

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	Sdruzenie Yuni Partners – (Association Euni Partners)
PIC number:	967602452
Project name and acronym:	European Alliance for Volunteer Support – learnings from Covid-19 crisis — ERAS II

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	2
Event name:	Improving conditions for the development of volunteering post-Covid-19
Type:	Participatory methods-based workshops and discussions, conference, photo exhibition
In situ/online:	In situ
Location:	Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad
Date(s):	15.06.2023 – 17.06.2023
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.erasnetwork.eu/
Participants	
Female:	34
Male:	22
Non-binary:	N/A
From country 1 [Portugal]:	2 participants

From country 2 [Latvia]:	2 participants		
From country 3 [Greece]:	2 participants		
From country 4 [Slovenia]:	2 participants		
From country 5 [Bulgaria]:	48 participants		
Total number of participants:	56	From total number of countries:	5

Description

Between 15th – 17th of June 2023 Association Euni Partners organized and hosted the 2nd international event within the project ERAS II in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. Six remarkable volunteering initiatives were presented over the three days, followed by an exhibition, showing how these volunteers act on the field.

On the first day, the speakers Mrs. Efrosina Kostova - Volunteer „Caps for Future“ and Mr. Boyan Kondurov - Chief Inspector Engineer Fire Safety and Population Protection, Blagoevgrad presented best practices from their experience. Mrs. Efrosina Kostova gave us insight into the National Campaign „Caps for Future“ for saving children’s lives and what has been done during Covid-19. After that, Mr. Boyan Kondurov talked about the firefighters`voluntary teams in times of crisis, how they act, what challenges they face on a regular basis and the recent missions they participated in.

During the second day Mr. Georgi Botev - Chief of Mountain Rescue Service south-west region and Mrs. Ani Andonova - Regional expert – Of youth Work in the Bulgarian Youth Red Cross – Blagoevgrad shared the activities of the youth structure, as well as the services and initiatives they implemented during Covid-19 and other crises.

A workshop based on participatory methods "Volunteering in times of crisis" was held on the same day where they had to identify essential challenges and issues volunteers may face during their service and how to cope with them. Over 30 young participants from Bulgaria, along with project partners from Slovenia, Portugal, Latvia and Greece, collaborated to address problems commonly faced in volunteerism and devised innovative solutions. From these insights and suggestions, we created a handbook on overcoming challenges in volunteerism:

<https://www.erasnetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ERAS-Handbook-Overcoming-challenges-in-volunteerism.pdf>

During the last day of the event, two best practices in volunteering were presented. Mr. Petar Petrov and Mrs. Liliya Angelska - Volunteers in the Social Kitchen at “St.Nikola” Church shared their inspiring cause - to take care of poor and socially excluded people, through providing them meals, clothes and a good word. Mr. Petrov explained how they started their initiative, how they manage to sustain it and what they did during Covid-19 in order to support those in need. Mrs. Slavina Georgieva - a volunteer and regional coordinator for Blagoevgrad of Association „Operation Teddy Bear“, presented another long-standing initiative for supporting and helping children, youth, and adults with fewer opportunities.

Presented programs and good practices as well as sharing of the knowledge and experience gave the participants an opportunity to develop an international network of contacts. It also enabled them to improve their skills and gain knowledge on volunteering and crisis response. Partners and participants were also able to transfer the good practices they learned about and/or adapt and improve their volunteer practices by incorporating elements of good practices from other countries. By encouraging and inspiring citizens to join volunteer programs, NGOs and organisations with volunteer programs reinforced their staff. Through inviting citizens to participate in the activities and discussions we provided them with the opportunity for democratic participation and active citizenship.

Local citizens were included in majority of project activities, mostly they were volunteers from local organisations, young people from local community and visitors of the photo exhibition. The volunteers from local organisations contributed their input at the discussions (shared their experience of volunteering during crisis, their opinion on how local authorities should support development of volunteering, provided information on what kind of support is already available for volunteers and their organisations, how their gender contributed to their chosen volunteer work etc). The young participated in the participatory methods-based workshop in which they provided their outlook and their input on challenges and issues volunteers may face during their service and how to cope with them. The visitors of the photo exhibition were the ones we tried to inspire and encourage to volunteer with the presented stories and good practices.

