptable to other countries. With a motivated local partner and clear community needs, similar Volunteering Team projects can bring valuable international exchange to rural regions across Europe. Based on their experience, Nouseva Rannikkoseutu sees Volunteering Teams as a powerful tool for community development. They connect local and international perspectives, inspire youth participation, and bring people together. When asked whether the organisation would recommend starting Volunteering Team activities, Erja's answer was simple: *"Yes — why not? It works, it brings joy, and it strengthens communities."*

Of course, we were lucky that everything went so well, and that was really encouraging. Every project has its own highlights because each one is so different in its own way. And honestly, I always learn a lot from the volunteers — that's probably the most important part for me. I get paid for doing these projects, but what truly matters is that I keep learning from the young people we work with.



Vransko Lake Nature Park

Croatia

Examples of
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Corps Volunteering
Teams





PRESERVING NATURE AND HERITAGE – VOLUNTEERING AT VRANSKO LAKE NATURE PARK

Vransko Lake Nature Park, located near Zadar in Croatia, is the country's largest natural lake and an important wetland habitat for many bird species. Managed as a protected area, the park's mission is to conserve its **unique natural and cultural values** while promoting sustainable interaction between people and nature. Through its **European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams**, the park combines practical conservation work with environmental education, offering volunteers a chance to contribute to habitat restoration and cultural heritage preservation while learning traditional skills.

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About the Organisation — Vransko Lake Nature Park

We had a chance to talk with **Norma Fressel**, a biologist who coordinates both the nature protection and volunteering programmes in the park. The organisation's work focuses on preserving **wetland and cultural landscapes**, raising awareness among the local population, and providing educational opportunities about biodiversity, sustainable water management, and traditional land use. The park's area extends beyond its borders, influencing the wider **Natura 2000** network and connecting local communities in sustainable development efforts.

Drystone Wall Restoration and Volunteering

The volunteering programme began with **drystone wall restoration workshops**. These walls, once built by local farmers but later abandoned, are part of the park's cultural landscape and visitor infrastructure, including cycling paths and hiking trails. Over time, the park recognised the need to maintain and restore these structures to preserve the region's heritage. Without regular maintenance, the sensitive wetland ecosystem would change and lose its natural function. Volunteers learn **traditional drystone wall building techniques** under the guidance of local experts and an NGO specialising in cultural heritage restora-

When people connect with each other and with the landscape, that's when the real impact happens.





Vransko Lake Nature Park Croatia

tion. *"It's endless work,"* Norma says, *"but it's meaningful. There's always something to repair, and we can see the results of our efforts immediately."*

Evolution of the Volunteering Programme

The park's volunteering journey began with local workshops on volunteering supported by the Ministry for Sustainable Development. After several successful years, the team learned about the European Solidarity Corps and saw how well it fit their goals. Since 2011, they have developed the activity into a one-month international volunteering team programme, held every November when conditions are mild — not too hot and not too wet. The tasks have expanded beyond drystone walls to include wetland habitat conservation, such as clearing vegetation to prevent reed beds from overtaking open water areas essential for migrating and nesting birds. Volunteers also help with visitor infrastructure maintenance, supporting the park's rangers and educators.

Volunteer Experience and Benefits

Each year, six volunteers join the team for a month of outdoor work. Activities take place in nature, creating a strong group spirit and a sense of achievement. *"The work is concrete,"* Norma explains. *"You can see what you've built, and it creates a very positive atmosphere."* Volunteers often describe the experience as relaxing and rewarding — a break from everyday routines that helps them reconnect with nature. Norma herself enjoys joining the volunteers in building walls: *"When you work with stone, you feel connected to the land. It's something very grounding and satisfying."*

Volunteers are accommodated in a rented flat in the nearby town of Beograd. In earlier years, they stayed closer to the park, but the remote location proved challenging. Now, with indoor accommodation and access to the town's amenities, volunteers can rest comfortably after their outdoor work. Because of the limited space, the park can host **six volunteers per team**, which Norma considers the ideal number for creating a close-knit group and allowing for personal attention.





