

REPORT

ICYE

Impact Assessment

Human Rights in Diversity

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Abstract

This study has been conducted within the framework of the Erasmus+ project *Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*. The aim was to examine the impact of the human rights learner-centred project on the volunteers (at a personal, social and cultural level).

The study explores the experiences of 18 international volunteers. The respondents were interviewed at the end of their service by project multipliers in 16 different countries in Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. What impacts of the voluntary service and human rights project can be identified through the narrations of volunteers? In order to shed light on the matter, the discussion focuses on three main questions: How do the volunteers perceive the impacts of voluntary service? How do they make sense of human rights topics encountered? What are the key aspects for promoting human rights education in the framework of voluntary service?

Based on the findings of the study, voluntary service creates greater well-being for the volunteer as a result of processes that boost personal growth and develop competencies for life and career. Personal growth develops in and through the volunteer's meaningful contribution in local communities. The respondents of this study have gained a deeper understanding of their own role in caring for the well-being of others; likewise they have enhanced their ability to assume that role by acquiring new skills, attitudes and values.

Human rights learning is intrinsically intertwined with this process. 15 out of 18 respondents show more awareness of the role of inclusion and participation in the well-being of people in general and beneficiaries (i.e. people in vulnerable situations) in particular. The experience has also fostered a commitment to act: all respondents see themselves as engaging in and catalysing dialogue and exchange on some level.

The impacts on the volunteers are created through the holistic experience of international voluntary service. Encounters with beneficiaries play a key role as they open up space for learning experiences. However, encounters do not automatically lead to learning. Volunteers require adequate support for developing new thinking tools to make sense of the experiences (link everyday experiences to the concept of rights and social change). The project has created an enabling environment for the respondents' deeper and more meaningful encounters with human diversity and dignity.

1. Introduction

This study is set within the framework of the Erasmus+ project *Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*. A pilot project, it has sought to create a culture of human rights within the sphere of volunteering and in local communities. This requires challenging practices and behaviour embedded in privileges and power relations and engaging with the blind spots of our consciousness, exploring new ways of perceiving, of understanding and of respecting vulnerable people. The human rights project has sought to reinforce the value of individual action and personal change. Thirteen EVS (European Voluntary Service) volunteers were recruited to serve in host projects in 12 countries around the world. These young volunteers – along with another five volunteers of bilateral EVS or ICYE programmes – became the respondents of a study that investigates the impact of the project and its human rights in diversity underpinnings on the volunteers. It draws on the volunteers own narrations in reports, articles and at the very end of their stay – one-to-one interviews.

The multipliers of this project, i.e. 16 youth workers from ICYE organisations in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America led local human rights education trainings for volunteers and provided ongoing support and occasion to reflect on the volunteers' own positioning vis-à-vis society's others. The training stressed the values on which human rights are based so that young people can empower themselves and others to develop the skills and attitudes that promote equality, dignity and respect in their communities, societies and worldwide.¹

Specifically, the study assesses the impacts of the human rights project and volunteering experience on the socio-cultural and personal development of the volunteers. It investigates the volunteers' critical reflection on and analysis of dominant norms, as well as the agency they grasp as they negotiate and challenge discursive practices. It also analyses the key components for creating positive impact.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical underpinning of the study and the actors involved.

Chapter 3 presents the sample and discusses the methodology adopted for data collection analysis.

Chapter 4 reviews the motivations of the young people for volunteering abroad, explores the impacts of the volunteering experience and the human rights based project on the volunteers, discusses the key components that create positive impacts, and makes recommendations.

Chapter 5 brings together the conclusions of the study

Chapter 6 offers some key themes for discussion in future studies on volunteering and human rights based work.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Voluntary Service and Actors Involved

Volunteering, by definition, is contingent to an individual's free will, it is unpaid and the aim is to benefit the wider community/environment. While volunteering entails many benefits for the volunteer, the guiding principle is common good rather than self-interest. Volunteering can be done informally or formally through a group, club or organisation. Here the term is used to refer to formal volunteering through the long-term international volunteering program.

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/human-rights-education/>. Accessed on 24.03.2016

The study also employs the term *international voluntary service*. This concept underlines that it is a structured activity that takes place in another country during a fixed period of time: it is “based on an agreement that provides all the parties involved with an appropriate framework of rules and procedures that inform all the partners about their duties and rights”². The objectives and means of volunteering are defined and the service program is implemented by an organisation, such as ICYE.

There are a number of voluntary service programs. These programs differ from each other in terms of their aims and objectives, duration, financial structure, work profile, volunteer profile and support. As this study is concerned with the voluntary service experiences within ICYE and EVS programs, they share five central features:

- **International.** Volunteers travel to another country in order to engage with volunteering activities. This means that the voluntary service encompasses a wide range of experiences resulting from not only working but also living in a foreign country.
- **Long duration.** The length of voluntary programs ranges from a few days to a few years. Here the duration is from 8 to 12 months.
- **Young people.** The ICYE program is essentially a youth exchange program. European Voluntary Service is limited to young people aged 18-30.
- **Non-specialised volunteers.** Volunteers are not required to have prior experience or expertise in the field of work or prior international experience. In most cases there are no language skill requirements.
- **Individual placements but network of support.** The volunteers receive support and training prior, during and after the volunteering period abroad.

The volunteers are a heterogeneous group of young people. Some have recently finished their secondary education and some are professionals. Unlike many other programs, the profile of the volunteer is not limited by skills or competencies. Although not required, a considerable number of volunteers have a set of skills that influence their placement and role at the host project.

Voluntary service is about *doing* and *learning*. The central idea is to learn *through* voluntary service: it is an opportunity for volunteers to develop skills and gain new experiences, but at the same time contribute to a project and wider community. A great part of the desired impacts is sought by empowering young people to bring about positive change in his/her own community during (to a lesser extent) and after the voluntary service. The mission of intercultural youth exchange is to promote active mobility, intercultural learning and international voluntary service.

The program is firmly set within the framework of *non-formal learning*, that is, “educational activities that are planned, organised and sustained outside formal education institutions”. “The purpose is to provide alternative learning opportunities for those who do not have access to formal schooling or need specific life skills and knowledge to overcome different obstacles. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view, as opposed to incidental or random types of learning.”³

One of the learning objectives is that the volunteer is willing and able to contribute to the wider community/environment in a sustainable way. As coordinating organisation, ICYE has practices and measures in place to create a mutually beneficial working relationship between the volunteer and host project and also support the volunteer’s learning process throughout the voluntary service period.

² Council of Europe and the European Commission (2002: 9). “T-kit 5: International voluntary service”

³ UNESCO (2005: 39) “Synergies between Formal and Non-Formal Education. An Overview of good practices”. Section for Literacy and Non-Formal Education, Division of Basic Education, Education.

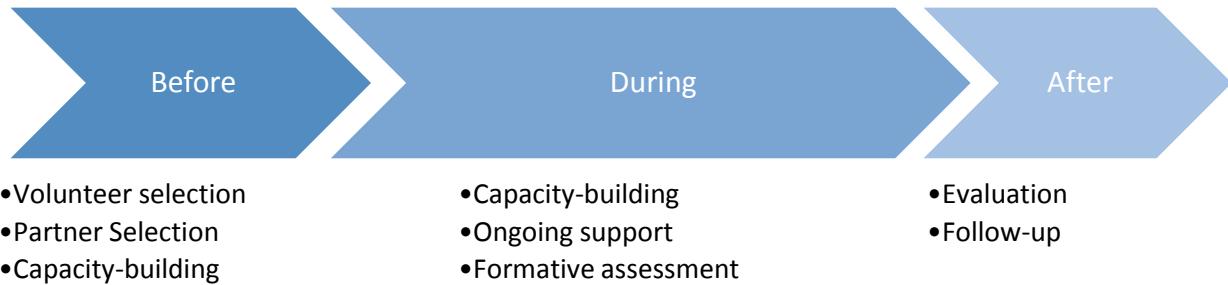


FIGURE 1

Figure 1 illustrates the different steps involved in voluntary service from the perspective of a coordinating organisation. These are also key moments for creating greater impact. Before the voluntary service is to begin, preparations are made: What kind of volunteering placements are sought, what is the profile of the volunteers in each placement and what kind of training and support do stakeholders (mainly the volunteer and host project staff) need before beginning the collaborations? During the service period, measures (training, support and evaluation) are taken in order to prevent potential conflicts and enhance the quality of the experience for all relevant parties. After the actual service, the experience is evaluated keeping in mind further learning of beneficiaries and development of the program.

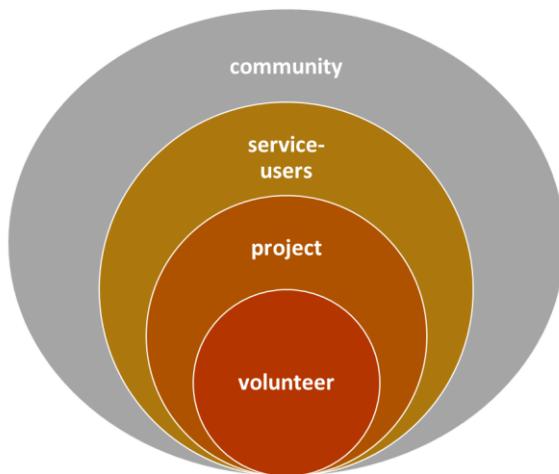


FIGURE 2

Each of these steps involves a different mix of actors: The sending organisation and host coordinating organisation⁴ that assume responsibility for the implementation of the program together with the host project⁵, i.e. organisation where the international volunteer undertakes the service. Nevertheless, when looking into the impacts of the program, it is the volunteer who is in the focus: in this case, this refers to young people who come from diverse backgrounds and have varying sets of skills but are all temporary members of staff and motivated to work without monetary compensation. Volunteers learn from and also provide benefit to the host project, beneficiaries⁶ (e.g. pupils at educational institutions

or residents at communities for disabled people) and the community at large (host community during the service and afterwards home community).

2.2 Theory of Change and Fields of Impact

Impact of volunteering refers to the long-term effects (c.f. Figure 3): for example, improved community cohesion, improved care and support for the children in an orphanage, better understanding of cultural diversity for volunteers, staff of host projects and beneficiaries. Impact is understood in terms of changes that can be witnessed also after a particular volunteering period has ended – but the longitude of the impact assessment study affects the kind of longer term impacts that are found⁷. Impacts may be positive or negative, desired or unexpected. Impacts are brought about by a series of *outcomes*, such as an increase

⁴ The host coordinating organisation is the organisation that organises the volunteer's host placement, the trainings and support that is part of the ICYE and EVS training cycle as well as other practical arrangement.

⁵ The host project is the host placement of the volunteer, i.e. the organisation where the volunteer serves.

⁶ Beneficiaries are the (vulnerable) people who are directly impacted upon by the work of the host project.

⁷ The main data used in the study consists of interviews conducted towards the end of the voluntary service period.

in the confidence and practical skills of volunteers, introduction of new practices in the host project (introduced by the volunteer).⁸

Volunteering and voluntary service means that the changes can also be studied in terms of input and output. *Input* could be, for example, hours spent by staff to train and support the volunteer, but there's also the input of the volunteer, ICYE staff, beneficiaries, etc. *Outputs* can be measured immediately, for example, the lessons taught by the volunteer. Each host project is different as is each volunteer. For this reason, the potential impacts are far from uniform and subject to a complex interplay of factors.⁹

Impacts arise in different contexts and affects different groups of people. The different types of impact are interwoven and interdependent, and often hard to discern. It may therefore not always be easy to differentiate one type of impact from another¹⁰. Due to the number of variables, it is usually very difficult, if not impossible, to establish cause – effect relationships of certain actions (e.g. human rights trainings for the volunteers¹¹) and outcomes. In general terms, impacts of voluntary service tend to originate from processes affecting skills, attitudes and values – all of which are not easily observable.

In this study, the focus is on three types of impact:

- **Human / Personal Impact**, that is the knowledge, skills and well-being of people (both from the perspective of beneficiaries and agents of change)
- **Social Impact** resulting from the interpersonal relationships developed between people during the volunteering period.

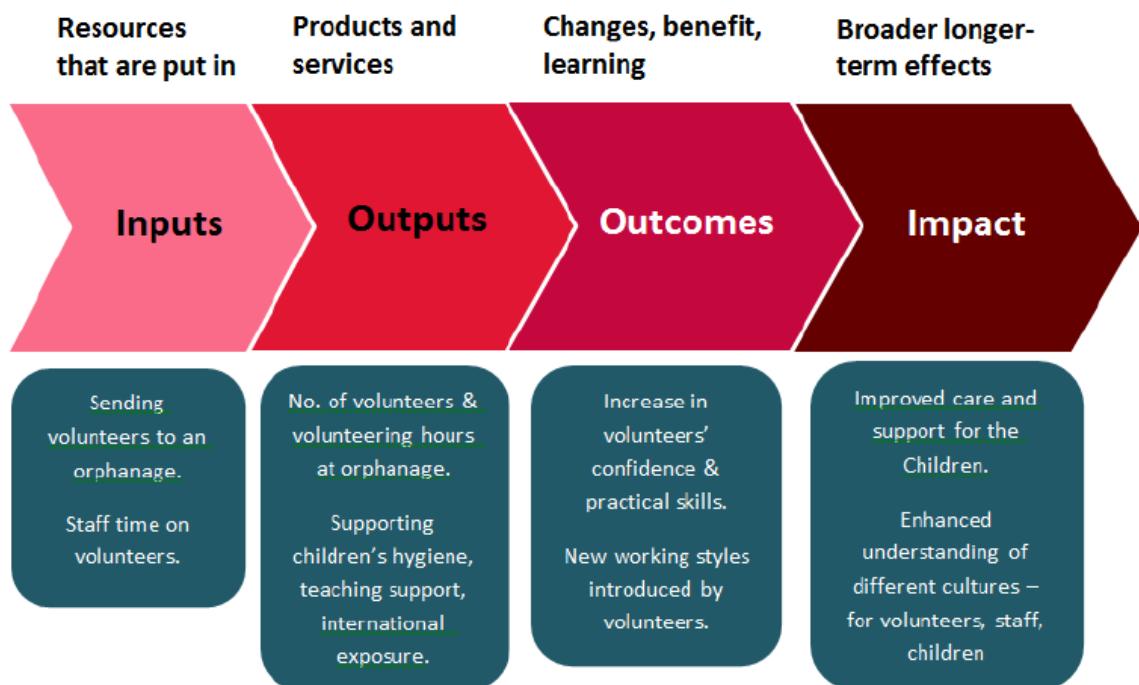


FIGURE 3

⁸ ICYE (2013). "IMPACT ICYE - Practical Guide for Assessing the Impact of Long-Term International Volunteering". ICYE International Office Publication, Germany.

⁹ ICYE (2013). Ibid.

¹⁰ ICYE (2013). Ibid.

¹¹ The aims of the capacity building activities in this Erasmus+ project were for the volunteers a) to become more self-aware and more self-critical b) to gain confidence to talk about/communicate human rights c) to be able to engage more with their host project and to empathise and interact/communicate more with the beneficiaries of the project.

- **Cultural Impact** arises from the sum total of interpersonal contacts creating a sense of identity and awareness of one's self and others.

These impacts do not exist in a social vacuum: “Different people and organisations will have diverging opinions on the benefits that International Voluntary Service brings to society as a whole and to volunteers in particular”¹². Different perspectives relate to the efforts made to achieve certain benefits while others are overlooked. What goals are perceived as meaningful and worth the effort? And can they also account for how the outcomes are perceived and impacts evaluated (e.g. success, failure, or not important)?

