JOINT
ASSOCIAZIONE DI PROMOZIONE SOCIALE

T4HL3
Team For Healthy Life

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

TEAM FOR HEALTHY LIFE 3 · DELIVERABLE D2.3

Handbook on the inclusion and involvement of young people fleeing armed conflict in short-term ESC Teams









Associazione Joint APS

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1. Introduction

1.1 About T4HL3

When a young person has fled a war, joining a group of strangers in another country is a brave step. What they need first is not to tell their story, but to feel safe, useful and free to choose.

Team for Healthy Life 3 (T4HL3) is the third edition of a European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams project coordinated by Associazione Joint. Between March and December 2025, six Teams of one or two months brought young people from all over Europe to five Italian host organisations, in rural, mountain and urban areas. Volunteers worked outdoors, cared for nature and shared spaces, cooked together and took part in sport and creative activities: a healthy lifestyle built on physical activity, nature, food and mental well-being.

Like the previous editions, T4HL3 was designed for young people with fewer opportunities. It also paid special attention to highly vulnerable young people, and in particular to young people fleeing armed conflict, who made up about one in six volunteers.

1.2 Why this handbook

Since 2022, many young Ukrainians have had their studies, work and plans interrupted by war. Some still live in Ukraine, others have found refuge in another European country. A short-term ESC Team can offer them a few weeks of safety, nature and community, and a first step towards new opportunities. But including them well requires attention before, during and after the experience.

This handbook collects what we learned in the six T4HL3 Teams. It is written from the point of view of Joint and the host organisations, based on what the Team referents observed and on what the volunteers wrote in their questionnaires and articles and what thy told during the follow-up of the mobility. It can be read on its own; a companion handbook describes how young people with fewer opportunities were included in the same Teams.

1.3 Who took part

The six Teams involved 109 volunteers aged 18 to 30 from 18 countries: 73 had fewer opportunities and 28 were in-country volunteers living in Italy. 18 were young people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

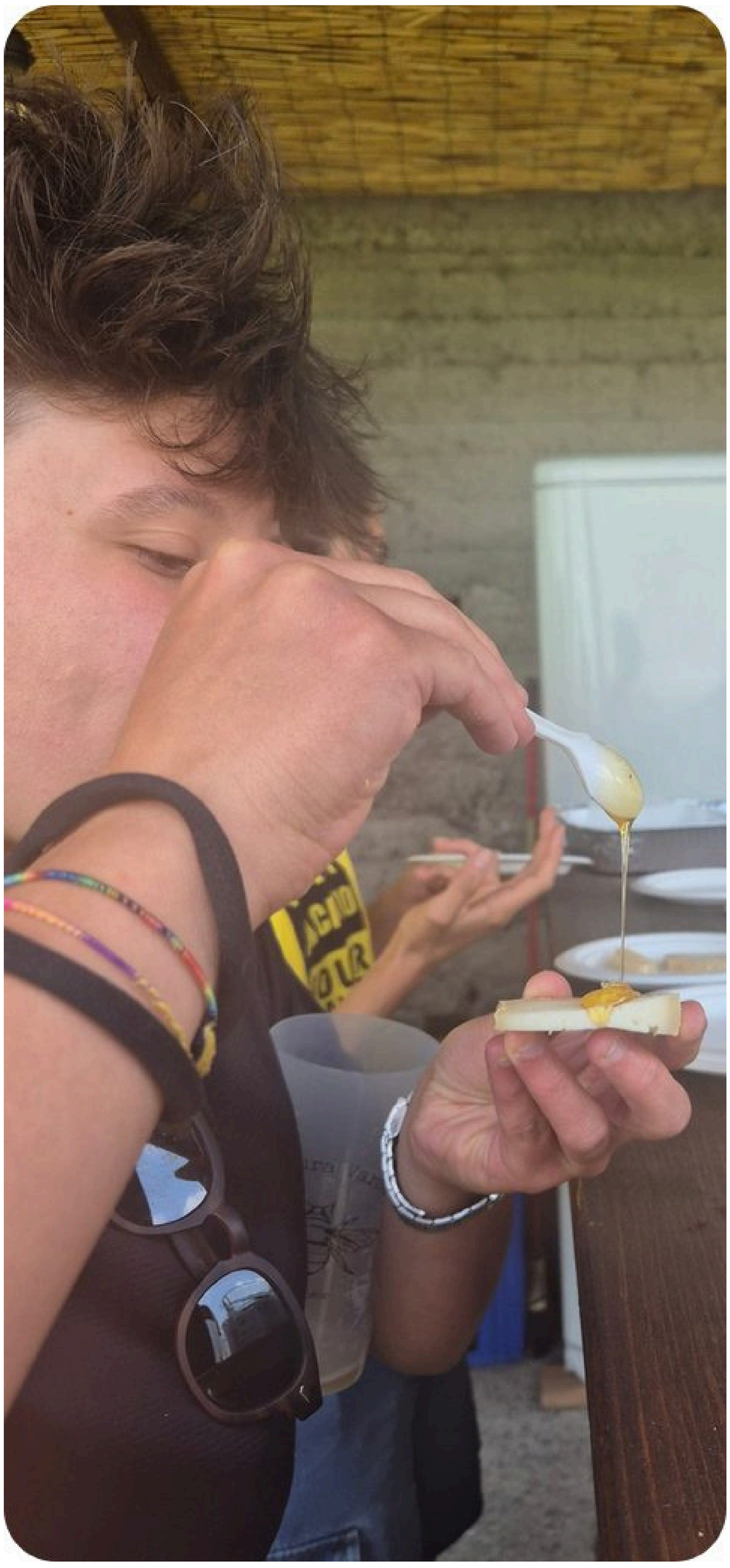
They arrived through the Ukrainian Supporting Organisation Centre for Euroinitiatives. The constant cooperation with the partner made it possible to involve young people who would otherwise hardly have come into contact with European mobility, and allowed us to tailor our support to each volunteer in a timely and effective way. Some were 18 or 19, at their first experience away from home; for several it was also the first chance to travel.

