

## **EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS**

### **Impact of Youth Volunteering in Sweden**

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## Contents:

1	Overview of Volunteering in Sweden .....	3
2	Action Research .....	5
2.1	ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS' INPUTS .....	5
2.1.1	<i>General Information about Volunteers</i> .....	5
2.1.2	<i>Motivation</i> .....	6
2.1.1	<i>Activities and Impact Areas</i> .....	7
2.1.2	<i>Training / Institutional Support</i> .....	7
2.1.3	<i>Community Engagement</i> .....	8
2.1.4	<i>Personal Impact</i> .....	9
2.2	ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS' INPUTS .....	12
2.2.1	<i>Motivation</i> .....	13
2.2.2	<i>Recruitment</i> .....	13
2.2.3	<i>Training / Institutional Support</i> .....	13
2.2.4	<i>Benefits and Challenges of hosting international volunteers</i> .....	15
2.2.5	<i>Suggestions to improve international volunteering</i> .....	16
3	Conclusions .....	16
3.1	Recommendations .....	17



# 1 Overview of Volunteering in Sweden

## *History of volunteering in Sweden*

Sweden is a country with a long tradition of volunteering among its population, a phenomenon that dates back to the 17th century. This phase was a transition from an old society built on feudal privileges to the new capitalists society. During this period, different intermediate organisations between local communities and authorities appeared. These organisations were specially charities helping the needy.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden went from an agrarian to an industrialised country, which influenced the social and voluntary organisations, and at the end of this period popular mass movements were born. Between 1850 and 1920 Sweden's population grew from 3.5 million to about 6 million, resulting in a great expansion of people living in the cities. Migration was thus an important issue during this period, and was a topic that many of the new movements dealt with or related to. These new movements included free churches, temperance movement, labour movement, adult education, women's liberation, and sports movement, among others. As these movements became powerful, they started to shape the Swedish not for profit sector focused on membership, membership activities and national democratic organisations. Since welfare was considered a political right instead of charity, considering voluntary work for poor people became very problematic in this society. Sweden's welfare state was developed during the period of World War I, becoming more advanced after World War II, and activist citizenship complemented it. Also, voluntary activities were considered an important part in the process of democracy and political mobilization in Sweden. In the 1960's, new social movements related to peace, modern women's liberation and environmental issues were born.

Now, traditional volunteering based on membership is slowly declining, and people are looking more for voluntary organisations that allow them to determine their own level of involvement more freely. According to Svedberg & Jegermalm (2010), nowadays, 48% of all Swedes are involved in voluntary work. The most common voluntary work relates to sports, culture, labour, housing and social work. Wikström and Larsson (2002) mention that there are about 200,000 associations that work with volunteer work in Sweden, in one way or another. These organisations gather 32 million memberships, to be compared with Sweden's population of 9 million. In total, the work and involvement of volunteers is said to be equivalent to about 400 000 full time employments every year. Added to this, it is estimated that the value of services produced by volunteers round about 150 billion per year.

## *Private sector/ state and civil society relationships*

In accordance with different representatives of voluntary organisations in Sweden, there is a connection between private, state and civil society and that these relationships impact positively or negatively on the volunteering sector. Sweden is one of the most comprehensive welfare states and has a long tradition of supporting different projects of organisations that represent civil society. It is interesting that some participants points out the dependency that has been created between the state and civil organisation, especially at an economical level. However, even though many Swedish organisations rely on income from state institutions, the supportive role of the state seems to be changing, and most organisations agree that funding is one of the main problems in this sector in Sweden. According to literature and people interviewed, the private sector has not been much involved to volunteering since this sector (volunteering) has been considered part of the third sector in Sweden (specially referred to NGO's). However, it seems to be changing and now volunteering is also becoming part of the market and sometimes it is considered "fashion".

## **General information about Swedish volunteers:**

### ***Total number of volunteers:***

48% of Swedish people between the ages of 16 and 74 do some form of volunteer work. This equates to over three million people.

### ***Time dedicated to volunteering:***

an average of 16 hours per month per person, which comes out to approximately 400.000 full-year equivalents.