The Council of Europe and European Commission Training Kit for international voluntary service suggests approaching organisational perceptions of international voluntary service by exploring differences in terms of idealist – pragmatist spectrum (c.f. Figure 4): e.g. “Some organisations will see IVS as a way of fostering tolerance, intercultural learning, social and cultural progress and the overall development of local communities. Other organisations will see IVS as a great opportunity for young people coming from difficult backgrounds in terms of personal capacity building, training for skills and even social reintegration in some cases.”¹³ It also points out that the dimensions are not mutually exclusive and that there should be a balance between the personal gains (learning goals) and benefits for others (service outcomes): “the satisfaction of a volunteer about the experiences and skills acquired remains incomplete without the sense of having effectively contributed towards a useful project for the local community.”¹⁴

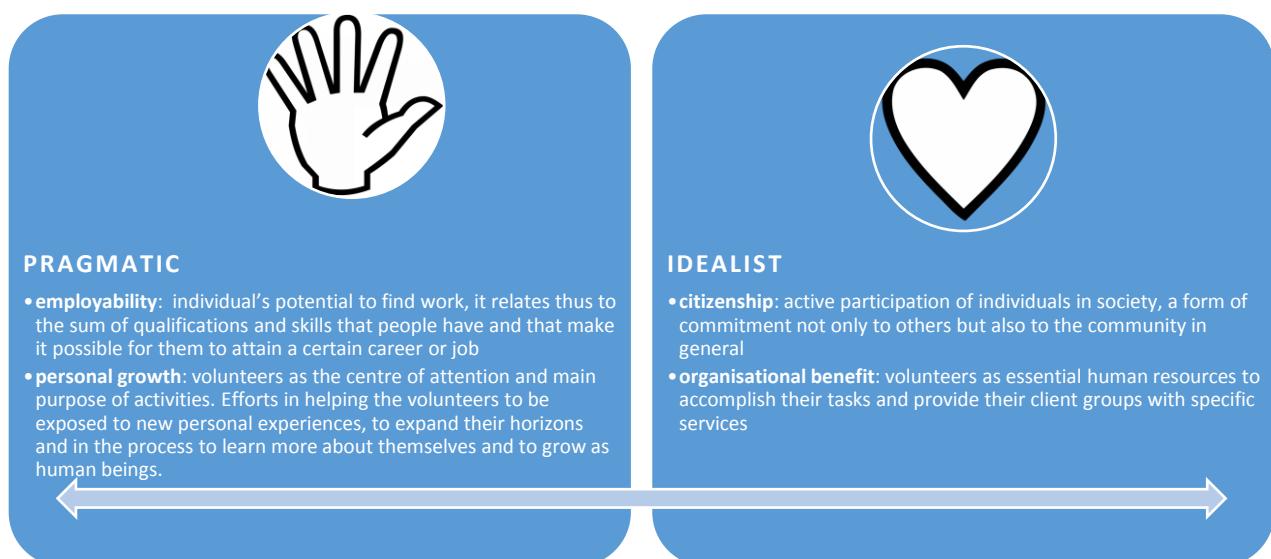


FIGURE 4

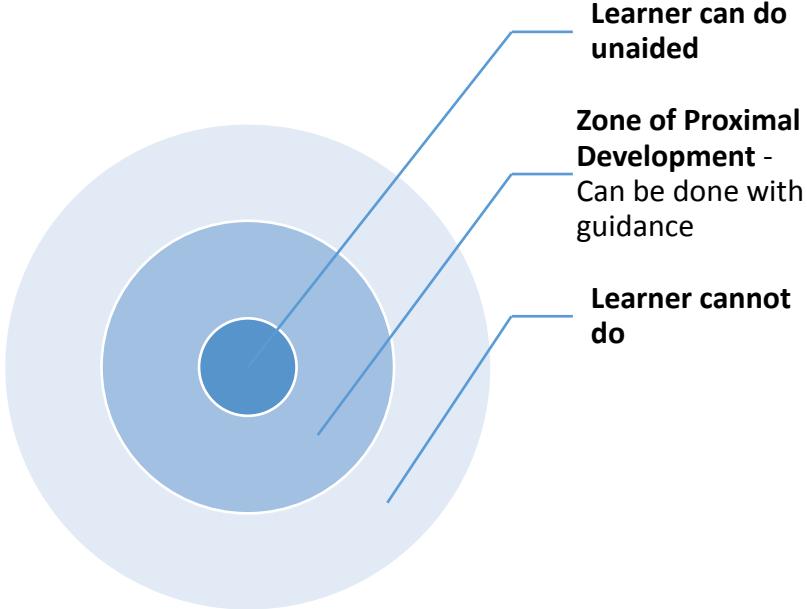
2.3 Learning through Voluntary Service

As stated previously (c.f. 2.1), voluntary service is about non-formal learning. Living and working in a new socio-cultural environment implies challenges and requires acquiring a new set of skills, values and attitudes. One particular feature of international voluntary service is the challenge of contributing to the host community. How to actively participate and make a positive difference in an environment when one lacks skills to interpret the local reality and to interact with others? Volunteers receive support to overcome daily challenges but ultimately the aim is to draw from the experience as much as possible; namely to turn the challenging situations into constructive learning experiences that build competencies for life and work.

¹² Council of Europe and the European Commission (2002: 14). “T-kit 5: International voluntary service”

¹³ Council of Europe and the European Commission (2002: 14-15)

¹⁴ Ibid.



Zone of proximal development, a concept coined by Leo Vygotsky, refers to the distance between the actual developmental level - as in the ability to solve problems independently - and the potential development that can be accessed only through guidance or collaboration (c.f. Figure 5). The support received by the learner is referred to as *scaffolding*.¹⁵

Voluntary service effectively expands the developmental zone of volunteers by providing learning challenges and support to achieve them. International volunteers may need considerable scaffolding in the beginning: e.g. to perform their work tasks or just to move around in a new city with a new system of transport. However, with

FIGURE 5

time, volunteers experience no difficulty in performing these tasks independently and in fact, often end up guiding others. Many challenges faced by volunteers are far less concrete though, such as adapting to the host community and dealing with homesickness. There is a degree of scaffolding involved in overcoming these kinds of challenges as well, but they are also addressed in volunteer trainings by means of explanations and simulations – often with the aim of providing the necessary tools to identify such situations in the future and build self-regulation tools to cope with the stress.

While voluntary service entails a number of educational activities that are in fact planned and organised, a lot of the learning happens in contexts that cannot be predicted. Learning is done by doing. *Experiential learning theory* can help make sense of this learning process. The theory was developed by Kolb in 1970s and is “a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour”. What makes it ‘experiential’ is the fact that it recognises the role of the consciousness and subjectivity in the learning process.¹⁶

Learning happens in cycles that are divided into four phases (c.f. Figure 6). Everything begins from a concrete experience. This may be a completely new experience for the learner or it may be one that calls for reinterpretation of previous experiences. Concrete experience is followed by reflective observation: the learner reflects on the experience. In the next phase, the reflection is developed into an abstract conceptualization; i.e. the concrete experience is detached from the immediate context, which is done by relying on the thinking skills of the learner. In the final phase, the learning is put into action. It is the phase of active experimentation, which again leads to new concrete experiences from which to learn more.¹⁷

¹⁵ Daniels, H. (ed.) (2005). An introduction to Vygotsky.

¹⁶ Kolb, D. A (2015:31). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Seeing voluntary service as being made up of small and big experiential learning cycles requires us to pay particular attention to the second and third phase of the cycle. There is hardly any shortage of new experiences or opportunities to test the new learning during the international volunteering period, but it is perhaps more important to pay attention to what happens with reflecting on and conceptualising the experiences. This is largely about receiving and using the feedback from others and drawing from a pre-existing body of knowledge. It is a much more covert process. There may well be experiences that imply insurmountable challenges for the learner if he/she does not have the necessary tools or support, which may in turn lead to undesirable outcomes.

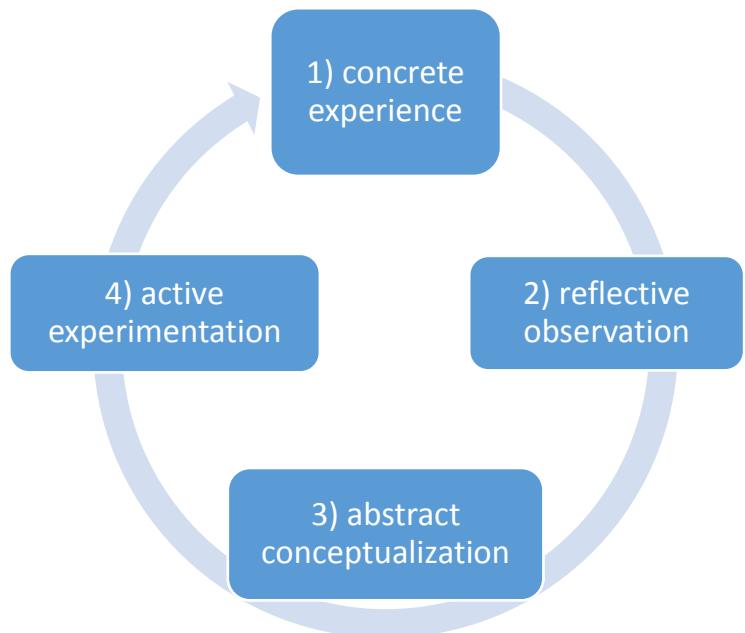


FIGURE 6

All experiences do not automatically lead to learning. The goals and resources of the volunteer guide how much and what he/she learns. Motivation¹⁸ and effort can be considered as input for learning outcomes. They are generally regarded as two interrelated prerequisites for learning and can be approached in the framework of cognitive economy (discussed in the field of Developmental Psychology; see for example, Bransford, J., Brown, A., & Cocking, R., 1999): any sort of learning process implies affective costs and requires emotional resources. From this we can conclude that learning is a personal challenge; or if it's not personal, it's not meaningful.

According to the *Basic Needs Theory* (part of a wider Self-Determination Theory developed by Deci and Ryan), there are three psychological needs that are also motivational resources for learners: autonomy, competence, and relatedness¹⁹. They are related to learners' "tendency to seek out novelty, pursue optimal challenge, exercise and extend their capabilities, explore, and learn"²⁰. According to the theory, this means active involvement when the needs are satisfied – and conversely, lack of engagement or antagonism when they are not met.

2.4 Learning about and through Diversity and Human Rights

One of the aims of the "*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*" project has been to "make volunteers active and responsible citizens valuing diversity and human rights and to build capacity of youth and volunteering organisations, making them multipliers of change beyond their prescribed roles as youth or social workers"²¹. Hence, in addition to personal growth, the expected outcome has been a greater commitment to the community and ability to service the beneficiaries – who belong to a vulnerable group

¹⁸ Motivation has a positive connection with greater learning. It is a "processes underlying the initiation, control, maintenance and evaluation of goal-oriented behaviours" (Hall & Goetz, 2013: 59).

¹⁹ Reeve, J. (2012).

²⁰ Reeve, J. (2012: 153).

²¹ C.f. Annex 1

due to age, disability, gender, immigration status, etc. and often an interweaving of these factors. Learning regarding diversity²² and human rights²³ are thus also in the focus of this impact assessment.

Intercultural learning is a central aspect of international voluntary service. On the one hand, it is about competence, i.e. an individual process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes or behaviour that is connected with interaction of different cultures.²⁴ This can be broken down to three aspects: awareness, cultural literacy and sensitivity²⁵.

On the other hand, the concept alludes to a process of promoting “a positive relationship between people and groups from different cultural backgrounds, based upon mutual recognition, equality and dignity, and giving a positive value to cultural difference,” and thus it “concerns learning about oneself to start with, about others and their differences, and finally, about what is cultural in each person.”^{26 27} The guiding principles of intercultural learning can be defined as²⁸:

- Tolerance of ambiguity; “the acceptance that different truths exist at the same time, that not everything can be explained through culture and that individual identity plays as important a role as culture”.
- Empathy; “being ready to put oneself into someone else’s shoes is necessary to make intercultural learning possible; it is essential to be interested in who the other is, their reality and emotional background, to be able to listen and be willing to understand the other’s point of view”.
- Solidarity; the “practical, social and political side of empathy” involves the capacity to work with others, in a group, to contribute to and be interested in everyone’s learning process”.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that cultural diversity is not a fact only in international contexts and, furthermore, not all *diversity* is cultural. Volunteering implies exchange and encounters between people from diverse backgrounds even when done locally or nationally. The core issue of defining intercultural learning is the fact that *culture* is a concept that is infamously difficult to pin down: one definition is *cultures* as “complex repertoires which people experience, use, learn and ‘do’ in their daily lives, within which they construct an ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows”²⁹.

Why include the dimension of human rights education in the learning process? Wouldn’t intercultural learning be sufficient? The spheres of intercultural learning and human rights education are intersecting but conceptually remain separate.

²²Diversity is “the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something” or “a range of different things or people” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, accessed at www.dictionary.cambridge.org/).

²³ Human Rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions which interfere with fundamental freedoms and human dignity (www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/humanrights)

²⁴ Council of Europe (2000:17).

²⁵ Salo-Lee, L. (2009)

²⁶ Council of Europe (2012):

²⁷ One close related concept is *identity*: Drawing on Jenkins (2004: 3-6), identification is understood as a social practice that takes place between individuals and between collectives, but also between individuals and collectives – it is about understanding who we are and making sense of how we are. The results of these interactions are relationships of similarity and difference (Jenkins, 2004: 5).

²⁸ Drawing on Peter Lauritzen and Henrik Otten in Council of Europe publication (2012).

²⁹ Jenkins (1994: 14)

HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURE is one where people:

- Have **knowledge about** and **respect for human rights** and fundamental freedoms
- Have a sense of individual **self-respect** and **respect for others**; they value human dignity
- Demonstrate **attitudes** and **behaviours** that show respect for the rights of others
- Practise genuine **gender equality** in all spheres
- Show respect, understanding and appreciation of **cultural diversity**, particularly towards different national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other minorities and communities
- Are empowered and **active citizens**
- Promote democracy, social justice, communal harmony, solidarity and friendship between people and nations
- Are active in furthering the activities of international institutions aimed at the creation of a culture of peace, based upon universal values of human rights, international understanding, tolerance and non-violence.

TABLE 1

Human rights education refers to "educational programmes and activities that focus on promoting equality in human dignity," and this is done "in conjunction with other programmes such as those promoting intercultural learning, participation and empowerment of minorities".³⁰

The idea of competence is entailed also in the human rights education practices and activities. The aim is to empower learners to contribute to the building and defense of a universal culture of human rights in society by building their knowledge, skills and understanding and developing attitudes and behaviour (c.f. Table 1).³¹ There are three dimensions involved in human rights education³² (illustrated also in Figure 7):

- Learning *about* human rights, knowledge about human rights, what they are, and how they are safeguarded or protected;
- Learning *through* human rights, recognising that the context and the way human rights learning is organised and imparted has to be consistent with human rights values (e.g. participation, freedom of thought and expression, etc.) and that in human rights education the process of learning is as important as the content of the learning;
- Learning *for* human rights, by developing skills, attitudes and values for the learners to apply human rights values in their lives and to take action, alone or with others, for promoting and defending human rights.

According to this vision, human rights education is not something that can be taught – "but that it has to be learned through experience".³³ This calls for particular attention to the context and practices of human rights education: human rights values, such as dignity and equality, should be enacted as practices.

³⁰ The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010)

³¹ Council of Europe (2012). *Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young people*.

³² Ibid.

³³ Council of Europe (2012). *Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young people*.

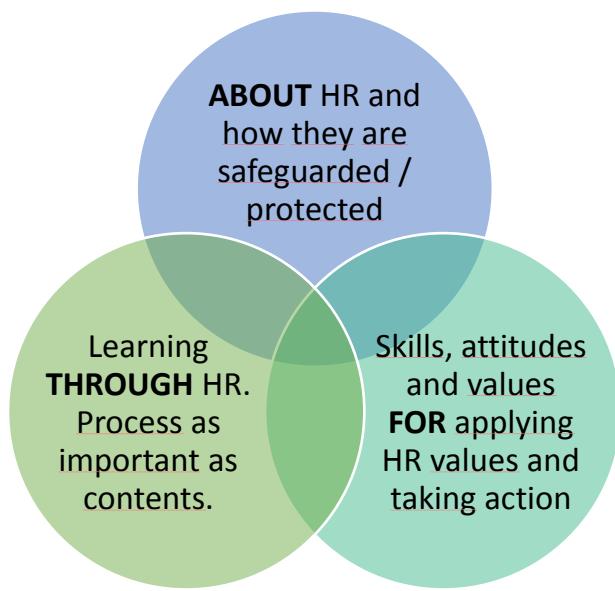


FIGURE 7

This leads us to another related concept *human rights based approach* that provides a framework for the process of human development: "It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress."³⁴

From this perspective, there are two important implications for voluntary service. One is that practices aiming towards human development are to be "anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations" – charity is not enough.³⁵ The second relates to sustainability; measures should be taken to empower people (especially the most marginalized) to participate in political processes.

agent of change. The challenge is to balance the two. "Volunteering has the potential to challenge the prejudices, stereotypes and perceptions of both the volunteer and those involved in or targeted by a volunteering activity."³⁶ Nonetheless, it may also reinforce them on some occasions.

At the intersection of diversity and human rights, there are two questions of particular importance in relation to international volunteers: *agency* and *privilege*. The position of international volunteers is an interesting one that entails a lot of potential but also potential pitfalls.

Agency can be understood as the ability to influence one's life.³⁷ Further, agency is implied in those actions that are intentional, in the sense that agency leads to actions that are intentionally pursued to exert influence on one's life.³⁸ In order to understand especially, the volunteers and beneficiaries, their actions and ultimately their agency, we need to look at the meanings and intentions behind their actions from their perspective.

During the time spent in the host country, the position of the international volunteer shapes the actions of the volunteer: for example, as a foreigner able to do things that might be out of reach for locals or vice versa. After returning home, the voluntary service experience continues to shape the volunteer's ability to exert influence later on: e.g. has it strengthened the young person's agency by providing learning experiences of making a difference, or has it perhaps reinforced perception that he/she lacks the ability to change the prevailing state of things.

When working with vulnerable people, an even more pressing question is how the international volunteer perceives the agency of the beneficiaries and local community members in general: Are they objects of charity or partners in the process of change. This has direct outcomes in face-to-face interaction, but there are also indirect outcomes; when volunteers communicate about the voluntary service experiences, they may deconstruct stereotypes by ascribing agency to the beneficiaries or reinforce them.

³⁴ The UN Practitioners' Portal on Human Rights Based Approaches to Programming.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Göksel, A (2011).

³⁷ Mortimer and Shanahan (2003) in Kristiansen, M. H. (2014)

³⁸ Bandura (2006); Emirbayer and Mische (1998); Hitlin and Elder (2007) in Kristiansen, M. H. (2014)

Privilege is a central concept in understanding the volunteer-beneficiary relationship; and also for making sense of the agency. There are five core components that provide the defining boundaries of this concept³⁹:

1. Special advantage; it is neither common nor universal.
2. Granted, not earned or brought into being by one's individual effort or talent.
3. Right or entitlement that is related to a preferred status or rank.
4. It is exercised for the benefit of the recipient and to the exclusion or detriment of others.
5. A privileged status is often outside of the awareness of the person possessing it.

There is often a considerable power distance between international volunteers and beneficiaries; for one, one group is in a position that enables them to travel to another country to engage in voluntary activities, which is out of reach for most beneficiaries – vulnerable groups. This is particularly relevant to young people from the global north volunteering in the global south.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted between 2015 and 2016. The purpose of undertaking the study is to identify areas and ways in which to support volunteers and improve their learning opportunities and outcomes. Thus one of the key objectives is to find out how the volunteering experience and the “*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*” project has impacted on volunteers. This is approached by studying volunteers’ perceptions on the volunteering experience and exploring their learning experiences regarding the thematic of human rights. Analytical methods employed rely primarily on content analysis but some discursive elements are also analysed. The project also sought to build organizational capacity to employ qualitative research methods by training local multipliers.