1. Introduction

1.4 How to use this handbook

Chapter 2 introduces the six Teams and chapter 3 the approach they shared. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 follow the three phases of a Team, before departure, during and after, with concrete examples and activities you can replicate. Chapter 7 tells the experience of each Team; chapters 8 and 9 give voice to the volunteers and sum up the lessons in a checklist. No volunteer is named, and no personal story can be traced back to a person.





2. The six Teams at a glance

Six Teams, five host organisations, five territories: a park in the mountains, an organic farm by the sea, a city in the South, a farmhouse in the hills, a village in the Alps.

Legambiente Lecco – Ostello Parco Monte Barro

Where: Galbiate (Lecco), a hostel inside a regional park
When: 10 March – 10 April 2025, one month
The group: 16 volunteers from 8 countries; 10 with fewer opportunities; 2 young Ukrainian women fleeing the war

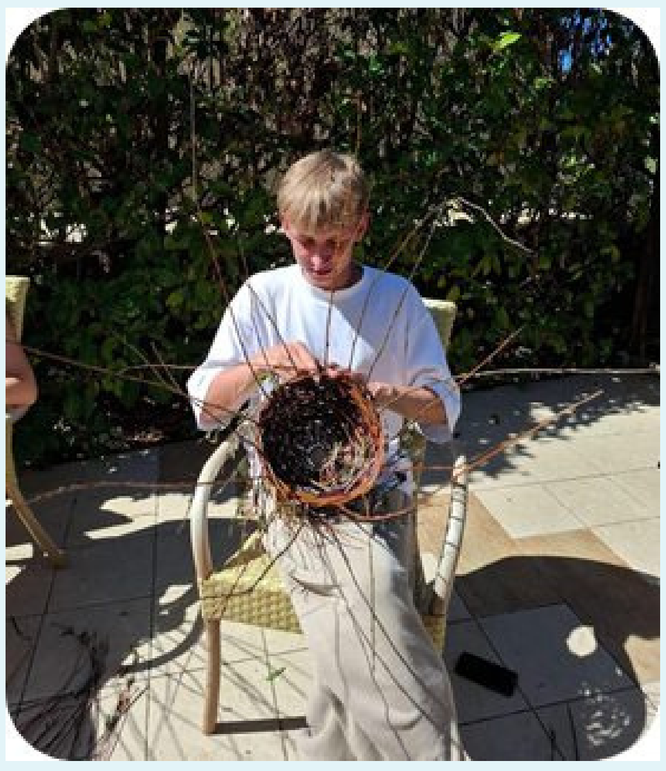
The month was built around the toad campaign: volunteers set up barriers and carried toads safely across the roads during their spring migration. They also built an ecological area at the hostel, hiked, climbed and cooked vegan meals in rotating groups.



Fattoria l'Arca, first mobility

Where: Belvedere Marittimo (Cosenza), an organic social farm
When: 30 March – 29 May 2025, two months
The group: 16 volunteers from 6 countries; 12 with fewer opportunities; 3 young Ukrainian women fleeing the war

Four mornings a week of farm work, from strawberries to olives, and one day of workshops with local associations and artisans: ceramics, basket weaving, music with young people with disabilities, a meeting with the local Ukrainian association.



2. The six Teams at a glance

Cooperativa ONE

Where: Crotone (Calabria), a social hostel in the historic centre
When: 24 March – 23 May 2025, two months
The group: 19 volunteers from 9 countries; 12 with fewer opportunities; 3 young Ukrainian women fleeing the war

Volunteers cared for the hostel, worked on land confiscated from the mafia, collected food for people in need and met migrants and unaccompanied minors at Sabir and Agorà. Many workshops were proposed and led by the volunteers themselves.



Cascina EUtopia – P.E.CO.

Where: Casaleggio Boiro (Alessandria), a farmhouse being renovated
When: 15 July – 12 August 2025, four weeks
The group: 20 volunteers from 7 countries; 13 with fewer opportunities; 4 young Ukrainians fleeing the war

The group prepared the Cascina to welcome future young people: upcycling, paths, a vegetable garden, small renovation works. Work followed the cool hours of the day, with a long siesta in the July heat.



Farfalle nella Testa

Where: Bordano (Udine), the “village of butterflies”
When: 20 August – 20 October 2025, two months
The group: 18 volunteers from 6 countries; 12 with fewer opportunities; 3 young Ukrainians fleeing the war

Volunteers cared for the Ecomuseum around Lake Cavazzo and an entomological path, tried rafting, paragliding and cycling, met the elders of the village and cooked a final dinner for about 130 people.



