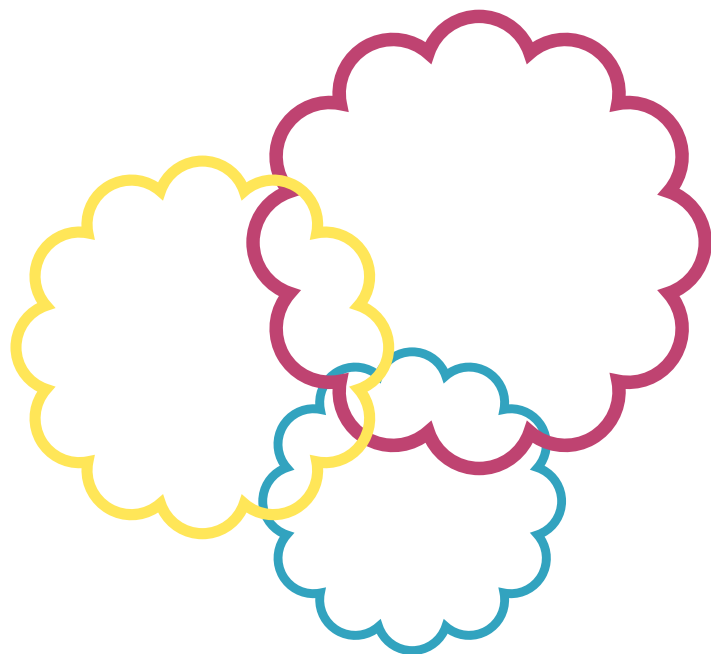




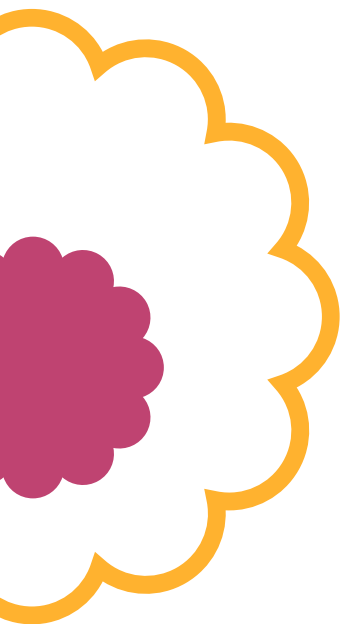
Centar za osobni i profesionalni razvoj  
Syncro - Synergy Croatia



# SYNCRO EVS WAVES\*

## INSPIRATION GUIDEBOOK

\*wave - a sudden occurrence of or increase in  
a phenomenon, feeling, or emotion



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## Introduction

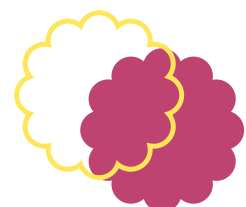
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# INTRODUCTION

*Syncro EVS Waves Inspiration Guidebook was created by a group of five volunteers coming from Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Spain and Ukraine who have done their European Voluntary Service in Centar za osobni i profesionalni razvoj Syncro - Synergy Croatia from 1st September 2014. to 31st August 2015.*

What makes this guidebook special is that it was created by the young people and for the young people and it's based on their one year long experience as EVS volunteers.

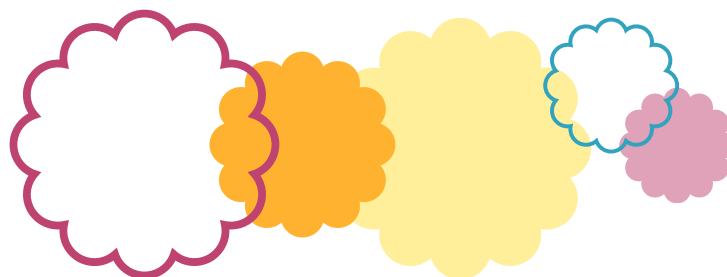
Spending a year volunteering in a foreign country can be a challenging experience, so this guidebook was meant to support and inspire other young people to take this step into the unknown. This guidebook is filled with real-life experiences, tips and tricks on how to make the best out of a European Voluntary Service project.

