



Worlds of Experience

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♦ EDITORIAL

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"Communicating Human Rights in Diversity"

Dear friends,

The diversity of globalised societies is rife with ambiguities and tensions. Cross-border and intra-regional movements of people are rooted in complex economic, historical and political factors. Yet cultural identity often becomes the justification for escalating conflicts and the worst forms of violence. The need is for "full humanity", an idea proposed by Arjun Appadurai (2014), which offers a way to link the value of human rights to the value of cultural diversity. Human rights were designed to ensure basic and universal aspects of humanity. Full humanity, on the other hand, is about expression, communication and creativity. These features of human life, "which really define its joys, pleasures and vitality, only come into being where humans can exercise their own linguistic, cultural and historical capacities, and this specificity can only exist where culture – as language, as heritage and as world-view is fully recognized" (Appadurai, A. (2014) "Full Humanity." In *From Words to Action*, UNESCO, France).

We dedicate this special 38th issue of the ICYE Newsletter entitled "Communicating Human Rights in Diversity" to the idea of full humanity. The title corresponds to an EU funded Erasmus+ Key Action 2 project being implemented in 18 countries worldwide. Working towards a culture of human rights, the project challenges customs, practices and behaviour based on stereotypes and prejudices, and explores new ways of engaging with the blind spots of our consciousness, with precarious spaces and vulnerable people.

In Volunteers Voices, 14 EVS volunteers in this project describe how the marginalized – underprivileged children, women, the disabled, victims of armed conflict, etc. – negotiate, communicate and creatively work towards the transformation of their world. Two ICYE volunteers likewise narrate their experiences, drawing out the different capacities of individuals and organisations in their struggle for full humanity.

ICYE Programme News includes: "Zusammen Leben" a mentoring programme and German course for Refugees in Vienna and Civil Courage Training Courses 2015 in Austria; an Intercultural Weekend with the "Movimento sem Terra" (Landless Workers Movement) in Brazil; a workcamp – Peace and Love Festival in Sweden; a new Cooperation Agreement between ICYE Ecuador/VASE and France Volontaires and the ICYE Erasmus+ KA2 multilateral project: Volunteers at the Interface between Formal and Non-Formal Education.

Wishing you an interesting reading, we would like to encourage readers to send us articles and pictures for the next issue of "Worlds of Experience", dedicated to "South-South Volunteer Exchange". Please send your contributions to icye@icye.org, before 31 January 2016.

Warmest regards!
ICYE International Office

This and previous issues of "Worlds of Experience" can be viewed and downloaded from: www.icye.org.

Volunteers Voices

Freshwinds – The diversity I see in the community

Thanh Nguyen (Vietnam)
EVS volunteer in the UK

I am from Vietnam and I have a great interest in human rights and related issues. Volunteering at “Freshwinds” in Birmingham (UK) has been an incredible opportunity for me to gain some first-hand experiences in the field.



Vietnam, despite being economically open, is still pretty much a traditional and conservative country. Foreigners and Vietnamese nationals of foreign origin make up a small percentage of the overall population, and human rights is still a regulated topic throughout the country. Every day I go out into the streets of Birmingham, I see people with different races, cultures, nationalities – this is my first impression of the UK and Birmingham. It's really inspiring that a community is so diverse, and yet the people all live with and contribute to some collective values while showing great respect for cultures and beliefs of minority groups as well as of individuals.

I was further amazed when participating in “Birmingham pride” – one of the biggest festivals dedicated to the LGBT community. At this moment in my country, gay people are struggling to live with their true selves and many still think gay is a disease which should be cured by shame and discipline. Here in this beautiful city of Birmingham, such a festival was shocking, wild and like nothing I had seen before. Above all, it was humane, I realized that when I saw love, happiness and passion filled the air and people lived like not one second was wasted. I have read a lot about homosexuality around the globe but seeing it here in the UK really brought me a new perspective about the world we live in.

Through the Freshwinds' program, I have also met some HIV patients and refugees from the Middle East, many of whom are much less fortunate than I am. They are fighting hard every day just to be accepted by society so that they can carry on living a decent life. Such an experience is so profound and invaluable.

Volunteering at Freshwinds has brought me closer to people from different walks of life and made me realize that too many people have had to suffer when the rest of us are too busy seeking comfort in our conventional lives, how our failure to see the beauty in diver-

sity has pushed people out of the very society that is supposed to nurture and protect them, and it doesn't matter how different we are, we are all human, only by respecting others' right to achieve happiness can we then achieve our own!

We all belong to a universal family

Dorottya Villanyi (Austria)
EVS volunteer in India

Even if it is hard to believe, my beautiful journey has come to the point where it is time to think about the countless experiences that I had the chance to gain in these few months in India. On the topic of “Human Rights”, I will share my experiences mainly on children's rights, as the nature of my project requires.

Let's start with a definition: “Human rights belong to everyone, everywhere, regardless of nationality, sexuality, gender, race, religion or age.” In my opinion, rights always represent something idealistic, something that we have to keep in mind in our life, something we use as a “crutch” to create a better world. The practices show us how close we are to that goal; it is the same in India or in any other country. On the other hand, the Indian way of thinking, the philosophy on which this incredibly diverse culture is based, is certainly unique. Grounded on Dharma (‘law’, ‘order’, ‘duty’, ‘custom’, ‘quality’,) the Indian concept sees the individual, the society and the universe as an elemental whole. This idea is represented in “social qualities” like friendliness, freedom from anger and egoism, compassion to living beings. It is very important to emphasise that human rights in India, which are based on fundamental duties of the individual, are strongly connected to the main religions.

