



EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

Volunteer Reports on the Impact of Youth Voluntary Service in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America

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INTRODUCTION

Impact assessment in international voluntary service has gradually become a priority area for ICYE as we need to understand not just how volunteering impacts on volunteers but also on the local community in order to improve our programmes and activities. This publication is a first step in this direction. It is the outcome of the EVS project “EYV 2011 – Volunteering Matters!” supported by the Youth in Action programme of the European Commission and implemented by the ICYE International Office in cooperation with its members and partners in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Comprising sixteen volunteers, who carried out action research in their respective host countries, this project aimed at examining the impact of long-term youth volunteering on volunteers and local community members. The publication thus presents the findings of the volunteers’ research about the situation of voluntary service in the participating countries. It should be noted that the reports of the volunteers in this project differ depending not only on the skills, capacities, writing styles and previous experiences of the volunteers but also on local realities and contexts. For example, a volunteer interested in disability issues has concentrated his research efforts and his report on the field of disability, another has given priority to volunteers and host projects, and yet another has included the host coordinating organisation as a target group in the research. In this publication, we present the main findings from their reports, attempting thereby to retain their individual styles and focus areas. The documentation starts with an overview of volunteering in the country in order to contextualise the findings of the action research, obtained through interviews, questionnaires and group discussions, as relevant, carried out with volunteers and local community members. The full reports of the volunteers can be made available on demand.

The strongest overall finding of the impact on voluntary service on volunteers is their perceived personal development and change; some even perceive this change as ‘transformational’. Interestingly, the narrations of most volunteers, host projects and the local community (in some cases only host families were interviewed) reveal that cultural exchange and ensuing intercultural learning is the most significant contribution of international voluntary service. This illustrates the importance of effective training measures for volunteers and host organisations prior to their cultural encounters so that intercultural exchanges are fruitful, enriching and have the potential to lead to personal as well as social change and transformation. This is emphasized by the statements of numerous volunteers and staff of host projects, who both mention ‘different styles of working’ as of one of the biggest challenges of volunteering in a country and context other than one’s own. A significant factor motivating projects to host volunteers is the new perspective that volunteers bring to the work at the local level. Most of them are also in favour of long-term placements as they feel that volunteers then have sufficient time to adjust and integrate, intensifying their commitment, engagement and experiences. Most volunteers stated that they worked in educational projects and/or with children, revealing it as one of the largest service sectors in the field of international volunteering cutting across countries and continents.

This publication reflects the vibrant and diverse experiences of volunteers and the hard work they put in to collect and compile data and write reports despite the hurdles and limitations they faced. We would like to thank all sixteen volunteers and partner organisations of this project for their contributions and their dedication to making this project a success. A big thank you to the European Commission for funding this project through the Action 2 Youth in Action programme.

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