## WHO IS THIS GUIDEBOOK FOR?

This guidebook was written for **current EVS volunteers, those who are about to embark on the EVS adventure and other young people who are thinking of becoming EVS volunteers**. Reading these experiences and challenges that Syncro EVS Waves volunteers went through will support you in making your decision. Here you will find what 5 young people went through and did during their year of EVS in Zagreb, Croatia, and it can serve to show you what you could expect. The guidebook also has useful tips on how to choose the best project for you. Here you can also read what is possible to do during one year volunteering abroad and it can inspire you to do the same or even more. This guidebook is also meant for EVS mentors, and EVS supervisors, as an example of what EVS is.

Not to forget, this guidebook can also be a useful tool for **all the parents, grandparents, friends, girlfriends or boyfriends of EVS volunteers**, to give you an insight or understand better what your loved ones might be experiencing.

# WHO ARE WE?



**Centar za osobni i profesionalni razvoj Syncro – Synergy Croatia** is an organization active in the field of education, personal development, skill training and youth support.

Syncro was founded in 2010. with the aim of supporting the enhancement of quality of living and development of human potential through powerful educational and personal development experiences. Being a part of International Synergy Group we are joined in the common vision of a world that works for everyone.



## MISSION



Our mission is to encourage young people to reach their potential, to create a learning space through personal development trainings, to support education and involvement of young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, to provide opportunities for cooperation in the youth field and to create opportunities for expression of creativity and enjoyment in life, while including everyone.

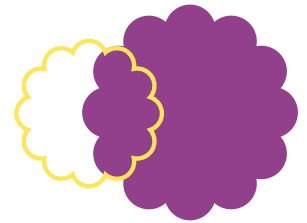


## ACTIVITIES

The activities of Syncro are focused on youth support, education and personal development. The purpose of activities is to empower people to develop skills, attitudes and knowledge for responsible and quality life, to become active citizens and to take an active role in their lives and in the lives in their communities. Specifically, it is implementation of the international personal development trainings, youth exchanges, experiential learning in the outdoors, teaching various technical skills, coaching, group moderation, communication skills, awareness programs, sports and community projects, to learn how to overcome physical and mental challenges that result in building self-esteem and discovering one's own full capacities, which can later be transferred to everyday life. Special accent is also given to realizing social and environmental responsibility and feeling the impact of one's actions on the group and society as a whole.

Our target groups are young people, youth workers and adults active in the field of youth-work and working with people, youth coming from broken families, youth with disabilities and coming from disadvantaged background and minority groups.

## TARGET GROUP



## METHODS

The methods we use in our work are methods of non-formal education: experiential learning, learning through playing, personal development methods, outdoor education, creativity workshops, coaching, theatre, and dance.

**Syncro EVS Waves** was a long-term EVS project that took place in the city of Zagreb in Croatia that took place from 1st September 2014 until 31st of August 2015. In this project Centar za osobni i profesionalni razvoj Syncro – Synergy Croatia hosted five international volunteers coming from Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Spain and Ukraine.

## WHAT IS SYNCRO EVS WAVES?

The context of this project is the desire to give more opportunities for young people belonging to the so-called Generation Y, a generation that is confronted with a slowly changing educational system that takes a long time to finish, and a job market that is changing abruptly and where having a degree is no longer a guarantee of success.