As for me, I have been working in South India, Mysore, Karnataka, and am connected with three kinds of religions and people with various social statuses. I contribute to my family, who are Hindus and belong to the upper-middle class; at work as a teacher, where I have met Hindu and Muslim children and teachers (the majority belong to the lower-class) and last but not least in my free-time, when I am in touch with Hindus, Muslims and Christians (from the lower to the upper-classes). So how are human/children's rights represented in all these areas? What can I see as a foreigner in this short period of time? How can the collective experiences impact and benefit me? In this article, my goal is simply to share my personal observations, which are obviously not inclusive of the entire field of violations.

As previously stated, human and therefore children's rights are related to religions and social or communal duties. Thus, religion-centred activities often take precedence over attending school. Also, although India is an incredibly fast developing country, the material gap between the classes is extremely high. Fundamental rights such as providing a basic standard of shelter, food and clothing to the children are often neglected. Despite of this fact, I personally did not

experience really serious cases, even the poorest parents in slum areas had the opportunity to provide their children a place to sleep (even if it was in the family grocery shop or in one room for 15 people) to feed and clothe them every day. As for freedom of expression and opinion, there are a lot of different examples. In my host family, the children are allowed to say what they want and express their concerns and feelings. In governmental institutes, this right is strongly violated: I have seen 2-3 year olds beaten because they used coloured pencils instead of grey ones.



A common issue is that teachers correct the work of children to make them nicer, proper or perfect. More emphasis is placed on producing results rather than enjoying the process. A lot of times, I experienced the lack of giving appropriate information; the children had no idea what is happening, what they are learning, why they are getting beaten. On the other hand, I have to emphasise that I have also seen many positive examples (amusingly interesting mathematics and English learning sessions by Pratham Foundation, exciting demonstrations of chemical experiments in a governmental boarding school, the way an English teacher explained a story for the hundredth time to the students so that they actually realize what they are saying, etc.) In addition, non-verbal communication is really intense here, and to understand each other without words works perfectly in this culture. I naturally faced a lot of difficulties in the beginning. Without knowing the language and communication forms, it was a funny journey to explore what was actually happening (a lot of times I had no clue where we are going, what we are doing, why we are waiting, what transport we are taking or even that there is a kind of transport like that, what am I eating, etc.) For children to be able to participate in decision-making processes is not really an important issue in India. During my work in the summer camp in a Muslim slum or in the centre for children with tribal roots, I try to include them to decide the topics that I teach or let them choose what we should play, which material we should use and so on.

To be perfectly honest, it is not always easy to observe, understand and when the situation asks for it, act on the children's right issues. But it is amusing to see the impact of positive practises, to watch that many great people are raising awareness with their enthusiasm, knowledge or simply their personality. In these few months in India, I have learnt more about my culture, my point of view and myself than I ever did. It opened my heart and my eyes, made me a more respectful, patient, creative, braver and stronger person.

Another View of Human Culture

Matias Almeida Garzon (Ecuador)
ICYE volunteer in Mozambique

Human Rights have become a topic that is a little 'commercial' nowadays. When they are spoken of, they are taken as the base of our culture and an unbreakable golden rule, but when it comes to putting them into practice, various obstacles arise. Living in a world with so many different cultures, many concepts of human rights cannot be reconciled with the ways of life of certain cultures.

My name is Matías, I am Ecuadorian and I am taking part in a volunteering programme in Mozambique. For me, multiculturalism has always been fascinating and something which I have greatly respected. My father is from Ecuador and my mother is from Colombia, therefore I was raised in a multicultural environment, and although the two cultures are not hugely different, I felt an 'international' environment at home and it made me very proud to belong to two countries. Now in Mozambique I can learn about a new culture and its world-view. Although they have the same basic understanding of Human Rights, there exist divergences from my understanding, especially regarding gender equality. Here machismo prevails, much more than in my country. I have listened to my Mozambican host-mother, whilst gossiping with other people, refer to other women as incompetent or useless because they could not cook for their husbands, for which they would be considered useless. Although I am not in a position to react as generally I would in my country when faced with situations like this one, the people are aware of the different viewpoints that we have surrounding these controversial issues, as a volunteer I can communicate the vision of my culture, but never impose it.

My project works directly with the planning and implementation of development projects in rural areas of Mozambique. As a volunteer, I have been able to experience the realities that are directly linked to the problems in Mozambique, but I believe that this has not only been me as a result of the theme of my project, but all the volunteers in Mozambique. Although the themes of the projects and their areas of work are very different, someone who has decided to be a volunteer is prepared to be open to the world, to new cultures, their traditions and their people; with the sincerest objective of bringing help.

Volunteers Voices



Although the volunteers learn to be open and to adapt, the host families also end up learning about our culture and in this way an inevitable cultural exchange is produced. Just as ICYE was founded to reconcile (young) people after World War II, I believe that this premise remains alive today. Although there is still the erroneous idea that volunteers go to countries to 'save them', I think that they are little agents of change in forging a concept of international respect which surpasses borders. We do NOT perform miracles, but we are the bricks in the building of a united world.