### ***Number of organizations engaging volunteers:***

150.000-200.000

### ***Gender:***

Approximately 54% of the male population and 43% of the female population, aged 16-74, engage in voluntary activities.

### ***Age:***

The predominant age group for volunteers is between 30 and 44 years.

### ***Types of organisations engaging volunteers:***

Organisations that operate primarily in the voluntary (ideell) or non-profit sector; volunteering in public and private sectors is marginal.

## **Volunteering in Sweden**

In accordance with the Sweden's National Report on the questionnaire on voluntary activities (2004), "In Sweden, the term "volunteer" has until lately been overwhelmingly associated with voluntary aid work abroad, but it is becoming more frequently used even in the domestic context. Voluntary work in Sweden is generally referred to as voluntary (or unpaid) associative activity". Often, volunteers are also member of the same organisation they volunteer, even though this has been changing and more often people are looking for more flexible options where they can volunteer without being attached to the organisation. The following part is based on the Report of Sweden 2010 and other national reports. Most of the facts were found in the population survey 2009.

## **Institutional frameworks**

Concerning the public bodies responsible for volunteering, Sweden consciously forgoes a legal framework for volunteering. However, the policy on NGOs and popular movements established in 2001 includes regulations and legal status that applies to organisations dedicated to volunteering. The Division for Youth Policy and NGOs within the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality is responsible for this policy. At national level, there are also other government agencies responsible for the distribution of grants, information and advice and the implementation of policies toward voluntary organisations within different sectors.

## **Organisations Promoting Volunteering**

There are about 80 regional volunteering centres in Sweden, which are either run by the municipalities or by large volunteering organisations such as the Red Cross. They offer volunteering opportunities that are not tied to membership of an organisation. The National Forum for Voluntary Social Work (Forum för Frivilligt Socialt Arbete) is an umbrella organisation for voluntary social work in Sweden. It is also responsible for Volontärbyrån (Voluntary office) in Stockholm that is a platform where people who are looking for voluntary activities are provided with links to voluntary associations and, vice versa, where voluntary associations seek volunteers. This initiative is supported both by the City of Stockholm and by private companies.

## **International Volunteering**

International volunteering in Sweden is becoming more popular every day. Some non-profit organisations such as PeaceWorks Sweden/ ICYE Sweden (formerly IKU - Internationellt Kultur Utbyte), has been working with international exchanges since 1973. Also, the government has been actively involved in international volunteering through the European Voluntary Service. Besides, many private companies offer different programs that promote international volunteering.

### ***Main Governmental Actors Involved in International Voluntary Work***

One of the main governmental actors that support international volunteering is the National Swedish Board for Youth Affairs (Ungdomsstyrelsen) that distributes the government grants to youth organisations and administrates the EU programmes Youth in Action. Also, SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), the government agency responsible for international development assistance projects, provides funding for a number of development aid organisations, which are engaged in voluntary work and exchange programmes. Currently, a new programme is about to get launch – aiming at spreading information about Swedish foreign aid and build competences amongst young people to work with development issues.

### ***Involvement with European Organisations***

Nowadays, many institutions and organisations in Sweden are affiliated with different European organisations and networks. For instance, the National Forum for Voluntary Social Work (Forum för Frivilligt Socialt Arbete) is member of the European Volunteer Centre (CEV). Also, non-profit organisations in the sphere of social welfare are members of the European Cities Against Drugs (ECAD) and the European Mutual Help Network (EMNA).

### ***Programmes Promoting or Supporting Volunteering at International Level***

Since Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, about 250 organisations send or receive full-time volunteers, many of these within the framework of the European Voluntary Service (EVS). Also, it is important to mention “The Swedish Centre for International Youth Exchange (CIU)” that used to run mutual youth exchanges with several different countries, giving both Swedish and foreign youth the opportunity to go abroad. However, this organisation was closed this year because they did not have any funding from SIDA any more. It shows also, how vulnerable volunteer programmes tend to be, and often depend on state or private funding.

### ***Trends***

Some new trends can be recognized in the International volunteering sector in Sweden. Since 20 years to now, many new actors and possibilities have appeared, for example, now there are more commercial actors (travel agencies) who promote volunteering programs.

