

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

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| PROJECT | |
| Participant: | Društvo za podporo civilne družbe (DPCD) |
| PIC number: | 937251346 |
| Project name and acronym: | European Alliance for Volunteer Support – learnings from Covid-19 crisis — ERAS II |

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| EVENT DESCRIPTION | |
| Event number: | 1 |
| Event name: | Kick-off event |
| Type: | Workshops, discussions and presentations of good practices, photo exhibition |
| In situ/online: | In situ |
| Location: | Litija and Ljubljana, Slovenia; Lousada, Portugal; Kekava, Latvia |
| Date(s): | 23.4. – 26.4.2023 (Slovenia), 1. 6. 2023 (Portugal), 27. 7. 2023 (Latvia) |
| Website(s) (if any): | https://www.erasnetwork.eu/ |
| Participants | |
| Female: | 124 |
| Male: | 32 |
| Non-binary: | 0 |
| From country 1 [Slovenia]: | 85 (72F, 13M) |
| From country 2 [Latvia]: | 29 (23F, 6M) |

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| From country 3 [Bulgaria]: | 2 (2F) | | |
| From country 4 [Portugal]: | 36 (25F, 11M) | | |
| From country 5 [Greece]: | 2 (1F, 1M) | | |
| From country 6 [Hungary]: | 2 (1F, 1M) | | |
| Total number of participants: | 156 | From total number of countries: | 6 |

Description

The first ERAS II event consisted of multiple activities – the Kick-off event, and photo exhibitions in Slovenia, Portugal and Latvia as well as building the ERAS II online platform <https://www.erasnetwork.eu/>.

Leading partner, Društvo za podporo civilne družbe (DPCD) hosted a small photo exhibition on January 31, 2023, showcasing the volunteer initiatives from Zasavska region during the COVID-19 epidemic that was later part of the international photo exhibition showing COVID-19 volunteer actions from ERAS II partner countries. During this period, all partners contributed good volunteer practices from all partner cities, which were carried out during the COVID-19 epidemic. 30 good practices were collected, which are presented on the website:

<https://www.erasnetwork.eu/category/european-volunteer-stories/>.

An international exhibition was created to raise awareness and promote volunteerism as such with photos representing volunteers and their work during the COVID-19 crises and highlighting the important impact and contribution of volunteers in times of crisis. The exhibitions were accompanied by workshops and discussions with local residents and organizations.

<https://www.erasnetwork.eu/international-exhibition-volunteering-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>.

1. international event within the project ERAS II took place in Litija and Ljubljana, Slovenia between 23th – 26th of April 2023. Over four days volunteering initiatives and a photo exhibition were presented, followed by photo exhibitions in Lousada, Portugal and Kekava, Latvia, showing how these volunteers act on the field.

On the first day, partners gathered for a working dinner where participants and their organisations were presented. The second day consisted of good practice presentations in Ljubljana. We visited Slovenska filantropija and Društvo Kralji ulice. Slovenska filantropija, coordinator of the Slovenian network of volunteer organizations. Nina Lukashovich presented their work in the field of volunteering. We learned that, among many activities during the epidemic, they organized transportation for employees of one of Ljubljana's senior citizen homes during the first lockdown when public transport was stopped. In the second lockdown, they offered the service to three senior citizen homes as well as acted as the reception point for all transportation needs and coordinated transportation with other providers. We were impressed that even though 79 volunteers made 60.000 km in 1.223 hours no infections were recorded.

Društvo Kralji ulice focuses on providing help for vulnerable groups such as the homeless and the Roma community. Hana Košan presented the work of the organization with focus on the activities during the pandemic. They drew attention to the consequences of distance education for Roma children, adolescents and families and the development of crisis accommodation for vulnerable groups of the COVID-19 – especially for the needs of isolation in case of infection with Covid-19 for homeless people, people from accommodation programs or housing units, victims of violence or perpetrators of violent acts and large (Roma) families who have no other option of isolation. At the same time, they drew attention to the very problem of the lack and great need for crisis accommodation and accommodation programs in general. During the first wave of the epidemic, they also opened public toilets and thus gave homeless people access to water, toilets, clean clothes, disinfectants, and protective masks. After visiting the Kralji ulice headquarters we experienced one of their activities – we went on a guided tour of Ljubljana (Invisible Lublana). Guides with experience of homelessness show tourists another side of Ljubljana while exploring the city together. They tell a story about the city, about themselves and about homelessness. The tours are created in the desire to be a bridge that unites worlds, the known with the unknown and the hidden with the discovered. Through stories, we want to soften stereotypes and show the multifaceted nature of homelessness and related phenomena.

