

PREPARING THE VOLUNTEER FOR THE VOLUNTEERING PROJECT

Practical guidance for supporting and host organisations | based on the European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2026

Updated October 2026

For supporting and host organisations preparing ESC volunteers for cross-border volunteering activities.

1. Why preparation matters

Good preparation helps volunteers understand the project, make informed choices, prepare for life and volunteering in another setting, and know where to turn for support. It should be a two-way conversation: the organisation provides reliable information and the volunteer has space to share motivation, expectations, questions, support needs and concerns.

Under the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Programme Guide 2026, pre-departure training is mandatory for participants in cross-border volunteering activities. It should take place at least one month before departure and be adapted to the participant's individual needs and to the project, activity and host country. The organisation responsible for the training must ensure that participants receive the ESC Info Kit.

Responsibility: The Guide specifies that, for individual volunteering, it is ensured by the supporting organisation; for volunteering teams, it is ensured by the host/support organisation for volunteers coming from countries other than the country where the activity takes place.

2. What preparation should cover

A. The project and the people involved

- Explain the purpose of the ESC and how the volunteering activity contributes to the needs of the local community.
- Introduce the host and supporting organisations, the volunteer's mentor, and other relevant contacts. Explain who does what and how the organisations will stay in touch.
- Describe the tasks, working arrangements, timetable, supervision, living arrangements and the local context. Be clear about what the volunteer will and will not be expected to do.
- Discuss the volunteer's motivation, expectations, fears, interests, learning goals and any support or accessibility needs they wish to share.

B. Practical and administrative information

- Provide accurate information about travel arrangements, arrival, accommodation, meals or food allowance, local transport, pocket money, working hours, days off and what to bring.
- Explain visa and residence-permit requirements where relevant, the participant's status, and the applicable agreement under the ESC.
- Explain insurance coverage and how to use it, including the claims process and emergency contacts. In case of involving volunteers from Western Balkans, the ESC insurance provides primary coverage.
- Check that the participant's activity details and dates have been entered correctly in the relevant European Commission system in time for insurance enrolment. The Guide notes that enrolment must take place before departure.

C. Safety, wellbeing and support

- Explain basic conflict prevention and crisis management. Discuss whom to contact if the volunteer feels unsafe, becomes ill, experiences conflict, faces harassment or discrimination, or has concerns about their tasks or living conditions.
- Share a clear contact list, including an everyday contact and an emergency contact. Explain what to do outside office hours and when emergency services should be contacted.
- Explain relevant safeguarding arrangements, codes of conduct and boundaries, especially if the volunteer will work with children or other people in vulnerable situations. Clarify any applicable national clearance or preparation requirements.
- Discuss culture shock, homesickness, communication, intercultural learning and practical ways to seek help. Avoid assuming that every volunteer will experience the same challenges.

D. Learning and participation

- Explain the learning opportunities in the activity and how the volunteer will be supported to reflect on progress.
- Introduce Youthpass as a process for identifying and documenting learning outcomes. It is useful to start reflection early and revisit learning goals during the activity. Participants are entitled to go through the Youthpass process and receive a certificate at the end of the process.
- Encourage the volunteer to make use of the ESC General Online Training available through the European Solidarity Corps Portal / EU Academy, as appropriate.
- Discuss environmentally sustainable behaviour and ways the volunteer can participate respectfully in the local community.
- Explain the language-learning support available. The Guide states that pre-departure preparation should include language-learning modules in the host-country language or the language used in the activity if such training is not offered through Online Language Support or other linguistic support.

3. Documents and links to share

- [the Info Kit, prepared by European Commission](#)
- [Information about insurance for volunteers](#)
- [Youthpass in Volunteering projects](#)

4. Suggested programme for a pre-departure session

The outline below is a practical suggestion, not a prescribed official agenda. Adapt the duration and methods to the volunteer's needs, the project and whether preparation is individual or in a group.

1. Who am I, and where am I going? — Introductions; the volunteer's interests; the host community; organisations, mentor and target groups.
2. Why am I going? — Motivation, expectations, hopes, concerns and personal boundaries.
3. What is the ESC volunteering experience? — Purpose of the programme, roles and responsibilities, the Info Kit, participant agreement and the project's tasks.
4. What do I need to know before travelling? — Travel, accommodation, local transport, money, working arrangements, documents, visa/residence formalities and insurance.
5. How will I stay safe and get support? — Safeguarding, conflict prevention, crisis management, emergency contacts and routes for raising concerns.
6. How might I learn and adapt? — Intercultural learning, wellbeing, language learning, sustainability, General Online Training and Youthpass.

7. What will I contribute? — Community needs, respectful participation, volunteer initiative and realistic expectations.
8. What remains unclear? — Questions, a final readiness check, agreed next steps and a short evaluation.

5. Readiness check before departure

- ☐ The volunteer has received the ESC Info Kit and knows where to find key information.
- ☐ The volunteer can explain their tasks, working arrangements, living arrangements and the support available.
- ☐ The volunteer has had an opportunity to discuss expectations, concerns, learning goals and any support needs.
- ☐ The volunteer has practical travel and arrival information and knows whom to contact if plans change.
- ☐ Visa/residence requirements have been checked.
- ☐ Insurance arrangements have been explained; enrolment has been arranged before departure.
- ☐ The volunteer knows the basic steps for handling a conflict, a crisis or a safeguarding concern.
- ☐ The volunteer knows the role of the mentor and the host/supporting organisations, and has their contact details.
- ☐ The volunteer has been introduced to Youthpass and relevant language-learning support.

Record any outstanding action, who is responsible for it and the deadline. Preparation is not a one-off substitute for ongoing support: check in with the volunteer after arrival and remain available throughout the activity.

6. Reference

Primary source: [European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2026](#)

Official Guide and other reference documents: https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/organisations/documents-resources_en

This info-kit is a practical summary, not a substitute for the Programme Guide, the grant agreement, the relevant Quality Label commitments, or instructions from the responsible National Agency/SALTO. If requirements or arrangements differ for a particular activity, check the applicable project documentation and ask the responsible body.