The study strives to shed light on the impacts by looking to three aspects:

- What are the **impacts of the voluntary service** from the perspective of the volunteer?
- What topics are discussed in the framework of **human rights** and how are they understood by the respondents?
- How does the volunteering experience influence attitudes and practices related to Human Rights? What are the **key aspects for promoting human rights education** in the framework of voluntary service?

The main data collection method employed in the study comprised of 18 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with international volunteers. The interviews were conducted between December 2015 and February 2016 in 11 countries: 13 interviews by hosting partners in the *Communicating for Human Rights in Diversity* project and four interviews in other Erasmus+ programme countries by non-hosting partners. The interview data is further supported by progress reports of 13 core group respondents (written both by volunteers themselves and their mentors/multipliers) and 12 articles written by international volunteers on the topic of ‘*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*’ (published in the ICYE Federation’s newsletter (in October 2015).

³⁹ McIntosh (1992); Robinson & Howard-Hamilton (2000) in Black, L.L. & Stone, D. (2005)

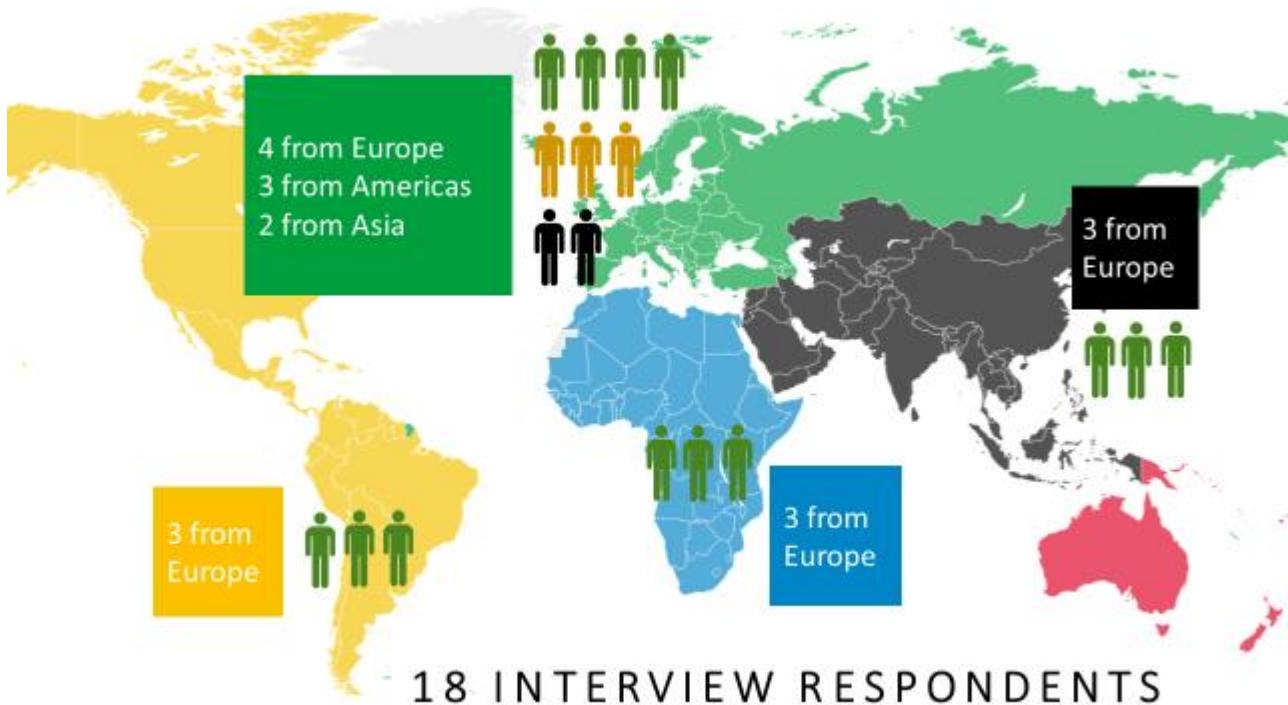
3.1 Sample

Respondents are 18 volunteers (16 females and 2 males) between ages of 18 and 30 taking part in a long term volunteering program abroad. They have also participated in capacity-building activities of the “*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*” project. Most of the respondents are doing their service within the European Voluntary Service program and in the Global South (c.f. Figure 8).

There are 13 core group respondents, i.e. EVS volunteers of the project “*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*”. As part of the project, the volunteers agreed to take part in the study at the time of applying. Their voluntary service projects are explicitly set in human rights contexts.

Further five volunteers (both ICYE and EVS) have been interviewed for this study. These respondents have taken part in a one-day human rights training and some follow-up activities (which varied from country to country). They were selected on the basis of the theme of the voluntary activities (namely that their service involved working with people at risk) and also an interest in taking part in the project (both the training session and face-to-face interview).

Figure 9 illustrates the geographical scope of the study regarding the interview respondents. Volunteers from different European and Asian and Latin American countries complete their voluntary service in four continents. There is, however, European predominance both as the origin and as the destination of the volunteers. “*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*” is multilateral Erasmus+ project involving European actors and their partners around the world.



International Volunteers
(total 18)

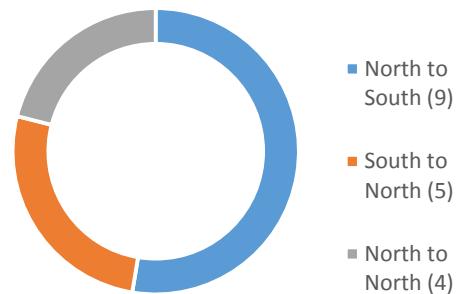


FIGURE 8

The group of respondents is diverse also in terms of background. Some of the respondents have recently completed their secondary education while others have graduated from university and a few have work

experience and are professionals in their fields. Some have vast prior international experience while for others the voluntary service is the first experience of living abroad. As the study strives to map the impacts of the volunteering experience, the focus is on the commonalities rather than the differences between all the respondents. The background of the respondents will be discussed when relevant.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

For the purpose of this study, data was collected from 18 volunteers in 16 countries. This was done by the project multipliers, i.e. representatives of ICYE national committees and coordinated by the ICYE international office.

The data set of this study consists of:

- 18 confidential **interviews** conducted in 14 different countries at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016. The average duration of interviews is approximately 30 min. Interviews have been conducted by representatives of the national ICYE organisations (either staff or volunteer collaborators) towards the end of the voluntary service.⁴⁰
- 12 **articles** written by volunteers on the topics '*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*' and published in the ICYE Federation's Newsletter *Worlds of Experience* in the section Volunteers Voices (October, 2015). As part of the voluntary service program, each core group respondent wrote about their experiences. In some cases, the texts written by volunteers were edited before publishing (discussed when relevant).
- 23 **progress reports** of core group volunteers (except for one). Each volunteer completed a report (featuring questions regarding their experience after some months). The same form was also used by the ICYE multiplier to report on the progress made; including observations based on feedback from both the volunteer and the host project.

The analysis relies primarily on the interview data. Articles and progress reports are best considered as complementary; they provide background on the process leading to the accounts given by the volunteers at the end of the experience.

A guide for the semi-structured interviews (c.f. Annex 2) was collaboratively designed by the multipliers trained in the project. The ICYE-IMPACT Practical Guide served as a starting point for this process, which was done at a preparatory seminar in Copenhagen⁴¹: some questions were developed further and some added to match the purpose of this project. The interview guide consists of three parts:

1. **Questions on human / personal impact.** This part maps out the impact on the volunteer or on others because of the volunteer's presence (knowledge, skills and well-being). This included questions related to what respondents wished to gain from the volunteering experience and also how their expectations were met.
2. **Questions on social impact.** The interpersonal relationships that develop between people because of the voluntary service are explored in this part.
3. **Questions on cultural impact.** This aims to gain insight into the impacts that are reflected in changing perceptions of identity and in awareness of one's self and the other.

⁴⁰ In one case, the voluntary service period was not completed and volunteer returned home early. The volunteer was therefore interviewed by the national ICYE representative in the home country.

⁴¹ Report of the seminar, including description of the design process, can be accessed online:
<http://www.icye.org/images/stories/PDFCurrentAndPastA/finalactivityreport.pdf>

The interviews were conducted by multipliers, who had received training in qualitative research or by other ICYE staff or co-workers capable of carrying out the interviews. Interviewers were instructed to ask questions in the planned order (unless the question was already answered). They were also encouraged to let the informant elaborate on their answers, expand beyond the question if relevant to the study and also explore interesting topics.

All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. All but two were conducted in English; two interviews were translated from Spanish and Portuguese into English once transcribed. Most of the respondents do not speak English as their first language, which was also taken into consideration when designing the interview questions (and interviewers were also advised to clarify terms when necessary) but also when analysing the responses. Nevertheless, the language barrier has remained an issue in this study as it limits the respondents' ability to communicate experience and affects interaction between the interviewee and interviewer.

Patterns of similarities and differences between the responses were explored by consolidating all the interview data in a spreadsheet. The responses were examined taking into account both the respondent and the content. Analysis focused on content, but some discursive elements have also been considered. The study takes into consideration that the interview data consists of transcriptions of face-to-face oral communication, i.e. the interview situations are much more intricate and multifaceted than the transcriptions suggest. The transcriptions have not all been done by the interviewers, which means, among other things, that there are multiple possibilities of subjective interpretation, just like this report is one possible interpretation of the data from my perspective. Interview data has been contrasted with the recordings when necessary.

The study is not interested only in the learning outcomes but also explores the process of achieving them. At the time of the interview, some learning is still in progress. This can be seen in the volunteers' accounts, for example, as varying ability to elaborate on given topics. Nonetheless, there are considerable individual differences in expressing how the experiences have influenced the respondents: the challenge is to determine how much these relate to differences in personalities, communication styles and language constraints of the respondents and how much they tell about the importance of the experience.⁴²

Even though it is the lived experiences of volunteers that are in focus, the discussion explores organizational impacts (host projects – its staff and beneficiaries). These are accessed through volunteers' accounts, implying a high degree of subjectivity.

4. Findings

4.1 Reasons for Volunteering Abroad

In order to understand the respondents' perspectives on the impacts of voluntary service, it is vital to look at the goals that the respondents have set for themselves and for the experience. The interview respondents were asked what their motivation was for taking part in the voluntary service program. "*Alright, the first reason is because I want to learn something but also to give something to others*" (I-11), is an idea that captures well the motivation of many respondents. Most often there is a combination of different learning-orientated motivations with other more altruistic motivations.

⁴² Compare for example: "*I think I achieved some skills, baking skills perhaps. I also achieved driving skills and had some nice experiences with people.*" (I-17) versus "...*like I am different person when I came here and now I am different person when I going back...*" (I-5)

The question of motivation relates to how respondents assess the outcomes of the voluntary service: e.g. it is considerably more difficult to meet the expectations of those respondents seeking professional development compared to those simply wanting to experience life in another country. We should also bear in mind that the goals may, of course, change over the course of the voluntary service (some goals gain more importance over others) which may also reflect how the initial motivation is perceived at the time of the interview.

Motivation is particularly central when the impacts are approached from the perspective of learning. It is a resource for taking on the numerous learning challenges implied by the voluntary service experience, and thus for achieving learning outcomes and creating impact. The volunteer is willing to invest considerable effort in challenges - such as adapting to a new environment, building a new social network and learning a language – only when they are perceived as meaningful. What are the meaningful challenges for volunteers?

Most respondents (13 out of 18) named more than one reason for taking part in the voluntary service program (c.f. Figure 10 and Figure 11). Particular project or type work was the most frequently mentioned reason for participating:

- Five respondents had been interested in some aspect of the project or the field of work in general: *"I just got to know about the project and I thought that it was a good idea because I like music and I play piano"* (I-6), *"I always was interested in work with this kind of people. And I studied for that"* (I-13), *"I liked the idea of a community where everybody knows each other and are friendly. And also because I like cooking"* (I-17)
- For eight respondents (7 out of 13 core group respondents) the project had represented an opportunity to learn specifically about human rights. This was mostly represented as exploring and learning about the topic, but a few also had some prior experience or interest in working in the field in the future: *"I've always been interested in Human Rights and I've been taking a course of that at the university so I wanted to know more about it in another country."* (I-1), *"I want to get experience about human rights and the project that is working with women rights that's why I came"* (I-5)

Many respondents had chosen a project that represented an opportunity to use their competencies: *"I came to it wanting to learn about this kind of work and also bring in my own background"* (I-16), *"could mix my profession with doing some volunteer work here"* (I-8). For equally many the project had been an opportunity to gain experiences considered important for the future, or the opportunity had simply presented itself at the right moment and provided a way to explore some interest. If respondents were driven by strictly instrumental reasons, such as building up the CV, these were not reflected in the respondents' accounts.

Many respondents (8 out of 18) made reference to having been at a **transition point** in their lives, which had influenced their decision to take part in the program: five respondents had left school or were finishing university studies and three were professionals seeking to change their lives somehow. At the transition point, voluntary service abroad was understood as:



FIGURE 10

- a time for reflection or simply as an alternative to the standard, conventional way: "*I was kind of bored with my normal job and I wanted a big change*" (I- 14), "*I didn't know what to do after school*" (I-17), "*I did not want to start studying right away.*" (I-6)
 - a way of validating or testing if the life plan was the right one: "*I wanted to do this to see if this would help me to get a more clear vision of exactly what kind of jobs to apply for*" (I-4), "*find out, where my true interest was maybe to be found.*" (I-9)

When discussing the initial motivation for volunteering, a number of respondents alluded to learning that is broader than the opportunities offered by the volunteering project. These reasons for volunteering can be understood as aiming towards **personal growth or development**: "*gain or develop my personal skill and life skills*" (I-12), "*I wanted to learn Spanish it was one main reason and I wanted to see what is life in a totally different country*" (I-5), "*wanted to get to know the different point of view/opinions*" (I-7), "*developing knowledge and doing something practical*" (I-9), "*I've never been out from my country and it was like a new experience for me [...] know about the culture and to learn new language*" (I-12).

Some respondents explicitly expressed ‘volunteering’ as one of their motivations: “*I always wanted to do volunteer*” (I- 3). “*I always say that helping is the best thing we can do. We gain a lot by helping without even expecting it.*” (I-7) “*I want to dedicate my time, my energy for helping others.*” (I-11). The term probably holds different meanings for different respondents, but based on respondents’ accounts, the idea practical, hands-on work and engaging directly with beneficiaries is generally associated with ‘volunteering’.

While many simply wanted to experience a life different from home, for a few respondents the destination was one of the motivating factors: e.g. "*I was concentrating very much on the location, because I always wanted to come to [host country]. It was my dream since I'm like five six years old, I always felt connect it to it and I was very interested in a culture itself*" (I-3).



FIGURE 11

4.2 Volunteers Assessing Impacts

How does the voluntary service experience match the expectations - those of the respondents and those of the hosting projects? The respondents have arrived in the host countries with certain expectations and met with expectations of the hosting community. The meaning and value of voluntary service is negotiated in the midst of different perspectives, and this process is still very much in progress at the time of the interviews.

When respondents assess impact on others, they are making sense of their own lived experiences. In this regard, there are two important things: interplay of impacts and subjectivity. The human, social and cultural impacts created through voluntary service are rooted in lived experiences of adapting to a new environment, interacting with the beneficiaries, overcoming challenges, etc.

In other words, their assessments are subjective by definition. The respondents' perceptions may or may not coincide with that of the beneficiaries, co-workers/staff and organisation as whole. All in all, respondents' accounts of the outcomes and impacts should be taken as subjective representations of themselves and the world around them.

What is clearly evident is that respondents see themselves as the main beneficiaries of voluntary service: "*I feel like I have helped them a little bit but I've gained much more for myself really*" (I- 4). This is concurrent with the learning-orientated motivations discussed in the previous paragraph. Although positive social impact is depicted as desirable, the main outcomes are in the areas of learning and personal growth (which will be discussed in the next section).

While voluntary service is regarded as an individually driven enterprise rather than an altruistic practice, several respondents stressed the importance of doing it in a way that benefits others (or at the least that it is not counterproductive). Negative impacts of volunteering are hardly discussed, which does not imply that respondents cannot critically assess them: on one instance, a respondent discusses how children benefit from the presence of foreign volunteers and points out how this does not apply to children with autism:

"... for them I would say it is not a benefit is more a problem. Because when the volunteers change that much or change every three months or half a year, there are differences that they cannot handle differences or changes in their lives very good. But for the most of the children I think all is benefits." (I-5)

Organisation hosting volunteers also have expectations of the service and of the volunteer. These do not always match the expectations of the volunteer and/or their skill level. The role of the volunteer is negotiated and renegotiated during the voluntary service; this is particularly so in the beginning but also throughout the service. Not all conflicts are resolved (two of the respondents changed projects), but in most cases the issues experienced by respondents were resolved:

"... they wanted somebody who arrived with lots of readymade ideas, and they, I think, they weren't expecting to necessarily have to teach me anything to begin with, but I think, yes, we did resolve that. I spoke with them about how I felt, and they told me that they didn't know I felt that way, and so it was good to be open to solve that problems through discussion..." (I-4).

In respondents' accounts, volunteers fulfil multiple roles at their hosting projects. Some entail tasks that are more routine-like, mechanical and others are more creative and independent. Some are, of course, considered more rewarding than others; and some more valued by the staff than others.

The data suggests that even when there is significant contribution by the respondent to the work of the host project, it may not be considered as particularly important or valuable by the respondent him/herself. Whether due to a strong learning orientation or lack of feedback, only few depicted themselves as having

managed to make a major contribution at the workplace. One's own impact was often understood in terms of one's own role in the organisation and the weight it carried in the eyes of others.