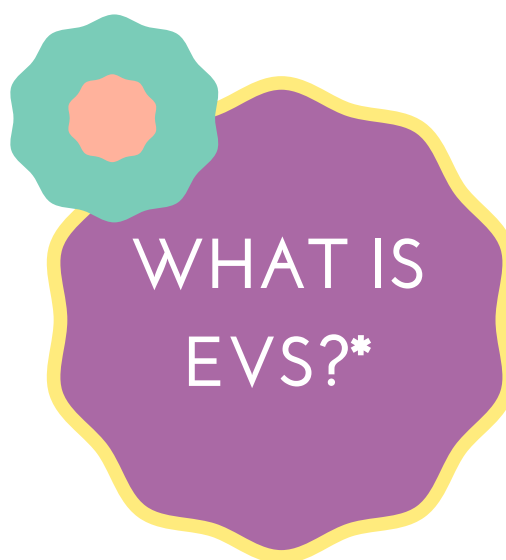
The volunteers who came to Croatia are also a part of this generation and they took part in the following activities: youth support, by creating opportunities for their peers to learn something new and meaningful, and to meet new people through a series of open events on different topics, from sports to communication skills. They were actively involved in improving interactions in the local community within projects that aim to connect people, create more tolerance and understanding. During this year they also had an opportunity to cooperate with other local NGOs, to learn more about project management and to carry out their own personal non-profit project that included the local community as well. All these activities were done through methods of non-formal education e.g. experiential learning and learning by doing.

**European Voluntary Service** is an activity that allows young people aged 17-30 to express their personal commitment through unpaid and full-time voluntary service for up to 12 months in another country within or outside the European Union.

Young volunteers are given the opportunity to contribute to the daily work of organisations dealing with youth information and policies, young people's personal and socio-educational development, civic engagement, social care, inclusion of disadvantaged, environment, nonformal education programmes, ICTs and media literacy, culture and creativity, development cooperation, etc. A project can include between 1 and 30 volunteers who can do their voluntary service either individually or in group.

Participating organisations are responsible for:

arranging subsistence, lodging and local transports of volunteers; envisaging tasks and activities for volunteers that respect the qualitative principles of the European Voluntary Service, as described in the EVS Charter; providing to volunteers with an on-going task-related, linguistic, personal and administrative support throughout the duration of the activity.



The participation in an EVS activity must be free of charge for volunteers, with the exception of a possible contribution for travel costs (if the Erasmus+ grant does not fully cover these costs) and additional expenses not linked to the implementation of the activity. The essential costs for volunteers' participation in the EVS activity are covered by the Erasmus+ grant or through other means afforded by the participating organisations.

## WHAT EVS IS NOT?

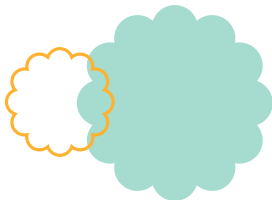
The following activities are not considered as a European Voluntary Service within the framework of Erasmus+: occasional, unstructured, part-time volunteering; a work placement in an enterprise; a paid job; a recreation or tourist activity; a language course; exploitation of a cheap workforce; a period of study or vocational training abroad.

\*Programe guide of Erasmus+, version 2015.



# HOW TO BECOME AN EVS VOLUNTEER ?

**Search the database of EVS projects** – on this website you can get information about existing projects that you can apply for.



**Search for the most exciting project** – finding a project you like is a crucial element in going for EVS, make sure you choose it based on your motivation, and not based on outside factors, such as liking the city or the environment around the organisation. After all, EVS is about volunteering, not about tourism.

**Find a hosting organisation** – The hosting organisation is a place where you will do your EVS, so we suggest you find one that fits your interests. Make sure you get enough information on them, check their websites and social network pages to get an overview of their activities and to see how you fit in the picture.



**Get in touch – and leave a good impression!** When you start communicating with your potential hosting organisation, make sure you shortly present yourself and that you let them know why you're interested exactly in their organisation and exactly in the project they offer.

**Find a sending organisation** – Except for the administration aspect of your project, the sending organisation will have the role to support you in your EVS, give you detailed information about your rights and responsibilities and be available for you throughout your time abroad.





# TIPS AND TRICKS FOR CHOOSING AN EVS VOLUNTEER

## Create an info-pack for the specific project.

Create an info-letter where you explain who you are, what you do in your organisation, what is the environment you work in and the target group you work with and describe the project in which you want to host volunteers - a clear presentation is a first step in making a successful project. If you add an application form to this info-pack with questions regarding the motivation of the volunteer, you'll see quickly which candidates take an effort to apply for specifically what you have to offer.



