

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	Social Innovation and Cohesion Institute (Fifty-Fifty)
PIC number:	928680717
Project name and acronym:	European Alliance for Volunteer Support – learnings from Covid-19 crisis — ERAS II

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	3
Event name:	Improving conditions for the development of volunteering post-Covid-19
Type:	Discussions, conference, good practices exchange
In situ/online:	In situ
Location:	Greece, Thessaloniki
Date(s):	19. 6. – 21. 6. 2023
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.erasnetwork.eu/
Participants	
Female:	30
Male:	21
Non-binary:	
From country 1 Greece:	43

From country 2 Slovenia	4		
From country 3 Portugal:	2		
From country 4 Hungary	2		
Total number of participants:	51	From total number of countries:	4

Description

The Third International Event on "Volunteering in Times of Crisis" took place from June 19th to June 21st, 2023, in Thessaloniki, Greece. Hosted by the Social Innovation & Cohesion Institute - Fifty Fifty, the event provided an opportunity for partners from various countries to come together and share their experiences regarding the contribution of volunteering during times of crisis.

On the first day of the event, which was June 19th, attendees had the honor of listening to the Vice President of the Youth Municipal Council of Thessaloniki, who served as the keynote speaker. He spoke passionately about volunteer actions undertaken in 7 different topics, highlighting the significant value of volunteering for the community. During his speech, the challenges faced by volunteers were brought to the forefront, including financial and housing issues. The speaker also emphasized the particular challenge during the quarantine period when the need for volunteering was met exclusively through the internet. Moreover, the speaker underscored the immense contribution of volunteers to the community, emphasizing their crucial role in improving the quality of life for people in crisis and those in need.

On the second day, June 20th, the ERAS II International Event continued with an array of inspiring speeches and visits to significant places. One of the speakers was the President of the Youth Activation Network of Katerini, who shared valuable insights into the volunteering actions in their area, showcasing the dedication and value of volunteering during crises. In addition to the inspiring speeches, participants visited the "Europe Direct" European Information Center, where they gained a comprehensive understanding of the European Union's support for youth participation in actions and initiatives. The day also included an engaging meeting with the Deputy Mayor of Pylaia-Chortiatis municipality, who discussed the volunteer action they manage, titled "Break the Silence." This initiative focuses on supporting abused women and brought attention to the crucial role of volunteer work in the community. The day concluded with the opening of the photography exhibition titled "Volunteer Actions during the COVID-19 Period," which beautifully captured the dedication and solidarity of volunteers during the pandemic.

On the last day, June 21st, participants had the privilege of visiting the street magazine "Shedia" and engaging in conversations with one of the magazine's sellers. This project offered a unique opportunity for socially vulnerable population groups, such as the homeless, unemployed, and those living below the poverty line, to earn a minimum, decent income, and break free from social isolation. During this visit, a vendor shared a deeply touching personal story, highlighting how participation in Shedia had profoundly changed his life. The event also provided an opportunity to discuss the invaluable contribution of volunteers who actively participate in social programs and activities, supporting the Shedia vendor network, the national homelessness group, and the social and environmental program "Shedia Art." The event showcased the immense significance of social networks and volunteer action during times of crisis as powerful platforms for positive change in society, truly making a difference in people's lives.

Part of the activity of the event was also the collection of good practices of volunteering support in the municipalities of partner organizations. We have collected all types of support for volunteering provided by the municipality or other institutions available in the cities involved. For best practices, we have prepared a detailed description of how the provided support is implemented by the municipality or other institutions, how the support affects local volunteer organizations and the development of volunteering, the main effects and results of this good practice, and information on the resources needed for implementation. Good practices of volunteering support in municipalities are published on the ERAS website: <https://www.erasnetwork.eu/category/regulation-and-support-for-volunteering/>

Local citizens were included in majority of project activities, mostly they were volunteers from local organisations, students and visitors of the photo exhibition. The students and volunteers from local organisations contributed their input at the discussions on how local authorities should support development of volunteering, provided information on what kind of support is already available for volunteers and their organisations etc. Students also participated in the presentation of opportunities in the EU shared their experience with volunteer work and learned about the volunteer opportunities of the European Solidarity Corps. 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. 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:

»The opportunity to visit Greece and learn about their best practices holds great significance for me, especially given my active involvement in volunteer work, where I dedicate a substantial amount of time working with young people. NGOs in Slovenia face many challenges in their work, but after my visit to Greece, I have realized that we receive much more support from the government, municipalities, and other organizations committed to the development of volunteerism. While in Greece, NGOs are still grappling with financial and societal support. The youth sector is particularly active in this regard, as despite the obstacles faced by NGOs, young people are actively establishing associations and conducting campaigns to raise awareness about social issues, develop the potential of youth, and organize various sports and cultural events.« (Participant from Slovenia)

»The ERAS II project visit to Greece was a valuable experience for me, both professionally and personally. It was a very enriching and unforgettable experience, it provided me with the sharing of experiences and good practices in the area of volunteering in times of crisis, having the opportunity to know the culture and identity of the country. What touched me most was the fact that it is a municipality that fights every day to implement volunteering, and that faces many obstacles and challenges to achieve it. The financial aspect is the most concerning because they lack adequate support from the competent authorities. Another moment that marked me was the visit to the Municipality of Pylaia-Chortiatis, where we had the honor of meeting the Deputy Mayor, who told us about the voluntary action they administer entitled "Breaking the Silence". This project focuses on supporting and helping women victims of abuse. The Deputy Mayor shared with us the history and work behind this initiative, highlighting the importance of volunteer work in the community. Through volunteering in various areas, volunteers contribute to improving the quality of life of people in crisis and in need«. (Participant from Portugal)

»The greatest experience for me was how exemplary the Greek municipalities I met solve the involvement of volunteers in the preparation of various city strategies and decisions, as well as how they support the tasks performed by volunteers or unique events. Similar to Hungary, our experience is that financing and financial maintenance of voluntary organizations is also a difficulty in Greece, so we were able to think together on this issue with our Greek colleagues«. (Participant from Hungary)

»I had the honor of taking part in the event on volunteering during crisis in Thessaloniki, Greece. The event illuminated the indispensable contributions of volunteers in addressing diverse crises. Through keynote addresses, visits to impactful initiatives, and a poignant photography exhibition, it emphasized the dedication and influence of volunteers, especially in the context of the pandemic. The event underscored how volunteer efforts can be a catalyst for positive change, providing crucial support to vulnerable communities and making a meaningful impact on society. « (Participant from Greece)

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

- Municipality of Litija, Slovenia: <https://www.litija.si/objava/826077>
- Društvo za podporo civilne družbe, Slovenia: <http://consulta.si/www.consulta.si/eras>
- Association Euni Partners, Bulgaria: https://eunipartners.com/en_gb/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=pfbid0vJkmJJanTghVaJcQoctL9BLVrwXzj28o4FNWi15rgBqbR9MM3WwW2ZPifTBpQHm7l&id=100064259666226&paipv=0&eav=AfZKGsaRlnGfU0TnXm0tm-YK7IQddZpJQimEmZ9rVhzosGS7KZtSrnqqBwmRYWW93i0&_rdr

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