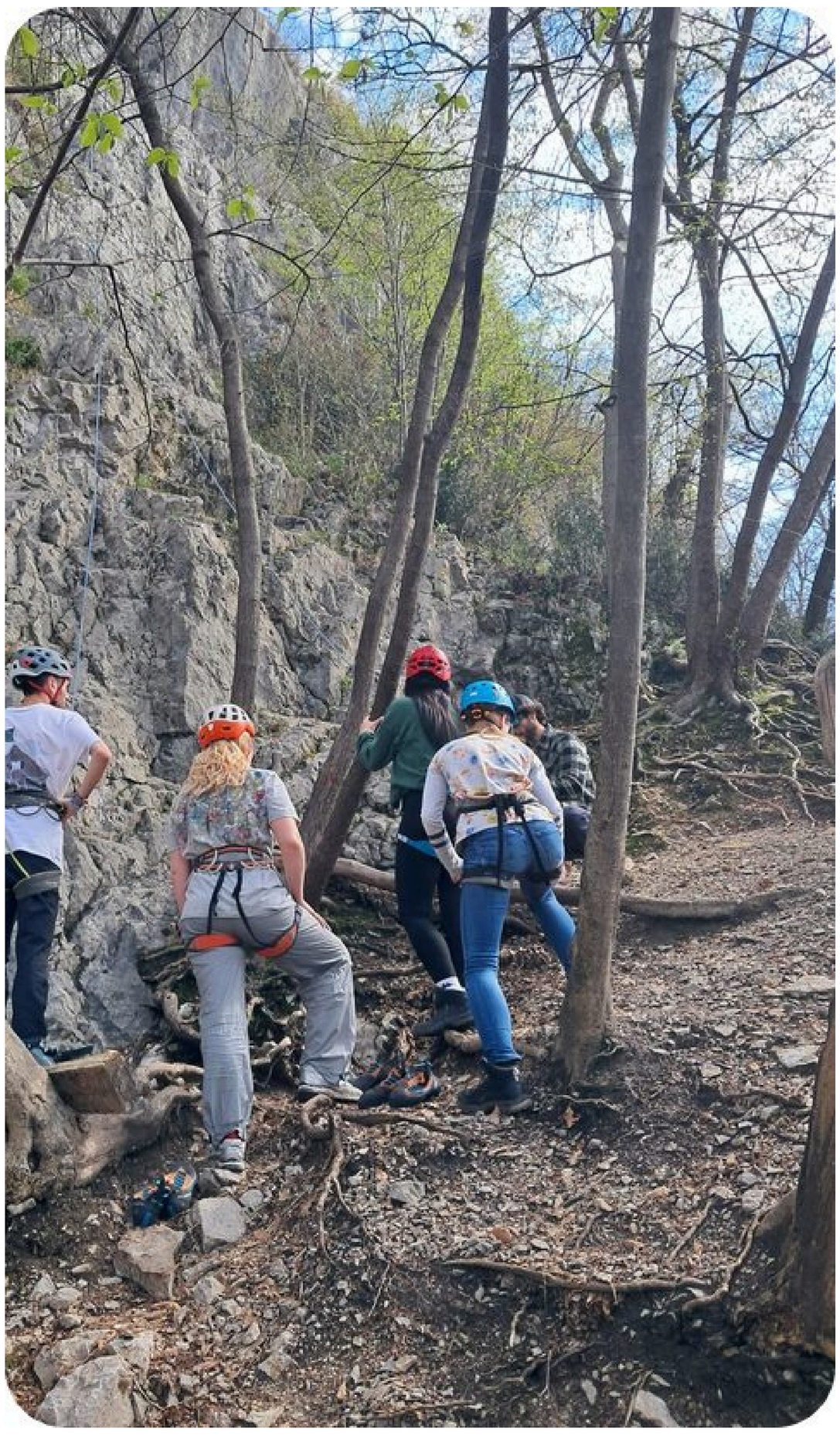
2. The six Teams at a glance

Fattoria l'Arca, second mobility

Where: Belvedere Marittimo (Cosenza), an organic social farm
When: 6 October – 5 December 2025, two months
The group: 20 volunteers from 9 countries; 14 with fewer opportunities; 3 young Ukrainians fleeing the war

Farm work in autumn, olive picking and many workshops proposed by the volunteers. The Ukrainian volunteers led a workshop on their country, with their own photos and testimonies.







3. A shared approach

All Teams followed the same path, built by Joint over three editions of T4HL and adapted by each host to its place and its group. It is the frame in which young people fleeing conflict were included.

3.1 One path, four steps

Before departure

A simple application and an informal online interview on motivation, not on the CV. A confidential questionnaire on needs. An honest info pack on living conditions. Help with tickets, pick-ups and insurance; a WhatsApp group and a pre-departure call.