**Be clear and honest** – If your project has just been applied for and not yet approved, if you're still searching for the accommodation, if you have specific living conditions for volunteers (for example you have a restaurant in your facilities and you don't plan to give them additional money for food) – make sure you communicate all this to your candidates.

## Talk about expectations – of both sides involved!

We suggest that you organise a Skype interview with your potential volunteers, and to use it to talk about expectations. Ask them what they want to do the most, what they wouldn't enjoy doing in their EVS, what support they would expect from you. Make sure you immediately set the record straight by saying what you expect from the volunteers and what you can offer. For example, if you have a volunteer interested in doing their service with animals, and doing a lot of field work, and your project is more focused on promotion of animal protection services with little field activities – it's important you make it clear for the volunteer.



INFORMATION



EXPECTATIONS



Living in a foreign country can be challenging, and even more so if you do it while sharing a house with 5 other young people from 5 different countries. Below you can find a list of tips and tricks that helped Syncro's EVS volunteers to handle life in EVS better and to make the best of it:

## EVS LIFE HACKS

- Write a blog or posts: afterwards you'll have a nice timeline of what happened to you.
  - Respect different eating times of different countries.
  - To miss people is part of the life.
  - It's important it to do what you really want to do in order to feel happy and have a healthy and joyful life.
  - To fail is part of the process.
  - Push yourself to do as many things as possible, things that you've never done before.
  - Summing up, master life by doing.
- 
- If you have paper, a marker and a bit of patience it is possible to travel around Europe for free by hitchhiking.
  - If you have some local friends from time to time it's possible that you will be invited to parties with a lot of food.
  - When you live in the centre of the city you forget about necessity to ride a car.
  - If you say "medo i kokica su prijatelji" you can see a lot of smiling faces.
  - You can sleep basically everywhere for a night or two.
  - When you are back from a trip the chance to be out of liquid for washing clothes is about 101%.
  - Small rooms are easier for cleaning but cleaning is optional.
  - Always knock at your flat-mate's door. If he/she doesn't answer, although you heard a strange sound from the room 2 minutes ago, he/she is not there.
  - Make sure you have different hobbies than the other volunteers: living, working and partying with each other 24 hours per day is not much fun.
  - Never take responsibility of managing a cleaning schedule: you'll always be enemy #1.
  - Your guest is your guest, you're the one to take care of him/her.
  - A deadline is a deadline, you can either start earlier or stay up late 2 nights.
  - Being a foreigner is a privilege, use it.
  - Learn how to cook food from your neighbors and colleagues.

Besides volunteering, an EVS project is a space for personal and professional growth. It often happens in a transition period between studies and work, so it can be useful to learn some communication tricks to ease the entrance to a new working environment once your EVS is over.

## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR BOSS TO GET WHAT YOU WANT?

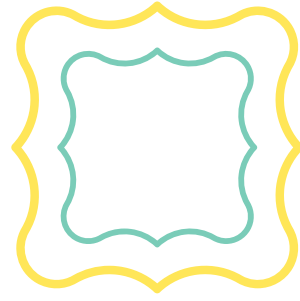
- Feed him/her with sweets - it works 99% of the time.
- Say a genuine compliment about something they do.
- Share a common hobby or interest and enjoy it so you always have a fun topic to talk about.
- Have a drink with your supervisor and boss or even better - invite them to your party.
- Be helpful whenever you can.
- Cheer-up her/him if you see they are worried or sad.
- Loan your backpack for travelling.
- Ask for advice; people in general like to give advice - your boss as well.
- Show to your boss the benefit of accepting your idea.
- Be honest, after all, he/she is also human.
- Hug your boss.
- Ask directly - if you have a story to tell make it as short as possible.
- In case of questions (about using your days off for example) just ask and you'll see what happens. Even if your supervisor is often quite busy, that doesn't necessarily mean he/she doesn't want to help. The most important thing is to let her/him know that you need some help/support and then in some time she/he will come to help you.

