RISE JOINT

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Handbook about Communities in ESC Team RISE projects







Deliverable D3.1 · ESC Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas (VTHPA)

Associazione Joint APS

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

A community does not happen by chance. It takes time, preparation and constant attention to the group and to the place that hosts it.

This handbook is a result of the RISE project (Road to Inclusion and Solidarity in Europe), coordinated by Associazione Joint APS within the European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas (VTHPA). RISE brings young people from all over Europe, many of them with fewer opportunities, to short and intense volunteering experiences in Italy. It collects the strategies developed and tested to answer two questions every ESC Team has to face:

Challenge 1

How do we turn a group of young people with very different backgrounds into an **inclusive community**, where everyone is fully included?

Challenge 2

How do we involve the **local community** in an ESC Team: with which role, what potential and which limits?

1.2 Two challenges, one road

The answers come from the RISE Teams hosted by four Hosting Organisations. Ostello dei Balocchi and Ostello Parco Monte Barro, in isolated mountain areas, each hosted a one-month Team. Cooperativa One, in the town of Crotone, hosted a two-month Team, and Cascina EUtopia, in a small village of Piedmont, a six-week Team. Each chapter follows the same structure, so the experiences can be compared.

1.3 How to use this handbook

Context

Territory, volunteers and Supporting Organisations.

Challenge 1

The strategy for an inclusive group, with activities step by step.

Differences

How language, culture, autonomy and needs were included.

Challenge 2

Local actors, joint activities, potential and limits.

Use it as a toolbox, not as a recipe: adapt the activities to your volunteers, your territory and your resources, and always give volunteers a voice in the process.

02

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Ostello dei Balocchi

Casalino di Ligonchio (Reggio Emilia)
18 April – 19 May 2026 · one-month Team



15 volunteers

8 countries

~24 average age

12/15 with fewer opportunities

Italy 4 · Ukraine 2 · France 2 · Spain 2 · Portugal 2 · Belgium 1 · Hungary 1 · Poland 1

2.1 Context

An inner mountain area at 1,000 metres, in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennine National Park and MAB UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The village of Ligonchio is a 5 km walk away; the nearest cities and supermarket are 65 km away, buses are few. The Ostello is an Environmental Education Centre run by Legambiente Ligonchio, young people who chose to live in the Apennines. It was already a reference point for schools and families, runs the Ravin'art art park and works with the primary school, Cooperativa San Rocco and the Atelier di Onda in Onda: a network that brought volunteers into local life very quickly.

NGO Stella · UA · Red Incola · ES · Las Niñas del Tul · ES · Parcours le Monde · FR · Juventude Vila Fonche · PT · Bona Fides · PL · Élményakadémia · HU

Supporting Organisations shared the call, helped with selection and preparation, stayed available during the Team and ran the final evaluation with their volunteers.

2.2 Challenge 1: from a group to a community

> Living together is already the project: we take care of the place, of the donkeys and of each other.
>
> **The Balocchi strategy in one sentence**

The main strategy was to invest heavily in the initial training, with team building and team bonding, to build mutual trust from the very first day. It grew out of Joint's experience in previous Teams and the Ostello's long experience with groups of young adults, minors and schools. From the start, the rules for living together and the rotating cooking groups were structured **with and by** the volunteers themselves.

1 — Before departure

An online welcome meeting to introduce each other, and a shared WhatsApp group to keep in touch.

2 — On arrival

Training mostly devoted to team building: getting-to-know games, trust activities, intercultural work, outdoor challenges and intercultural evenings.

3 — During

Weekly group meetings on mood and work, mentoring, an Italian course and a weekly reportage by the volunteers.

4 — At the end

Evaluation and closing: recognising the journey and the impact on the community, reflection, Youthpass and dissemination.



2. OSTELLO DEI BALOCCHI

Two days on the trail with the donkeys

Two-day trek with the donkeys

13–14 May

OBJECTIVE

Prepare the Ostello's donkeys for the summer camps with children, on their first outing after winter

ROUTE

From the Ostello to Ospitaletto and back, with a barbecue and a night in tents

On 13 May the volunteers set off from the Ostello with the donkeys, walked to Ospitaletto, cooked a barbecue together and slept in tents, then walked back the next day. Along the way they stopped at the small local shops they came across and talked with the people running them: the donkeys opened conversations, and the group was welcomed into the life of the villages.