Also, there are new demands for volunteering programs and they have to be creative and flexible because people look for different options, and international volunteering could even be seen as a “fashion” sometimes. The European Volunteer Centre (2007) supports these ideas by saying that a new trend in Sweden in this field is the marketization, and adds that many organisations have started campaigns to make their names better known. As well, another trend is to promote shorter programs because most people prefer go abroad some weeks rather than 6 months or 1 year. Finally, another trend is that the projects tend to be more focus on ecological subjects.

## **2 Action Research**

### **2.1 ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS´ INPUTS**

#### **2.1.1 General Information about Volunteers**

**11 volunteers participated in the questionnaire** - 1 incoming and 10 outgoing volunteers.

For certain points the total sum of the answers is not 11, and this is because not everybody answered the particular question. Eight of the participants are female and seven are male.

For most volunteers this has been the first time that they participated in an international volunteer activity. Most volunteers participated in long-term projects. Nine were abroad from 26 to 52 weeks, four from 4 to 10 weeks, and two from 11 to 20 weeks. Most of the Swedish participants were in different projects in Latin America and living in host families. The volunteers who came to Sweden from other countries were living in their projects.

Another interesting fact is that most of the participants plan to get involved in any local volunteer activities or organisational work in the future, and many are already involved since they have finished their voluntary service. Most volunteers are not aware that 2011 is the International Year of Volunteering+10 and European Year of Volunteering.

- **Previous experience:** Yes – 1  
No - 10
- **Location:**

**Where are/were you based?**

Region	Volunteers
Asia	2
Latin America	5
Africa	3
Europa	1

Host family	Project
6	5

- **Area of work**

**What is /was your area of work (i.e. disadvantaged children, ecology etc.)**

Education	Taking care of children	Human rights	Ecological sustainability	Administrative assistance	Microcredits
4	4	2	2	1	1

In relation to the area of work, most participants were involved in educational projects or taking care of children or people with disabilities. Other projects were related to Human Rights, ecological sustainability, cleaning and cooking, and administrative labour.

### 2.1.2 Motivation

**What was the main reason for your participation in an international volunteering program?**

I wanted to learn about other cultures	7
To understand other realities	3
To get professional experience	1
Learning or practicing a new language	3
To do something genuine	3
To see if I can live in a completely different country	1
Get involved in a social program	1

Every volunteer had different reasons for participating in an international volunteering program; however, most of them agreed that they were motivated to know a different culture and different realities. Other important reasons were to learn a different language and to do something genuine. Most of volunteers agree that their project fulfilled their expectations; however, some people also mention that they did not have any expectations related to their project. Some people say that the experience as a whole was very good but the project itself could be improved. Unfortunately, some volunteers who came to Sweden experienced subtle discrimination within their projects and communities that they had not expected, but they state that it did not affect they experience as a

whole. To summarise, it is important that even though every volunteer had different motivations and expectations, and some of them thought that their projects could be improved, they still could enjoy their experience.

### 2.1.1 Activities and Impact Areas

**What was your main contribution to your project?**

Teaching	2
Technological tools	1
Helping in extra activities	2
Helping children	3
The task itself	1
Knowledge / professional advice	2
Cultural exchange	1
None	1

**How was your relationship with project?**

Very close	Close / good	Distant	Very distant	none
4	5	1	0	0

**How did you perceive the relation between your host organisation and your project?**

Very close	close	Distant	Very distant	none
1	4	4	2	0

### 2.1.2 Training / Institutional Support

**As a volunteer you have the access to some things. How satisfied are you with your access to the following things?**

0=not relevant, 1=very dissatisfied, 2= dissatisfied, 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Access to training, courses in the host country	1	0	1	2	5	1
Access to social events with other volunteers and/or staff during the project	1	0	0	2	5	3
Access to support of your voluntary service	1	1	0	1	6	2

**Please indicate how much preparation and support you received from: sending organization (in your country), host organization and your project?**

0=not relevant, 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree,3=neither disagree nor agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Sending organization supported me well before during my volunteer exchange	0	0	2	2	4	3
I received training from the host organisation on culture	0	1	1	1	5	3
Local staff from the host organisation supported throughout my volunteer placement	0	0	0	2	7	2
I received thorough training on my volunteer duties (in the project)	1	4	3	1	1	1
I was trained through everyday tasks (in the pro	1	2	4	2	1	1