- *"... and I think the foundation was really happy with the result as well, they used it. They had a presentation of the foundation in a university as well where it were presented [...] And they choose to take the video to show to them, they said the reaction was really good, so I think that was a nice thing." (I-4)*
- *"Actually I think that the... we were talking with my boss several times about the perception of the children that I am in the project and he is really happy and I am also happy..." (I-12)*

Generally, respondents find it difficult to assess their own "value" for the hosting project. When asked about their overall contribution to the work of the host project, most respondents are unsure, doubtful or hopeful, i.e. only a few see that they have clearly made a difference. In some instances, this seems to be much more related to the respondents' expectations than to the actual impacts from an organisational perspective:

- *"I think they happy with my work but I'm still think that I'm don't contribute too much" (I-10)*
- *"In my project there have been volunteers for many years, so I don't have the feeling that I do something different than other volunteers. I don't feel like I'm contributing with something new. Of course there are moments with some people where I've felt like I helped them. It's nice when then respect me or accept me or something. But it's not that I changed something." (I-17)*

The volunteers' roles can be divided into three types: a) "extra pair of hands", b) community member who is a catalyst for learning about differences and similarities (namely in terms of culture), and c) staff member who creates added value with his/her skills and competencies.

In the respondents' accounts, contributions that can be characterized as **performing tasks** (a) that are generally not considered particularly important. However, many appear to understand their value for the hosting project.

- *"I have also been doing some practical things, but I think anyone could have done that or would have done that [...] one day after the flooding, I decided to clean all the toys in a very thorough manner, that was VERY recognised." (I-9)*

The outcomes are often rather tangible and usually limited to a specific point in time and place (during the actual service period) – although they might also contribute to creating some long-term effects. One respondent, for example, reports being happy knowing that the input has contributed to greater well-being of the staff: *"Their routine is like [clicking fingers] ...like professional but after I come there I think the staff is less stressful because I can help them or cover them in some point..." (I-11)*. However, most respondents do not portray acting as an extra-pair of hands in such positive light; many feel frustrated and limited by their role.

However, at many times the respondents realise that their most important contribution in terms of their **social role** (b) than the tasks they performed:

- *"Sometimes I have the feeling that I don't do so much. But then it's, they, they need that the villagers see that you are working like them, you can make them more happy and they feel like they are working like you, so they are normal. So maybe you are doing simple things, like cleaning the dishes. But if they see that you are new, you are from another country and you are cleaning the dishes, so it's like example for them." (I-13)*

- “[...] I think I mainly I contributed by like just being there and the children are able to like having communication with somebody else not from here [host country], from another country so I think they gain from that to see maybe how English is important or important today to be able to communicate to foreigners, maybe open to new culture.” (I-2)

The respondents tend to differ from regular staff not only in terms of their professional background or proficiency but often also in terms of age, socio-economic and cultural background. Even though some hosting projects are culturally more diverse than others, nearly all respondents perceived themselves as bringing in some degree of diversity and consequently influencing others.

This is predominantly linked with the fact that the respondent comes from another country and brings a fresh perspective to the local environment. In many instances, this seems to have been built into the volunteer's role implicitly or explicitly; e.g. volunteer organising intercultural events or giving talks to refugees about the experience of adapting to the host country. On many occasions, these were also learning opportunities for the respondent - the idea of exchange and mutual learning was highly valued by the respondents.

Most respondents place considerable stress on having a role that entails responsibility, particularly one that requires **using their skills and competencies** (c), not only as representative of a cultural group but as individuals. In most cases, the skills and competencies are regarded as key to improving the quality of service: e.g. by introducing and developing new teaching methods in the classroom, the volunteer enhances students' learning. Some of the contributions amount to building the capacity of the staff or even entire organisation.

4.3 Skills, Attitudes and Values for Making a Difference

“I feel like I have helped them a little bit but I've gained much more for myself really I feel.” (I-16)

The most important changes brought about through volunteering are perceived to be on a personal level. These changes are connected to the competencies developed through the voluntary service experience, i.e. sets of skills, attitudes and values. These competencies enable respondents to make a difference in their own well-being and the well-being of others, both in the present and the future. International volunteers go through a process that entails learning to assume a new role in a new environment. This means acquiring new competencies but also recontextualising pre-existing ones.

International voluntary service entails plenty of competencies that are clearly new ones. In many cases, however, volunteers have skills and knowledge relevant to the volunteering activities, but before being able to transfer these to a new context, he/she must become competent vis-à-vis the environment. Adapting to a new culture means challenges to mental models: e.g. the process may also entail some “delearning”, because cultural norms of behaviour are learned through socialization. In the beginning, especially language and communication tend to imply a major obstacle.

Not surprisingly, acquiring language skills are perhaps the most common of the hard skills mentioned by the respondents. They are often depicted as a threshold skill: vital for ability to perform at work. Consequently, several respondents named limited language skills as a major obstacle either in the beginning or as an obstacle that they were not able to overcome. This prevented them from accessing more/other more meaningful tasks and limited their role in the organisation.

- “... the first few months was the language with the children, it was a barrier... I felt far from them, and after a couple of months it was solved totally.” (I-12)

- “... and I pushed myself to do that and then I learnt lot more. Then you see that people are opening more up to you also because they see that you are making an effort to try things.” (I-16)

Language skills were often set in a wider context of communication and interpersonal skills. Communication and interpersonal skills were perceived as a valuable result in itself, but also as a gateway for accessing another level of achievements - not just to perform tasks but to perform well and to feel accomplished.

- “I think, firstly about my English level, I think so I'm not really confident about my English level, maybe with the talking is ok, but with the writing skill is horrible, so when everybody just give some tasks for me, I just try my best to do but sometimes it is not good enough and maybe I think so is the reason that [host project] don't give too much tasks for me.” (I-10)

Well-being of others	<p>“...i think the way they see [respondent's home country] or Latinos definitely changed. I think they had one idea and then they saw this big teddy bear... Oh, these guys are not so bad at all, so it.. i think i made an impact, 100%.”(I-14)</p> <p>“They do have an art room but it was not really used much, it was mainly used by 1 or 2 people so I kind of took control of it in a way, I kind of organized it and I've run different workshops and tutoring and now there is a separate lady coming in and doing some art therapy, photography workshops and so they are doing more and more.” (I-16)</p>	<p>“...I made a lot of networks like relations with person with organizations and I am planning to do something here and use these networks that I made and it's because of my project and because of I don't know ... consequences I get known to many I can use these relationships and these networks in future because I still want to do something here in [host country] and planning projects and be like helping here somehow.” (I-5)</p> <p>“this has encouraged me to bring this issue/question up more openly and I am more interested in doing volunteer work back home, and to learn more, and also to somehow to share my knowledge.” (I-1)</p>
own well-being	<p>“... and I think i became more open, and I try to get in contact with people. I try to come to them instead of waiting for them to come to me. I also learned about how to deal with different personalities and how to make them feel more comfortable by changing my behaviour.” (I-18)</p>	<p>“it's helped me to you know, to more understand about my dream and to help me make sure that I follow up it when I go back to my country” (I-10)</p>
during the voluntary service		in the future

TABLE 2

In this part of the discussion, the focus is on impacts experienced and perceived by the respondents. What this means for the life and career of the respondents and people around them is explored first. Learning is then viewed from the perspective of ‘diversity’: What kind of changes in ideas and behaviour are triggered when gaining new experiences of diversity?

As discussed previously, most respondents were driven by a mix of personal and altruistic motivations. The respondents’ narratives tend to stress learning and personal growth, which is represented as valuable. But how are the competencies (pre-existing or newly acquired) put to use? Table 2 features some examples of these.

From the respondents' perspective, the most tangible outcomes tend to be personal achievements, i.e. learning something. Consequently, their role is much more pronounced in their narratives as compared to the impacts on others, which are not as easily observable. The discussions on the benefits of volunteering are often orientated towards the future, to moments that present opportunities to use the competencies. In this sense, many of the impacts discussed here are best understood as potential for change rather than real world consequences.

4.3.1 Competencies for Life and Career

Voluntary service appears to boost the life and career skills of the respondents but also to foster values and attitudes that create more self-awareness and self-confidence. These competencies are developed or reinforced in everyday contexts (work and free time), but the training activities related with the voluntary service also play a significant role in supporting the learning. To make sense of the cluster of learning, we use the '21st century skills' as a framework: these are a set of key abilities that are identified as important for today's and tomorrow's society. Here we take a close look at the "thinking skills, content knowledge, and social and emotional competencies" that are needed in order to navigate complex life and work environments⁴³ (c.f. Table 3).

It is safe to say that voluntary work represents opportunities to experiment and develop new skills. The respondents name a number of skills and competencies that they have acquired through performing tasks: fundraising, administration, teaching, cooking for large groups, driving heavy vehicles, public speaking, etc. But the learning goes far beyond acquiring "hard skills". In the sum of volunteering experiences, we can discern learning processes that have led to increased abilities in each of the areas featured in Table 3.

Flexibility and adaptability were one of the most common new abilities mentioned by the respondents. These competencies, along with many others, are learned through adjusting and adapting to a new social environment.

Although volunteers have a network of support at their disposition, voluntary service in a foreign country still entails a great deal of situations in which one must deal with uncertainty. Learning to adapt to new situations is a recurring theme in the respondents' accounts, which conveys the idea of newly discovered/developed traits like patience and flexibility.

- *"Yes, maybe that I know that I am pretty flexible and I can adapt from many things. Because I didn't really know so much about the project, I had decided one month ago before I went to [host country] that I want to go and I did everything by my own and it was very cool. I adapted it pretty well." (I-6)*
- *"At the beginning it [unpunctuality] was a little bit annoying but I think I learned to deal with this and be more flexible, be more patient about those things." (I-1)*

1) FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

- adapt to change
- be flexible

2) INITIATIVE AND SELF-DIRECTION

- manage goals and time
- work independently
- be self-directed learners

3) SOCIAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS

- interact effectively with others
- work effectively in diverse teams

4) PRODUCTIVITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- manage projects
- produce results

5) LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

- guide and lead others
- be responsible to others

TABLE 3

⁴³ "P21's Framework for 21st Century Learning" accessed at <http://www.p21.org/>

- *"...I learned to be much more flexible and to welcome other ideas also let go my expectation my ideas it was needed, so the flexibility, the patience and how to communicate with people with really much respect and how important cooperation is if you want to get a support, it was like biggest challenge and biggest lesson." (I-3)*

Initiative and self-direction represent another area of abilities that the voluntary service experience strengthens considerably. In respondents' narratives, these abilities manifest in a greater ability to take initiative, be more independent and generally identify learning needs and work towards them.

Generally, the 'volunteer' is not a position to be filled – i.e. no tasks and responsibilities that require a certain set of qualifications – but it is something that builds according to interests, abilities and needs. It is essentially a process and the respondent may need to employ different strategies at different points to overcome issues (e.g. not being satisfied with the role assigned by the hosting project and finding ways to create a more fulfilling work experience).

Many respondents report having gained greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and some also a greater sense of direction for their lives or careers. *"I really realized my limits in many kinds of ways. [...] And it was good, because there, I really know where I am standing now, even with my weaknesses. But even where I was thinking, even the things which are really a strength, but also sometimes then there is also a limit..." (I-8)*.

Some challenges were predetermined. Many respondents set out to do the voluntary service to achieve some personal goal: e.g. *"I wanted to do this to see if this would help me to get a clearer vision of exactly what kind of jobs to apply for, so yeah, for that kind of experiences It's have been very useful and valuable to me." (I-4)*.

Being faced with challenges, both big and small, as part of everyday experiences is at the core of the learning process about what respondent can achieve and what is currently out of his/her reach, i.e. awareness of own competencies. Several respondents also mentioned self-confidence as knowledge that they have the ability to face challenges.

Social and cross-cultural skills are developed in and through new social environments and discussed in-depth in the next paragraph. Social environment and networks provide respondents with resources and support but also learning opportunities. The first major challenge usually arose through the need to build relationships in the new environment.

Most respondents make references to having developed their people skills, interpersonal skills. For many this meant overcoming shyness and becoming more proactive in social terms: this was depicted as difficult at first, but they gained confidence with time and positive experiences. In addition to taking more initiative, many mentioned being more mindful of others, more empathetic. Two respondents put it as follows:

- *"... and I think I became more open, and I try to get in contact with people. I try to come to them instead of waiting for them to come to me. I also learned about how to deal with different personalities and how to make them feel more comfortable by changing my behaviour." (I-18)*
- *"I feel like I learnt a lot with working with people and how to deal with different situations when they arise. How to be calm and figure out what needs to be done. How to react to different things but not in a dictator kind of way but in a, being more family kind of way, because we are kind of like a family." (I-16)*.

Productivity and accountability represent a set of competencies that are more closely linked with the volunteering project and the subsequent tasks. Although the respondents' role is mostly supportive, many develop their own projects within the project: for example, produce and direct a dance show with a group of children and youngsters, design and run an awareness raising-campaign or organise a disability youth festival. Although these do not strictly entail responsibility for producing results or management-level expectations, respondents see themselves accountable for the success of the project, which they are expected to carry out more or less independently.

Leadership and responsibility. Reflecting on their role as volunteers working with people in vulnerable situations, the respondents show inclination to be aware of their responsibility. "*...I also showed other ways of being an adult towards the children, and I think that gave them some different perspectives, because I was listening to them, I think I was talking to them, trying to understand them from their perspective, [...] I tried to empower them as well by asking them where to go or what to do, if there was something I didn't know instead of always asking maybe a teacher.*" (I- 9) Nonetheless, many voluntary work tasks have also involved pushing the boundaries: many report having developed soft skills like collaboration, team work, initiative in interpersonal relations (e.g. approaching people). Thanks to practical experience and new interpersonal and problem-solving skills, many respondents have gained confidence to take on roles that involve influencing and guiding others.

4.3.2 Competencies for Encountering Diversity

"It did make me reflect a lot on my culture, it did make me reflect on "Why". At the beginning, my question for myself will be "Why it is like this" then during the time, it would change to "Why do I think it's weird, why it is so difficult to me, like why it is important for me to be on time. I will question my own culture. And then, I don't know if I've been adapting to a new culture. It made me reflect a lot about myself." (I-1)

Intercultural learning is a central element of international voluntary service. Encountering differences and similarities and being immersed in a new environment is the catalyst for a learning process: becoming more aware of oneself and one's thinking, as exemplified above, but also skills for making the previously unintelligible intelligible.

- *"... sometimes is so difficult because I can't understand what somebody's want to say me because of the cultural differences but during these eight months I learned and now I am a little bit scared to come back because I am using this kind of cultural methods people are using here."* (I-5)

For nine respondents, the voluntary service represented the first time they really came into contact with diversity and meeting people from other countries and having an international group of friends was a new discovery.

- *"... now I am like more international and also like seen that how little this world is, because now I have friends from every country and I have strong social life in this country and also is sad to come home but I believe I will keep all these contacts from different countries."* (I- 5)

But the diversity encountered by the respondents went well beyond nationalities. Firstly, the volunteering project opened up opportunities to meet people from groups that are somehow excluded from majority led society: e.g. for many respondents arriving at the volunteering project had been the first time they actually met and interacted directly with people with disabilities.

Secondly, the entire host community and country represented a new cultural environment – sometimes the cultural difference was considered very big and sometimes not so big, but still offering points of reflection on similarities and differences.

Thirdly, encountering the local diversity appears to have been a striking experience for many. A common topic of reflection was how countries that seem homogenous entities from afar are actually complex and diverse when experienced on site. For respondents from the global north to the global south, discovering inequalities at a local level, i.e. gap between the wealthy and poor, was a challenging experience.

The competencies developed through the “exposure” to diversity can be grouped together under five categories of abilities.

Ability to make sense of others in contexts marked by diversity. One aspect of this is ‘cultural literacy’ as in ability to change perspective. Learning about different perspectives and understanding them was named as one of the reasons for becoming an international volunteer. In order to access the way of thinking and to understand ‘others’, the respondents have had to overcome challenges of learning how to communicate with people. In some cases, the first obstacle was building language skills (e.g. local lingua franca or language of the beneficiaries like sign language) or overcoming their shyness, but even more often it was a question of learning how to communicate in a context-appropriate way. After describing the efforts of building a relationship with the beneficiaries, one respondent sees the rewards as follows: *“I felt like they were letting me to enter into their lives, and that in a way, its recognition in itself, just to like open up to you and tell you their story.”* (I-4)

Ability to communicate own perspective to others. This can be seen in the respondents’ accounts as metacommunication and metacognition. The respondents report having become more aware of themselves and their thinking. This is generally discussed in the framework of culture, but there are also reflections on blurred boundaries between personality, cultural belonging and social belonging. More often than not, the adaptation process conveys frictions, which makes respondents reflect on and also communicate their own beliefs and values.

Ability to adapt and navigate in new socio-cultural environments. Immersion is a challenge in itself. The respondents spent approximately eight months in the host community, which means that they needed strategies to find their place as temporary community members, that is to be accepted into the community. Succeeding in this was depicted as a powerful, “the best” experience by many. The experience of adapting – or not adapting – relates strongly to two basic needs: A sense of (group) belonging and the feeling of being competent. Acquiring a role and status in the hosting community was often depicted as an achievement. This validated the efforts made to adapt. *“I know sometimes it might have been just a way of flattering me, but when I meet new people, the first few minutes of interaction, I feel they recognise me as a peer, as someone who can be a [host country nationality]. And that is maybe, as I said, a way to try and flatter me, but I actually feel my understanding of some subtle things in the culture, whether it is because I know some specific word, it is important to say, or whether it is just understanding how to greet, I don't know, it's some unspoken things, and it makes me feel like I really managed to embrace the culture as well as...”* (I-9)

In order to live and work in the host community, the respondents have had to develop skills to communicate and relate with others, but also to go through a process of coming to terms with difference and ambiguity. These were recurring elements in their narratives, only the process

and the strategies employed were different. For some the ‘community’ was predominantly made up of other foreigners, and for others it was more local friends and/or host family.