On arrival

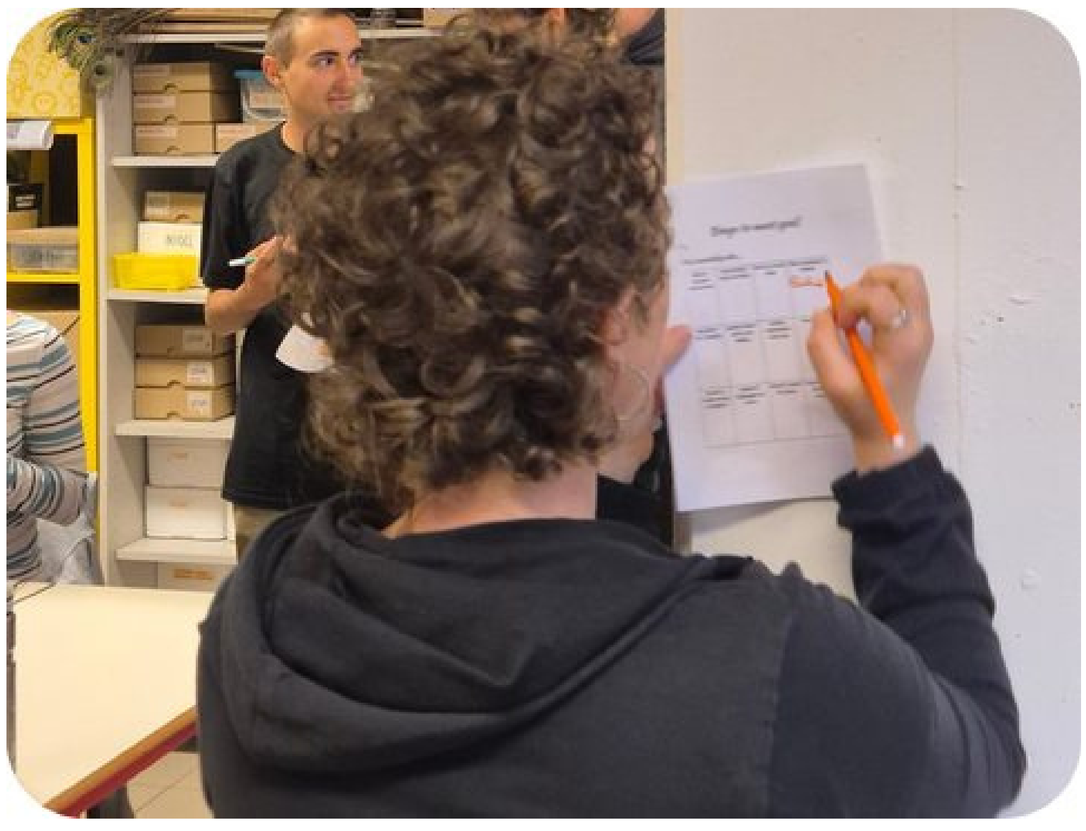
Two to five days of training: team building, intercultural activities, the Identity star, fears, expectations and contributions, a letter to your future self, safety guidelines and rules for living together written by the group.

During the Team

A predictable rhythm with two free days a week; mixed, rotating groups for work, cooking and cleaning; a weekly meeting and Italian lesson; individual talks on request; a mid-term evaluation.

At the end

A final evaluation with non-formal methods (Walk and talk, River of life, Circle of appreciation), a session on future opportunities, the Youthpass and a final event with the local community.





3. A shared approach

3.2 A healthy routine

For many volunteers, and especially for those who arrived from a context of war, the routine itself was the first healthy habit: regular working hours with breaks and two free days a week; work adapted to the climate, with a long siesta in summer; weekly menus decided together and rotating cooking groups; movement without competition, from hiking to rafting, always optional; time for the mind, with creative workshops, weekly reflection and time alone when needed.

3.3 Safety and well-being

Each host presented its safety guidelines during the on-arrival training. Shared principles: never work alone; a daily briefing on tasks, risks and weather; the right to ask for a different task without justifying it; the reason behind every rule explained; proper equipment from day one; clear reference people and emergency numbers given on the first day.





4. Before departure

Most obstacles for young people fleeing war are practical, and they appear before the journey even starts. Solving them early lets volunteers arrive calm and focused on the experience.

4.1 Selection with the Supporting Organisations

A first selection close to the volunteers

The Ukrainian Supporting Organisation proposed young people with fewer opportunities, after asking them to fill in a form; Joint then held an informal online interview and confirmed the selection. **Working with organisations that know the volunteers and their families made it possible to reach young people who would not have applied alone.**

A pre-departure meeting

Once the volunteers were selected, the Supporting Organisations met them before departure. Thanks to this early meeting, the volunteers travelling from Ukraine to the same mobility organised the long journey together.

A constant contact

During the Team the Supporting Organisations kept in touch with the volunteers, sometimes with individual calls, and with Joint, and closed the experience with their own final evaluation. In a situation made uncertain by war, they were also the link with the families.

4.2 Practical obstacles we solved

A long journey

There are no flights from Ukraine: volunteers travelled by bus to a neighbouring country, often to the Polish border, and then by plane or bus to Italy. Joint checked every ticket before purchase, and hosts that cannot be reached by public transport organised pick-ups from the nearest stations at different times of day.

Documents and residence

No visa was needed for a short-term Team. For volunteers living in another EU country, Joint checked that their residence permit was valid for the whole project. Joint also managed the volunteering agreements, the matching on the European Youth Portal, the monitoring module and the programme insurance.

Pocket money

Some volunteers could not receive transfers on a Ukrainian bank account. Hosts explained how to open an account without fees, collected bank details with a simple form, or found a temporary solution so that every instalment arrived on time.