Most participants agree that they are satisfied with the access to training and courses in the host community, social events and support during the project. Also, volunteers agree that the sending organisation supported them well before and during the volunteer exchange. However, one volunteer mentions that he did not receive any preparation and came too late to Sweden, which made his stay in the host country very difficult at the beginning. In general, volunteers agree that they receive proper training from the host organisation and support during their experience. However, most of them strongly disagree about receiving thorough training on their volunteer duties in the project. Besides, some projects seemed to have a weak organisational structure and seemed not to be prepared for receiving international volunteers. Additionally, some volunteers perceive the relation between the coordinating organisation and their projects as distant or very distant sometimes, which could affect the quality of the project. Thus, even though most volunteers are very satisfied with the support of both sending and hosting organizations, some of their answers reflect that the projects need to be improved in order to maximize the experience of international volunteering. Thus, support and training before and throughout the voluntary service, also from the coordinating organisation to the hosting projects, is fundamental in order to have a better experience as international volunteers.

### 2.1.3 Community Engagement

**How was your relationship with your host community?**

Very close	Close / good	Distant	Very distant	none
3	6	0	0	1

Most volunteers agree that they had a good relationship with their host community and their projects. While some of them mention that they were involved in additional projects of the local community that maximized their experience, others think they did not do any contribution to their host communities. The main contribution to their project was the task itself, i.e. what they were told to do; however, some volunteers mention that they were also involved in extra activities beyond their tasks.

**Can you mention any concrete contribution to your host community?**

Additional projects to the task itself	3
To share cultures	1
Inspire others	1
None	3

**Do you have any suggestions as to how one could maximize the positive impact or minimize the negative impact of volunteering?**

Most volunteers agree that international voluntary service is a unique way of learning about other cultures, lifestyles, languages, and in general, about other realities, and at the same time increasing



respect and reducing preconceptions. Thus volunteering is a way of building respect, understanding and love between people around the world. Moreover, by volunteering in a completely different culture, people are exposed to many challenges that make them strong and allow them to know more about themselves, increasing their personal development and trust in others. There are different suggestions however of how one could maximize the positive impact or minimize the negative impact of volunteering:

- *Talking about volunteering and the positive impact spread the word, so people can get a positive approach and they will also understand the importance of volunteering.*
- *Get to know your community, that's the only way to see what is actually needed. Respect people and try to become a part of your community.*
- *Have a very clear at the project for the volunteer. Define why they need a volunteer and how the volunteer can be used to contribute as much as possible*
- *Engage as much as possible with the project you are doing, and interact with as many people as you can.*
- *Give clear expectations to the host projects so that they can prepare more for their volunteer.*
- *Preparation camps is important*
- *The time goes by way too fast to harp on things that go wrong. Make the best of it and force yourself to be active in their culture and what they do. It'll help on those days when you feel homesick.*
- *I think that the positive impact would be greater if the volunteers received more training in the host country that would increase the cultural understanding.*

Some volunteers were impacted in a positive way by their voluntary service, and it is inspiring to mention what they wanted to share their experiences:

- *This is the best thing I have ever done. It changed my life to the better. Even though it was hard at times, but it was all worth it. It was a part of my education for life experience. Loved it!*

- *This was easily the greatest year I've lived so far. A once, maybe twice, in a lifetime opportunity that I will always look back on positively.*

### 2.1.4 Personal Impact

**What did you gain personally from being a volunteer? Have any of the following increased or decreased for you?**

0=not relevant, 1= decreased greatly, 2= decreased, 3=stayed the same, 4=increased, 5=increased greatly

	0	1	2	3	4	5
My personal development (e.g. confidence, self-esteem, self-management)	0	0	0	1	2	8
My skills (e.g. from teamwork through to computer literacy)	0	0	0	4	3	3
My general health and well-being	1	0	1	3	5	1
Other (language)	0	0	0	0	0	1

**What did you gain through the social links you developed by volunteering?**

0=not relevant, 1= decreased greatly, 2= decreased, 3=stayed the same, 4=increased, 5=increased greatly