# AN IMPORTANT LIST OF DONTS IN YOUR EVS

Thinking about what your friends back home are doing or what's your plan after EVS, might make you lose focus on where you are right now. Here's a list of suggestions of what to avoid:

- Don't worry.
- Don't leave boiling beans on the stove and go to read a book. You might fall asleep and wake up because of an intolerable smell of smoke a few hours later. Afterwards you will spend an hour to brush the pot from burned beans and living with open windows for two weeks to get the smell out from the flat.
- If you have to wake up early don't go to clubs on Wednesday night.
- If you are on a diet don't go to visit a Croatian family it might happen that you wake up next morning with moral hangovers and a sore stomach from overeating.
- Don't stalk your friends on Facebook and look at all the cool stuff they are doing without you.
- Don't try to act local on the market and answer "yes" to everything even if you don't understand, because you will get home with an extra 5 kilos of stuff.
- Don't host too many Couchsurfers and don't let them stick around for half a month.
- Don't expect to always find what you look for in the shop.
- Don't stick to the country and friends you left. They are still there in your life but enjoy this year here and now.
- Don't waste your time with things you don't want to do.
- Don't stay in your comfort zone. Don't know how to dance, swim, sing? Go and try, after all, people don't know you here, it's safe.
- Don't get stressed about the amount of EVS pocket money: it's usually enough to go out for coffees, dance salsa and travel every two months.
- Don't upset your supervisor, he/she is responsible for your days off.
- Don't expect anything. Just enjoy and trust the process.
- Don't try to change people. Accept them.
- Don't forget to forgive.
- Don't stay in your room if downstairs there is a party with people from all over the world.
- Don't leave your food in the middle of the kitchen for days.
- Don't pretend you are in your own place, this is a different place so everything is different.
- Don't be in a hurry to do things, you have one year.
- Don't feel bad or guilty if you sometimes feel alone, it is normal.
- Don't forget your passport.

# AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT LIST OF DOS IN EVS



*Here's what you can do during your EVS:*

- Smile and people will smile back.
- Try one new thing every week.
- Get to know someone enough to miss him/her when you will have to leave.
- Party until sunrise.
- In your free time, travel as much as it is possible and do it even when it isn't.
- Hitchhike and spend one night sleeping on the beach.
- Laugh a lot, laugh until you lose your breath and start to cry.
- Go for a walk and talk with someone you know once a week; you can combine it with city exploration.
- Take the most from each season, swim in summer, hike in autumn, ice skate in winter and fall in love in spring.
- Do all things with love.
- Join every single plan someone proposes.
- Accept failure as a part of the process, it's not a big deal.
- Food, just eat it.
- Challenge yourself.
- Listen.
- Meet and get to know people who are completely different than you.
- Enjoy. If you don't enjoy it, change it.
- Be patient to people back home: they might not be ready to consume all of your info about your adventures and awesome year.





# HOW TO STAY COMMITTED WHEN THINGS GET ROUGH?

*At some point you might feel a bit down, and feel like it might be better to head home. Here's what our volunteers suggest to stay committed:*

- Keep in mind that there are no mistakes only learning opportunities.
  - Go out in nature.
  - Buy headphones and have a Skype talk with a friend.
- Talk to other people who'll keep you on track and support you in difficult times.
  - Make new plans, the crazier the better. New strong emotions will turn your perception of the situation 180 degrees.
  - Make a list of things you have and appreciate.

## HOW TO KEEP FRIENDS? AND HOW TO GET THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE?

- First you have to disconnected from your old world so you can connect properly to your new one.
- When you are giving your full attention to new people they are answering with the same.
- To get friends it's quite easy, you have to be positive, open-minded, a good listener and you have to talk a little bit too.
- It's not easy to keep balance between meeting new people and keeping in touch with old friends. Old friends do understand you, they need 1 call from you to start preparing a welcome party when you get back home. New friends see the world differently and need time to accept them the way they are. As for new ones: just get connected and do things you both like, time will erase misunderstandings.
- Socialize, use Facebook or get everyone's number and talk to them on WhatsApp.
- Skype!