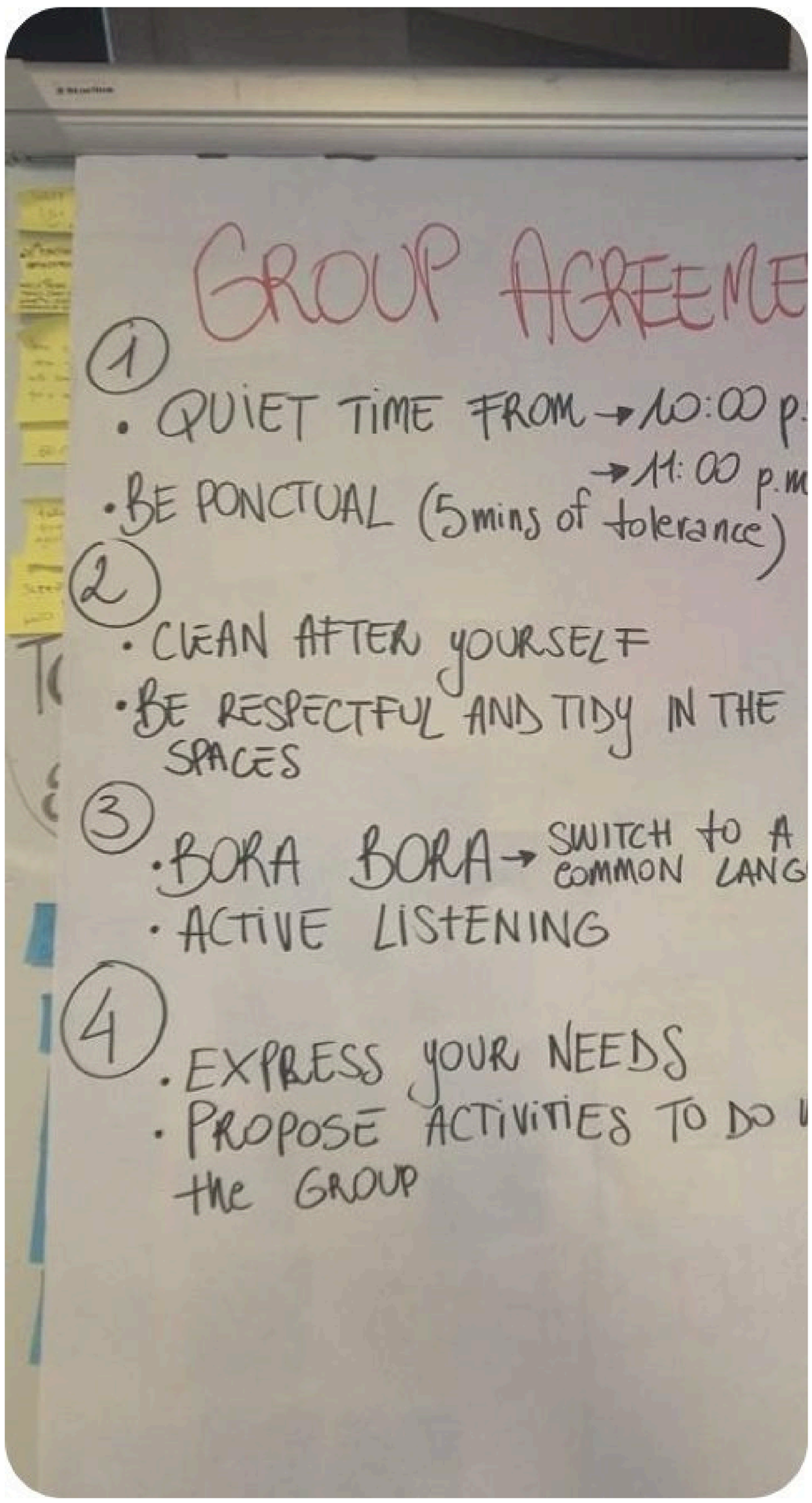
4. Before departure

Needs and preferences

Diets, allergies, room preferences and other needs were collected confidentially before arrival. Welcome packs and info packs explained the place and the work, and included free links to start learning Italian and materials for daily life.

4.3 Preparing the group

When a Team brings together volunteers whose countries are at war, or whose backgrounds may create tension, the host needs to know it in advance. At Cascina EUtopia, young Ukrainians and a volunteer originally from Russia joined the same Team. The host planned rooms and groups accordingly, but the lesson was clear: collect this information confidentially, and prepare how to accompany it, before the group arrives.





5. During the Team

Across the six Teams, one principle came first: the war is never imposed as a topic. Volunteers fleeing conflict decide when, how and how much to talk about it.

5.1 Their choice, their voice

Never imposed

At Fattoria l'Arca the Ukrainian volunteers decided when and how much to speak about the war. At Monte Barro, the two Ukrainian volunteers shared their background spontaneously, in an intimate, convivial moment, and the tutors gave them space whenever they needed it.

Leading, not being asked

The most meaningful moments were those proposed and led by the volunteers themselves: a workshop on Ukraine, a documentary on the start of the war followed by questions, vareniki cooked for Ukraine's Independence Day, intercultural evenings where each volunteer presented their country with food, games and traditions.

Useful from day one

A central, concrete activity in small groups that needs no common language, like the toad campaign at Monte Barro or planting strawberries at Fattoria l'Arca, lets those who come from a war feel useful immediately, without having to talk about themselves.







5.2 Nature, movement and food

The healthy lifestyle at the heart of T4HL3 proved especially valuable for young people fleeing war. Working outdoors, in parks, fields and woods, gave a rhythm to the day and a sense of calm. Sport offered by the territory, such as rafting on the Lao and Tagliamento rivers, climbing at Monte Barro, cycling the Alpe Adria path and tandem paragliding at Bordano, was always led by professionals, designed for beginners and optional. Cooking for the group, with weekly menus and vegetables from the gardens, turned food into a moment of care and sharing.

5. During the Team

A Ukrainian volunteer at Fattoria l'Arca summed it up: she felt “more relaxed and connected with nature”, and found friendship.







5.3 News from home

Listening and hope

News from families and friends about the war weighed on the volunteers' mood and made it hard, at times, to enjoy the present. Staff listened, offered comfort and tried to keep hope alive.

An attentive group

At Fattoria l'Arca, staff helped the other volunteers understand the situation, so they could notice changes of mood and eventually choose the right moment for questions.

Time to stay in touch

Staying in contact with loved ones in a difficult situation is essential. Talk about it with the volunteers and find together the right balance between group life and moments of contact with home.

Small details

Before village festivals, hosts warned the Ukrainian volunteers that there might be fireworks, which can be disturbing. Free time was organised so that those travelling for the first time could make the most of it.

5.4 Living together

Mixed rooms and groups

At Cascina EUtopia the Ukrainian volunteers were placed in different rooms, and cooking and work groups were mixed and rotating, so that nobody stayed only with those from the same country.