"If something is worth doing...

Helene Joergensen (Denmark)
EVS volunteer in Kenya

... It is worth doing it properly", my dad always said to me. And what does that mean in the context of volunteering in a small school for children with disabilities in Kenya? To me it turned out to mean virtually everything.

It took me about one day to decide that the best thing I could do for eight months at the age of 29 was to travel to Kenya and work as a volunteer for children with disabilities. For the past couple of years, I had worked night and day as a researcher on the topics of disability and vulnerability along with volunteering on global causes. I didn't mind working hard, but at some point, I was getting myself lost in the many opportunities to try and do something for society that at best might have been mediocre. So I went to Kenya. Not to change the world, nor to be a voluntourist – but to breathe and find my own footing again in a context where I believed that my life's complexity would be reduced and where I would be able to easily distinguish between what is good and bad for me. And so the adventure began. I started working at Brook School for the Deaf and Autistic Children in a small working class suburb near Nairobi. From day one I embraced learning Swahili as well as Kenyan Sign Language and did my best to engage with anyone and everyone from the school and the local community. It paid off. Soon I found myself feeling relaxed and at home in Zimmerman to the extent where I started looking at ways of prolonging my time in Kenya.

Meanwhile, the work at the school started to morph into a much larger project. An idea of organising a big event for children and youth with disabilities was becoming more than an idea and soon the first ever Kenya National Festival for Youth & Children with Disabilities was in the making. Somehow, I ended up at the steering wheel of this vehicle, which was to drive 1000+ people with and without disabilities to

come together in Nairobi for a whole day in October 2015. How it all evolved and what the planning entailed is a story in itself, but what I find important to highlight is the purpose and opportunities arising with volunteering in the name of human rights in diversity. Initially, I didn't expect to make any revolutionary impact on my environment neither in Kenya nor in Denmark upon my return. I still don't expect any revolutions. What I do expect of myself is, however, that what I do, I do full-heartedly and with thorough reflection along the way. Because it is really easy to take a wrong turn and make a much less positive difference when trying to impose one's own cultural practice in a significantly different cultural context.



So what does full-heartedly mean? I think that depends on the eyes that see and the legs that move. To me, it means as my dad has always told me, if something is worth doing, it is also worth doing properly. Therefore, when the headmaster at the school presented the idea of a national disability festival to me, I saw it as a way of doing something significant about the disability rights violations in Kenya. Although the event date is yet to come and we still need funds to make it all happen, we have already engaged a large number of organisations and individuals, which speaks for itself on how great the need for and interest is in improving lives of persons with disabilities in Kenya. Next week, I am invited to speak at a disability sports event for about 1000 people although I don't have a disability, I am not Kenyan and the success of our festival is yet to take place. Okay, let's put aside the concern of 'postcolonial idolisation' of the global north and whether the event organisers' judgement is poor. It is still hard to see the relevance of a foreign white lady with no (identified) disabilities talking about disability in front of a local Kenyan community. Yes, I might have a relevant academic background and knowledge about disability in a Danish context, but putting that aside, I see that the work I have set out to do to make a push for change is already being noticed before our festival has taken place.

My point is not to celebrate myself for becoming popular in the disability community in Kenya but rather to show that a young volunteer from a faraway country is able to do something properly in the name of rights for children and young people with disabilities in Kenya. But obviously, this young volunteer is not doing the work on her own but is relying on a strong team to make the festival come together. And apart from making friends with new people from another culture, the teamwork of locals makes the project more sustainable and increases the chances of carrying the project forward after the volunteer travels back home. Only time will tell whether our project and my contributions make that all-important positive difference.

The Kids of Dom Orione

Magdalena Kuranda (Poland)
EVS volunteer in Mozambique

My name is Magdalena and I'm from Poland. It's been 6 months since I came to work as a volunteer in Maputo, the capital city of Mozambique. Every day I have to face the fact that in this country human rights are being violated. It hurts to see all the misery and the pain in the people's faces, but at the same time this pain reminds me of the reason why I am here. It keeps me motivated to show local communities how important it is to help each other, how giving instead of receiving is a blessing, and how to be a real change in the world.

The orphanage for disabled kids, where I work, tells terrifying stories about how the children got there. It is shocking that in the 21st century some people still don't know that a life is a gift and we have to treat it with all the respect it deserves. Camilo (name changed) is an 8 years old boy who lives in our center - Obra Dom Orione. His parents abandoned him because of his mental disorder when he was 4, so his grandma decided to take care of him. Unfortunately, she was under pressure from the people in the village, so she locked him in an empty, dark room. He was kept there for 3 years. This resulted in Camilo suffering a great deal and his mental condition worsening.



The kids at the center have a chance to live again, they have a chance to experience what it means to be loved and hugged. They have a chance to enjoy the sun.

One of many things that I learned while working in Obra Dom Orione is patience. Eating, walking, playing - everything takes more time with disabled children. But it doesn't mean that they are worse than other children, or that we can get upset easier because of them not being able to react as fast as we wish they would. They have full human rights and they have a

right to enjoy them and reach their full potential in education and in the community. Their views should be listened to and taken seriously, on an equal basis with other children. Let's help to develop disabled kids' abilities and competences! Let's always consider the best interest of disabled children! Let's listen to them!