Ability to see own place in the world. This relates to the psychosocial need of building a sound relationship with one’s group and good relations with other groups. A significant number of respondents stated having gone through a process of change in this sense. Comparisons between host and home environment have led to discovering new things about their own background and re-evaluating it.

Learning about perspectives of others and also seeing oneself through the eyes of others has created awareness of respondents’ own position in society and/or the entire world. This means reflecting on the rights, privileges and opportunities available, to which the respondents had previously been “blind”.

Many narratives entailed the idea of balance between good and bad things found both at home and in the host country; and also between self-respect and respect for others. However, some views were more balanced than others. Some accounts conveyed admiration for one group/collective/culture over another, while most included both valuing and critical reflection on their own and the host culture.

When the own cultural background was perceived to entail some disadvantage, discovering its value was particularly significant.

- *“...how I feel more good feelings for my country. Because it’s like, if you are living in your country you think that your country is the worst. But now, sometimes I really miss [home country]...”* (I-13)
- *“...because [home country] is not a developed country, so we always think, people who haven’t gone outside, abroad, we always think that comparing to a developed country, we are nothing, we are still left behind or something but I have found it every country has their own specialty and we are really rich with our culture, local wisdom, we are more socialized but the system here is really good, so, yeah, I compare but not judging which one is better, it’s all different...”* (I-11)

Three respondents narrated how their multicultural background became a strength in the context of international volunteering⁴⁴.

- *“...when I was younger I hated it [“cultural intermash”]. But now I love that I have this. I really like talking with people about where they come from, about their culture and these things...”* (I-16)
- *“...they are curious about my background, so they would ask you, like what is the situation there? Did your family still live there? What are the difficulties that they face? So me being able to talk about that, made them maybe see what the difficulties in [country of origin] situations was, I think that makes them able to have really interesting conversations.”* (I-4)

Ability to promote positive relationships between groups and individuals from different backgrounds. Many respondents represent themselves as representing their cultural group (generally

⁴⁴ Social identities are not contingent only on how we perceive ourselves, but also on how others perceive us and how we perceive them. This is what Jenkins calls internal-external dialectics of social identification (see, for example, Jenkins, 2004: 18): “Identity is always the practical product of the interaction of ongoing processes of internal and external definition. One cannot be understood in isolation from the other” (1997:73).

nationality) in their host community and see their role as increasing awareness of it. However, even more of them see themselves as creating intercultural dialogue by bringing forth diversity. At the same time, as respondents engage in intercultural learning, by 'being different' they inadvertently become catalysts of an intercultural learning process in their host environment. The idea of bringing about understanding and respect through exchange and dialogue is not just limited to cultural groups. As a consequence of aligning themselves with the vulnerable, excluded people, several respondents find it important to speak up for them and try to change majority perceptions regarding these groups:

- *"I've had many conversations with different volunteers, staff, etc. about different topics which touched on human rights, which touched on like marriage traditions, gender... violence and things like that. And whether it has changed their perception or not, I don't know, but I do know that also religion and homosexuality and stuff like that.. and I know there were some volunteers, maybe some peers, from the neighbouring university who started out by saying something very categorical and then maybe my perspective was also very categorical and we discussed and I ended up hearing "yeah actually, I see what you are saying, okay" so we were kind of meeting somewhere and sometimes we agreed to disagree. But I think it has started thoughts in different ways..."* (I-9)

4.4 Making Sense of Human Rights in Diversity

In this part, the discussion focuses on how human rights topics discussed by the respondents are understood. This includes exploring the ideas, attitudes and values that are communicated in relation to human rights but also the potential changes generated by the volunteering experience.

The entire voluntary service experience is made up of many pieces; their interplay shapes the consequent human rights learning. There are considerable differences between respondents in terms of the human rights learning process and its outcomes. The most important factors relate to pre-existing competencies and how they are further developed.

- **Interests and motivation** of the respondent. As discussed previously, voluntary service has many meanings from the respondents' perspective. For many the project represented an opportunity to learn more about a specific theme/topic, gain valuable work experience and/or the opportunity to use their own competencies for common good. For some the learning was explicitly set in the framework of human rights and/or work with vulnerable people.
- **Knowledge and skills** of respondents. The respondents had very different starting points for making sense of human rights issues encountered as a volunteer: a) nine reported having had no, or very little contact with human rights topics prior to the voluntary service, b) six had a strong interest in human rights topics and/or practical experience of working with vulnerable people, c) three were very familiar with human rights topics either in a professional capacity or through their studies.
- Human rights dimension of the **voluntary service project**. How is the learning supported? A great part of the learning happens at the host project⁴⁵, but many respondents have also engaged in volunteering activities that are not directly linked with the host project (e.g. visiting local schools, running an awareness campaign). Volunteer trainings and the supported reflection - in this case, specifically the activities undertaken by the project multipliers - are also part of the voluntary service.

⁴⁵ Two of the respondents worked at organisations that do political advocacy for human rights. Six of the respondents worked at organisations that work with vulnerable groups and have explicit human rights based missions and approach. The rest (10) of the respondents worked at organisations that work with vulnerable groups (such as children or people with disabilities) but where human rights are not necessarily part of the daily discourse.

These aspects have laid the foundation for learning human rights through volunteering together with the capacity-training activities organised by the project's multipliers.

4.4.1 Perceptions of Human Right Topics

How does volunteering influence the respondents' perception of human rights issues? As stated before, by virtue of volunteering the sphere of experiences is expanded – especially by encountering, interacting directly with people at risk. In this sense, the volunteering project and the encounters that it promotes have a central role in fostering learning. In the role of volunteer, the respondents have had access to experiences that are not familiar to most, neither to tourists nor even to most locals. Are the experiences able to foster ideas of "equality in human dignity" (c.f. page 12 – section 2.4)?

Through the volunteering activities, the respondents of this study have been exposed to one or more of the following topics (see Figure 12): children, education, disability, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, women and gender and health. These topics are intertwined in the work of most of the host projects.

Nonetheless, the sphere of experience extends far beyond volunteering activities. International volunteers experience a whole new social environment in the host country. Particularly the active adaptation phase is marked by reflection on similarities and differences. Human rights topics come especially into play with the transition from the global north to the south or the global south to the north: new insight has been gained by comparisons between divergent societal models and cultures and by encounters with multifaceted local realities instead of stereotypical images of faraway places.

In many instances, the real-life experiences contrast with what the respondent knew before: the new information is compared with the previous knowledge that has been constructed on the base of a varied mix of media representations, subjects taught at school, cultural norms, etc. Some experiences have even managed to cause an impact so strong as to challenge some deep-seated values and beliefs of the respondents (see, for example, point three in Table 4).



FIGURE 12

TABLE 4

The observations around human rights and the situation of vulnerable people are processed and evaluated by mirroring the new information against the pre-existing knowledge or preconceptions.	
Compared to expectations. Imagery of countries, western perspectives on developing world.	"...there was always shelter where kids could sleep and there was always food to feed them and they could provide them cloths, clean water and everything, so in this mean I can say that situation is quite good concerning to my previous expectations." (I-3)
Comparisons between host and home communities	"...I have the perception of the asylum that in my country we don't have... yeah, we have this human rights but is not really used, is no one is used this human rights... but here I think the countries are giving a new opportunity for people who is... who

	<i>only want to escape for a war and I think this is really, really important and before even I didn't know that it happens..."</i> (I-14)
Compared to own beliefs	<i>And also my perception about job-less people, yeah, before I came here this is my first time to go abroad so I only doing things around my country before and when I, so I met people which is unemployed, probably it's really bad of me but somehow I think that why you didn't try to get a work, because I know in [home country] it is easy [...] But now, in here dealing with the job club I really, really witness, I'm the eye-witness of these things, I mean this system, they are looking for job, they, what's it, make a really massive efforts for this everyday...</i> (I-11)

At other times, the real-life experiences appear to have somehow complemented the previous information: usually by adding an affective dimension to the cognitive body of knowledge. A recurring theme in many accounts is the gap between knowing something and really knowing (i.e. experiencing something).

The observations, experiences and reflections are often part of becoming aware of their own position and perspectives on human rights issues, but do not necessarily lead to human rights learning. Sometimes the observations are much more telling of the observers' own thinking, the "volunteer's gaze" (see, for example, point one in Table 4), as opposed to knowledge about the situation of vulnerable groups, human right issues at large and their interplay with societal structures in a determined context.

Experiencing human rights topics "first-hand", on the scene is a powerful experience and has the potential to initiate deep learning processes: at times even witnessing a series of situations relating to a specific topic may prove to be enough, but more often it requires encounters, i.e. interacting directly with people in vulnerable situation or those affected by a determined issue. It is these encounters that have the power to shift the perspective: to see the issues from the beneficiaries' point of view. Many respondents make sense of the local community by comparing the realities of different social groups (e.g. migrants compared to the majority population or slum-dwellers to the middle-class families) – the way of framing these experiences alternate between (positive) diversity and (negative) inequality. Often the encounters are compared with other sources of information, and introduce another dimension to the knowledge by adding the perspective of the people affected by the issues.

Empathy is learned through interactions with people in difficult life situations, which in turn fosters commitment to human rights:

- "...I think it's about the awareness, I have more knowledge about what happen with them, like normally, I just understand a few little bit about the way, why they need to migrate, move to another country and how another country support them, but now when, during the time talking with them, listen their story, I understand that what happened during this, on the way, they need to go like, they have a lot of struggle." (I-10)

4.4.2 From Human Rights Topics to Human Right Thinking

"If I talk to somebody about their experience, or if I see something on the news, or if I talk to my friend about something that is going on, I'm more likely to think about it, from my humans right's perspective, than just to think about it as bad situation..." (I-4)

Human rights education through voluntary service is not about learning about the human rights situation in a determined country (although it may *also* be that). In addition to knowing about human rights – i.e. about human rights violations and ways to protect rights, it is about skills, attitudes and behaviour. These can be learnt anywhere and applied in everyday life; they can enable people to take action in defence of human rights. Although the respondents still appear to be processing their experiences at the time of the

interview, fifteen (out of eighteen) respondents demonstrate a certain level of human rights thinking, some more consistently than others.

On some occasions, the respondents are able to synthesize, evaluate and express the changes in their own thinking very clearly:

- *"...I am just more aware of it now in different ways than I was before. Before I would see non-everyday things, when I think of Human Rights, I see things that would happen at places where they have wars and refugees and other things like that. And now I can see in a more local view as well."* (I-1)
- *"I've always found it [human rights] important, but I am a lot more aware now and I feel like I can see more when they are, where they are lacking or being violated. And in relations to mental illness, I pick up a lot more now than I did before. I think we become so desensitised for a lot, when stuff is constantly coming at you. But now I feel like I am more able to focus on this thing..."* (I-16)

In many other instances, the learning is still in progress and respondents are still analysing the experiences. In respondents' accounts, this manifests in answers that are more reflective or those that display reluctance or hesitation to draw conclusions.

- *"[...] I still struggle to accept human rights violations even though there might be cultural acceptance of it because I'm also finding different opinions within the context I've been in, so it's not that everyone thinks it's ok to beat children, especially those who are not even yours."* (I-9)
- *"[...] sometimes you gain small things that we do not even notice that we got something. You have situations, for instance, you interact (talk) with a children or one of the social workers at the project, at the centre and you do not notice you have learned something so significant for life but after a certain time you realise that. I think I still need some time to say that I have learned something. I need some fresh air, return to my country, to [home country] to have that other perspective to then say, "Now yes", without any emotions because I think with emotions we cannot say anything, we cannot say much."* (I-7)

There are also examples of experiences that have brought about reflection on inequality, but respondents have not quite managed to make the leap to human rights learning. Particularly, the European volunteers in Africa struggle to make sense of their own privileged position connected to their ethnicity. One respondent, for example, narrates an incident of being denied access to public transportation as a result of being white and thus perceived as privileged. The reflection however is centred on the experience of becoming a victim of reverse racism rather than on ethnic power relations in the sociocultural context.

In order to understand how people think and act in the host community, the volunteer needs to go beyond looking at *what* people do and explore *why* and *how* they do. The challenge is not only learning to see things from the host community's perspective – i.e. the ability to change between one's perspective and that of others – but then also to choose one's perspective based on the differences in each context. When to view things from the perspective of cultural diversity and respect differences? When to view them as human rights issues and address them as injustice/inequality? These are questions that respondents appear to struggle with, particularly at the start of their volunteering period; this is generally the active adaptation phase.

Understanding different perspectives was mentioned as a reason for taking part in the program by some respondents and a few mentioned perspectives to human rights issues, in particular: e.g. *"know their perspective and how they are feeling about being in this society and like, are they feeling inferior or yeah, so, that is the first reason."* (I-11) In general, working directly with beneficiaries and doing hands-on work was communicated as being a key element of the experience. This was a way to see the consequences of

human rights violations on the people affected: “...it’s a more personal perspective, is not just reading about what they are going through, it’s really about the situation of the country, it’s actually talking to people and hearing exactly what they’ve been through and what the families’ been through, so I guess it makes you see what effect a human rights violation has on somebody’s actual life and how what difficulties and causes them...” (I-4)

When the respondents discuss their own experiences and those of the beneficiaries, the narratives often feature a strong affective dimension. Injustice is often perceived as a violation of human dignity that affects us all. Some respondents are also able to connect these experiences to societal structures and set the discussion in the framework of rights: i.e. turn the everyday experiences into concrete examples of the abstract concept of rights.

- *“After doing the training, when people would say things to me I kind of would think about it in a completely different way. For example, some people were talking to me about not being able to find work and that suddenly clicked differently with me, I realized there was this discrimination possibly and different things are happening and people are being boxed in different ways. That made me realize that I am more aware and look at that whole situation differently.”* (I-16)

However, a great part of the respondents’ learning that can be understood as human rights thinking is not set in a human rights context by respondents themselves. For instance, respondents’ accounts on learning about people include also learning about diversity and people in vulnerable situations (i.e. beneficiaries). They are very much intertwined with other discoveries made during the time spent in the host country and always entail a personal level due to the respondents’ subjectivity. There are many accounts on the process of becoming aware of one’s prejudices against people at risk and one’s role in their exclusion. Quite often these are framed as self-awareness and personal growth rather than human rights learning. Table 5 features examples by two respondents (I-11 and I-14) discussing the attitude change from pity to respect.

Before	After
“...people living with HIV, they have stigma and something, and I feel "oh, it's not really nice when I live with stigma and society doesn't want to accept me.”	“...it's changing my perspective, that 'Oh, they find glory of life, they find happiness, joy in life, they are not really sad about this one' It's like "Oh, [respondent's name], they do fun with life, they have joy in life", so it's really good to know this one.”
“...I don't want to work with disabled people. Because I feel bad for them and it's impossible for me to help them more than I can... because they are disabled, they have disabilities. They cannot... they can improve until a certain point. You cannot push them farther. Not because I'm there, they're going to become normal with parenthesis.”	“I know that they're just like normal people with their problems. So now I'm much more aware of how disabled are in society and in general. And one thing I learned a lot from them was to enjoy the little things. Like for them giving you a hug means way more than like someone giving you something else in like normal people...”

TABLE 5

When human rights are explicitly set as a topic of discussion, they are largely viewed and discussed through a lens of problems – either violations of rights or their absence. Many respondents draw attention to the stark contrast between the human rights discourse and the realities observed during the voluntary service. The difficult experiences are often discussed as human rights violations. Volunteers may encounter difficult or even traumatic experiences, which are challenging to turn into constructive learning experiences without appropriate thinking tools. Cases, such as child abuse and abandonment, provoke strong emotional responses and at times the respondents struggle to make sense of the complexity of the situations. While

they identify strongly with the struggles of the victims/vulnerable people, they may not have the necessary ability to analyse the structures of inequality in the socio-cultural context.

Six respondents report that as result of volunteering they have been more exposed to human rights topics, which has made them reflect more: “*Of course here, I got more confronted with the Human Right issues than in [home country], because in [home country], I don't have to think about it so much...*” (I-8) In most cases, the experience has not necessarily changed their opinions or views, but appears to have made them more aware and committed to human rights.

4.4.3 Equality and Inclusion

As a human rights principle, equality and inclusion mean that: “All individuals are equal as human beings and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each human person. No one, therefore, should suffer discrimination on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, gender, age, language, sexual orientation, religion, political or other opinion, national, social or geographical origin, disability, property, birth or other status as established by human rights standards”⁴⁶.

Through voluntary service, the respondents have had new types of encounters where difference and diversity are not respected, but used to legitimise inequality. These experiences seem to have generated abundant reflection on human dignity, causes of inequality and ways to transform prevailing attitudes.

Respondents make sense of ‘equality’ and ‘inclusion’ by examining the values and attitudes that affect the beneficiaries: What is socially acceptable and desirable in the determined cultural context, but also how the respondents have perceived the group of people before and how that has changed after encountering people face-to-face? Thus the discussions are based on a process of becoming aware of their own thinking and knowing about other people’s perspectives.

Mechanics of exclusion are discussed widely and often addressed from the perspective of emotions: ignorance, pity and shame are frequently seen as leading to exclusion of vulnerable people. Exclusion and inclusion draw a lot of attention particularly in relation to disabilities. New encounters have challenged many respondents’ preconceived notions - fixed ideas of what is normal and what social norms are - has led them to become aware of inadvertent ways of excluding others.