Why it matters

The trek brought the two challenges together. Walking, cooking and camping as one group strengthened the bonds between volunteers, who called it "a nice bonding group experience". Meeting shopkeepers and residents along the way connected the group with the local community. And it prepared a service the Ostello then offers to local families and children.





2.3 Making room for every difference

Language

English was the common language, at different levels: simple communication, visual aids, non-verbal activities and peer translation. Italian volunteers bridged with staff and locals; a weekly Italian course, and a Ukrainian volunteer taught Ukrainian in her free time.

Culture

Differences were put at the centre from the arrival training and the intercultural evenings. Group meetings were a space to talk openly about habits, for example what “being on time” means.

Autonomy

Most volunteers were away from home, and around donkeys, for the first time. The mentor introduced them gradually to shopping, running the house and caring for the animals.

Specific needs

Health, accessibility, diet and emotional needs were collected confidentially before departure. Those who could not lift weights took other tasks in the same work group, such as the website, without being left out.

Care, decisions and roles

- **Rhythm:** a gradual start and 4 activity days with 3 free days a week, to balance physical work and rest and allow weekend travel from an isolated place.
- **One path for all:** roles built on each person's strengths and free choice of role in public activities, with specific adjustments inside the common path.
- **Safe spaces:** shared rules on privacy and quiet; private meetings with the mentor, also outside scheduled times; a daily on-site tutor who knew the agreed adjustments.
- **Decisions:** staff set the frame (ESC rules, safety, service hours); inside it, rules were built in a **Rules Agreement**, changed by consensus. Household shifts ran on a rota decided by the group, and free time was entirely theirs.
- **Voice:** weekly meetings, an anonymous feedback box, the mentor as a channel to staff and a mid-term evaluation.
- **Roles:** clearly divided from the welcome pack: Joint for selection, training, paperwork and remote support; the Ostello's experienced tutors and mentor for daily life and activities. Above all, they were present, consistent and reachable.

2.4 Challenge 2: involving the local community

Primary school · Elders · Cooperativa San Rocco · Atelier di Onda in Onda · National Park · Municipality · Ravin'art community · Village shops and bar · Families on donkey treks · Legambiente · Puliamo il Mondo

We used the Ostello's existing network, with direct and informal contacts. What convinced partners was a concrete, useful proposal: games for primary school children, a workshop and a snack for the elders, help at the Atelier.



Cyanotype with the elders of Ligonchio

7 May

Objective: an intergenerational and intercultural meeting with one of the most isolated groups in the area

Volunteers spent two days learning cyanotype, an old printing technique that uses sunlight, then ran a workshop for the village's pensioners in Cooperativa San Rocco's social centres. The activity was manual and visual, Italian volunteers bridged the language, and for many it was the first time they were not "guests" but people bringing something to the community.

A learning station for the Atelier · 27 April

Volunteers helped build a new station on solar energy for the Atelier di Onda in Onda, in Ligonchio's hydroelectric plant, now used with children and adults: a contribution that stays with the community after the Team.

2.5 Voices and lessons learned

The community was mostly **beneficiary and partner**. In a one-month Team, 5 km from the village, it can hardly become a "family": that role was played by the Ostello staff and by the group itself.

A group that did not break up

Fifteen young people, most with fewer opportunities, arrived in an isolated place. They worked on fears, expectations and values from the first days; then cooking in mixed groups and caring for the donkeys did the rest. They helped each other without being asked, taught each other their languages and travelled together on free days. For the first time in one of our Teams, **everyone stayed in touch with everyone**. One volunteer told his Supporting Organisation that the arrival training helped him overcome his fears; he now takes part in international youth exchanges and training courses.

9.4/10
overall experience

0
conflicts to manage

> It is better to go through hurdles of life with people rather than alone. Even if it is scary.
>
> Sofiia

> For living together, an open mind is more important than a lot of shared opinions.
>
> Kobe

> I learned more about kindness and collective support.
>
> Margherita

> The best way to prevent conflicts is to talk about each other's needs.
>
> Miriam

Do it again

Strong team building at arrival, a Rules Agreement built with volunteers, activities open to the community.

Limits

Distance, little time, language with the elders and mountain weather: always have a plan B.

Avoid

Overloading the calendar: 1–2 community activities a week are enough.