Sharing knowledge to fight prejudices

Huong Nguyen (Sweden)
EVS volunteer in Vietnam

On my 24th birthday in November 2014, I looked back on my year as a 23-year old and thought of the goals I had accomplished and also the goals I have yet to reach. I graduated from university, majoring in social work and I got employment as a social worker in Stockholm. Naturally I wanted new goals for myself, and my new goals were to explore, learn and at the same time to do something meaningful - which lead me to where I am today, in the capital city of Vietnam, Hanoi.

Here in Hanoi, I am living in a house full of other volunteers from all over the world. My project is an organisation working to promote the rights for people with disabilities in Vietnam. They are working for a barrier-free society and sustainable development of people with disabilities in Vietnam. There are many negative myths and stereotypes about persons with disabilities. Most of them are due to a lack of knowledge which makes this kind of work important. It is challenging, as well as very fulfilling to conduct this type of work. I am impressed every day and inspired by the people I work with at my project.

I get to experience the cultural exchange just by being here in Hanoi and volunteering for a Vietnamese organisation. Since I live with people from all over the world, there are a lot of different cultures to adapt to. By living here, I get culture exchange beyond that of the Vietnamese culture.

We are all doing different projects, and we are from different parts of the world, but we are all still going through similar experiences and emotions, everything from cultural clashes to feeling overwhelmed by the kindness of strangers and to all being homesick. We have many volunteers that are working with disabled children and youth; hearing about their everyday experiences gives me an understanding of how important my work is and how important it is to communicate human rights.

Volunteers Voices



Being here has been such an opportunity to learn and I feel privileged to share what I have learnt. For if there is one thing I have learnt here, it is that knowledge is such a valuable treat. The fear of the unknown is probably how prejudices are created and why these negatives myths and stereotypes are all being made to begin with. So, my new goals for my 25th birthday are going to involve sharing my experiences and share the things I have learnt from my time being in Hanoi.

Changing my life through experiences

Claudia Lizeth Flores Matute (Honduras)
EVS volunteer in Poland

My experience is difficult to explain because it is something extremely different from my life in my country. I've experienced a lot of new feelings through my work as a volunteer in different situations working with disabled people. I know that these people are happy and accept themselves and others regardless of their disability. I enjoy doing my best to help them.

The trainings: questions and answers, solving our doubts. Those were great days that we spent getting to know that we are humans who live in the same world but in different countries and have many different things such as culture, ideology, language and opinions, but all of us had the same intention of going to another country to help others. We came to Poland without knowing the people who we were going to help and sometimes without knowing very well what we were going to do. During the first training, we had the opportunity to clarify our doubts. We got clear responses to our questions, and all the differences between us and our different experiences were respected. The thing that we have in common is that we are young and will gain new skills. We have a great opportunity to get to know the cultures of other countries. All of us had to leave our families and friends and sometimes even studies behind, and we came to Poland to live an unforgettable and unique experience. Regardless of the different languages we spoke, we discovered that there are different ways of communication and that the most important thing is to be motivated to help other people without ex-

pecting anything in return. We got to know different cultures, opinions and thoughts.

Human Rights, the theme of my EVS project, is something that we are entitled to by virtue of being human. The problem is that a lot of people currently don't respect that. We are free to speak and express our feelings regardless of our physical or other conditions. Nobody can say what is best for us and shouldn't make decisions for us.



My experiences and the things that I learned have made me stronger. I am a young girl, I am interested in human rights and I like sharing my knowledge on it. When I go back home, I will share my experiences with my family, friends and the organisation that I collaborate with. I will share the knowledge I gained during my EVS and my impressions about differences between cultures, in particular my country and Poland.

The diversity of diversity

Brónagh Mairead Grace (Ireland)
ICYE volunteer in Ecuador

Human Rights belong to everyone. Everyone should have access to these rights regardless of who they are or where they come from. They are universal. However, all too often it is where we find difference or vulnerability that we find the denial of human rights. Members of the LGBT community, people with disabilities, those living in poverty - these groups are just a sprinkling of the people in society who are frequently marginalised and whose rights are ignored and abused. The Human Rights which are supposed to protect diversity falter when faced with it.

My name is Brónagh and I am an Irish volunteer in Ecuador. Ecuador is a beautiful and fascinating country. Sitting here in Quito we are surrounded by incredible mountains which dwarf the rolling hills I'm used to in Ireland. The sun shines down from a sparkling blue sky most days; the food, from ceviche to locro, is delicious and the Salsa is as lively as my bus journey to work. Despite the differences, though, I have noticed similarities to Ireland: people are friendly, potatoes are plentiful. I've only been here a month but I feel fairly settled, the nerves of the first week have dissipated and I'm excited about making the most of my time here.