Vransko Lake Nature Park

Croatia

Inclusion and Future Goals

Vransko Lake Nature Park aims to make its programmes **more inclusive**, exploring how to adapt activities for volunteers with different needs or backgrounds. A recent workshop by the Croatian National Agency inspired the team to expand its approach and consider partnerships with organisations experienced in inclusion. *"We would like to cooperate with sending organisations that know how to support volunteers with fewer opportunities,"* Norma says. *"We are still learning how to build such partnerships, but we see a lot of potential."* The park also plans to use its **bird ringing station** for hosting longer-term volunteers and to develop exchanges with other organisations to share good practices.

Rewarding Aspects of Volunteering

For Norma, the most rewarding moments come when volunteers complete their work and see the results of their efforts. *"At the end of the project, they write their initials in the stone,"* she says. *"They are proud because they can see what they built, and they leave a part of themselves here. They also build their own small community."* Many volunteers describe the experience as life-changing, developing new skills and a deeper appreciation for nature and teamwork. *"It's wonderful to see how they grow during the month,"* Norma adds. *"When people connect with each other and with the landscape, that's when the real impact happens."*

Transferability and Recommendations

The experience of **Vransko Lake Nature Park** shows how nature conservation and cultural heritage can be meaningfully combined in volunteering. Through teamwork, practical learning, and cooperation with the local community, volunteers gain valuable experience while helping to preserve a unique ecosystem. Norma encourages other organisations to take the step: *"Yes, why not? If there is real work to be done and it can be done as a team, it's perfect. Volunteers are happy when their work has purpose — and it's great to see how much can be achieved together."*



Ljubljana Pride Association

Slovenia

**Examples of
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CREATING INCLUSIVE SPACES THROUGH VOLUNTEERING — LJUBLJANA PRIDE

The Ljubljana Pride Association in Slovenia has been hosting European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams since 2016 to support the Ljubljana Pride Festival and other LGBTIQ+ events. Volunteers participate in a wide range of activities, including event support, merchandise management, and creating educational materials. The volunteering activities have been successfully implemented promoting active citizenship, safe space concepts and community-building. The strong collaboration with the City of Ljubljana ensures its sustainability and impact.

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About the Organisation — Pride Parade Association

The Ljubljana Pride Association is an LGBTIQ+ youth organisation based in Slovenia's capital city. It promotes equality, human rights, and visibility of the LGBTIQ+ community. Each year, the organisation coordinates a European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Team that supports the Ljubljana Pride Festival and related events, including large-scale LGBTIQ+ conferences.

Mateja, who has been part of the organisation since her own volunteering experience in 2016, coordinates the volunteering teams. She describes the approach as one that combines community care with active citizenship:

"We are an LGBTIQ+ youth organisation, and we use the European Solidarity Corps primarily to work with and include LGBTIQ+ youth. There are only a few others in Europe doing this, but we are changing that and helping more organisations join."

The organisation stands out for using volunteering as a tool for empowerment and social inclusion. It aims to create spaces where young people can safely explore their identities and engage in civic life. Over the years, Ljubljana Pride has mentored several other LGBTIQ+ organisations across Europe to adopt similar inclusive practices.

"It's hard to describe in words the kind of impact this activity has. You can see it in people's faces — how happy someone is to try something new and to feel they belong."



Ljubljana Pride Association Slovenia

First Steps into Volunteering Teams

Ljubljana Pride Association took its first step into hosting European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams in 2016. Each year, around 10 to 15 volunteers are selected to join for one month, with a well-structured process in place to guide their work and personal growth. The journey for volunteers begins with an on-site orientation, where they are introduced to the Pride Festival's schedule and activities, and where the groundwork for a positive group dynamic is laid. During this initial training, mentoring relationships are established, ensuring that every volunteer feels supported throughout their time in the programme.

Once the training is complete, volunteers dive into the festival's preparation and implementation, contributing to a variety of tasks that keep the event running smoothly. From supporting the logistics of the Pride Parade to assisting with decorations, creating educational materials, and providing hospitality, volunteers play an integral role in making the event a success. They also take on creative duties, including curating LGBTIQ+ tours of Ljubljana, producing promotional content, and designing banners and visuals for the parade. The team's involvement extends beyond the festival, with volunteers supporting both the main events and smaller, side activities during the festival month.

