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Call for participants

for

Seminar “Mountain spirit – Volunteering for Nature Conservation”

Dates: 24.05-30.05.2019

Place: Bagoevgrad region, Bulgaria



The village of Vlahi in Pirin mountai, Picture: gowhere.bg

[Velebit Association Kuterevo](#) and [Vlahi Nature School](#) are organizing the Seminar **Mountain spirit – Volunteering for Nature Conservation**. The seminar is within the Erasmus+ project [Mountain spirit – Strategic EVS for Nature Conservation](#) and aims at providing space for volunteers, volunteer coordinators and organizations hosting international volunteers to meet and work together for encouraging and improving the quality of volunteer work for nature conservation.

Main topics include:

- Nature conservation and volunteering – examples, needs, challenges, future cooperation possibilities
- Volunteer management – coordination and mentoring, needs of volunteers and organizations, conflicts, program developing, etc.
- [European Solidarity Corps](#), [Erasmus+](#) and other possibilities for cooperation
- [Mountain spirit project](#) – exchanges 2018 and feedback, possibilities for the future.

The specific objectives of the Seminar are to:

- create a space for exchange between coordinators and volunteers
- build the capacity of organizations for working with volunteers on nature protection topics
- encourage volunteers to initiate volunteer projects and become coordinators
- present possibilities for developing in the field of volunteering and nature protection – European Solidarity Corps, LIFE+, national programs, etc.



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- provide space for feedback and evaluation of first year of Mountain spirit exchanges
- contribute to creating informal network of organizations working with international volunteers in nature protection topics

Within the Seminar we will be discussing and working on the following subjects:

- The role, needs, motivation and expectations of international volunteers for nature protection activities
- Development of international volunteer programs – resources, needs, training, challenges
- Successful stories, bad practices and recommendations how to improve volunteer management within an organization
- How to support each other, to exchange volunteers and coordinators
- The new philosophy and opportunities which the European Solidarity Corps provide especially with the focus on nature protection (volunteer project, volunteer teams, solidarity projects)
- Mountain spirit – Strategic EVS for Nature Conservation – presentation of 2018 activities and achievements, challenges, recommendation, next steps
- Volunteering activities for nature conservation – realities (Balkan region, Central and Western European countries), needs, challenges, possibilities
- [Service Civil International](#) and nature protection
- Erasmus+ and other programs

We are looking for 27 participants (age: 18+) from Erasmus+ program countries and partner countries from the Western Balkans (**eligible ONLY for: EU countries, Macedonia, Turkey, Liechtenstein, Norway, Iceland, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia**). The participants should be representatives of youth or nature protection organizations, ex or future EVS/ESC volunteers in similar projects, who have interest, motivation and energy to work on the topic, who want to improve existing and to develop new volunteering activities for nature conservation.

Profile of suitable organizations:

- Nature protection organizations who would like to explore the opportunities to include international volunteers in their work
- Nature protection organizations interested to exchange experience and share knowledge
- Organizations already working with international volunteers in nature protection activities who would like to improve the process of volunteer management and to create new links
- Mountain spirit project partner organizations
- Members and partners of Service Civil International

Suitable participants could be:

- Volunteer coordinators
- Ex or future EVS/ESC volunteers in nature protection project who would like to develop in the field
- Activists and volunteers with some experience in the field of nature protection, voluntary and youth work
- Active members of the organizations with long-term project ideas involving volunteers

If you are interested to apply, fill in the [following form](#) until April 21st.



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Important practical information

The Seminar will happen in the the region of Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

Accommodation and **food** is covered. The participants will be sharing rooms.

Food will be seasonal and domestic as much as possible.

Travel costs will be covered within the Erasmus+ limits of distance band (100-499 km = 180 euro, 500-1999 km = 275 euro, 2000-2999 km = 360 euro). Be aware that we encourage environmental friendly means of transport (bus, train, etc.) therefore **travelling by plane will be reimbursed only up to 80 %** (unless really necessary).

Participants are expected to buy their own tickets and will be reimbursed once they sent the original tickets. *The travel reimbursement could take up to few months.*

Do not buy your tickets before you get a confirmation by the organizers!

About Mountain spirit – Strategic EVS for Nature Conservation

Mountain spirit is a project involving several EVS short and long-term volunteer exchanges in Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and Bulgaria. It aims at combining efforts of international volunteers and local people from mountainous/rural areas for nature conservation activities in protected areas or species.

Short-term volunteer exchanges in 2018:

- Croatia – Kuterevo Bear Refuge, Velebit Mountain (12 volunteers for 59 days) – July-September
- Kosovo – National Park Sharr Mountain (12 volunteers for 30 days) – July-August
- Kosovo – Prishtina Bear Sanctuary (14 volunteers for 15 days) – August – September
- Serbia – National Park Frushka Gora (12 volunteers for 15 days) - July
- Bulgaria – Nature School Vlahi, Pirin mountain (10 volunteers for 20 days) – June

Long-term volunteer exchanges in 2019 and 2020

- Croatia – Kuterevo Bear Refuge (3 volunteers for 8 months)
- Bulgaria – Nature School Vlahi, Pirin mountain (2 volunteers for 8 months in 2020)

The project involves activities in mountains spread from West to East in the Balkans. **Velebit Association Kuterevo, Croatia; GAIA Kosovo; Vlahi Nature School and Cooperation for Voluntary Service Bulgaria** have been working together for some years now, aiming at making strong connections between people through learning from and acting for nature in the Balkans.

The Spirit of Kuterevo Refuge for Bears and People served as inspiration for the current project which involves new partners such as **Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia** and **Four Paws, Kosovo**. For 40 years now Kuterevo has been a place where young people can learn and volunteer by being close to nature, bears, local people and their traditions. Thus experiencing and creating the **Kuterevo Spirit**. We believe each place has its uniqueness and its messages to be listened to and respected, therefore exploring and developing its own spirit.