I'm working in the VASE office (Voluntariado Para La Ayuda Social Del Ecuador), the ICYE committee here in Ecuador. The reactions of my fellow volunteers to this in our orientation camp were amusing. 'Did you choose that?' was a common response, as if I was facing some sort of punishment. I suppose most people don't want to sit behind a desk and do largely administrative work, opting rather to be on the ground in projects, partaking in practical activities. But I did choose this. I specifically asked for something administrative. There were a range of reasons: professional experience, a deeper insight into the running of an NGO, the possibility of engaging in both written and oral Spanish and honestly, strange as it may sound, I quite like organising. And so I find myself here, answering volunteers' questions, visiting projects, sending emails, and I'm really enjoying it. Seeing how such an organisation functions was a particularly key reason and already I'm beginning to see how each piece fits together, not only the practical aspects of the work but the propelling ethos behind it. ICYE, and VASE in turn, works on the principal of promoting human rights, particularly the right to peace. The theory? That if we can share, understand and appreciate our cultures and thus diversity we can learn to collaborate and communicate to resolve conflicts; if we know and care about another place and people we will foster and protect each other's rights, not just our own. Thus the programme celebrates the diversity of culture. But this is not all, because to me ICYE is structured around a double-layering of diversity: the diversity of the volunteers who come from a multitude of countries and backgrounds, in turn working with project beneficiaries who represent the diversity which exists in every society. Whether this be street children, women who have been trafficked or refugees, the spectrum of realities which ICYE projects together represent is vast and highlights the breadth of the organisation's support in ensuring human rights are respected in diversity.



My role enables me to see this. I find it the perfect perch from which to observe and learn about the diversity of the projects. The other volunteers learn about the diversity of humans, an in-depth look at the realities of a particular group. However, my insight into diversity is of a different kind. It is an over-

arching view of the projects, people, social issues, combative approaches and challenges which exist. The diversity of diversity. To me, this is not boring. It is fascinating. The dedicated staff in the office are like silent players in a complex chess game, manoeuvring pieces to make this great network of volunteering, cultural exchange, mutual support and teaching possible. And their ultimate aim? The biggest and perhaps most overwhelming there can be: Human Rights. It is at the heart of VASE in the same way it is at the heart of ICYE. The right to equality, to safety, to freedom, to peace.

„Go on, chase your dreams!“

Yogi Panggayuh (Indonesia)
EVS Volunteer in the UK

Young people have to jump out their comfort zone to play roles in resolving issues. Problems and even violence may occur while interacting with people, and also some problems burdening people, whose rights are deprived, their disability or incapability ruins their lives. It cannot be left any longer. The courage and passion in helping each other will call forth a peaceful world. I was that person who watched a couple of action movies with a cup of hot chocolate during my most active hour at home. I was that person who loved to hang out and have fun all day long with friends. Enjoying that life is amazing, but are you sure everyone has pleasure in their life? How can they live if they cannot afford their basic needs like food and shelter? We know that basic human desires consist of psychological needs, safety, love/ belonging, esteem and self-actualisation. You may say he has to try, take action, and move on and on. But does it help? Critique never helps them, my friends. They really need our help and it has to be real, not only words. Remember *acta non verba*, action speaks louder than words. I found that I had to link my comfort zone with a more contagious happiness for others, to be a more helpful man. I am not going to break my comfort zone but expand it to reach the positive element of humanity. For me, the easiest way is to be a volunteer. As volunteers, we can help anyone anywhere and anytime. We can start from the smallest and provide the biggest support.

The pleasure of helping addicted me more and more. It has driven me to participate in the international EVS program. I got a placement in a charity organisation called Freshwinds in Birmingham. I am so grateful that I can help people to overcome various barriers in looking for jobs, accessing health therapy and getting welfare support and benefits. Supporting people in the job club is a special experience for me. I see many depressed people come through the door; the world is changing into a beast for them. It is cruel, so competitive. For those who do not have enough education, qualification or experience, this urgent basic need is driving them mad, particularly relevant to the minorities. In applying for a job, they have to send a CV, a covering letter, fill forms. All of these are computerized forms which are too much for them.

Volunteers Voices



They do not apply for fancy jobs, just survival jobs to feed themselves without begging. I was shocked the first time that there is such high competition to get a job as a cleaner, picking and packing or in a warehouse. How they can compete if their presence has already deprived them of the very basic needs. In my country, Indonesia, an unemployed individual can easily create his own work by selling food, drink, reselling people's products. There are big opportunities for entrepreneurs. But here, they cannot do the same things as in Indonesia even if they are willing. The only way is for them to come to the job centre and get referrals from some helpful organisation like Freshwinds. To be honest, it is not difficult for the younger generation to help them. We are familiar with computers, writing CVs, searching for jobs on websites and sending emails. In creating a CV and covering letter, we can learn how to do a good layout and apply it to the people's profiles.

I remembered the first time I did it; I found the happiest expression on their faces. It was so relieving. The world will be so much more beautiful if people who are struggling to put in their best efforts can be supported by us. We will say "Go on chase your dreams, whenever you need help, you know to whom you can turn!"

Viewing my life at home in a completely new way

Halla Gunnarsdottir (Iceland)
EVS Volunteer in Indonesia

My life in Indonesia has been very interesting, filled both with good and bad experiences. A usual day for me here starts around 5:30 each morning, and then I wake up and take a shower. It is not a shower like we know it in Europe, there is a large basin filled with water and then a bucket you use to pour the water over yourself, it is very cold. After that I eat breakfast which is usually rice, meat and boiled vegetables.



The food in Indonesia is amazing, you will have something new every day and you also find a lot of different fruits here you didn't even know existed.