As Mateja, the project coordinator, highlighted, the volunteers are essential to the festival's success: *"It's literally impossible to attend a Pride event without meeting one of our volunteers. They are everywhere — helping visitors, preparing food, sharing programmes. We couldn't organise the festival without them."* The volunteers are not only helping to implement the festival's many facets but are also given the space to contribute with their own ideas and talents. In one memorable year, the team took it upon themselves to create a publication that reflected on their experiences, a project entirely led by the volunteers. This initiative became a meaningful part of the programme, showing how the volunteers' contributions extend far beyond the expected tasks.

Learning, Growth, and Impact

For many volunteers, joining Ljubljana Pride Association volunteering team is a deeply personal experience.

"For a lot of them, it's the first time they're around other LGBTIQ+ people in such an open and safe way — what we sometimes call a queer bubble," said Mateja.





Ljubljana Pride Association Slovenia

The volunteering period combines teamwork, civic engagement, and personal reflection. Volunteers learn to collaborate across cultures, express themselves, and contribute to an event that symbolises equality and visibility. They also gain practical competences such as event coordination, public communication, and intercultural learning.

"They felt included and safe because their pronouns and identities were respected — because we asked what they needed," Mateja explained.

The evaluation at the end of each project, guided by the Youthpass model helps participants recognise their achievements and learning outcomes. Many stay connected long after their volunteering period, with some moving into careers in NGOs or human rights advocacy.

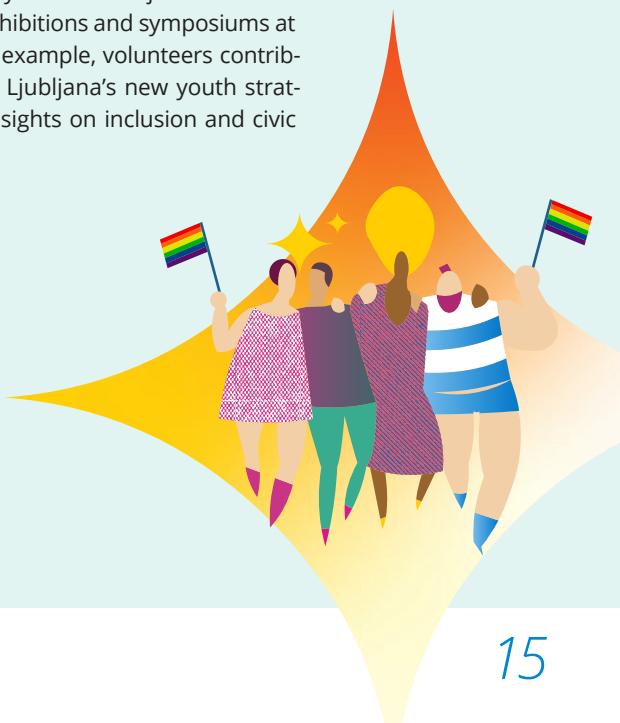
"It's hard to describe in words the kind of impact this activity has," Mateja reflected. *"You can see it in people's faces — how happy someone is to try something new and to feel they belong."*

Cooperation with the City of Ljubljana

A key factor in the project's sustainability is the strong partnership with the [City of Ljubljana](#). The municipality provides financial and logistical support, offers public spaces for events, and engages directly in dialogue on equality and inclusion.

"Without this cooperation, many things we do simply wouldn't be possible," said Mateja. *"It's not something volunteers see in every city — a municipality openly supporting the LGBTIQ+ community. It's inspiring for them."*

Volunteers are regularly involved in joint activities with the city, such as exhibitions and symposiums at City Hall. In one recent example, volunteers contributed to discussions on Ljubljana's new youth strategy, presenting their insights on inclusion and civic participation.





Ljubljana Pride Association Slovenia

Inclusion and Future Outlook

The Ljubljana Pride Association's model focuses on inclusion, safety, and empowerment. It demonstrates how volunteering teams can serve both as operational support for events and as powerful learning experiences for participants while contributing to the overall mission of the host organization. Ljubljana Pride Association aims to expand the volunteering model to reach more young people with fewer opportunities, offering them a chance to grow and experience solidarity in a safe environment.