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Access to new contacts and networks	0	0	0	0	5	6
Sense of trust in others	0	0	0	4	5	2

**Thinking about your international volunteer experience, how much you agree with the following statements?**

0=not relevant, 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither disagree nor agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

	0	1	2	3	4	5
It affected my cultural identity	0	1	0	3	3	3
It greatly increased my appreciation of other peoples' cultures	0	1	2	3	4	6
It increased my participation in cultural, environmental or leisure activities	0	0	0	2	5	4
It exposed me to communities different from the one(s) that I grew up in	0	0	0	0	1	10
I was exposed to new ideas and ways of seeing the world	0	0	0	0	4	7
I gained a better understanding of the community where I worked	0	0	0	0	5	6
I improved my chances of finding a job	0	1	1	3	4	3
It improved my performance on the job	0	0	0	5	3	3
It encouraged me to make positive career changes.	1	0	0	1	3	6
Overall, I am highly satisfied with my volunteer experience so far.	0	0	1	1	1	7
It has been a "transformational experience" (one that results in significant changes in my life that probably would not have occurred if I had not participated in volunteering).	0	0	0	4	1	6

In relation to personal benefits throughout the volunteering service, most participants agree that their personal development increased greatly. Most of them think that their skills stayed the same or increased and that their general health and well being also increased. Besides, most participants agree that their access to new contacts and networks increased significantly, and their sense of trust in others also increased. Moreover, most volunteers agree that the international voluntary service exposed them to different situations and new points of view. Most of them agree or strongly agree that this experience affected them in a positive way in different aspects such as their appreciation of other people's cultures, participation in cultural, environmental or leisure activities, understanding of the community where they were working, improving their chance of finding a job, and encouraging to make positive career changes

According to the volunteers, one of the main contributions that they perceived is the understanding of different socio-economical situations while contributing to improve them. Also, another contribution was to increase their personal development and tolerance. In relation to contributions towards the host community and the projects, some volunteers agree that they had a good relationship with both host community and projects, and were involved in additional projects beyond their tasks in order to maximize their experience. However, other volunteers think they did not make any greater contribution to their host communities or projects more than the actual tasks that they did in the projects. In order to take full advantage of their experience, some volunteers tried to do more than what they were told to do and were more involved with the community, which allowed them to understand their communities more and to perceive a bigger contribution towards them and the projects.

Overall, most of the volunteers are highly satisfied with their international volunteering experience and consider that it has been a transformational experience, one that resulted in significant changes in their life, which might probably not have occurred if they had not participated in a volunteering programme. Also, it is interesting that one can see not only an obvious link between the original reasons for doing the voluntary service and what the volunteers obtained through this, for instance, to learn about new cultures and different realities, but also that this experience gave much more to them than what they had expected, for example, a significant personal growth. It is important to add that even though the project itself is an important part of the overall volunteering experience, every volunteer creates his or her own experiences. Along the way, the volunteer has the chance to be creative, take new opportunities, and achieve their own potential to make the whole experience even more valuable and important.

### What was your main challenge in this experience?

Language	3
Deal with the organization of work / roles	2
Gender differences	1
To live with a family	2
Lifestyle	1
Trust in others	1
Communication	1
Not to be involved too much / getting personal	2
To leave the project	1

Every volunteer faces different obstacles during this experience. The main challenges they expose are the language, dealing with the way work is organized and understanding their role in the project, living with a family and also not to getting too involved or too personal in the relations or conflicts of others.

### How did you handle with difficulties during your volunteering?

Being creative	1
Switching projects	1
Talking to people in the community	2
Talking to host family	2
Trying to understand differences	1
Stay positive	1
Talking to host organisation	1
Talking to other volunteers	2
Talking to my family / friends	1
Trying to support as much I could	1

Communication was the key for most volunteers to handle difficulties during their volunteering period. Some of them mention that the best way to solve their problems was talking to people in the community, to the host family, to other volunteers or to the host organisation. Also, some people mention that for them it was important to stay positive and be creative, and of course try to understand differences. Some volunteers point out the importance of preparation trainings in order to know what to expect. In some cases, the support from the host organization or host community and family were very important.