We spent the third day of the event in Litija. Participants learned about the volunteer actions and initiatives implemented and supported by the Municipality of Litija (Sopotniki and Point for Seniors) and visited Sitarjevec mine, the city's largest tourist attraction that evolved from a volunteer project. The good practice presentations were followed by a visit to Gimnazija Litija (Litija Grammar school) where we presented the EU and opportunities for young to the students by Europe Direct Zasavje and partners of the ERAS II project. We also discussed with students about what motivates them to volunteer. The day was finished with the opening of the photo exhibition

"Volunteering in times of Covid-19" and a consultation with NGOs from the municipality of Litija on the development of the sector and about the possibilities of further development of volunteerism both at the local and European level.

The event was concluded with the visit of the multimedia center "Experience Europe" in the House of EU in Ljubljana and a last good practice visit. The last good practice was presented by Aljoša Petek from PIC - Legal Centre for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment. He presented how they strive for effective protection of rights, for promoting the development of legal thought and the search for more advanced, more democratic, and more humane solutions, for strengthening civil dialogue and the position of non-governmental organizations, for involving the public in decision-making processes, and for simpler and more understandable legislation. Their work during the epidemic was largely characterized by the fight against constitutionally contested management of the epidemic by the former government. PIC was one of founding organizations of the Legal Network for the Protection of Democracy that provided legal help to citizens. During this time PIC also participated as co-organizer of the campaign for the referendum on the Water Act. The work in the scope of the campaign largely included volunteers in informing the public and spread of information.

In June (1.-30.6.2023) the Photo exhibition was hosted by Municipality of Lousada in the Municipal Library of Lousada. On the opening day, an information session was held for 8 young people, where volunteer work in the time of Covid-19 in the partner countries was contextualised. The month-long photo exhibition was also accompanied by a lecture titled "Healthy ageing". The lecture addressed the importance of various social issues as well as the importance of volunteering and its benefits to quality of life of elderly in that time as demonstrated in times of Covid-19. The lecture was attended 28 people from the senior institutions of Caide De Rei, Lustosa and the Senior University (USALOU).

In July 2023 the photo exhibition was opened in Kekava, Latvia. The opening of the exhibition on July 27, 2023, took place in the exhibition hall of the Jaunu ideju centrs. At the opening event, representatives of NGO "Solis Tuvāk" presented the theme of the exhibition and what was shown on the posters. 27 visitors were introduced to the members of the ERAS project and the work done by volunteers in each country during the COVID 19 epidemic. To promote the importance of the theme of the exhibition, NGO "Solis Tuvāk" representatives presented the ERAS project and the exhibition at a local action group meeting held at the Jaunu ideju centrs on the opening day of the exhibition. In August, the exhibition posters are placed in the windows of the Jaunu ideju centrs. Exhibition posters are available for viewing by any interested passer-by.

As part of this event project partners cooperated in building the ERAS II online platform: <https://www.erasnetwork.eu/>. The platform provides a space for presentation of results from ERAS and ERAS II projects (good practices, European volunteer stories, presentation of partner cities and partner organisations, project related news and project materials as well as a partner search platform where different organisations can present themselves and search for potential partners for cooperation on different EU calls for funding).

Gender mainstreaming is essential to CERV objectives as is to our project. 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. Partners have also discussed about gender in volunteering – how volunteers perform different roles during volunteering that correspond to the societal roles assigned to their gender, why is it so and what could be done to attract volunteers to roles that are not typical for their gender.