"If you have the opportunity to host a group activity like this," Mateja concluded, "you get to see the impact right in front of you. It's beautiful — you see people realising they can make change happen."

Transferability to Other Contexts

The Ljubljana Pride Association volunteering teams approach is transferable to other contexts that seek to combine inclusion, civic engagement, and diversity. Core ingredients include strong mentoring, well-structured reflection processes, collaboration with local authorities, and clear attention to safety and belonging.

The proposed activities can be transferred also to other volunteering teams and also other topics, such as art festivals or sport events. By merging activism, learning, and solidarity, the model shows how European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams can create visible and lasting change — not only for participants, but for whole communities.



YEAH — Youth Empowerment & Action Hub

Germany

Examples of
European Solidarity
Corps Volunteering
Teams





FROM A VOLUNTEER'S PATH TO LASTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

YEAH — Youth Empowerment & Action Hub gGmbH is a Berlin-based non-profit organisation empowering young people through inclusive education, digital tools, and creative participation. By focusing on youth with fewer opportunities — including migrants, LGBTQ+ youth, and those facing social or economic barriers — the organisation creates safe spaces for learning, connection, and self-expression. Through its European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams, YEAH promotes social inclusion, mental well-being, and active citizenship, helping young people build confidence and shape positive change in their communities.

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About Armin Cerkez and the Organisation — YEAH — Youth Empowerment & Action Hub

YEAH is led by Armin Cerkez, founder and Managing Director. Originally from Bosnia, he has spent more than 20 years in the field of volunteering and youth work, combining professional experience with a personal passion for community service. Today, he continues to support initiatives such as the REDI School for Digital Integration, working with migrants, and volunteers for foundations in Asia and Africa.

Armin began his journey in 2006 by working with young people living with HIV and young sex workers. Over time, he became involved in non-formal education and intercultural dialogue, which shaped

his vision of youth participation and empowerment. His first contact with international volunteering came through a training on intercultural understanding offered by the National Agency of Türkiye, where he first learned about the available opportunities.

Armin's first international volunteering experience took him to a Volunteering Team activity in Croatia, in the small rural town of Gospic, where 40 volunteers worked on environmental and community projects. What began as a simple volunteering placement soon became something bigger: the group, initiated by Armin, decided on their own to clean and revitalise an abandoned area around the local school. Although this was not part of the official programme, the impact was significant — the school was later rebuilt, and the volunteers' names were painted on the wall as a

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It creates a family feeling, a small community. People start to care for one another, and that sense of connection is what truly makes volunteering powerful.

”





YEAH — Youth Empowerment & Action Hub

Germany

tribute. *"The school is still running today,"* Armin says with a smile. This experience marked the beginning of a long journey in volunteering.

Preparation and Youth Participation from the Beginning

Since then, YEAH has cooperated with partners across Europe, learning from each project. Armin recalls one group of volunteers from Portugal who had received so little preparation that they expected a relaxing beach experience but instead found themselves camping in a forest. *"At first, they were shocked,"* he says, *"but by the end, they realised how much they had learned about teamwork, flexibility, and adapting to new situations."* For Armin, preparation and participation from the start are essential. *"If volunteers are involved early, they feel ownership, and the project becomes more meaningful for everyone,"* he explains.

YEAH places great value on volunteering teams, seeing them as a source of inspiration and mutual learning. *"The organisation is growing,"* Armin says. *"We are learning a lot from volunteers, and even those we send abroad often bring something back to us. A few times, volunteers we sent to Estonia developed new ideas during their projects and then created joint youth exchanges with us. That kind of exchange keeps the energy flowing both ways."*

The organisation believes that the success of a project depends on good communication, shared values, and a sense of ownership among volunteers. They are encouraged to contribute ideas from the very beginning. *"We avoid projects where everything is already fixed,"* Armin explains. *"It's important that volunteers know their role and understand their tasks. When everyone feels involved, the experience becomes meaningful for all."*

In the volunteering team activities YEAH runs with German partners, volunteers often support youth activities and workshops, depending on their interests and skills. Some lead creative sessions in art or dance, while others help with administration, event coordination, or project writing.