### Did your project fulfil your expectations?

yes	No
7	3

Most volunteers agree that their project fulfilled their expectations; however, some people also mention that they did not have any expectations. Some say that the experience as a whole was very good but the project itself could be improved.

### What has been the main contribution of this experience to you?

To understand different socio-economical situations and contribute to improve them.	4
professional experience	1
self-confidence, personal growing	4
to make new friends.	2
The cultural exchange itself.	2
To get a partner.	1
To learn a new language.	2
to get a network of contacts.	1
To support people I met	1

Most people mention that this experience mainly contributed to their understanding of different socio-economical situations and to improving them and increasing their personal development.

## 2.2 ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS' INPUTS

The following information intends to reflect the importance of international volunteering from the point of view of the hosting projects that host international volunteers in Sweden. Qualitative interviews were conducted with three different projects, one through a telephone interview and two through visits.

The information provided below has been obtained through qualitative interviews conducted with the responsible contact persons of three different hosting projects in September and October 2011.

Name of the organisation / responsible		
Älvsby Folk School Matilda Wiklund	Kärsögården Activity Center Kerstin Hedefalk	Mullsjö Folk School Pär Gunnarsson
Location		
Älvsby, North of Sweden	Drottningholm, outside of Stockholm	Mullsjö, South West of Sweden
Area of work		
Adult Education	Organisation of many activities: campings, conferences. It is a project of YMCA.	Adult Education
Previous experience		
Hosting international volunteers since autumn 2008	Hosting international volunteers since 2001	Hosting international volunteers since 2005
Volunteers in 2010/2011		
2 volunteers	2 volunteers	2 volunteers
Type of Program		
Long term (6 months to 1 year). We have not hosted short-term volunteers, but think the experience is much better with long term projects because there is more interaction and exchange.	Long-term. Definitely long-term projects are better because you need time to get to know each other and also for the volunteer to experience a complete year in Sweden not only in winter time when it is harder.	Long-term (1 year). We prefer long-term because it takes time to know people. However, depending on the person sometimes long-term could be hard for the volunteer.

### 2.2.1 Motivation

There is a course in the school related to international volunteering so it is very important for this kind of exchanges with volunteers from other countries because they can learn from each other. It is a way of having a real cultural exchange.	Someone involved in PeaceWorks mentioned the possibility of having volunteers for the centre and to have not only help but also cultural exchange.	Many motivations like to get more cultural contact and dialogue. Also to give the opportunity to volunteers from other countries to meet Swedish youth. We are used to sending people to other countries but we also need help here and want to learn about others.
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The different organisations were motivated to host international volunteers in order to have a real cultural exchange and also to help in their daily activities. They prefer to have long-term volunteers because it takes time to get to know people, especially from other cultures. When the period is longer, the benefits, interaction and exchange among people are greater.

### 2.2.2 Recruitment

Requirements for volunteers		
No, however we appreciate it if volunteers speak Spanish because they can share their language with students, but it is not a requirement.	None.	There are no specific requirements however we are more interested in people who are interested in social and international relationships, and in Nordic countries.
Process to have volunteers / satisfaction		
PeaceWorks Sweden sends them to the School. We are very satisfied with the process because the volunteers have been very sociable and friendly. We have had a very good experience with them.	PeaceWorks Sweden send them, we are very satisfied.	The process is a mutual cooperation between PeaceWorks and the School, both select the volunteers. Very satisfied.

The different organisations that host volunteers get them throughout PeaceWorks Sweden, which is the organisation that selects the different volunteers and send them to the projects trying to match as far as possible both the profiles of volunteers and projects. All three organisations are very satisfied with the selection of volunteers. Even though the host organisations do not have specific requirement to host volunteers, they state that it is important that the volunteers show an interest in the culture and things related to the projects. Also in some projects it is important that they can share some knowledge like their language, for example, especially if they are to work with students. This last aspect reinforces the importance of having a real cultural exchange between the volunteers and the host country, which is one of the main aims of international volunteering.