03

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Ostello Parco Monte Barro

Galbiate (Lecco)
9 March – 8 April 2026 · one-month Team



15 volunteers

9 countries

19–27 age range

12/15 with fewer opportunities

Italy 5 · Ukraine 3 · France 2 · Belgium 1 · Greece 1 · Poland 1 · Portugal 1 · Spain 1 · Hungary 1 · 9 women · 5 men · 1 non-binary

3.1 Context

A rural, mountain territory: the Ostello stands at 750 metres in the Monte Barro Regional Park, isolated and without public transport. Legambiente Lecco has run it since 2013 and already had solid ties with the Park, local farms and the volunteers who protect the toads, and had hosted previous editions of the ESC Team.

mu-zee-um · BE · Parcours le Monde · FR · Bonafides · PL · Juventude Vila Fonche · PT · Las Niñas del Tul · ES · NGO Stella · UA · Élményakadémia · HU · Joint · IT and GR

In pre-departure calls, Supporting Organisations explained ESC and project rules, gave practical information on the EHIC card and insurance, and helped build realistic expectations, with more frequent contact for volunteers with fewer opportunities.

3.2 Challenge 1: from “I” to “we”

The approach was **“from I to we”**. It grew out of experience: Joint has worked with the ESC and non-formal education for over 20 years and has a long relationship with the Ostello, built across several projects and previous editions of the ESC Team. We took what had worked and adapted it to the new group.

1 — Before departure

A Welcome Pack with practical information. Volunteers were asked to bring typical food and games to share.

2 — On arrival

Two days of training: getting-to-know games, team building, intercultural activities, the “star of values” and a letter to their future self.

3 — During

Caring for the environment together, especially protecting toad eggs and building a safe passage.

4 — At the end

Final training with reflection, evaluation, a circle of appreciation and the Youthpass.

Activities were led by Joint's trainers, Maryna and Silvia, together with the Ostello's facilitators and tutors.







3.3 Making room for every difference

Trust from day one

Getting-to-know games, intercultural and mutual-respect activities such as "5 houses", and sharing fears, expectations and values created a climate of trust from the start.

A word a day

English was the common language. Every day one volunteer taught the others a few words of their own language: in four weeks everyone shared a piece of their culture.

Listening as we go

Weekly evaluations with the group and a mid-term evaluation collected difficulties and proposals, so activities could be adapted along the way.

Health needs

Collected before departure; tasks were adapted, for example avoiding heavy physical work for those who needed it.

A predictable, safe rhythm

- Regular days from 9:00 to 16:30 with two coffee breaks and an hour for lunch; late afternoons, evenings, weekends and some rest days free.
- A rainy-day alternative plan for every day; activities simplified or adapted to each person when needed.
- Four teams of three for common spaces and kitchen: everyone had a clear, shared task and never felt alone.
- Double or triple rooms with private bathroom as quiet spaces; roommates asked to be each other's first support group.
- Clear reference people: daily facilitators, rotating tutors, a contact person for the toad activities, and emergency numbers given on day one.

Decisions and roles

Day one was devoted to rules for living together, safety, shifts and free time, and cleaning teams were formed through a group activity; with the cook, the group discussed food, allergies and the use of the kitchen. Weekly meetings and the mid-term evaluation gave volunteers a voice; free time was self-organised. The Ostello's facilitators acted as team leaders, its tutors as mentors, and Joint's trainers ran the arrival and final trainings. What worked best was continuity: the same experienced team as previous editions, and two preparatory calls between Joint and the Ostello to agree on roles and programme.

3.4 Challenge 2: involving the local community

Legambiente Lecco | Local toad volunteers | Monte Barro Regional Park volunteers | Cascina Selvetto | A goat farm | Residents leading foraging, zero-waste cooking and sewing workshops | Spazio Oggiono

Almost all were long-standing partners of the Ostello, contacted directly by its staff by phone and in person, before and during the project. What convinced them was **mutual exchange**: the farm and the toad volunteers always need a hand and the Team offered concrete help at no cost; they were also curious to meet young volunteers from all over Europe and share their skills and territory.

Saving the toads

2 weeks + "toad nights"

OBJECTIVE
Join a conservation action the community has carried out for years

SCHEDULE
Monday and Tuesday mornings, 9:00–12:30

MATERIALS
Buckets, gloves, high-visibility vests, rakes, shears

WITH
Ostello staff and local toad volunteers

During migration, toads cross roads to reach breeding sites and many risk being run over. Volunteers protected the eggs and prepared nets and safe passages. In the last week they joined the "toad nights", evening outings to help the toads cross. It was the most important activity of the project and one of the volunteers' favourites: two volunteers even chose the poem "If I were a toad" as their favourite moment.