5. During the Team

A language rule decided by the group

In the first week some volunteers often spoke their own language, Russian or Ukrainian among others, and those who did not understand felt excluded. The group adopted the “Bora Bora” rule: anyone could say it to ask for a switch to English.

Someone always available

Staff living on site, a tutor living with the group and a weekly meeting gave everyone a reference point for their well-being. At the end, each volunteer received written feedback.





5.5 Meeting other young refugees

Three Teams met young refugees or migrants from other countries: young Ukrainians of the local community at Fattoria l'Arca, migrants and unaccompanied minors at Sabir and Agorà in Crotone, young refugees hosted by OIKOS ETS in Udine at Farfalle nella Testa. For the Ukrainian volunteers, these meetings had a special value: they recognised in the guests' stories experiences close to their own. One named Agorà her favourite activity; another wrote that seeing the life of migrants “from the inside” helped her understand whether she wants to work in this field; a third became even more convinced to continue in the field of psychology.

5. During the Team

5.6 Activities step by step

A workshop on Ukraine, led by Ukrainian volunteers

Where: Fattoria l'Arca, second mobility
Objective: let the volunteers tell their country in their own way, and help the group understand
Led by: the Ukrainian volunteers, who chose contents and photos
Participation: free; the film was optional

The volunteers presented their country with their own photos and testimonies, then proposed the film “20 Days in Mariupol”, which each person could choose whether to watch, and opened a space for questions. They said they do not like talking about the war, but think it is important to do so, and that the workshop helped the group understand them better. For the others, it was a way to learn about a reality that is often forgotten.

A documentary and a moderated debate

Where: Cooperativa ONE
Objective: show what happened at the start of the war, beyond what social media shows
Led by: three Ukrainian volunteers, with the Joint referent as moderator

The idea came from the three volunteers, aged 18 to 20. The Joint referent helped them organise the evening and prepare questions to start the discussion. During the debate she gave the floor, brought the conversation back to the facts when needed and paid attention to the emotions of both the Ukrainian volunteers and the group. The volunteers could tell their story feeling supported and not exposed, and the evening brought the group closer to them.

A testimony with SALO Calabrese APS Ucraina

Where: Fattoria l'Arca, first mobility
Objective: meet the local Ukrainian community and open a respectful dialogue on the war
Preparation: a conversation with the three Ukrainian volunteers, who chose whether and how to share their experience

A representative of the association told his own story: life when the war broke out, the move to Italy, the support received from the association and the host community. The volunteers then shared, on a voluntary basis, stories of their own and of people close to them, and suggested a documentary to those who wanted to know more. To close the meeting serenely, everyone shared a snack with the guest, and the conversation moved on to interests and passions.

5. During the Team

Vareniki for Independence Day

Where: Farfalle nella Testa
Objective: share a piece of culture on an important day, chosen by the volunteers
When: 24 August, in the first days of the Team

The Ukrainian volunteers proposed to celebrate Ukraine's Independence Day by cooking vareniki. They prepared the dough and the filling and left to the others the task of filling and closing the dumplings. It was a way to share their culture and to feel recognised on an important day for their country, without words.

Ceramics with young refugees

Where: Farfalle nella Testa
Objective: meet young refugees of the territory through an activity that needs no common language
With: young refugees hosted by OIKOS ETS, Udine, through the host's network

In two workshops, volunteers and young refugees first modelled plates, bowls and pendants, then painted them. Ceramics needs no shared language and no experience: the workshop became a moment of creativity and intercultural encounter.





6. After the Team

The end of a Team is a beginning. For young people whose plans were interrupted by war, it can open new paths.