After my morning routine, I go to school sometimes in a local bus and sometimes on the back of a motorcycle. In the beginning, I didn't have much to do and I mainly observed the classes. I had a hard time fitting into the community and I soon found that I couldn't have chosen a country with a more different culture. My school had very poor children in it, but they still got their education because it was funded by the government and a private organisation. So they got their basic right to education there, and even though it is maybe very basic, at least they learn how to read and write. I therefore learned not to take everything for granted and to appreciate my life at home.

Every day I support teaching in 5 classes and it is a little difficult because the school system here is completely different. Everything is about copying and learning by heart. I soon found out that not only am I helping to teach them English but, more importantly, how important it is to speak another language. Because the children in my school are poor, some have difficult backgrounds and do not get any support at home. Working in a school in a new country takes you out of your comfort zone, it has taught me many things, but mainly to believe in myself.

I have also participated in other projects, for example: I went to different elementary schools to support teachers, I have been a judge in an English competition, and I have helped restoring a temple. When I was restoring the temple, there were volunteers from other countries, for examples, from Tunisia, Austria, America, Egypt and of course Indonesia. We all had different religions and traditions, but we all came together and restored a temple and learned a lot about Indonesian culture and heritage. We were all so

different but we had so much fun together.

In my travels around Indonesia, I saw how vast the country is and that it has so many different dialects and cultures that are nice to explore. I have had an amazing experience that will change me forever and make me view my life at home in a completely new way.

Faces of equality

Isabel Fernandez Garcia (Finland)
EVS volunteer in Honduras.

The first four months I lived in a middle class family in a middle class neighbourhood. Every day I used buses to get around. I participated in the cleaning of the house and cooking. After four months, I changed families. I moved to a good and safe neighbourhood in a private street with security. My life changed and became more secure. I don't use buses anymore. I am also able to take warm showers every day, which was not possible in the other family. In our home, there are housekeepers so cleaning and house work doesn't take up my time anymore.

These two realities are real life in Honduras. There is also a third reality in the society for those who live in unsafe zones, where gangs lead and rule. People might not have water, no access to healthcare services or schools and they have to spend their time taking care of their basic needs.

Centro Estudio de la Mujer works on women rights in Honduras. It works for the rights of the people who are in weak positions in society. In particular, they are working to improve the position of women. They provide education and empower girls and women on sexual rights, political participation and economic education. In Honduras, there are big income differences and there is a vast lack of reading and writing skills. I took part in a project which was building a community centre in a poor area in Tegucigalpa. Like so many other areas in Honduras, access to healthcare services and schools is not easy. There is no water system, and many people do not have the ability to read or write. While I took part in building the community centre in Manzanal, I talked with kids in that area. The kids told me that they didn't have an English teacher in school, but they still have to give exams. Based on these conversations and my experiences working in Centro estudio de la mujer, I started to plan my own project. I wanted to combine the need for teaching English to the kids and the need to improve knowledge of equality, and give them tools and motivation to develop their life. Last week we started the English course in Manzanal; there were about 25 children participating. We will have 10 classes studying English and good values through different kinds of activities. We are also planning to have

two educational workshops for all people in an area of Manzanal. On two Saturdays, it will be 'education for everybody' about women's right, healthcare, and other related subjects.



Can a human being influence which one of these realities becomes her reality? Can I choose my family and my reality? Can these children choose their family or living situations? Should everybody have access to healthcare and have an opportunity to receive an education? Faces of equality.

Sowing seeds of peace and inclusion

Sara Vaca (Ecuador),
EVS volunteer in Austria

When I knew that I had been chosen to be part of the project "Communicating Human Rights in Diversity", I realised that this event would change my entire life. After almost 4 months of this experience, I don't stop learning and discovering something every day.

Vienna is a perfect city, full of culture, different people, languages and history. It represents a big challenge to live here, day by day, I started to learn German and the culture, met new people who have become my real friends. A safe city with the best transportation system I have ever been in. In this part of the world, I enjoyed the long sunny days, but on the other hand, fruits are not tasty, and after a while I realized that I could keep my fruits for two weeks and then they get ripe.

I feel honored to be in the Project "Kinderinitiative-Hort Goldrichtig", working with young minds. Sharing the awesome learning process together fulfills me every day. Since the first day, the team has given me great support in everything. This place has become my personal school, where I learnt my first words, particular behaviors and new delicious vegetarian recipes. Together we have enjoyed a sleepover, discovered new places and animals in the forest, built paper doves and clay figures and finally do the unwanted "Hausaufgaben" (homework) every day.

While I was in the “Communicating Human Rights in Diversity” training, I realized how limited my knowledge was. I was discovering rights which apparently are obvious or implicit, but it doesn’t mean that those are applied and/or respected by all around the world. Thanks to Grenzenlos, I had the opportunity to be a leader in an Inclusion summer camp. There I found the perfect time to cross borders in the same place, sowing seeds of peace and inclusion to young people from more than ten different countries. It took me more than three hours to conduct the workshop, various exercises and questions came up as a result, and we agreed that each society has problems and we could improve it. The first step is information and the next is action.