Armin remembers two volunteers from Slovakia who were completely different: one was highly creative and built wooden furniture for the office, while the other preferred administrative work and learned project management. *"Both found their place,"* Armin says. *"In the end, it's always emotional — we grow together."*





YEAH — Youth Empowerment & Action Hub

Germany

A recent Volunteering Team also supported the Great Minds Meeting Conference in southern Germany. Volunteers helped with photography, participant guidance, logistics, and post-event documentation. For many, it was their first time facilitating a large-scale international event.

For Armin, the most rewarding moments come when a group connects and grows together. *"When you see people changing their perspective, especially when they overcome prejudice or religious barriers — that's the most beautiful part,"* he reflects. He describes how volunteering builds empathy and understanding: *"It creates a family feeling, a small community. People start to care for one another, and that sense of connection is what truly makes volunteering powerful."*

Inclusion and the Future of Volunteering

YEAH's mission is rooted in inclusion and accessibility. Many of its local and international projects focus on involving young people who face barriers — whether social, cultural, or economic — and giving them the confidence to participate and take initiative.

Armin believes that societies should give more recognition to volunteering. *"If it were up to me,"* he says, *"I would make voluntary service mandatory. It empowers young people and helps them step outside their comfort zone, learn new languages, and see life from a different*

perspective." He also points to good practices from other countries. *"In the Netherlands, people who volunteer receive tax benefits. It shows that society values their contribution. We should build similar habits and gratitude in our countries — volunteering is not only about giving time; it's about investing in our communities."*

Transferability

The experience of YEAH shows that volunteering teams can strengthen both organisations sending volunteers abroad and communities where the volunteers are placed in. Involving young people already in the planning process almost guarantees a high-quality and successful volunteering activity, as well as a variety of meaningful roles for participants. Through collaboration and shared learning, volunteers bring new energy and creativity that continue long after the project ends.

Armin encourages other organisations to start volunteering projects and to trust the process: *"Definitely. Volunteering creates personal growth, builds bridges between people, and strengthens communities. It makes sense — and it leaves a real impact."*



Curba de Cultură

Romania

**Examples of
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EMPOWERING RURAL YOUTH THROUGH VOLUNTEERING

Curba de Cultură is a youth work organisation based in the small village of Izvoarele in southern Romania. Founded in 2012, the organisation runs several open youth centres in the Prahova region, where young people can learn, connect, and express themselves freely — often for the first time. The organisation makes use of different European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ funding opportunities to support its mission. It has hosted over 300 volunteers in the past 10 years.

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About the Organisation — Curba de Cultură

In the quiet hills of southern Romania, surrounded by forests and traditional villages, Curba de Cultură is bringing new energy and opportunities to local youth. Founded in 2012, the organisation operates several open youth centres in the Prahova region, where young people can meet, learn, and express themselves freely — often for the first time. Founder Cosmin Catană and his team combine community youth work with the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+, hosting international volunteers who help run local youth activities and intercultural programmes. *“It’s a very rural area,” Cosmin says, “but what happens when European volunteers come here is something magical. They bring ideas and energy — and we share our way of life.”*

Volunteering Teams

Curba de Cultură hosts European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams three times a year, in spring, summer and autumn. Each team of international volunteers stays for around a month, working alongside locals on projects that meet real community needs and helping organize the Ruralympics festival, the only rural youth dedicated festival in Romania. The teams combine hands-on work, youth engagement, and intercultural learning, turning solidarity into visible action in the villages of the Prahova region.

During their time in Romania, volunteers support a variety of activities that connect creativity, education, and community service. They help run workshops for young people — from environmental sessions and creative arts to digital learning activities such

We might not build roads, but we build and invest in people. And that’s what really changes a community.





Curba de Cultură Romania

as LEGO education, graphic design, and 3D printing. Volunteers also contribute to the daily life of the local youth centres by welcoming visitors, organising games and film evenings, and transforming simple spaces into open, lively places where everyone feels at home. Beyond the centres, they assist in renovating classrooms, painting school walls, and improving playgrounds and public areas in cooperation with local municipalities. Many teams take part in solidarity actions, such as helping elderly residents with gardening or preparing firewood, or supporting families in need with small home repairs.