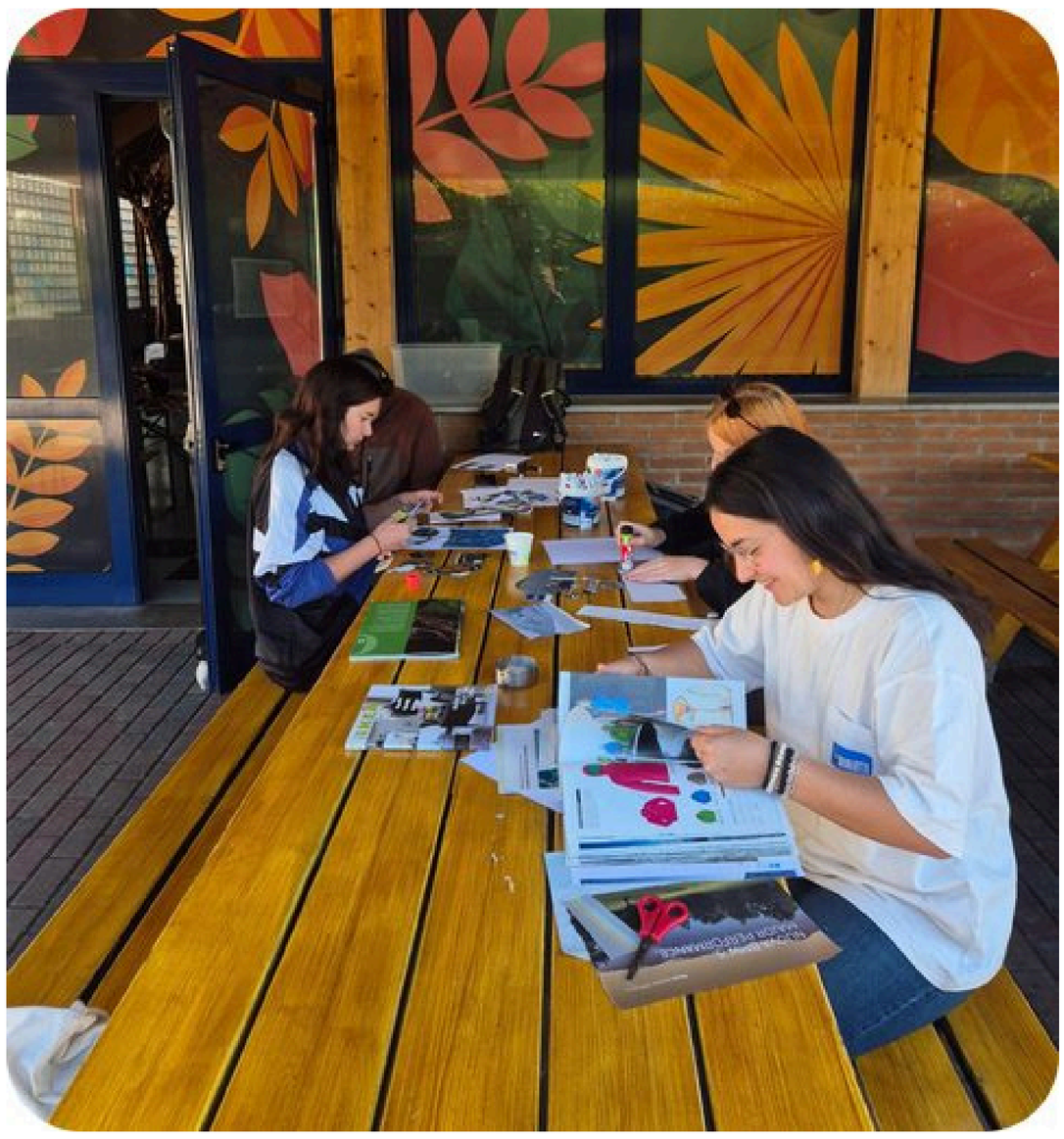
6.1 Follow-up

The Supporting Organisations closed the experience with their volunteers through a final evaluation and stayed in touch with them. At the end of each Team, Joint presented the next opportunities: long-term ESC projects, youth exchanges and training courses. Volunteers built their Youthpass from the concrete activities they had done, and at Cascina EUtopia each volunteer received written feedback from the staff.

6.2 Where the volunteers went next

After the Teams, at least five young Ukrainians started a new ESC or Erasmus+ project: one in a long-term ESC near Ostello Parco Monte Barro, one at a riding centre, following her passion for horses, one in a long-term ESC in the social field with P.E.CO. in Genoa, and others in new projects in Italy and in training courses.

Others found a direction. A volunteer from the first mobility at Fattoria l'Arca discovered she wants to work in education and, combining it with her studies in civil architecture, designed a project for the children's educational centre where she now works while continuing university. A volunteer at Cooperativa ONE became even more determined to continue in the field of psychology. A volunteer at Monte Barro says she feels “more inspired and stable” and would like to come back one day with her children. A very shy volunteer at Farfalle nella Testa, insecure about her English, took part in everything and wants to join other projects. At Cascina EUtopia, a volunteer stayed in touch with a young woman from the village she met at the festival.





Legambiente Lecco – Monte Barro

Each Team met young people fleeing war in its own way. These are their stories, as told by the Team referents.

The Ukrainian partner made the first selection of volunteers; Joint confirmed it, managed the agreements and the insurance, and organised a pre-departure call, updating individually those who could not join. Since most of the Hosting locations, like Legambiente hostel, cannot be reached by public transport, staff picked the group up at the closest station at different times.

In the park of Monte Barro, the toad campaign gave everyone a concrete role from the first days, in small groups and without the need for a common language. The two volunteers took part in the intercultural evenings, where each volunteer presented their country with food, games and traditions. One evening, in an intimate and convivial moment, they chose to share their background; they felt welcomed in a safe environment, and the tutors gave them space whenever they needed it.

After the Team, one of them started a long-term ESC project not far from the hostel. The other feels “more inspired and stable”, with new bonds and new opportunities.

> *“I've learned to leave my comfort zone and take initiative, it's not that scary.”*
>
> **A volunteer from Ukraine**



Fattoria l'Arca, first mobility

Before departure, a pre-departure meeting let the three involved volunteers get to know each other and organise the long journey together, by bus to the Polish border and then to Italy.

At the farm, news from family and friends about the war often weighed on their mood. Staff listened, offered comfort and tried to keep hope alive, and helped the rest of the group become more attentive to changes of mood and to the right moment for questions. The meeting with SALO Calabrese APS Ucraina, prepared together with the three volunteers, became a moment of dialogue that ended with a shared snack.

After the Team, one volunteer continued with ESC projects at a riding centre, following her passion for horses; another designed a project for a children's educational centre where she now works while studying.

> *“I know for certain that I'm not the same person I was before the project.”*
>
> **A volunteer from Ukraine**



Cooperativa ONE

Three young Ukrainian women, aged 18 to 20, joined the Team; one had just turned 18 and was at her first experience of this kind. Joint checked their tickets for the long overland journey and, since they could not receive transfers on a Ukrainian account, found a temporary solution so that all four instalments of pocket money arrived on time. Their Supporting Organisations stayed in constant contact with them and with their families.

The three volunteers proposed to show the group a documentary on the start of the war, followed by questions, and led the evening with the support of the Joint referent as moderator. The meetings with migrants and unaccompanied minors at Sabir and Agorà had a special value for them: one named Agorà her favourite activity, another said it helped her understand whether she wants to work with migrants, a third became even more convinced to study psychology.

> *"This project is a good opportunity to go outside of the comfort zone."*
>
> **A volunteer from Ukraine, before departure**



Cascina EUtopia – P.E.CO.