Throughout the duration of the project partners have strived to create an environment open and welcome to all, regardless of their gender. We have tried to write our texts in a gender non-excluding way so that men, women,

and non-binary people were equally addressed. This includes registration forms, documents, texts on the internet and press releases, advertising for events, etc. We also paid attention to a gender-sensitive choice of images when preparing public relations material.

Testimonies of participants:

»My participation in Blagoevgrad was an enriching experience that provided me with insights into various European volunteer initiatives. During these days, I was introduced to different approaches to engage a diverse audience in these activities, as well as examples of how they have the power to change the lives of the average citizen in meaningful ways. I also had the opportunity to learn about the dynamics and constraints related to the organization of volunteer programs, along with strategies on how to overcome them. From this meeting, I take home not only a deeper understanding of the reality of European volunteering, but also some innovative ideas that I hope to implement in my community.« (Participant from Portugal)

»I had the opportunity to participate in an event in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, where I had the chance to meet with colleagues from the Red Cross Blagoevgrad. This exchange of knowledge and experiences was invaluable and further solidified the importance of collaboration within the volunteer community. I also attended the opening of an international exhibition in Bulgaria with the theme Volunteering in the time of Covid-19. This event served as a powerful reminder of the significant contributions made by volunteers in the fight against the pandemic. It was a great experience to witness our collective efforts' impact and see how volunteer work plays a crucial role in addressing critical challenges. I felt deeply honored that my contributions as a volunteer at the University Clinical Center Ljubljana during the pandemic were acknowledged and appreciated. This recognition reinforces the importance of volunteerism and its impact on our communities. During the exhibition's opening, I had the privilege of sharing my experiences as a volunteer with the other attendees. It is my sincere hope that these stories, served as an inspiration to encourage others to join in and support the causes they are passionate about, promoting solidarity and volunteerism. « (Participant from Slovenia)

»I had the privilege of attending the 2nd international event organized by Association Euni Partners as part of the ERAS II project in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, from June 15th to 17th, 2023. Over three days, we were introduced to six remarkable volunteering initiatives, each with a unique story to tell. They shared their heartwarming mission of caring for the less fortunate, even in the face of Covid-19 challenges. This event was a profound reminder of the incredible impact of volunteer-driven initiatives in times of crisis. It underscored the dedication, creativity, and resilience of volunteers, leaving us with invaluable lessons and inspiration for our own volunteer endeavours. « (Participant from Greece)

» I found the training quite useful and enriching. The presentations of the different activities in the field were great and the workshop helped us to exchange experiences and knowledge with the participants from other countries, who were exceptional people. We had many common topics to talk about and the event became a unique experience. « (Participant from Bulgaria)

» I really enjoyed the event in Bulgaria and all the activities and presentations that were included. They were very educational, useful, and interesting because I met many other people from different countries and nationalities and was able to hear their opinions about volunteering and what they do. The assignments were very informative and on important topics. Overall, it was a very enlightening and useful event! « (Participant from Bulgaria)

The event description sheet is published on the project partners websites:

- Municipality of Litija, Slovenia: <https://www.litija.si/objava/826077>
- Društvo za podpora civilne družbe, Slovenia: <http://consulta.si/www.consulta.si/eras>
- Association Euni Partners, Bulgaria: https://eunipartners.com/en_qb/eras-ii-learnings-from-covid-19/
- Institoyto Koinonikis Kainotomais Kai Synoxis, Greece: <https://fifty-fifty.gr/eras-ii/>
- DDTG Nonprofit Kft., Hungary: <https://www.ddtg.eu/eras-ii>
- Municipality of Orfu, Hungary <https://orfu.govern-soft.hu/page.php?49>
- Municipality of Lousada, Portugal: <https://www.cm-lousada.pt/pages/152>
- Municipality of Kekava, Latvia: <https://kekava.lv/nekategorizets/eras-projekta-ietvaros-sniedz-atbalstu-brivpratiqo-darbam/>
- Solis Tuvak, Latvia: https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0vJkmJJanTqhVaJcQoctL9BLVrwXzj28o4FNWi15rgBqbR9MM3WwW2ZPifTBpQHM7I&id=100064259666226&paipv=0&eav=AfZKGsaRlnGfU0TnXm0t m-YK7IQddZpJQimEmZ9rVhzosGS7KZiSrnqqBwmRYWW93i0&.rdr

Link to media releases about the project: <https://www.erasnetwork.eu/media/>