I feel glad to be in Austria at a moment when the refugee crisis is so strong, understanding the reality of some cultures and people who only claim freedom. I see smiling faces all the way in the train station because of the feeling of safety, being far from a war without an end. Austrians welcome refugees with food, clothes, smiles and new opportunities. However there is too much to do, the next day I met a young homeless guy, seriously hurt in his face in the metro station. On this day, I felt helpful because of his simple words of gratitude, but I also learnt something sad: a simple white sticker in his jacket not only means that he is homeless, but it also means less help and indifference from other people. We need more people concerned about others.



Life brings us to the right place at the right time. When I started this beautiful adventure, I thought it will be a huge opportunity to look at the world differently. Now I know that this experience will mark my future life as I sow seeds of peace and inclusion in diverse souls. I am thankful to the Austrian community, Kinderinitiative-Hort Goldrichtig, VASE Foundation, Grenzenlos, and ICYE & ERASMUS+, because of their wish to write part of my personal story and let me write some lines in the people’s stories.

Lagos: bridging inequality in education between rich and poor

Patricia Siegert (Germany)
EVS volunteer in Nigeria

Human Rights – a big word including many elementary issues which should be provided for everybody in the world. Human Rights should be the anchor of every human society, but still in 2015 we are far away from this aim.

I am Patricia, 29 years old, from Germany. I arrived in Lagos, Nigeria in April, in other words, I have already spent more than 6 month in the 18 million mega city. I am working for an NGO called “Hope for HIV/AIDS International”. This organization owns a school in one of the slum communities of Lagos. My main work is looking for funds, food items, clothes, school material and making sure that the salaries for the teachers is available. From time to time, the NGO gets some big grants through which different projects in the poor communities can be implemented. The idea is: Providing an exchange between the more privileged children going to really expensive private schools and our kids in the slum. Therefore we are driving from private school to private school and sensitizing the head of the schools, teachers, pupils and their parents about the critical situation of some rural areas in Lagos and asking for their support.

With only the few sentences I wrote to explain my work, I could fill pages with so many different issues concerning the human rights topic. So let me pick one: equality in education and in the living situation in Lagos. In our project, we offer education for free and there are governmental schools that are for free. Then we have a big range of private schools where the school fees can be up to 5000 Euro each term (15000 Euro yearly). Not only between school fees do we have this kind of difference, but also with the equipment you can find in the school and especially the quality of the education itself. While in governmental schools, the environment is absolutely not affordable – missing windows, broken desks and chairs, dirty walls, insufficient sanitary facilities, etc., the standard in the expensive private schools is really high (e.g. swimming pool, different sport activities, computer rooms). In addition to that, the teaching and pedagogical methods are often quite different. The ranges go from just repeating school themes from

books, punishing mistakes or the misbehaviour of the pupils by beating them rather than treating the young kids like individuals and enabling them to self-development and personal responsibility.



I also want to highlight that because of my work I am travelling around Lagos. I have the possibility to see the whole range of social living situations. On the one hand, our slum community is built on dust and waste at the edge of the lagoon, people living in wooden barracks surrounded by dirt and polluted water and unhygienic circumstances. As for me, I would say that I am living among the lower middle class in one of the most crowded areas in Lagos in an average apartment with typical Nigerian electricity and water issues. But there is the other side of Lagos where people don't know what to spend their money on because they already have 5 cars, one or more huge houses with gardens, pools and security staff, you need in such cases, a driver, a maid, etc. Can the inequality between human beings be more obvious than this?

Photo: Donations from a private school

Diversity, Human Rights and New Horizons

Toka Davani (UK)
EVS volunteer in Colombia

For five months now I have been living and volunteering in Bogotá, Colombia. My project, Fundación Colombia Nuevos Horizontes (FCNH), is a small NGO on the outskirts of the city. FCNH's main mission is to protect Colombians who have been forced to flee their homes and abandon their livelihoods due to threats and/or violence resulting from the long-standing armed conflict that still plagues part of the country. The foundation offers its service users temporary shelter, food, clothing, and support in the process of seeking work and accommodation, so that these families and individuals can begin to rebuild their lives.

Since the Colombian government's safety net provisions for this group (which according to UNHCR figures from 2015 is approaching six million people) are markedly inadequate, displaced people often experience a high level of vulnerability and run risks such as ending up living on the street or drifting into criminal networks. While the foundation cannot combat the root causes that result in the displacement itself, it strives to help prevent the human rights of its service users from being further violated in the volatile and precarious period that often follows displacement.

Human rights and the defence of diversity are inextricably linked, and their connection is particularly salient in a country such as Colombia where a myriad of cultural and ethnic groups have long co-existed, much of the time turbulently. Receiving and assisting displaced people from all over the country and placing emphasis on non-discrimination and on valuing all who call on the service for who they are, FCNH, to me, represents an apt forum for communicating human rights in diversity. Their focus on protection and support based on basic rights rather than any distinctions between people, paired at the same time with respect for each person's identity and personal dignity, forms a strong basis for the organisation.

On a personal level, volunteering in this environment has been deeply educative and humbling. I have been able to interact with people who I would likely never otherwise have had a chance to meet, and have had the privilege of hearing their stories of hardships and resilience in the face of grave human rights abuses. In turn, adding another facet to the experience with regards to communicating human rights in diversity, I have also been met with much interest and curiosity about my own background. As someone who originally hails from Iran, a country with a rather murky human rights record, I have been able to have some interesting exchanges on the topic and share some stories and perspectives of my own. Opening up a mutual dialogue on these important issues in this way, and being able to relate to and learn from different people in the foundation, has been the most rewarding and satisfying aspect of my time in Colombia.