One of the most innovative initiatives is the Mobile Youth Centre — a converted van that travels to more than 40 villages, bringing youth activities directly to those who cannot easily reach the main centres. *"Some young people simply can't come to us,"* Cosmin explains. *"So we decided the youth centre should go to them."*

Before starting their work, each team takes part in an on-arrival training, focusing on teamwork, cultural understanding, safety, and basic Romanian language. The activities are practical and designed in response to local needs identified in cooperation with municipalities and social services. *"We train and mentor the volunteers intensively,"* Cosmin says, *"but most importantly, we make sure they arrive as a team — that sense of community makes all the difference."*

Impact on the local community and volunteers

The impact of the Volunteering Teams is immediate and tangible. Local residents often stop to talk with volunteers, bring food, or simply express gratitude for their work. Municipalities now actively invite the organisation to return each year. *"Mayors often ask, 'When are you coming back?'"* Cosmin laughs. *"Because volunteers bring not just help, but joy and new perspectives."*

For local young people, the volunteers' presence sparks curiosity and confidence. *"A woman once told me,"* Cosmin recalls, *"that she wanted to bring her daughter to our centre because she had seen how other kids had changed — they had become more open, more curious, more alive."*

For the volunteers, the experience is equally transformative. They learn teamwork, resilience, and intercultural understanding while adapting to rural life. *"They realise that even in a small village, they can make a difference,"* Cosmin says. *"And they grow a lot from that."* Although Curba de Cultură operates independently, it works closely with local municipalities and social services. These partnerships help identify families or community spaces that could benefit from support. *"It's more than manpower,"* Cosmin explains. *"It's trust — they see the change and want us to come again."*



Transferability to other contexts

Curba de Cultură's work demonstrates how volunteering can transform rural realities — not through grand infrastructure projects, but through personal encounters and shared learning. By intertwining local and international perspectives, the organisation nurtures a generation of young people who are active, aware, and connected to Europe.

Curba de Cultură is committed to inclusion and accessibility, offering equal opportunities to young people from diverse backgrounds. Local teenagers often start by joining activities in the youth centres, later take part in international exchanges, and eventually become volunteers or even project leaders. *"We might not build roads,"* Cosmin says, *"but we build and invest in people. And that's what really changes a community."*

The experience of Curba de Cultură shows how Volunteering Teams can revitalise rural areas by combining practical action with non-formal learning and community cooperation. Lessons that make this approach transferable include close collaboration with municipalities, strong mentoring and preparation for volunteers, and a balance between manual work and reflection. Continuity through regular activities ensures trust and visibility in the community.

Curba de Cultură's example proves that European solidarity can take root even — or especially — in small villages, turning volunteering into a lasting source of growth, learning, and hope for young people and their communities.



Beyond Barriers — Building Inclusion, Skills, and Solidarity Across Albania

Albania

**Examples of
European Solidarity
Corps Volunteering
Teams**





BEYOND BARRIERS — BUILDING INCLUSION, SKILLS, AND SOLIDARITY ACROSS ALBANIA

In the heart of the Western Balkans, Beyond Barriers has turned youth volunteering into a driver of community transformation. As Albania's Contact Point for Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps since 2011, the organisation empowers young people to learn, connect, and contribute through international volunteering teams. *"Volunteering teams are not just about helping out for a few weeks,"* says Rafaela Mborja, Programme Coordinator at Beyond Barriers. *"They are laboratories of solidarity — spaces where young people learn about cooperation, inclusion, and belonging."*

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About the Organisation — Beyond Barriers

Beyond Barriers began hosting international volunteers in 2011, after several years of sending Albanian youth abroad through earlier European volunteering schemes. Since then, hundreds of volunteers from across Europe have come to Albania through the European Solidarity Corps, and volunteering teams have become a cornerstone of the organisation's work.