A day at Cascina Selvetto

A full day at a local farm with Giacomo, who runs it, helping with farm work and sharing lunch: an exchange at no cost. Farm visits were among the best moments of the month.

The wetland

A visit to the local wetland with Miriam and the Park volunteers, to discover this ecosystem and the work the community does to protect it.



The community's role, potential and limits

The community was mostly **partner and beneficiary**. Local volunteers, Cascina Selvetto, the Park and other producers led activities with the group, sharing their knowledge in exchange for the volunteers' help, and the territory benefited from the Team's work, above all for the toads. In its own way it became a small "family", celebrated at the final party with volunteers, Legambiente, the Park, farms and local volunteers. There was no formal round table: dialogue went through direct agreements with each partner.

What the community gave

Cascina Selvetto hosted the group for a day with lunch at no cost, and a goat farm opened its doors. Miriam and the Park volunteers guided the wetland visit, local experts shared foraging, zero-waste cooking and sewing, and Spazio Oggiono provided materials for the workshops.

How perceptions changed

Local actors saw the volunteers as concrete help and got to know the ESC up close. Volunteers discovered a territory rich in nature and sustainable practices; many say they will make greener choices.

Added value

Volunteers learnt sustainable practices from people who live them every day; for the territory, real help with the toads and a stronger network between Ostello, Park, farms and local volunteers.

Limits

Isolation: without public transport every meeting needed organised transport, and volunteers struggled to move on their own. Some activities depended on partners' availability and budget.

Risks

Health needs were collected before departure and tasks adapted. Isolation, diet and practical work were explained in the info pack, welcome pack and pre-departure calls.

> **Few quality collaborations, with concrete tasks and clear timing for everyone.**
>
> **How far to go · beyond that, volunteers become spectators and local partners, often volunteers themselves, get overloaded**



3.5 Voices and lessons learned

9.1/10
the group

8.9/10
overall experience

100%
felt safe and at ease

No conflicts or moments of exclusion emerged. The credit goes mainly to prevention: team building from the first days, clear roles, and weekly and mid-term evaluations to pick up tension early. Volunteers keep in touch, travel together and share photos of their meetings, and some went on to become long-term ESC volunteers in other projects.

> I learned to be more open to living together with different people.
>
> A volunteer

> It changed my point of view about people different from me.
>
> A volunteer

> Not be afraid to open up and rely more on other people.
>
> A volunteer

> Thank you for taking care of every small detail, that's why I could feel safe and happy!
>
> A volunteer

Do it again

An experienced host with a stable team; pre-departure calls, arrival training, weekly and mid-term evaluations; hands-on activities with nature and the territory.

Change

More practical, useful work and fewer team-building moments; more variety in food; bikes to move around independently; the same selection process for all countries.

Keep

Pre-departure calls, the arrival training and weekly and mid-term evaluations, which let us build the group and follow it closely.

Avoid

Underestimating expectations. Explain from selection what isolation, a vegan or vegetarian diet and the amount of practical work really mean.

04

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Cooperativa One

Crotone (Calabria)
22 March – 21 May 2026 · two-month Team



13 volunteers

6 countries

19–30 age range · avg 23

8/13 with fewer opportunities

Italy 4 · France 2 · Germany 2 · Spain 2 · Portugal 2 · Ukraine 1 · 9 women · 4 men

4.1 Context

An urban area of southern Italy, peripheral in social and economic terms: youth unemployment in Crotone is 64% and many young people leave. Volunteers lived at Ostello Casa di Chiara, in the historic centre, with a former church as common space. Cooperativa One, born from the association Amici del Tedesco, runs language and vocational courses, workshops for minors and projects against educational poverty. It already had a wide network (migrants and unaccompanied minors, food recovery, assets confiscated from the mafia, parishes, schools) and had already hosted Joint's ESC Teams in 2024 and 2025.