- “*When I came I wasn't used to disabled people, but now it's normal for me, to see them and to see what they are doing. And they seem like they are comfortable around me. I respect their values and behaviour.*” (I-18)
- “*Now I know that they're just like normal people with their problems. So now I'm much more aware of how disables are in society and in general. And one thing I learned a lot from them was to enjoy the little things.*” (I-14)

Respondents reflect on their own reactions and actions. Some experiences call for changes on a personal level. In some instances, it is about turning awareness into sensitivity to differences: e.g. “*The things that are so normal for me can be such a big thing for others especially when comes to different disabilities. [...]. I just thought that I should have been more considerate to differences.*” (I-1) Many anecdotes are about adjusting one’s attitudes towards marginalised groups; in one case this requires readjusting self-perception:

“... *I always think that I'm quite open minded [...] I realise that I think and that I feel is quite different because I still feel uncomfortable when I see with some guy and guy or girl and girl hug each other or kiss each other and let me realise that is maybe because in our country we don't have diversity community that what I think is that it's not enough when I can see directly with my eye, my vision*

⁴⁶ (UNFPA, 2005)

and I just know that I'm not open enough, I need more, I need to contact more with them, to talk with them and understand them, join their community, to really, to the real understanding and respect them. It's very good, it's a very good experience when I discover about myself what I need to improve me. Reading is not enough I need to do the real activity." (I-10)

Generally speaking, inequalities are a salient topic of reflection for respondents who compare realities in their home and host countries and also locally between different social groups. Respondents learn *how equality/inequality stems* from people in different kinds of social positions – especially for those who experience disadvantage resulting from it. This may also happen on a more personal level: in a new environment, the respondents are placed in a new position themselves, in which they are viewed, categorised, treated, etc. in a new way. One European respondent in Africa discusses racial ideologies and narrates an incident of being denied access to public transportation because of her ethnicity, for which she was considered too wealthy to use the bus. Encountering the advantages entailed by one's identity appears to cause a great deal of contradiction and ambivalence that are difficult to overcome and turn into constructive learning. One respondent describes the experience of coming to terms with his/her privilege as follows:

- *"... And being white has... has... you know, has been a challenge in the way that that is exactly what will prevent me from being one of the [locals] because I'm more likely to be seen as someone who is superior, it would even sometimes rule over my not very fortunate gender and my not so fortunate age. Ahm... And I don't know this, and this has bothered me a lot. It has bothered me a lot, and it always has, it's not a new thing, it's just been very obvious here...." (I-9)*

4.4.4 Participation

As a human rights principle, *participation* means that: "All people have the right to participate in and access information relating to the decision-making processes that affect their lives and well-being. Rights-based approaches require a high degree of participation by communities, civil society, minorities, women, young people, indigenous peoples and other identified groups."⁴⁷

Respondents reflect on 'participation' on a big and small scale. This is again a result of working and interacting with people, whose space for participation is more limited than the volunteer's. Many discuss issues affecting the beneficiaries and a great deal of these accounts convey the idea that beneficiaries have less opportunities to make a difference in their own lives due to their circumstances or belonging to a particular group. Both the workplace and society act as a backdrop for these reflections.

When reflecting on the interactions at the host project, the key question is what is or should be the role of the beneficiaries in creating their own well-being? There are the significant differences in the kind of role respondents construct for themselves in relation to the beneficiaries: Who are the protagonists in the respondents' narratives? The following three examples give an idea of the different approaches and different understandings of volunteer-beneficiary relationship. They also suggest how these discourses may shape the everyday practices enacted by the respondent:

- **Providing and receiving help/support:** *"...There is a kid that does not move, a single move and does not speak, I even though she was blind. No one ever played with her and no one cares about her. One day I decided to take her for a walk..." (I-7)*
- **Servicing and having the right to choose:** *"...because I am volunteer and they are clients so is different whether I am giving a service and they receive or accept a service so I try to switch my perspective so ok let me try, if I am the client am I satisfied with my service or no, if no then I need to improve something so I build communication with them." (I-11)*

⁴⁷ UNFPA (2005)

- **Involving others and having the right to participate:** “*I think that is really important, that people have space to do that, to feel, not worthy but kind of... I can't think of the word, that they've contributed and they feel productive.*” (I-16)

There are also reflections that go beyond the immediate context of voluntary service, although they are connected to it. The ways of participation in decision-making are not the same for everyone: e.g. a child cannot be expected to participate in the same way as an adult. The barriers to participation are different for different groups of people. One respondent working with disabilities discusses the ethical challenges based on observations of everyday practices at work: “*... for me it's more about how much freedom to give the disabled and how much to decide for them*” (I-17).

By learning about the lives and challenges of the beneficiaries, the respondents have a greater understanding of their needs and will to contribute to their well-being from a human rights perspective as well. Well-being is created not only as the end result, the outcome of the actions, but also through the process. Participation of beneficiaries is considered necessary and valuable. Several accounts show that the respondents not only reflect on the topic but also actively try to engage others in their activities:

- *“...It wasn't just me, I had some help, I was working with them, one of the other guys of the foundation... we we're doing it together I think it came up really well, the video itself was getting the children to interview the residents, so it wasn't actually us in the video, we were getting the kids to do everything, so they were pretending to be like a news team, and we had kind of sound man, and we had the makeup lady, we had... so it was really sweet, the children got really into, that was nice, all those kids weren't going to the school at that time, they were in the foundation everyday bored, doing nothing , so it was really nice to be able to kind of gave them something to do...”* (I-4)

Participation is mostly viewed between individuals or at a community level – depending largely on the context of the host project. Some respondents do, however, link the realities known through the volunteering experience to wider societal structures. One respondent, for example, calls for the need to empower people to take collective action to transform their own situation:

- *“They are together fighting for their rights it really can changed something and it's more important to help just, of course, we have to help one person but we have to, like, put people together and know their rights and then they can fight for their rights together and help other ones to join and they can take part of this group.”*(I-5)

4.4.5 Agency

As established, most respondents demonstrate a high level of empathy towards the beneficiaries (show interest in their lives and ability to understand their experiences). They also analyse the situation and tend to seek solutions to prevailing problems – with the underlying belief that things can change. How do the respondents see their own ability to influence the state of things?⁴⁸ (c.f. Figure 13) The great majority of respondents (17 out of 18) understand their role and commitment as everyday social responsibility: leading by example and actively engaging in exchange and dialogue. For them, ultimately, the aim is to create awareness in order to transform prevailing attitudes and practices.

Many also present ways of making a difference that can be grouped together as aiming towards community empowerment. These imply involving people through their organisations in processes of change. This may

⁴⁸ While most respondents see themselves as having agency, this is not the case for all of them. One respondent states that “*We are self-centred that we feel like we are the most important. That is really bad, I don't think like we can change it. Because is something in our culture. You cannot change it from one day to another.*” (I-6). Later the same respondent presents travelling as a way of transforming attitudes.

mean supporting the agency of the beneficiaries by proving psychosocial support, for instance. The idea is to inspire people to take action for the benefit of their community.

A few also make references to different forms of political advocacy or campaigning. Charity and philanthropy are also mentioned briefly. Forms of actions such as participation in formal politics or social entrepreneurship are not discussed.

Each form of action has different set of limits and possibilities. Every day social responsibility, for instance, relies mostly on individual's competencies; as a conscious citizen or a professional. Some of the forms of action portrayed by the respondents are enacted in the present and others more as potential for the future.

How is the relationship with the local beneficiaries understood? In the respondents' accounts, individual conversations and local circumstance form the backdrop for discussions on human rights topics and issues. If the idea of volunteers as guests in the host community is strong, so is the degree of inbuilt friction in the agency. The question is particularly pressing when:

- **Host community is perceived as very distant from own⁴⁹:** Many respondents have struggled to make sense of the complexities and disentangle one issue from another. The adaptation process may also put into question some fundamental beliefs regarding right and wrong when they conflict with the general norms in the hosting country.
- **There is a considerable power distance:** When adapting is perceived more as a process of assimilation rather than that of integration, the space for action is very limited (especially when action is understood as critique towards the host). Economic disparities can lead to problematizing relationships with the beneficiaries but also to their own legitimacy to act.
- **Respondent does not feel competent enough to meet expectations** (either their own or those of others): The learning opportunities for the respondents are far greater than their contributions at the host project, particularly at the start of the service, which clashes with their desire to contribute, to do something meaningful. In several accounts, the beginning of the service was marked by confusion, disappointment and frustration when expectations met with the lack of knowledge on how to service the host project.



FIGURE 13

How does 'diversity' influence agency? Regarding spaces for action, most respondents' perceptions can be seen as moving somewhere between depoliticised injustice and a culturally sensitive approach to human rights questions. The first approach is prone to a cultural relativism, which does not recognise the internal

⁴⁹ For example, as in: "... I think the main thing is I just appreciate more what I have at home I see people in like very different situation and they are not able to get out of and I feel little bit hopeless sometimes so I think I am sure more like I know how privilege I am somehow, yeah" (I-2)

power relations in a community or the local forces of social change. The second approach seeks to identify local allies. While acknowledging that prevailing ideologies cannot be changed by imposing new values and attitudes from the outside, external agents are represented as supporting the local forces of change: push towards a particular direction.

Through voluntary service, several respondents have discovered their own abilities to make a difference. For six of them, it is clearly connected to their competencies as an individual: e.g. "...*creativity is really a powerful thing and it's very nice to bring that in and show people that everybody can be creative and everybody can experience that for themselves and bring that in.*" (I-16) For eight respondents, it has more to do with human potential - fostering dialogue and reflection on similarities and differences or acting as a disruptive force by raising topics into discussion, that otherwise would not necessarily be discussed.

4.5 Human Rights Education? Key Components of Voluntary Service

In this part of the discussion, the aim is to identify key components that create positive impacts. Most of the impacts discussed in this study originate from social interactions, and therefore involve a complex array of factors. Here the focus is on the cases that seem to have produced the most significant impacts in relation to human rights: What did the human rights component of the project bring to the volunteering experience? This question is approached by looking at the interplay of two central learning elements of international voluntary service - intercultural learning and on-the-job learning – together with human rights education.

Human rights education through volunteering can also be done in the home country. However, what the international dimension introduces is illustrated by one respondent as follows: "...*every country has their own problem, every society or inhabitants they have their own local problems, and oh, i never found this problem in my country, but ok, it could be happening as well.*" (I-11) Along with the personal growth and competencies, the experience creates awareness of what happens in the world but also new perspectives of the home country. It generates the ability to imagine alternatives – both good and bad.

"*I don't see them differently, but maybe I see them more clear now because I work with people who need the human rights.*" (I-18) In the case of most respondents, voluntary service has not changed their views on human rights per se, but it has highlighted their importance. The experiences do not perhaps lead to more content-knowledge, but more importantly they give an idea of what the human rights issues are. This is achieved by encountering and forming bonds with people from different backgrounds.

Making the relationship to human right more personal, backed by the authority of own experience, respondents gain confidence. In the best case scenario, these aspects empower and inspire the respondents to take action:

- "... *[before] it was only knowledge and now is like experience and it makes the difference when something it's like explore something that just know something its totally different and also make you want to do something about the things before this experience I was just interested about these kind things but now I have experience like own experience and I really want to do something and it makes me look my future life differently and ask myself what should I do? To improve this world and maybe is not something big but in my everyday life I can do it somehow and I will do it after this experience.*" (I-5)

Voluntary service is marked by three aspects: a) holistic participation; the learning is done everywhere, i.e. at work and during free time, b) supported reflection; the learning program is structured and deliberate, c) contribution to common good; the volunteering activities are undertaken by one person but the aim is to multiply the learning effect.

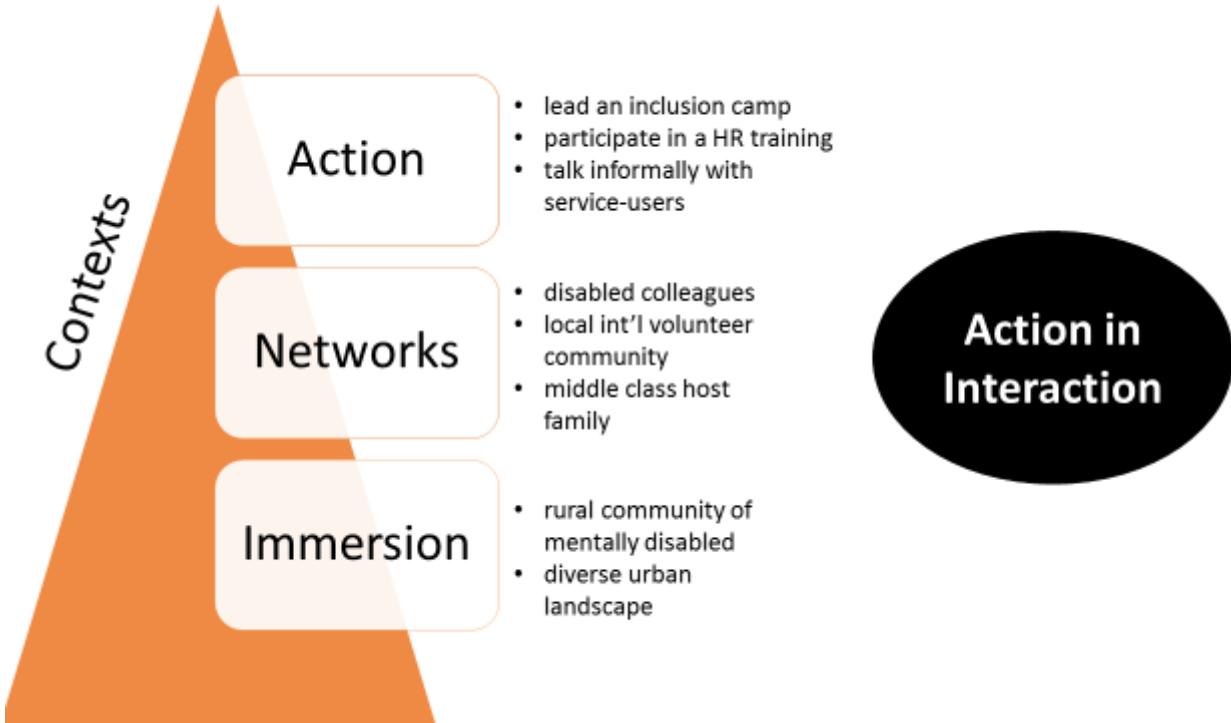


FIGURE 14

4.5.1 Spaces for Learning

Through which contexts and practices are human rights learned? What are the things that support and hinder learning human rights through voluntary service, i.e. are the program and project contexts and practices consistent with human rights values?

Holistic learning is a characteristic feature of volunteering. Firstly, learning is done by doing: engaging directly with people in vulnerable situations, working side-by-side with activists, taking action for common good, etc. Secondly, unlike a classroom, this learning space is also a source of learning in itself. “Studying” and “applying” what is learned takes place simultaneously (i.e. experiential learning) and they cannot be separated from each other. Figure 14 illustrates the different volunteering contexts where interaction and thus also the learning takes place.

Immersion: The respondent is immersed in the host community. As a result, the experiences are extremely multifaceted and, by no means, limited to the contents of the work or host project: the respondents go to parties and festivals, spend time with their host families, meet people through their hobbies, etc. At times the gap between work and free time is perceived to be very big and sometimes non-existent. A few respondents live at their host projects, in small rural communities, which tend to have close ties with the beneficiaries and opportunity to encounter the same people in many different contexts. This helps the respondent get to know one reality in-depth, but without links to other realities in the host country, its meaning may become blurred. Similar ‘social bubbles’ appear in urban contexts – inadvertently or not - without local friends or social networks outside work. Diversity of contacts, for example, conveys more opportunities to contextualise and make sense of the majority-minority relations. However, other important learning still takes place in the “bubbles”:

- *“It came a lot more multicultural than international really. Even though I live in this country, I feel like my friends are anything but from this country really, they are from anywhere in the world. There is all this cross cultural thing going on, sharing, living, it's really nice. [...] It's living in a bubble but it is a lovely bubble.”* (I-16)

Networks: The respondents of this study participate in work related to human rights (whether advocacy, community empowerment or work with people at risk), which also shapes their networks. The respondents interact, share, learn and form bonds with people and also take action together with disabled colleagues, other volunteers (local and international), the host family, etc. Through the ‘Communicating for Human Rights in Diversity’ project, many respondents have also had the opportunity to access expert knowledge on human rights (practitioners and/or experts by experience). The relationship may be professional but many accounts illustrate that 14 respondents have formed close personal bonds with people in vulnerable positions or those actively working to promote human rights.

- *“...now I know people who are also interesting this kind of things and it was such a nice experience you can compare the same enthusiasm to do something with the human rights and make the world a little bit better place [...] in this country I made a lot of networks like relations with person with organizations and I am planning to do something here and use these networks that I made and it’s because of my project and because of I don’t know ... consequences I get known to many I can use these relationships and these networks in future because I still want to do something here...”* (I-5)

Action: Usually the ‘volunteer’ is not a position to be filled – i.e. there are no tasks and responsibilities that require a certain set of qualifications – it is something that needs to be created. It is essentially a process. What is learned through the action is contingent on the role and the consequent activities of the volunteer. ‘Participation’, for example, is hardly learned if the role is limited to being an “extra pair of hands”. ‘Empathy’ often appears to grow through horizontal relationships. Many respondents describe their role as being a friend, who shares the joys and sorrows of the beneficiaries. One respondent reports to have gained important leadership skills through leading an inclusion camp.