Each team consists of young people from different countries who live and work together for several weeks on community-based projects. Today, Beyond Barriers manages around a dozen European Solidarity Corps placements at a time in Tirana and has expanded to the cities of Korçë and Sarandë, bringing

international volunteering to new parts of the country. *"We wanted to reach smaller cities and rural communities where opportunities are scarce,"* Rafaela explains. *"When volunteers arrive, they bring energy, curiosity, and hope — it changes the atmosphere immediately."*

Volunteering teams show what Europe can mean in practice — different cultures, different languages, but one shared purpose: to grow together beyond barriers.



Volunteering Teams in Action

Educational Greenhouse Projects

In two schools — one for children with intellectual disabilities and another for students with hearing impairments — volunteering teams help build and maintain educational greenhouses. Working with teachers and local staff, they engage pupils in gardening, up-cycling, and environmental education. The children learn teamwork and experience the joy of growing their own food, which is later used in the school lunch programme.

"Our volunteers don't just teach; they learn," says Rafaela. "They learn patience, empathy, and how to communicate beyond language. For many, it's their first time working with children with disabilities — it's life-changing."



Art Lab for Ceramics and Pottery

Another team supports the Art Lab for young people with hearing impairments. Together, they learn pottery and ceramics — shaping, painting, and glazing unique creations. The project combines creativity with entrepreneurship: students and volunteers present their works at small exhibitions and online, promoting inclusion while developing practical and digital skills.

"The European Solidarity Corps volunteers are the heart-beat of the Art Lab," Rafaela notes. "They bring continuity, new techniques, and above all, friendship."

Mobile Youth Work Center

To reach young people in remote areas, Beyond Barriers runs a Mobile Youth Work Center — a converted truck that brings youth activities directly to local communities. Workshops cover digital literacy, financial education, media production, and crafts. Each year, a new volunteering team designs sessions, mentors peers, and turns public spaces into hubs of creativity and learning.

"The mobile center allows us to reach youth who have never heard of the European Solidarity Corps or Erasmus+," says Rafaela. "For them, it's often their first encounter with non-formal education. It sparks something new."



Beyond Barriers Albania

Inclusion, Impact, and Sustainability

Inclusion is at the heart of every Beyond Barriers volunteering team. Many projects involve young people with fewer opportunities — from Albania and abroad — creating diverse groups that learn and grow together. The organisation partners with schools, social enterprises, and municipalities to ensure that activities respond to real needs.

Parents and teachers frequently report higher confidence, motivation, and social skills among the students. *"When a child goes home talking excitedly about their volunteer friends,"* Rafaela says, *"you can see that real impact."*

To ensure long-term sustainability, Beyond Barriers builds continuity into every project. New teams join existing initiatives, community partners take ownership, and former volunteers provide peer support to those who follow. This model transforms volunteering into co-creation — linking social innovation, employability, and community development.

Transferability to Other Contexts

Beyond Barriers' approach demonstrates how volunteering teams can connect inclusion, learning, and social innovation in any context. Key elements that make the model transferable include strong partnerships with local institutions, continuous mentoring for volunteers, and activities rooted in real community needs.

The combination of creativity, entrepreneurship, and solidarity ensures that projects leave a lasting impact — both on the volunteers and on the communities they serve. *"Volunteering teams show what Europe can mean in practice,"* Rafaela concludes. *"Different cultures, different languages, but one shared purpose — to grow together beyond barriers."*



EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

The European Solidarity Corps is a programme of the European Union that creates volunteering opportunities for organisations and young people aged 18–30 to volunteer or run their own Solidarity Projects that benefit communities.



Want to get started?

Find out how to apply for funding and get in touch with your National Agency [here](#)



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About SALTO European Solidarity Corps

SALTO European Solidarity Corps supports National Agencies and organisations in the volunteering field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The mission is to explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European societies and to promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity. SALTO European Solidarity Corps coordinates networking activities, training, seminars and events that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact. By doing this, SALTO European Solidarity Corps contributes to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations and Solidarity project teams.

SALTO European Solidarity Corps is hosted by OeAD. The OeAD is the national agency for the implementation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in Austria. SALTO European Solidarity Corps is part of a European network of SALTO Resource Centres with the mission to improve the quality and impact of the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+

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