Parcours le Monde · FR · Las Niñas del Tul · ES · NGO Stella · UA · Juventude Vila Fonche · PT · Eurocircle · DE · Joint · IT

4.2 Challenge 1: from a group to a community

> **A shared home in the heart of the city.**
>
> The Cooperativa One strategy in one sentence

The group becomes a community by living together at Casa di Chiara and taking care, every day, of the house, of the group and of the most fragile people in the city. Mixed rotating cooking groups, rules built together and shared service activities were the main tools. The approach grew from Joint's previous Teams at the Cooperativa in 2024 and 2025: the arrival training format was reused and adapted, and because earlier volunteers asked for more moments of exchange, team building and sport, we added a weekly meeting and non-contact American football. Training was led by Joint facilitators Alessandra and Silvia.

1 — Before departure

Info pack and welcome pack, a pre-departure meeting with the Supporting Organisation and Joint, and a shared WhatsApp group.

2 — On arrival

Four days of Welcome Training (22–25 March), with a World Café on the territory and rules built together.

3 — During

A Friday meeting to review the week, plan the next and prepare the menu; mixed cooking groups and weekly Italian lessons.

4 — At the end

Three days of final evaluation (Reconnect, Walk & Talk, River of life, circle of appreciation) and a party with partners.



Activities step by step



World Café: Crotone and its challenges

Training · day 1

Objective: get to know the territory and give meaning to the volunteers' tasks · about 1.5 hours

Four tables, each with a Cooperativa referent and a theme: the challenges of Crotone, the Cooperativa's activities, the volunteers' tasks and their meaning, the challenges of Calabria. Groups rotate between tables, carrying large sheets and markers, and enrich them with questions and ideas.

Personal space and Rules Agreement

Training · day 2

Objective: name what makes everyone feel safe and build the rules of living together

On post-its, each person writes what makes them feel safe or uncomfortable in a group, then everyone shares. Next, in four groups with printed guiding questions, volunteers build the agreement that complements the hostel's rules. On day three, cooking and cleaning groups are formed and everyone writes a letter to their future self.

The final party

End of project

Objective: celebrate with all the partners and the people met during the Team

Volunteers organised a party with partners and people they had met: the final video, Greek dances and tarantella learnt in the workshops, a song, a buffet with dishes from their countries and the Youthpass ceremony.

4.3 Making room for every difference

Languages

English was common; Italian volunteers, including one from Crotone, bridged with staff, partners and residents. Weekly Italian lessons, and volunteers taught each other their languages.

Culture

Valued from day one with an intercultural dinner with stakeholders, then Greek and Calabrian dance workshops and the final buffet.

Needs known in advance

Diet and health needs were collected confidentially. Volunteers already following psychological support could continue it, with times and tasks adapted.

Rhythm

5 days a week, up to 36 hours, 2 free days plus 2 extra days off a month. External activities in small rotating groups, e.g. 3 volunteers at a time at the Camper.

Care, decisions and roles

- **References:** Cooperativa tutors day to day, a Joint mentor for one-to-one talks and a local psychologist, with whom the Cooperativa had started working in autumn 2025; double or triple rooms, the terrace and common spaces to retreat.
- **Decisions:** within the hostel rules, a Rules Agreement built together; the Friday meeting for feedback, menus and proposals; self-managed free time; a mid-term evaluation and an anonymous feedback form. Some volunteers asked to be heard more on house rules and weekend shifts: a point to work on.
- **What worked:** clear roles, the same mentor in training and during the project, and continuity with previous Teams.

Tensions and how we handled them

This Team was demanding: there were tensions about household chores and participation in activities, and communication between volunteers and the organisation was sometimes difficult. Joint facilitators and the local psychologist, who ran a group activity on relationships, supported the group. Lesson: a large two-month group needs structured exchange at mid-project and an external figure to rely on when tensions grow.

4.4 Challenge 2: involving the local community

Sabir | Agorà | Terre Joniche and Libera | Camper della Speranza | Red Cross | Canteen and parishes | Alle Hand in Hand | Amici del Tedesco | A school and Piccoli Passi | American football team | Local radio and Il Crotonese | Road education park | Dog shelter

Partners came from the Cooperativa's long knowledge of Crotone's third sector, and wanted to show volunteers how the city responds to poverty, migration, organised crime and youth exclusion. The community was mostly **partner and beneficiary**, and partly a small "family": neighbours, shopkeepers and a grandmother who taught how to make covatelli were invited to the final party.



Camper della Speranza

Several evenings a week

Objective: support food recovery with local volunteers

Small groups collected unsold food from bakeries, pizzerias and families, divided it into bags and handed it out to people in need. Volunteers felt truly useful and worked side by side with residents: it is one of the service activities volunteers name among their favourites.