### 2.2.3 Training / Institutional Support

They have different contact people, Swedish classes, is a small school so everybody is in contact always.	Volunteer have two contact persons for the tasks and personal situations. We are like their parents here. Also contact with PeaceWorks (they appoint a social contact for the	They have preparation seminars to know about the culture and volunteering. They receive Swedish classes. They have two mentors, one for everyday tasks and other
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	volunteer).	for social and personal matters.
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Training and support during the project is one of the key means to ensure a successful voluntary service. All the host organisations interviewed provide the volunteers different contact persons or mentors for the tasks they are assigned in their projects and also for personal situations. They also provide volunteers the opportunity to study the language, and look for other options for the volunteers to interact with the community.

## 2.2.4 Benefits and Challenges of hosting international volunteers

<b>Benefits of hosting international volunteers</b>		
To learn about cultures, talking about freedom and understanding between people. Learning from each other.	It is nice to host people from other countries because you learn a lot and make friends for life. It is also important for the project and people who visit learn about volunteering and are interested in meeting the volunteers and learning from them.	International volunteers open our eyes to other points of view. They take responsibility for the free time activities of students so they are very important in the process of socialization in the school. They also help the staff in different activities.
<b>Relationship between international volunteers and the community / benefits</b>		
The volunteers live in the same school; they have a lot of contact with other students. They know their community and if they want to become part of activities in their community they can do so. For example, last year a volunteer was part of the football team in the community. They provide cultural exchange, better communication with other countries, many benefits related to learning about other cultures.	Depending on the volunteers, some are interested to be more involved in activities with the community like participate in sportive teams, or assisting to classes in the town where they meet more people outside the project.	They have very good relations with the student community in the school. Also some volunteers are involved in activities in the community, like taking classes, helping in youth clubs, knowing people from similar cultural groups.
<b>Potential challenges of hosting international volunteers / dealing with difficulties</b>		
To understand the country and culture. For the volunteers it could be very shocking to live in a completely different country that in winter is very dark and cold. Communication, some people do not speak English and at the beginning it could be difficult to communicate and express exactly what people need. In case of problems, we have a very good relationship with PeaceWorks Sweden that is why if we any problem that we cannot solve here, we call them. We try to talk to the person and to see how we can solve the situation, working together.	Language. Sometimes there are misunderstandings. Cultural things but they are not big problems. Expectations of the volunteers, if they expect something or are not well prepared about the country, the experience may not be the best for both the project and the volunteers. Also, it takes a lot of time to know people so it is a challenge sometimes. In those cases, it is important to talk a lot and be flexible, and look for different options.	For the volunteers, the climate conditions because in winter is too dark. Also, during some periods the volunteers are alone in school because everybody is on holiday. We deal with these difficulties by talking a lot, listening to them and trying to find different solutions.
<b>Why to recommend international volunteers to other organizations</b>		
You get a point of view that you do not get in other ways, it is very interesting and you learn a lot from volunteers. Definitely worthwhile, a great experience.	There are more positive aspects than negatives.	There is so much to learn from different ways of living, cultures, and perspectives. It is a way to contribute to having a better world.

The main contribution perceived by the host organisations is the cultural exchange. It is also important that every part involved not only learns about the other's culture but also about their personal lives as human beings, and most of them become very good friends. Besides, the projects benefit from the help of volunteer in terms of increasing the quality of their respective projects. Some of the volunteers also help in extra activities in the community close to the project, which also helps other people become more aware of other realities and new perspectives. As a result, all the host organisations recommend that other organisations host international volunteers since they consider this experience to be worthwhile.

There are different challenges of hosting international volunteers, and that is why the previous preparation is fundamental for a great experience. Sweden is a country that exposes volunteers to different challenges such as severe climate conditions; it is very dark and the days are cold during winter especially in the north. For some people it is more difficult to adapt to new cultural patterns and codes. Language is sometimes a big obstacle for some volunteers especially if they cannot speak English, and at the beginning there are often misunderstandings that make it difficult to understand the needs of the volunteers. Communications is the best way of solving these problems. When both parts talk about their problems and work together looking for different solutions, the volunteering experience will be enhanced. It is important not only to have good relations between the volunteer and the projects but also with the coordinating organisation, in this case PeaceWorks Sweden.