- *“...I have gained the skill to be a leader in a group of young people for more than 20 people as a volunteer and to deal with the cultural shock between them, and to be in the middle and try to manage these things. I think these skills could never have happened in my life if I am not in this kind of project. To be in the middle and impartial, even my thinking is different, understand cultures and don’t be... don’t take anything personal if something is about the culture or something affect me.”* (I-12)

Naturally, we must also take into account the experiences of the beneficiaries. The volunteer’s role is not only to participate but also to interact with the community and to try “to make a difference”. How close are the respondents’ relationships with the people whose lives are impacted? How do the beneficiaries themselves participate in the processes of change? In respondents’ accounts, their role as volunteer can be placed on a continuum that ranges from working *for* beneficiaries to working *with* beneficiaries. Some respondents appear to be much more sensitive to the power relations entailed in the working relationship and strive to involve beneficiaries by supporting their agency, either explicitly or implicitly: for example, including children in the process of making a video about the host project as opposed to merely interviewing them as beneficiaries. There appears to be a connection to the type of organisations and type of work performed by the respondents.

4.5.2 Support for Learning

Participation solely is not enough for learning. Reflection is needed in order to turn the experiences into thoughts and knowledge that can be applied in other contexts. To this end, the respondents need tools. Some respondents have strong pre-existing conceptual tools to make sense of experiences (e.g. theoretical knowledge of human rights) and others rely more on the new tools made available and developed in the

program: training, discussions at work, peer support, etc. The data suggests that the differences in respondents' competencies may have played a significant role in the human rights learning at the beginning of the volunteering period, but over time, the support and opportunities provided by the hosting project gain more importance.

In the interview data, the importance of this support is mostly implicit. Explicit reference to support is usually made in connection with situations where it has been seen to be missing. How do the main support mechanisms of the voluntary service program relate to human rights education and when they are the most effective?

- **Ongoing support at work.** This is the single most important element for human rights education through voluntary service. There are mentors and colleagues to help the newcomers but being part of everyday activities plays an equally important role. Observing co-workers in their everyday tasks (especially when they are able to explain why things are done the way they are) and being part of everyday discussions opens up new perspectives on human rights. One respondent describes the difficulties in the beginning of the service period: "*I didn't have any role model, so it was really hard to get into the process and know what we really need, even on the administration stuff and on the finances background.*" (I-8)
- **Trainings and support by the ICYE National Committees.** This form of support is more sporadic in nature, but is central to creating links between theory and practice by explaining the (structural, historical, socio-cultural, economic, political) background of the experience or incident. In the interview data, there are some comments about the training sessions organised by ICYE multipliers, most of them on training content. Based on the progress reports of the core group respondents, the training activities have been a good resource for the respondents and have managed to clarify the link between their practical work and the concept of human rights. As a creative way to support further learning and reflection, in one country, the volunteer was made a multiplier – he/she led a training on human rights for other volunteers.
- **Other support network (peers, host family etc.).** When the respondents narrate their learning process related to human rights topics, they make frequent references to informal conversations and experiences with friends and the (host) family. The local network provides insight into different perspectives; at times by providing a counterbalance to their own views. Friends and peers, who are in the same position as actors from the outside, can help make sense of their role in the community. Meeting likeminded people has the potential of empowering volunteers as agents of change.

When in place and working coherently with human rights values, all these support mechanisms together enabled the respondents to build new competencies, to provide support in reaching the next level of challenges (c.f. Figure 15).

The question is also what kind of role do these mechanisms play in human rights learning? When is support needed and what kind? The purpose is to facilitate the volunteer's learning process, which aims to empower them as agents of change: through personal growth and building resilience, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, etc. Nevertheless, the degree to which the learning objectives are understood in terms of human rights varies.

The beginning of the volunteering period is marked by limited understanding and the ability to act in the particular environment, thus participation is supported and in a way mediated by the hosting project. The entire support network is influential in directing the course of human rights learning. Human rights and linked practices are learned in a wider framework of reference, which supports the learning at times and at other times may hinder it. As opposed to many other educational settings, in the real world the number or level of challenge cannot be adjusted to match the abilities and resources of the volunteer. The experience may seem overwhelming at times: the stress and anxiety can lead to a situation where the volunteer shuts down and the learning stops.

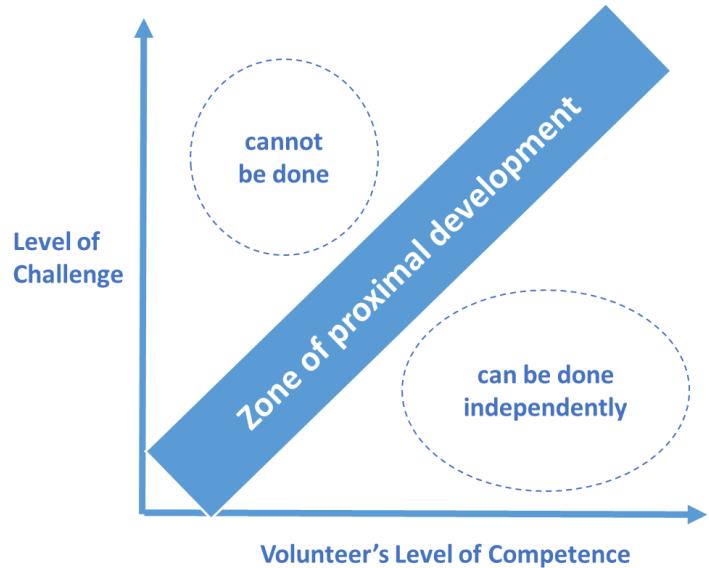


FIGURE 15

Problems and difficulties provide valuable learning opportunities when they are addressed appropriately. Many respondents report having faced and overcome culture shock and homesickness. Cross-cultural adaptation is one of the topics addressed in capacity-building activities throughout the voluntary service program. Probably thanks to this, respondents and the support staff are also able to identify and manage conflicts relating to the adaptation process:

- *"I think that maybe the most important thing to resolve this problems was that I have to change myself like I have to change a new way to be and give a new way to think and give away all the expectation that I had and just relax and after that I learned when all these problems solved somehow they after that I was like kind of new me and I started to feel good here and good at my work place..."* (I-5)

And also to turn them into constructive learning experiences, for example, how to tolerate ambiguity: "...it is good and bad things mainly but it is so different I think in just everyday..." (I-2)

When it comes to other kinds of difficulties and conflicts, the thinking tools may prove to be inadequate. Some anecdotes signal that there is perhaps not enough support for respondents to process all experiences in a constructive way, at least from the perspective of human rights values. On some occasions, the respondents make sense of incidents or situations using the relativist framework of intercultural learning, which leads to counterproductive results from a human rights perspective: e.g. legitimising privilege or corporal punishment of children. In these cases, the aim of adapting leans towards assimilation and not integration.

4.5.3 Matching Volunteers and Host Projects

What is the balance of benefits of voluntary service between the respondents and the beneficiaries? From the respondents' perspective, the benefits appear evident (although not uniform) on a personal level, but how do the respondents see their contribution to the beneficiaries, hosting community at large and to their home community? As discussed in section 2.1, the experience is not complete without a sense of meaningful contribution to the host project and/or local community.

This question relates to learning outcomes: how the new skills and knowledge are applied? Some competencies are discussed in the framework of contributions made during the voluntary service, but many others are perceived as being more useful in the future, after the service period. In terms of human rights, the ways of making a difference can be divided into three categories:

1. **Human rights based practices.** The volunteers as practitioners employ the practices in the everyday work during the voluntary service. Four respondents (out of 18) portray this as having potential for diffusing human rights based practices more widely - among the co-workers or volunteer peers in the hosting country.⁵⁰ Nine respondents also expressed the wish to continue working in a similar field in the future, in which case the practices are shared even further.
2. **Sharing experiences, perspectives, ideas etc.** Communication and dialogue between people from diverse backgrounds is perceived as a powerful force for change – even if the outcomes are not immediate and tangible. In a certain sense, this is also understood as a responsibility. Respondents who see themselves as accountable to the beneficiaries consider it important to raise awareness of human rights topics and promote understanding and inclusion locally; 14 respondents talked about prejudices against the marginalized, e.g. the poor, homeless, people with disabilities, LGTB, etc. Many see themselves as accountable to both home and host community. Approximately half of the respondents consider it important to act as kind of interpreters between the different local realities during and/or after the service period.
3. **Leadership.** The idea of leadership is entailed in the previous point, in the sense of influencing others, but eleven respondents articulate the commitment to more target-orientated action in the future. The experiences, competencies and networks gained during the voluntary service represent a central resource in these efforts⁵¹. Most plans are clearly anchored in the context of the home community but there are also some that entail building bridges between home and host countries.

There are differences between respondents in what is seen as a viable way of ‘making a difference’. For the most part, it is not possible to trace where exactly differences between respondents originate: i.e. are they contingent on the individual’s background (prior experiences of ‘active citizenship’), what is learned through the work at the volunteering project or are they influenced by other capacity-building/support mechanisms? Nonetheless, there appears to be a connection between the perceptions and the models for action learned through their role as volunteer.

One finding is that the respondents who report significant changes resulting from the volunteering experience are more likely to place great emphasis on influencing others by means of exchange and dialogue. At times, this may even take precedence over more tangible, visible outcomes created by the contributions at work which benefit the hosting project even after the volunteering period.

The second finding is linked to the human rights based practices. Many respondents exhibit great ability to reflect on the everyday practices at work and their implications in terms of the rights of the beneficiaries.

⁵⁰ For example: “First of all I hope that I gave them different way of looking on things, different way of methodology concerning the communication with the children, and also I gave them much more free much more European point of view about the way of children expressing themselves, and also I try to organized many creative activities [...]That I hope that I can give something also to the teachers how they were watching my work with all the cooperation and interaction I had with them, because I can say that we had a very good connection in the end all the talks everything I am sure they see things differently after I work there in the project.” (I-3)

⁵¹ This is, for example, learning about models that respondents see beneficial in their home communities: “When I see the system in there and the way they support each other and I feel really interested with this and I really want when I go back in my country I can use in my country to support each other.” (I-10)

However, it is predominantly the core group of 14 respondents who actively strive to influence the practices of others in the organisation or to create organisational changes – at least by adhering to the principle of “leading by example”. Perhaps this is due to having been given a “mandate” as volunteers of the human rights project. In some cases, however, the host project did not seem receptive to the cause, which caused frustration for the respondents in question.

The third finding concerns the idea of leadership. Many respondents make links between the voluntary service experience and themselves as professionals (either currently or in the future). Perhaps this constitutes the main way of making a difference in life after the voluntary service. There are only a few references to grassroots level activism: In one case, the respondent was already active in community volunteering activities at home. In another, the respondent had been active in the host project’s capacity-building and awareness raising activities during the voluntary service.

Although there are no conclusive findings, the data suggests that the volunteer - host project match may represent one key instance for creating greater impact. Drawing on the findings, Figure 16 illustrates some potential outcomes of collaboration. The volunteer’s capacity to assume responsibility does not depend solely on their set of skills (those acquired before or through volunteering). It is also a question of being able to apply the skills in the determined context and the ability to learn and adapt.

Organisations with a strong human rights base appear to be a good match for respondents in general; this is taking into account the common expectation of respondents to engage with beneficiaries directly and the need to have entry-level tasks for the volunteers who may for instance be limited by language skills. Respondents benefitted from the organisation’s expertise and the organisation also received support from the respondents. In the case of a few respondents, the project has managed not only to empower the respondents to act as multipliers of human rights, but the collaboration has also been mutually beneficial.

- *“I have learnt a lot and especially I think I have the skill to, I have gained the skill to be a leader in a group of young people for more than 20 people as a volunteer and to deal with the cultural shock between them, and to be in the middle and try to manage this things. I think these skills could never have happened in my life if I am not in this kind of project. To be in the middle and impartial, even my thinking is different, understand cultures and don't be .don't take anything personal if something is about the culture or something affect me.”* (I-12)

In organisations that do not have a strong, explicit human rights based approach, the collaboration seems to produce more ambiguous results and the role of the multiplier gains even more weight in supporting the human rights learning. Undoubtedly, some volunteers are more proactive and self-directed in their learning than others, and the same applies to the ability to reflect on one’s own position, role and practices in relation to the beneficiaries. Respondents name numerous examples of engaging in and catalyzing exchange on human rights topics or related experiences, so there is great potential for impacts: sometimes

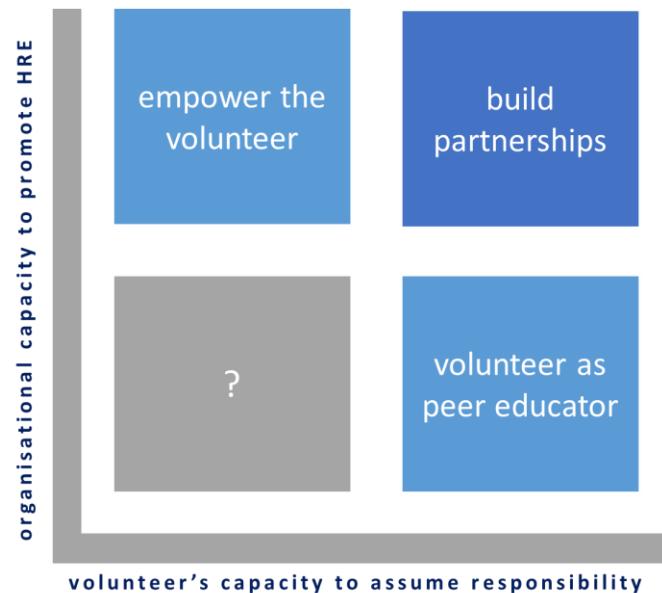


FIGURE 16

as a disruptive force challenging prevailing notions and sometimes as a mediator who opens up dialogue. Critical thinking skills are vital to act as buffer preventing negative impacts on people in vulnerable situation.

4.6 Recommendations

The main aim of the study has been to investigate how the human rights project impacted on the volunteers and thereby to identify areas and ways in which to support volunteers and improve learning opportunities and outcomes. In this section, we consider what practices – preparation, training, support... need to be adjusted or developed so that volunteers can contribute more fully in their host projects and recognise their learning and contributions during their service.

- A) Linking human rights to volunteering:** Although the host projects of all respondents in the study serve the needs of vulnerable people in society, only a few have a rights-based approach to their work or for example are involved in advocacy or campaigning work. In the absence of a direct link to human rights, drawing connections between the volunteers' daily engagement, the hands-on work at the host project and the theme of human rights becomes imperative. This will avoid building false expectations about their role in the host projects. It can be done by placing emphasis on learning for the volunteers as one of the main goal of international volunteering. Observing, listening and understanding what has shaped the lives of the beneficiaries lead to learning about human rights and the values on which they are based (i.e. respect, understanding, inclusion, participation...). At the same time, as the study reveals, volunteers should be made aware that through their interactions and discussions with beneficiaries, peer groups and other members of the local community, they have the potential to influence others towards human rights.
- B) Volunteers as main beneficiaries of voluntary service:** One of the findings reveals that the respondents see themselves as the main beneficiaries of voluntary service. Although this is concurrent with their learning-orientated motivations for volunteering, it clashes at the start of their service with their motivation to contribute and "do good" in the host project and community. Linked to point A, during the preparation of volunteers, both in the home and host country (for the latter during the on-arrival training), volunteers should be made to understand that particularly the start of the service period is inevitably a time for learning a new language, learning about communication and working styles, finding their place and negotiating their role within the host project. It is the learning derived from these experiences that will assist them in contributing more fully within their host projects.
- C) Recognition and validation of volunteer's contributions:** The findings of the study illustrate that many volunteers do not feel they have contributed significantly to the work of the host project. This may be due to lack of feedback or not being able to recognise positive feedback when given. This could be addressed by giving more structured feedback (i.e. not giving praise in passing but in meetings with the volunteer) and developing (self) assessment tools that enable volunteers and host project supervisors to discuss challenges and evaluate performance. These measures will make volunteers aware of their contributions and feel recognised for their work.

D) Role of support: The volunteer can be supported in a variety of ways: concrete hands-on training and feedback on tasks or through training and other measures that support reflection on human rights and understanding the volunteers' role in the host projects.

1. **Role models or project supervisors** (i.e. contact persons at host projects) are vital for the volunteers at the start of the service. Observing co-workers at their everyday tasks (explain why things are done the way they are) and being part of everyday discussions has the potential to open up new perspectives on human rights. Role models or supervisors should be in place and prepared to support volunteers through their service period.
2. **Ongoing Support by mentors or multipliers** is central to creating links between theory and practice by explaining the (structural, historical, socio-cultural, economic, political) background of particular human rights situations. One project multiplier enabled the volunteer to become a multiplier by having him/her lead a human rights training for other volunteers. Another put together a team of young people who developed a local campaign. Others introduced the volunteer to local activists and human rights defenders. Such actions support reflection and learning, generate empathy and enable volunteers to make the link between human rights and volunteering. Such actions should be planned in advance and used to support volunteers' learning and to foster commitment to human rights.
3. **Issues of power and privileges** should be given greater attention in volunteer trainings (e.g. in the intercultural learning sessions). In particular, European volunteers participating in this project on the African continent often struggled to understand their own privileged position. Methods that enable volunteers to recognise privileged positions and to deal constructively with power and privileges should be given priority in trainings. Likewise, continuous reflection and support by mentors or multipliers is crucial to enabling volunteers to reflect on the human rights "knowledge" gained at the training and to connect it to their own realities as well as the lived realities of the beneficiaries and local community.

5. Conclusions

This study explored respondents' perceptions and experiences of voluntary service. Even though all the respondents had some sense of having made a contribution to the host project and/or community, the biggest impacts were undoubtedly perceived to be on a personal level, on the respondents themselves.

The volunteer's role is understood in terms of planting seeds of change through exchange and dialogue; this is done during the voluntary service but particularly after the actual service period. Although not directly observable, contributions to the well-being of others in the host community were mostly represented as modest when discussed explicitly. Nonetheless, the idea of mutual learning is entailed in the accounts on encountering diversity: interactions were perceived to produce mutually beneficial learning effects for both the respondents and local community members.