Terre Joniche

A week working on land confiscated from the mafia, listening to the stories of those who run it and talking about organised crime in Crotone.

Agorà and Sabir

Activities with migrants and unaccompanied minors: a meeting on peace, art workshops, games. Several volunteers made friends.

4.5 Voices and lessons learned

Growing through a harder journey

Living together was harder in spring 2026: in the final evaluation the group scored 5.4 out of 10. We report it because difficulties are also a learning tool for those organising the next Teams. Even so, many volunteers describe real personal growth: more respect for themselves, the ability to say no, and feeling "valuable and loved by some people".

From the previous Team: the city seen with new eyes

Oct–Dec 2025

Same Cooperativa, same strategy, a very different Team. In autumn 2025 one volunteer was from Crotone: living with volunteers from seven countries, she rediscovered her own city through their eyes, and two of them taught her Polish. Volunteers kept each other informed "so no one gets excluded", travelled together and ended with a small concert in four languages and handmade bracelets. That group rated itself 4.6 out of 5.

> "I learned that I can be alone without feeling alone."
>
> A volunteer

> "It really opened my eyes to the problems of south Italy."
>
> A volunteer

Do it again

The World Café, the weekly meeting, mixed cooking groups, the psychologist, the final party and service activities.

Change

Fewer short, one-off activities and more continuity with the same partners; a programme planned two weeks ahead.

Limits

Language with residents and some partners; activities tied to partners' timetables; an impact not always visible.



05

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Cascina EUtopia

Casaleggio Boiro (Alessandria)
16 July – 28 August 2026 · six-week Team









18
volunteers

7
countries

18–29
age range · avg 22

6
weeks together

Italy 6 · Ukraine 5 · Spain 3 · Belgium 1 · Estonia 1 · Poland 1 · Portugal 1

9 women · 9 men

5.1 Context

A hilly rural area: Casaleggio Boiro is a small village near a Regional Park, among fields and woods, with one grocery shop; volunteers were picked up by the Cascina's van at Ovada or Arquata Scrivia station. The Cascina is a young project and its bond with the community grows year after year: the first activities with the Municipality and the Pro Loco started in 2025 and intensified this year.

Las Niñas del Tul · ES · Bona Fides · PL · Juventude Vila Fonche · PT · NGO Stella · UA · Joint · IT and other countries

Supporting Organisations shared the call, helped with selection and prepared volunteers before departure, with reinforced support for those with fewer opportunities.

5.2 Challenge 1: building an inclusive place, together

> **Building together an inclusive place for others, and learning to be one among ourselves.**
>
> **The EUtopia strategy in one sentence**

The Team's work had a clear, shared purpose: making the Cascina a safe and welcoming place for the young people who will come next. We used it as a frame for group life too: if we are preparing an inclusive place, the first test is how we live together. The strategy grew from the experience of Joint and P.E.CO. in youth exchanges and ESC projects and from previous editions of the Team at the Cascina, including May–July 2025; tools like the Identity star, the Rules Agreement, the letter to the future self and the Circle of appreciation are shared with the other RISE Teams.

A four-day arrival training

Non-formal education, team building and rules built together.

Into the village from day one

Helping at the Pro Loco festival made the group feel like a team.

Daily life as a tool

Six mixed groups rotating for cooking and cleaning, with growing autonomy.

Constant monitoring

Weekly meetings, a mid-term evaluation and an anonymous form.

1 — Before departure

Welcome pack, WhatsApp group and a group video call to start planning the intercultural evening.

2 — On arrival

Four days of training (16–19 July) by Joint and P.E.CO.: games, a tour of the Cascina, goals, rules and shifts.

3 — During

Group work, rotating cooking and cleaning groups, a weekly Italian lesson and a Friday group meeting.

4 — At the end

Three days of final evaluation (24–26 August), with group activities and individual reflection.

Activities step by step

Mission Impossible

Arrival training · day 3

OBJECTIVE
Make the group cooperate at once, discover the Cascina and the village, create first shared memories

DURATION
One morning

MATERIALS
A list of missions per team, phones for photos and videos

LED BY
Joint and P.E.CO. staff

Teams get a list of missions to complete in a set time, and may skip one. For example: take two group photos, find the "Welcome to EUtopia" sign, note bus and shop times, collect two bags of litter in the woods, invent a project motto and translate it into every language of the group, teach everyone a traditional dance, write a song with the words "EUtopia", "Casaleggio Boiro", "volunteering", "solidarity" and "group", and get a villager to say something in dialect on video.