### 2.2.5 *Suggestions to improve international volunteering*

<p>It is very important to be prepared. There are always questions that we do not expect.</p> <p>We would like to have a bigger connection to society, visiting other schools and other places to talk about culture.</p> <p>The experience would be better if families could host but it is very difficult here.</p>	<p>To be more involved in and connected to PeaceWorks so that we can share more and understand more the objectives of volunteering.</p> <p>To have better profiles about the projects so the volunteers can know exactly what they are going to do before coming.</p>	<p>Related to some difficulties we have found with our volunteers, one way is that they start the volunteering some weeks before, so when the students start classes everybody sees the volunteers as part of the school.</p>
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## 3 Conclusions

International volunteering is a unique experience that allows people to interact with different cultures and new realities while doing something meaningful. It is also a way of building respect and understanding between people around the world. These aspects have been the main reasons that motivate volunteers to get involved in this experience. In fact, most of the volunteers in this study are highly satisfied with their volunteering experience and consider it a transformational experience.

One of the main contributions perceived by the volunteers is the increasing of their personal development. Another very important contribution is the understanding of different socio-economical situations and the opportunity to contribute to improve them. Moreover, by volunteering in a completely different culture, people are exposed to many challenges that make them strong and allow them to learn more about themselves. One of the main challenges is the language, which could be an obstacle in meeting new people and understanding the culture. Other common difficulties are related to getting used to living in a completely different environment with new people and with very different climatic conditions. Communicating what people feel is one of the main strategies for dealing with difficulties. Finally, most volunteers are very satisfied with the support they received from both sending and hosting organizations. However, some projects need to be improved in order to maximize the experience of international volunteering.



### 3.1 Recommendations

As a result of this impact assessment and analysis, I hereby present some recommendations. In order to maximize the positive impact or minimize the negative impact of volunteering, there are different recommendations for every player involved in international volunteering:

#### **For new volunteers:**

- ❖ Even though every experience is personal, it is necessary to be open-minded and always being positive is the key to a great volunteering experience.
- ❖ It is very important to engage as much possible with the community and the project, trying to go beyond the tasks you have to do.
- ❖ Do not be afraid of saying what you feel but in a respectful way and talking to the right person, especially if is a delicate subject. Communication is the best strategy to deal with difficulties and reduce misunderstandings.
- ❖ It is fundamental to be prepared before the volunteering period starts. Read and asking people about the new culture, and assisting at preparation camps and other activities organized by the sending organization could make a big difference in the experience as international volunteer.

#### **For ICYE organisations:**

- ❖ More promotion of the programs and voluntary service is very important to attract those who have never heard about it. One strategy is to talk about the importance of volunteering and its positive impact. This can also contribute to more families became interested in hosting international volunteers which is very important to get to know a new culture.
- ❖ To undertake continuous assessment and research work related to the impact of international volunteering, as a way to collect examples and material to be able to raise the awareness of international volunteering.
- ❖ Support and training before and throughout the voluntary service is fundamental in order to have a richer experience as international volunteers. It is also important to continue with the preparation seminars or camps and reinforce the process that commenced there. It is necessary to strengthen the relationship between the projects and the host coordinating organizations, improving the profiles of the projects, and sharing information on international volunteering and on the organizations as a whole so that both parts can work together and can support each other.
- ❖ To organize activities so that former volunteers stay involved in volunteering activities, provide support and extra contact to incoming volunteers, and bring local groups together with volunteers.

#### **For hosting projects:**

- ❖ It is important to have clear profiles about projects and to specify the roles and tasks of volunteers, contact persons, schedule, etc.
- ❖ It is very important to improve the communication between the projects and the host organization.
- ❖ The projects could be flexible and at times allow the volunteers to suggest new ideas in order to have a greater impact.
- ❖ The projects should offer the volunteers not only supervisors but also social mentors who help them to build new social networks in the new place.
- ❖ To look for new spaces within the local community is a good way of widening the social circle of volunteers, which will contribute to them having a better cultural experience.

Overall, this research project has been a fruitful way of gathering useful perspectives that can show the way to further developing international volunteer programmes, which is a way of working towards a more peaceful world.