Austria: “Zusammen Leben” Mentoring Program and German Course for Refugees in Vienna



During the past months, the world and media has focused intensely on the refugee situation in Europe. Grenzenlos has been actively involved with this target group since 2010 through its program “Zusammen Leben” (“Living Together”) aimed at mentoring migrants with an asylum status. The program consists of bringing the local population together with the newcomers and support them during the initial stages of integration – speaking and helping them to learn German, showing them around Vienna and its many offers, helping them with the many and most often difficult bureaucratic paths, and opening doors to enable them to meet new people and expand their circle of friends. Grenzenlos is also offering free German courses for asylum seekers, who do not get any support from the state.

There is much to be done, and this is just the beginning. Grenzenlos is happy to be part of this process and to continue working for intercultural understanding and exchange.

Austria: Civil Courage Training Course 2015

Grenzenlos/ICYE AUSTRIA organized and hosted 2 training courses on Civil Courage this past summer.



The first seminar, which was called: “I CAN DO IT! How to support civil courage with the EVS project”, took place in Vienna from 30 May - 6 June 2015. The second seminar was called “Stand up! Support Civil Courage with your youth projects” and took place in Tulln, Austria, from 5 – 12 July. The key aims comprised promoting and sensitizing on civil courage, sharing methods to empower and motivate young people to take a stance against racism and inequality.

Brazil: Intercultural Weekend with the Movimento sem Terra-Landless Workers Movement



On 12th and 13th September ICYE Brazil’s long-term volunteers (from Germany, France and Finland) had a special intercultural experience in Alvorada, a city close to Porto Alegre, Brazil. A local volunteer Eduardo, who runs a language school together with his German wife, invited the volunteers for an informal chat with their students about their countries and culture. The students asked them questions about life in Europe, and of course the volunteers had the chance to ask the students about Brazil. After the visit to the school, the volunteers were invited to spend the night at the home of a couple, who live at a MST settlement in Viamão (Movimento sem Terra-Landless Workers Movement <http://www.mst.org.br/>). The family, which grows biodynamic rice, lives in a simple wooden house and opened their doors to receive the foreign visitors with typical food and drinks. The volunteers got to learn about rural life in Brazil and organic farming and of course to taste and buy some of the locally grown fruits and vegetables. They also got to watch wildlife around the settlement.

The idea of the weekend was to get an insight into other realities of Brazilian society, have the chance to talk to representatives from a political and social movement, and to give Brazilian students the chance to get to know people who speak the languages they are studying, to hear about other countries and the life

Sweden: Work Camp – Peace and Love Festival



In July 2015 ICYE Sweden / PeaceWorks Sweden organized a work camp during the annual Peace and Love Festival in Borlänge, Sweden. Peace and Love is a music festival based on the concept of diversity, understanding and solidarity and attracts more than 20 000 visitors every year. The work camp aimed at raising awareness of peace and how to take action for peace. The participants of the work camp encouraged festival visitors to take part in the Action Square arena, where they were invited to join in competitions, games, discussions and debates about peace and young people's participation and organisation in Swedish society and internationally.

Ecuador: Cooperation Agreement between ICYE Ecuador/VASE and France Volontaires



On April the first, the cooperation agreement between France Volontaires and ICYE Ecuador/VASE was signed to develop a complementary relationship based on shared values around volunteering. The agreement was signed in the presence of Fabien Moury (First Counselor of the Embassy of France), Carlos Salazar (France Volontaires Representative for the Andean countries and Peru), Belen Mora (Executive Director of VASE), and Evelyne Ladet (French volunteer coordinator).

This cooperation shows the ties between French and Ecuadorian civil societies, concerning solidarity's promotion and social development through a quality volunteering.

France Volontaires is a platform created in 2009 to promote and develop different forms of involvement relevant to International Exchange and Solidarity Volunteering and to contribute to their implementation.

Multilateral Project: Volunteers at the Interface between Formal and Non-Formal Education

The new Erasmus+ Key Action 2 project "Volunteers at the Interface between Formal and Non-Formal Education" centrally coordinated by the ICYE International Office has been approved by the European Commission.

The project seeks to reinforce links between formal and non-formal education. It aims to make learning an interactive and collaborative process that inspires young people, in particular youth with fewer opportunities, to partake in learning and acquire knowledge. The majority of young volunteers worldwide are engaged in formal education, e.g. in schools, adult education centres, etc. The project also aims to strengthen the volunteers' work and contributions in the formal educational projects. Volunteers therefore play a key role in supporting teachers and educators to introduce and use the new non-formal education methodology in the classroom to improve delivery of formal educational content.

The project comprises different components:

- Training for non-formal – formal educators in February 2016
- An EVS project for 8 months from April – November 2016, which involves 16 ICYE National Committees, 12 host projects and 14 volunteers.
- Trainings of volunteers during the EVS, so they can support teachers and educators to introduce a non-formal methodology in their projects.
- Evaluation of the project to take place in March 2017, followed by the publication of non-formal education tools and resources for formal education.