The village festival as first team building

17–18 July

Objective: bring the group into village life from the very first moment

During the arrival training, each evening half the group helped run the Pro Loco's festival and the other half enjoyed it with the villagers; after the first night, helpers passed tips to the next group. Volunteers learnt to take an order in Italian and danced with people of all ages, and villagers met there kept greeting them for weeks.

Circle of appreciation

Final evaluation

OBJECTIVE
Close the experience by recognising everyone's contribution

MATERIALS
A script of sentences, different for each group

Volunteers sit in a circle with eyes closed. In turn, a small group stands up silently and touches the shoulder of whoever matches a sentence read by the facilitator: "someone who always made you feel included", "someone who was there for you in a difficult moment", "someone you now see with different eyes". Two volunteers named it their favourite activity of the whole project.

5.3 Making room for every difference

Languages

English was common; Italian volunteers bridged with staff and villagers, with a weekly Italian lesson. With five Ukrainian volunteers there were many informal Ukrainian lessons: by the end everyone knew words in every language.

Autonomy in the kitchen

Rotating groups planned menus and cooked for about 20 people, with staff support that decreased over time.

Needs known in advance

Diet, health (including mental health), fears (two dogs live at the Cascina) and room preferences were collected confidentially to compose rooms and adapt tasks.

Time to reflect

Weekly and individual meetings, plus sessions on topics such as solidarity, helped volunteers reflect on the experience.

Care, decisions and roles

- **Rhythm and tasks:** 5 activity days and 2 rest days; in summer, work from 9:00 to 12:30 and 16:00 to 18:00. Painting, upcycling, green maintenance and cooking, adapted to health limits; rooms for 3–4 people, changed when someone needed to sleep better.
- **Decisions:** staff set the frame; the Rules Agreement was written together from guiding questions. Volunteers chose menus every week and organised free time and trips.
- **Voice:** the Friday meeting, a mid-term questionnaire and an anonymous form on safety and group dynamics, which led to changes in cleaning and meals.
- **Roles:** coordinators living at the Cascina, a referent for daily life and a mentor; almost all volunteers described the relationship with staff as “very good”.





5.4 Challenge 2: entering the life of the village

Pro Loco of Casaleggio Boiro | Villagers at the village festival | Summer festivals, such as Mornese | Occitan dance festival | Nico and Ale's vineyards | Apicoltura Varacca | The Municipality | The village shop and bar

The main channel was the daily presence of staff, who live at the Cascina, and direct, informal relations with the mayor, the Pro Loco, neighbours and farms, built on the wish to make EUtopia an open place that also serves the territory. On that basis we built a concrete exchange.

A day in the vineyard · 30 July

Starting at 6 a.m., the group learnt to tend vines with Nico and Ale: for many, a first experience of farm work.

Apicoltura Varacca

A guided visit on bees and honey, ending with an aperitif overlooking the hills during the lunar eclipse.

The community was **partner, beneficiary and, in its own way, a small family**: the village got help at its festivals and a football pitch with newly painted lines. Intercultural dinners at the Cascina, open to the whole village, took the place of a formal round table.

Added value

Volunteers lived village life from the inside and practised Italian; the village gained help and young energy.

Limits

Little time for meetings (5 work days a week), language, distance and transport, and summer heat.

Risks

A demanding rural life, explained from the call to arrival; public or tiring moments adapted for the most vulnerable.

How far to go

Join existing events with a useful role; one community appointment a week suits a six-week Team.

5.5 Voices and lessons learned

We are not utopia

Eighteen young people from seven countries spent six weeks in a farmhouse under renovation, with shared rooms, few bathrooms and the heat of July and August. Their task was to make the Cascina a safe, inclusive place for those who will come next, and they did it first among themselves. They repainted rooms, cleared paths, gave new life to furniture through upcycling and decorated the walls with personal drawings, each leaving a sign in the place they were building. Small tensions about chores and food were handled with individual talks, group reflection and clearer task boards. When one volunteer's car got stuck, the whole group came out to free it: one of her best memories.