*Integrating in a new place might also be challenging - here you can find the stories of how our volunteers overcame the challenge.*



EVS is about volunteering in the local community, and volunteering is unfortunately often connected with having no income while doing something you love to do, so people might be asking you why do you do it? Here are the top things that our volunteers got out of a year in EVS that they might be using for the rest of their lives.

- If you like your job and have nice colleagues you will always want to go to work.
- The most joy in life comes from interactions with people not from material things.
- You can get a lot of life knowledge – cooking, cleaning and living independently.
- Couchsurfing, hitchhiking and sleeping on the beach don't need much money, and you often come back with much cooler stories.
- The more money you have, the more you spend on things you don't need. With less income you start to understand what is really important for you.
- In order to know how people feel and in order to let them know what you need, you have to ask and say it.
- Knowing yourself better is something priceless
- It's okay to let people make their own mistakes.
- EVS can bring a lot of AHA moments!
- Experience is invaluable.

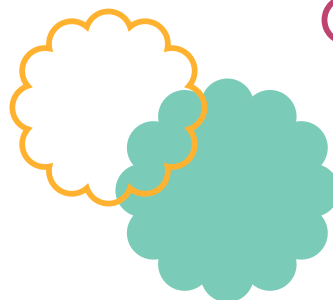
HOW MUCH  
MONEY DO  
YOU NEED TO  
BE HAPPY?

## HOW TO PACK FOR A YEAR ABROAD?

- All you need is an indestructible attitude that what ever happens it is going to be fine.
- You don't really need to take all of your 20 T-shirts when you wear just your 5 favorite ones. You can pack for a year in just a medium-sized bag.
- Take your passport and visa, your laptop, high heeled shoes and a couple of nice dresses.
- Take both summer and winter clothes.
- If you forget something, it was not that important in the first place.

If you're going for a long term EVS (more than 2 months abroad), packing can be tricky. Do you take 365 pairs of socks or a hair-dryer? Here's how to manage it:

*EVS can bring a lot of successes in your life. Here are some examples of what our volunteers have accomplished*



## GREATEST HITS

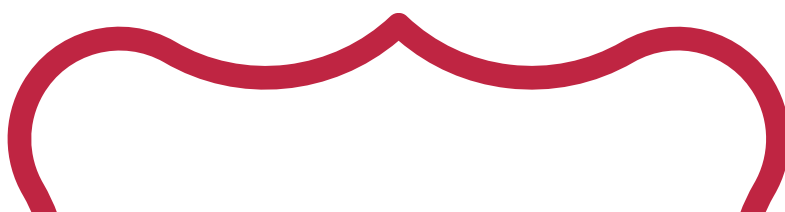
- I made a new family with five different nationalities.
- While doing my voluntary work I made it possible for some people to travel abroad for the first time which made me really happy.
- I was a part of an organising team for a project that some of the participants called the experience of their life-time.
- I stayed around for the whole year, even when I felt like leaving.
- I found my passion - salsa and my job: if you do something you love, new opportunities will find you.
- I finally found out how to keep balance between my private and professional life - by practicing it.
- I developed my project management skills, and I have improved my English skills.
- We managed to organize an event out of NOTHING. We created a 4 and a half hours long concert, with instruments, musicians and lot of people. One week before that happened we had nothing. How we did it?... by asking people to support/help us. It was probably one of the best moments I remember in the whole year.
- During my EVS I have said "I love you", and I have been in many and countless awesome and new places.

## WHAT WILL I TAKE FROM MY EVS?

*After your EVS is over, here's what could be left for you to take it back home:*



- Fantastic memories.
- Experiences, skills, and more memories.
- Acceptance of what comes along in life.



# SYNCRO EVS WAVES IN NUMBERS

Emails Sent:

4500

Times saying I miss you:

104

New people the volunteers talked to:

countless

Local young people involved in our activities:

500 +

Local events organised:

10

Bits and pieces of knowledge gained:

1000 +

Times fallen in love:

countless &  
once more

Times saying WOW this is amazing:

365



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Publishing year: 2015

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