The respondents' and organisations' views on what input and outcomes are the most valuable do not always coincide. The way of assessing the efforts of "doing good" is mostly evaluated by their own standards (in relation to their goals for volunteering). Seeing the beneficiaries happy, succeeding at tasks, getting positive feedback and generally being depended upon were considered as important signs of "doing

good". The opposite cases, "failing to do good", were described as not getting the opportunity to take on responsibility or not being able to engage with the beneficiaries directly.

All respondents recognise having gained something valuable through volunteering, but the depth of the experience varies in their narratives. The experience has been particularly significant for fifteen (out of 18) respondents who feel empowered through the discovery of how they can make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

1) What impacts does the volunteering experience have from the respondents' perspective?

The impacts of volunteering are experienced to be strongest on an individual level: evidenced by new competencies and personal growth. Voluntary service is regarded as creating greater well-being for international volunteers themselves and potentially for others as well.

International volunteering essentially entails living in a new social environment and often also working in a new field. Immersion, new social networks and new kinds of activities together sum up a learning experience that could not happen by volunteering in the home environment. There are a wide range of challenges. On the one hand, concrete and easily identifiable needs to be solved – such as learning a new language and developing skills necessary to perform everyday tasks at the host project. On the other hand, there are the less visible challenges, like the need to develop new strategies for social situations or dealing with conflicts, which often challenge the very perception of oneself and deep-rooted interpretations of behaviour. Overcoming these challenges can be an empowering experience.

Expectations for voluntary service are most often a mix of learning and "doing good". Through voluntary service, the respondents learn to understand their own role in creating well-being and also to develop competencies (skills, attitudes and values) that enable them to do so. There are no major differences in voluntary service experiences that can be explained by previous professional experience or the lack of them; though, assuming responsibility for the first time was considered particularly important by the respondents.

In relation to the beneficiaries and the work community, the service is mainly understood as a social role. This entails giving psychosocial support and creating opportunities to exchange ideas as the central activities of the international volunteer. Although the impacts are not observable as such, the relationship is perceived to be mutually beneficial. Respondents recognised that they had been beneficial to the organisation by bringing in new ideas and practices. In some cases, this was in a professional capacity but more often simply having a different background from the rest of the employees.

Situations that lead to particularly rewarding experiences often convey the idea of competence and a sense of connection with the beneficiaries. Typically, this is within the context of being able to make a difference to someone's life and evidenced by direct feedback; seeing the beneficiaries become happy, receiving praise or being relied on by colleagues. Also the process of adapting was depicted as a powerful experience. Being accepted into a group/community was often framed as the outcome of overcoming challenges – outcome of learning.

2) How does voluntary service transform ideas, attitudes regarding human rights and human rights action (both of volunteer and of the beneficiaries)?

Through the process of voluntary service, volunteers become more aware and gain a better understanding of what creates well-being or what acts as its obstacle. Encounters with people in

vulnerable situations play a key role: these bring about an understanding of human rights at a grassroots level and a more personal level relationship with human rights. The relationship between the volunteer and the beneficiaries shapes human rights learning and vice-versa.

The degree to which well-being is understood within the framework of rights varies among the respondents. Voluntary service entails a lot of experiences that have the potential to provoke reflection around human rights values such as equality, inclusion and participation. However, the experiences do not automatically lead to learning about the situation of vulnerable groups, human right issues at large or structures. Although the role of supported reflection is mostly implicit in the respondents' accounts, it is evident that this has offered the respondents new insight and tools to address human rights issues observed during the service period and beyond.

The respondents see themselves as more committed and able to act in defence of human dignity after the voluntary service. Through voluntary service, some respondents have discovered their own particular role and way of making a difference. Most, however, see their potential as enlightened citizens, who share their knowledge with others by means of exchange and dialogue.

3) What are the key components of creating positive impact?

The study identified how three central aspects of voluntary service act together to create impacts through the volunteer's learning.

- **Holistic** learning. The respondents of the voluntary service program are a diverse group of young people with varying sets of skills and interests. Through volunteering they encounter real world challenges that are meaningful (interrelated and all set in the context) and diverse (to match the skills and interests of each learner). Learning happens in and through a determined social environment, which enables them to explore new content and ideas but also requires acquiring new skills and attitudes.
- **Experiential** learning. The foundation for learning is personal experience. This is what gives depth to all learning outcomes due to the strong affective dimension. The volunteer does not only observe but also participates, which enables learning through experimentation. There is usually immediate feedback to orientate and support further learning. In the process, the learner develops a sense of direction and awareness of his/her strengths and weaknesses.
- **Supported** learning. The international volunteer is faced with challenges, big and small, on an everyday basis. Some challenges are inherent to the international voluntary service experience (such as adapting to a new environment and encountering diversity): volunteer trainings aim to develop thinking tools to address these situations. At the host project, suitable challenges are chosen for the volunteer and they receive support in order to perform tasks. However, the volunteer's role goes beyond merely performing tasks and tends to require considerable initiative. By creating a support structure that is sensitive to the volunteer's needs and involves a high level of participation, the learning impacts on the volunteer are greater and consequently also the potential contributions to the host community.

All these aspects are present in the voluntary service experience. But impacts are contingent to *how* they are: How diverse are the contexts of encounters? How deep is the relationship between the volunteers and beneficiaries or the understanding of inequality and its structures? How well are the multipliers able to identify the learning needs?

The sum of experiences is capable of empowering the volunteers not only as individuals but also as citizens, community members. This can be witnessed in some respondents' statements and/or anecdotes about the process of finding out what makes him/her valuable to others. This entails

recognising one's strengths, being aware of oneself in relation to others and acquiring skills and knowledge that stems from the experience. The respondents' role in the well-being of others is learned through concrete experiences of making a positive difference. Most of the time this is not understood as 'helping' / 'charity' or considered a responsibility, but rather as a mutual exchange.

An important factor appears to be the ways in which the volunteer interacts with human rights topics. Some respondents have been involved in advocacy work: their activities were explicitly set in a human rights framework and their colleagues are professionals in the field (for most, the work also entailed different levels of contact with the beneficiaries). For the majority of respondents, however, the human rights dimension of their voluntary activities was not that apparent. While the work consisted of direct interaction with people at risk, linking the everyday tasks of the volunteer to the concept of rights and social change depended greatly on the organisation's approach to human rights, on the individual volunteer and the support provided by the multiplier.

[...] during my study I also deal with topic of Human rights but not so deeply and here when I arrived to [host country] on-arrival camp I had a very good mentor who was talking lot about human rights and children rights in [host country] and that was point I was really surprised about lot of things so my awareness definitely raised and that is the theoretical part and the practical part how I was looking rights in my everyday life it changes a lot... (I-3)

The *Communicating Human Rights in Diversity* project entailed additional support for reflection. Although the role of this support is mostly implicit in respondents' accounts, it is evidenced in the concepts applied by the respondents to make sense of the experience, a greater awareness of human rights topics in everyday contexts and an increased commitment to human rights.

6. Points for Further Discussion

How can we make the most of international voluntary service and avoid pitfalls involved in human rights education through voluntary service? Here are some guiding questions for further discussions on the topic when reviewing the steps involved in program implementation before, during and after the actual service period:

Agency⁵² – What is the purpose of learning in and through voluntary service?

- How do we and our partners understand the international volunteer's agency? Is our vision enacted in the everyday practices?
- Do the volunteers have adequate tools to recognise the agency of others; particularly, of the beneficiaries? Do the understandings of 'agency' include both individual and collective dimensions?
- Are there young people whose agency it is particularly contingent to the support provided by the international voluntary service program? Who is able to access the learning experiences and who is not?

Power and Culture – How to develop critical thinking while promoting cultural exchange?

- How do we and our partners understand the relationship between social change and cultures?
- Do the encounters between the volunteer and beneficiary promote active dialogue? Are the encounters diverse enough (e.g. not only in roles of helper and those who are being helped)?

⁵² Agency can be understood as the ability to influence one's life (c.f. page 13 - section 2.4).

Thinking and Assessment Tools – How is the volunteer's ability to see and understand the impacts of volunteering beyond personal experience?

- Is there a need to develop new methods to track the learning process related to attitudes and values? How can these overcome the language barrier or complement other linguistically bound assessment methods, such as interviews?

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Annexes

Annex 1

Communicating Human Rights in Diversity

Key Action 2 project capacity building in the field of youth

10.12.2014

ICYE International Office

Introduction

The main impetus of this is to make volunteers active and responsible citizens valuing diversity and human rights and to build capacity of youth and volunteering organisations, making them multipliers of change beyond their prescribed roles as youth or social workers. Over time, the lack of skills and knowledge results in a certain "blindness" for the rights of vulnerable people due to age, disability, gender, immigration status, etc. and often an interweaving of these factors. Simultaneously, the scope of volunteers' contributions, often limited to physical "help" in host projects, can be extended and their learning maximised.

One challenge is also volunteers' sometimes negative impact on beneficiaries, revealed by research and prior experience within ICYE, which depicts the need to empower host and coordinating organisations and volunteers with skills to identify and change their own and others' perceptions and practices. A conceptual approach that moves beyond established representational practices will foster respectful engagement with vulnerable people and groups.

This project thus explores new ways of engaging with the blind spots of our consciousness, with precarious spaces and people at risk. It gives occasion to stimulate discussions on representational practices and their influence on human rights in diversity to bring about change in the lives of the precarious. The project, which creates synergies between the fields of non-formal education, practical training, academic research, youth and volunteering, is meant to infuse a culture of human rights in the diverse local organisations and communities, reducing simultaneously the negative impact of volunteering and maximising its positive impacts.

Main Aims

1. Build capacity of volunteering organisations by creating multipliers and infusing a culture of human rights in diversity
2. Test the impact of the Human Rights in Diversity project on the socio-cultural and personal development of volunteers
3. Fill gaps in knowledge through the impact study to maximise volunteers' learning outcomes, strengthen cooperation among programme and partner countries and organisations

Specific objectives

1. *Creating a Culture of Human Rights in Diversity comprises:*
A) *A 'training for Human Rights Education (HRE) multipliers'* to build capacity of host coordinating organisations by creating multipliers and improving human rights practices and communication within these 19 NGOs through a HR learner-centred educational approach.

- B) *The development and implementation of HRE modules and methods for on-the-ground HRE training activities* to promote a culture of human rights in diversity among the 14 EVS and other EVS and ICYE volunteers, staff and co-workers of at least 13 host organisations. An HRE training manual will be published for use in future trainings in the volunteering field. The HRE activities should also reduce the possible negative impact of volunteering.

2. *Non-formal learning and Active Citizenship:* The project serves to maximise volunteers' non-formal learning and transversal skills for their long term commitment as active, mature and responsible citizens.

3. *Undertaking an impact assessment study to :*

- A) *Build capacity of staff and co-workers in qualitative research skills*
 - B) *Create internal organisational change through research findings on the project's impact on volunteers.* The study's outcomes will augment the visibility and promotion of Erasmus+ and the marketing of EVS and ICYE volunteering programmes.
 - C) *Create external structural changes* as the study's findings will be used to attract donors, lobby for volunteering structures and legislations at national levels
4. *Mutual learning and strengthened partnership among the different regions of the world.*

Project Activities and dates

- I. **17. – 18.03.2015:** **Taskforce Preparatory Meeting** to plan the training and project phases
- II. **19. – 23.03.2015:** **'Training for HRE Multipliers' in Copenhagen, Denmark** comprises:
 - a) HRE training emphasising inter/cultural communication will be facilitated by youth workers with experience in HRE and receive inputs from an Amnesty International human rights educationist
 - b) Developing HRE guidelines and modules for on-the-ground training activities enabling the examination of HRE issues and initiating change in perceptions and practices
 - c) Qualitative research training by youth workers of the former EU-wide impact assessment project. Participants will work in groups and with the Practical Guide for Impact Assessment to discuss and set parameters for impact assessing.

A representative of Amnesty International will be invited to introduce the human rights education part of the training.

- III. **15.04.2015 – 15.12.2015:** **8-month EVS for 14 volunteers**
- IV. **April 2015:** **HRE Multipliers train EVS volunteers and/or host organisations** using modules and interactive multidisciplinary methods based on a non-formal pedagogical HRE approach.
- V. **Two actions before the EVS ends**
 - a) **September 2015:** All 14 volunteers in this project will write articles for the October 2015 ICYE newsletter on their learning experiences on human rights and diversity in their host communities.
 - b) **November 2015:** HRE multipliers will conduct interviews to test socio-cultural and personal impact of the volunteering experience on volunteers. There will be 2 interview sets comprising: 1) the 14 EVS volunteers of this project, 2) other ICYE or EVS volunteers participating in local HRE trainings and having volunteered in a project for at least six months.

The recordings of the interviews as well as the transcriptions should be sent to the ICYE IO latest by the end of November 2015.

- VI. **Analysis of questionnaires** by the ICYE IO and publishing a report.
- VII. **19. – 20.04.2016:** **Taskforce Meeting** to discuss the study's results and plan the conference.
- VIII. **21. – 25.04.2016:** **Gauging Impact Conference in Bogota, Colombia** will include:
 - 1. Partners will present and feedback on the multiplier training, the HRE modules and strategies for a culture of human rights in diversity, and the impact study and its findings
 - 2. The report of the study will be discussed on the basis of:
 - a) How, when and where partners should use findings in their visibility, promotion and marketing work?
 - b) How volunteers' learning outcomes can be maximised and further supported?

- c) How the findings can be used for future projects, to attract donors and lobby for volunteering laws.
3. The project's final evaluation will include perspectives of the volunteers and host coordinating organisations and the different project phases.

Annex 2

Communicating Human Rights in Diversity Interview Questions

Introduction

One of the key objectives of the project "*Communicating Human Rights in Diversity*" is to find out how the volunteering experience and this human rights project has impacted on you, a volunteer in this project. In all, there are 14 EVS volunteers in this project - from different European and Asian, African and Latin American countries. All of them have undergone a similar human rights project, but in different host countries and host projects, and they are all respondents of this impact study. This study is important to us as it will tell us how the human rights project impacted on volunteers. Moreover, it will help us identify areas and ways in which we can support volunteers and improve in the long run their learning opportunities and outcomes. The findings of the study will help us market EVS and ICYE programmes better, and promote, advocate and educate about the value of volunteering.

Your responses will remain anonymous, i.e. volunteers' names will not appear in the report; all names will be changed or coded. Similarly, host projects' names or locations will be changed if they appear in the report.

The interview will last between 30 to 40 minutes.

Do you have any questions or any doubts that you'd like to clarify before we begin?

I will be recording the interview so that I can be sure that I've not missed out or misunderstood something. (Please ask volunteer to agree to the recording.) *Don't forget to test the recording device before you start!*

During the interview

- Ask questions in the planned order
- Allow time and space to think and elaborate on questions / topics
- If other topics are brought up, allow time to explain – it may bring up unexpected, but relevant information. If, however, it is not relevant to the assessment of impact, say that you will discuss this later
- Follow your instinct: indirect remarks may lead to interesting information
- One question can give answers to other questions - do not ask a question that has already been answered

Part A - Human / Personal Impact (knowledge, skills and wellbeing of people - impact on the volunteer or on others because of the volunteer's presence)

1. Why did you want to participate in the programme?

*Guidance question*⁵³: What was your main expectation of volunteering abroad?

2. What do you think you have achieved during your stay in host country?

Tips: personal or professional examples, both specific and general examples are fine

3. What kind of problems did you experience during your stay in your host country? Have you been able to resolve these? How?

Tips: feeling alone, homesick, problems at work, language barrier

⁵³ **Guidance questions** – other questions or questions asked differently – to be asked if the volunteer does not understand the question or you get a very brief reply. **Tips** are examples of the kind of replies we would like from volunteers.

4. Did you find out something about yourself that you did not expect?
5. Did your awareness of human rights increase, and your perception and understanding of human rights change? How?
6. Please describe your best experience during your volunteering time?
Tip: Encourage volunteer to talk but be aware of time

Part B - Social Impact (the interpersonal relationships that develop between people because of the voluntary service)

7. Did your social network change during your stay abroad? In what way?
Tips: Explain that by social network you mean friends, colleagues, host family, other people you interacted with.
Guidance questions: A) Did you make new friends? B) Was it easy or difficult to meet new people and make friends? In what way?
8. How do you feel that you contributed to the work of your host project?
Guidance questions: A) Do you feel your contribution was recognised? Please explain how. B) Do you think that you have learnt anything/something, and how?
9. Which skills did you gain through your volunteering?
Guidance questions: A) What about relationships, learning, contributions in relation to human rights? B) What have you learnt and what have you gained through your volunteering, e.g. language?
10. What is your perception of the situation of the beneficiaries / people in your host project?
11. Have your plans for the future changed during your time in your host country?

PART C - Cultural Impact (change in perceptions of identity, awareness of one's self and others - individual, group, national cultures)

12. How did your time in your host country make you reflect on your culture / cultural background and behaviour?
Tips: perception of time, social relations, food
13. Have the interactions with beneficiaries, staff, community, etc. changed the way you look at and react in relation to human rights?
Tips: Name a memorable experience or situation that made an impression on you, e.g. relating to gender roles, disadvantaged groups, social class, etc.
14. Has your presence (as someone from a different culture or background) at the project influenced beneficiaries, staff and community members' views on human rights?
15. Has your perception of human rights changed? How and why?

At the end of the interview

1. Would you like to add something? Do you have any questions?
2. Thank you for your time. The report of the study will be uploaded on the ICYE Federation website and also emailed to you.

After the interview

- Tape recorder: if used, verify that the full interview was recorded
- Write down observations made during the interview: Mood and physical reactions of the volunteers are valid scientific data