8.6/10
overall experience

100%
felt safe and at ease

6
weeks together

> Exists some problems but I think that is normal cuz we are not utopia, and kindness and energy from some people create a good space to feel comfortable.
>
> A volunteer

> Somehow, in just one month, these people became like a little family to me.
>
> Maryna, Ukraine

> Living together was sometimes challenging, but it taught me how important communication, cooperation, patience and openness are.
>
> Arthur, Belgium

> I also learned something that I definitely didn't expect: how to cook for more than twenty people!
>
> Luca, Italy

Do it again

The arrival training with the village festival in the first days; rotating mixed groups; weekly reflection; mid-term evaluation with an anonymous form.

What continues

The next Team is already planned; with the Municipality we are thinking of caring for the village playground.

What we learned

We asked every Hosting Organisation: if you had to give three pieces of advice to an organisation running its first ESC Team, what would they be?

Ostello dei Balocchi

1. **Invest in the first two days:** the arrival training sets the climate of the whole Team.
2. **Use daily life** as a community tool: cooking and caring for spaces in mixed groups.
3. **A few concrete community activities**, with a clear goal, so volunteers see their mission completed.

Ostello Parco Monte Barro

1. **Choose an experienced host** and prepare the programme together.
2. **Clarify expectations from selection:** place, diet, rhythm, practical work.
3. **Collect needs before departure** and keep closer contact with volunteers with fewer opportunities.

Cooperativa One

1. **Few partners, with continuity:** better to return to the same place than do many one-off activities.
2. **Plan a structured mid-project exchange** and an external support figure, such as a psychologist.
3. **Protect free time and rest**, and share a stable programme in advance.

Cascina EUtopia

1. **Invest in bonding activities** at the start: games, team building, rules built together.
2. **Monitor constantly,** as a group and one to one, and let daily life build autonomy.
3. **Enter the community through existing events**, from the first days and with a useful role.

How far should community involvement go?

It makes sense as long as it remains a real, sustainable exchange for everyone. It becomes counterproductive when the calendar fills up and volunteers get tired, when the community becomes an "audience" rather than people to do something with, when volunteers become just labour, or when coordination overloads hosts and local partners. **A few quality collaborations, with concrete tasks and clear timing, are worth more than many meetings.**

> People make the experience.
>
> Leonor, volunteer at Ostello dei Balocchi

7. CONCLUSION

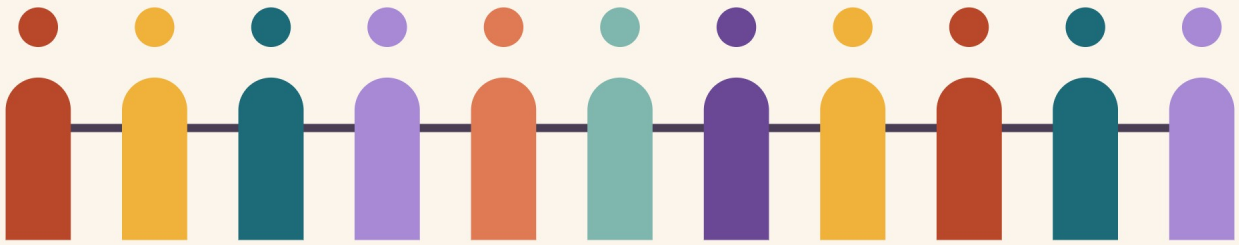
A community is built, not found

As we reach the end of this handbook, we return to the two questions we started from. The experiences of the RISE Teams offer an answer that is simple to say and demanding to practise: **a community does not happen by itself.** It needs time, preparation and constant attention, both to the group and to the territory that welcomes it.

Inside the group, inclusion grew from intentional beginnings, a clear and predictable frame, roles built on everyone's strengths and daily life shared in mixed groups, and above all from giving volunteers a real voice in the rules they live by. Concrete work with a shared purpose, like preparing a place that will welcome other young people, turned into a powerful tool of inclusion. We learned to speak about concrete needs and how to respond to them, rather than labelling people.

With local communities, the strongest moments came from relationships that already existed and from a few activities useful to both sides: a cyanotype print made by young Europeans and village elders, toad eggs saved alongside local volunteers, an order taken in Italian at a village festival.

ESC Teams are neither perfect experiences nor holidays. They are weeks of effort, care and learning that can reopen a young person's path, as many of our volunteers have shown. We invite you to take these ideas into your own communities and adapt them.



8.

Disclaimer

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