Local citizens were included in majority of project activities, mostly they were volunteers from local organisations, high school students 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). High school students participated at the presentation of opportunities in the EU and shared their thoughts on volunteering and motivation for volunteering. The visitors of the photo exhibition were the ones we tried to inspire and encourage to volunteer with the presented stories and good practices.

We presented programs, shared experience and expertise and developed an international network of contacts. This enabled all participants to improve their skills and gain knowledge and international contacts network of experts to turn to and cooperate with in the future to address different issues affecting the development of volunteering. 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.

Testimonies of participants:

»I can genuinely say that it was an eye-opening and enriching experience. The opportunity to witness and learn from various volunteer initiatives left me with a deep appreciation for the power of volunteering in times of crisis

and beyond. The good practice visits to organizations like Slovenska Filantropija and Društvo Kralji ulice allowed me to see the practical impact of volunteer work and gain insights into the strategies that make these initiatives successful. It was inspiring to witness the dedication of volunteers and their unwavering commitment to creating positive change in their communities. The guided tour of Ljubljana with the volunteer from Društvo Kralji ulice was a unique perspective on the city. Seeing the city through her eyes actively involved in volunteering provided a profound understanding of the transformative potential of volunteer-driven initiatives. Exploring how local municipalities, including the Municipality of Litija, support and promote volunteering underscored the importance of collaboration between local governments and volunteers. The exhibition on "Volunteering in Times of Covid-19" was a powerful reminder of the incredible contributions of volunteers during challenging times. It highlighted their resilience and unwavering commitment to supporting those in need. Overall, this event left me inspired and motivated to continue my own volunteer work, knowing that the impact of volunteering is not only significant but also essential for positive change in our society. I am grateful for the knowledge and experiences I gained during this event and look forward to applying them in my own volunteer initiatives. « (Participant from Greece)

»The experience was extremely useful and beneficial for me. I was fortunate to meet different people whose mission and cause is to help others, which made me feel close to them. We got acquainted with various volunteering organizations and associations and had the opportunity to exchange good practices and experience in volunteering. When we were in Ljubljana, I was very impressed by the life story of a lady who struggled with addiction before, and now years later she is helping people with the same problems. She is a true inspiration and hope. At Litija we saw what these organizations have done during challenging times, such as COVID-19, and how important volunteering service is not only for beneficiaries but also for those who help people in need. We hope we will have the opportunity to engage again in a project where I can meet this group of people, whom I now consider my friends and supporters. « (Participants from Bulgaria)

»The visit in Litija municipality was the most interesting part of the program which we had in meeting in Slovenia. Real help with different programs encouraging and supporting volunteers are important part of the building voluntary work system in any municipality. Possibility to meet representatives, even mayor and deputy mayor was good and challenging experience. This has encouraged me to develop new projects connected with voluntary work in our hometown.« (Participant from Latvia)

»The program in Slovenia was very useful and inspiring for us, we were able to learn about several examples that we hope we can implement in Hungary and Pécs as well. I especially liked the system operated in Litija, which allows volunteers to help the needy with their cars in shopping or managing other matters, as well as the "Hitchhikers Guide", created mostly by volunteer work, which made it possible to protect the country's natural values and this mechanism knowledge for Slovenian citizens. « (Hungarian participant.)

»The presentation of Europe Direct Zasavje and representatives of various NGOs from European countries who organize and host different volunteering opportunities within the European Solidarity Corps program and other programs inspired me to explore and apply for volunteer experiences abroad. This has encouraged me to contribute to international volunteering efforts and to embark on a volunteering journey that allows me to make a positive impact and broaden my horizons. « (Participant from Slovenia)

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_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=pfbid0vJkmJJanTghVaJcQoctL9BLVrwXzj28o4FNWi15rQBgqR9MM3WwW2ZPifTBpQH7&id=100064259666226&paipv=0&eav=AfZKGsaRlnGfU0TnXm0tm-YK7IQddZpJQimEmZ9rVhzosGS7KZtSrnqqBwmRYWW93i0&_rd_

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