Before arrival, staff explained to the Ukrainian volunteers how to open an account for the pocket money without fees, checked the insurance, collected diets and added free links to learn Italian to the welcome pack. The Cascina cannot be reached by public transport, so staff picked volunteers up at the stations of Arquata Scrivia and Ovada.

The group also included a volunteer from Russia, living in Bulgaria. Staff knew this needed care: the Ukrainian volunteers were placed in different rooms, and cooking and work groups were mixed and rotating. When the group started to split by language, it adopted the “Bora Bora” rule to switch to English. Staff lived at the Cascina and were always available for an individual talk, and each volunteer received written feedback at the end.

Right after the Team, a young Ukrainian started a long-term ESC in the social field with P.E.CO. in Genoa.

> *“Step by step, I notice that I start to be more calm and accepting reality.”*
>
> **A volunteer from Ukraine**



Farfalle nella Testa

Before arrival, staff collected bank details with a simple form, room preferences, allergies and intolerances, prepared Italian materials for daily life and organised pick-ups from the station at different times.

In the first days, the Ukrainian volunteers proposed to celebrate Ukraine's Independence Day by cooking vareniki with the whole group. A facilitator lived with the volunteers and, with the weekly meeting, was the reference point for everyone's well-being. Ceramics workshops with young refugees hosted by OIKOS ETS brought them together with other young people who had fled their countries.

A very shy volunteer, insecure about her English, took part in everything and at the end wanted to join other projects. Another, at her first volunteering experience, wrote that she wants to “try other projects”.



Fattoria l'Arca, second mobility

Joint held an online interview, managed the matching, the monitoring module and the agreement, sent the welcome pack and info pack and held a pre-departure video call. For one volunteer living in another EU country, Joint checked that the residence permit was valid for the whole project.

The topic of war was never imposed. The volunteers led a workshop on their country, which they said helped the group understand them better. Staff paid attention to small details, such as warning them about fireworks before village festivals, and organised free time so that those travelling for the first time could see as much as possible.

After the Team, one volunteer joined another project in Italy and another continued with training and ESC projects.

> *“It made me braver, calmer, and more confident in who I am.”*
>
> **A volunteer from Ukraine**



8. Voices of the volunteers

In their questionnaires, articles and evaluations, the young Ukrainians described what the experience meant to them.

- *“I discovered so much about myself, became more confident, and learned how to enjoy the little things.”*
- *“I'm leaving the project with valuable knowledge in agriculture, unforgettable memories, and friends that have become like family to me.”*
- *“I feel more open minded for new opportunities, more self-confident and put new goals for myself.”*
- *“Take your time, not to be in a rush, happiness is in the simplest things.”*
- *“I feel more relaxed and connected with nature and I found friendship.”*
- *“You'll meet people from all over the world that become a second family for you.”*
- *“We created a real family together, I found a lot of friends with similar life values and hobbies.”*
- *“Step by step, I notice that I start to be more calm and accepting reality.”*
- *“I've learned to leave my comfort zone and take initiative, it's not that scary.”*

9. Lessons learned and checklist

9.1 What to do again

Let them lead

Leave space for activities proposed by the Ukrainian volunteers, so they decide what to share of their culture and their story.

Concrete tasks without words

A central activity in small groups, useful to the territory, lets them feel useful from day one without having to talk about themselves.

Nature and movement as care

Outdoor work, non-competitive sport and shared meals give rhythm and calm, and are a natural space for building relationships.

A rule on languages

A language rule decided by the group, like “Bora Bora”, and volunteers from the same country in different rooms and groups.

Support without exposure

When a debate on the war is planned, an experienced staff member helps prepare it and moderates, paying attention to everyone's emotions.

9.2 What to avoid

Arriving unprepared

Collect confidentially, before arrival, information on possible tensions between volunteers from sensitive backgrounds, and build cohesion from the first days: at mid-project it is hard to recover.

Underestimating contact with home

Staying in touch with loved ones in a difficult situation is essential: plan time and space for it.

Asking for stories

Never ask volunteers to tell their experience of the war: wait for them to choose to.

9. Lessons learned and checklist

9.3 A checklist

Before departure

- ◯ Work with Supporting Organisations that know the volunteers and their families
- ◯ Check travel routes, tickets, residence permits and the bank account for pocket money
- ◯ Collect needs and possible group dynamics confidentially
- ◯ Organise pick-ups, a WhatsApp group and a pre-departure call

During the Team

- ◯ Never impose the topic of war; let volunteers decide when and how
- ◯ Offer space for workshops proposed by the volunteers
- ◯ Give everyone a concrete role from the first days
- ◯ Mix rooms and groups and agree a language rule
- ◯ Plan time for contact with home and pay attention to small details, like fireworks
- ◯ Make sure someone is always available for an individual talk

After the Team

- ◯ Close with written feedback and a final evaluation with the Supporting Organisation
- ◯ Present the next opportunities: ESC, exchanges, training





A safe place to be young again

The young people fleeing war who joined T4HL3 did not come to talk about the war. They came to volunteer, to meet other young Europeans, to work outdoors, to cook and to travel. What helped them most was what helps every volunteer, done with a little more care: practical obstacles solved early, a group that listens, concrete tasks, a language everyone understands, and the freedom to choose what to share.

When they chose to speak, through a workshop, a documentary, a dish or a conversation at dinner, they were the ones leading, and the group learned something that no news report can teach. Nature, movement and shared meals gave them calm and a rhythm; the group gave them friendship.

At the end, many wrote that they felt calmer, braver and less alone; several started new projects. This is the strongest reason to keep including young people fleeing conflict in ESC Teams.



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