"You are not going to get the experience that you want, but the experience that you need"

The motivations and perceived outcomes of European International Volunteers

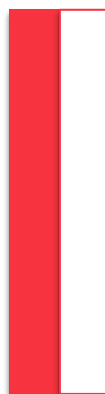Inês Maria Silva Santos

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"You are not going to get the experience that you want, but the experience that you need"

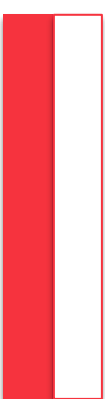The motivations and perceived outcomes of European International Volunteers

Inês Maria Silva Santos

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Abstract

This study examines the experience of international European volunteers, exploring the motives leading young people aged between 18-30 years to enroll in European Solidarity Corps (ESC) - an International Volunteer Service program led by the European Commission. It also aims to determine whether international volunteers intend to return to their home country after the voluntary experience or prefer to pursue an international career. This work uses a qualitative and exploratory methodological approach which captures the stories and experiences of 16 international volunteers through semi-structured interviews. The data analysis was performed using the method of content analysis with the aid of Nvivo® 12 software. The findings show that the volunteers were driven by multiple drivers, being status and social drivers the most common ones. The volunteers identified many different outcomes, most related to status and personal growth. Overall, these results suggest that going from and to a "first-world country" as a volunteer can also contribute to personal development, even if the cultural shock is not as significant as going to an underdeveloped country. Although not all volunteers showed interest in developing an international career, all recognized that the program gave them competencies and skills that could be helpful for such career. Furthermore, the findings suggest that an ESC program can help reduce career indecision. The contributions of this study are twofold. The first is theoretical, as this is one of the first studies examining the experience of Young Europeans who enroll in an international volunteering project within Europe. The second contribution is managerial since this study highlights the motivations behind the decision to volunteer and the perceived outcomes of the program, which have several implications for International Human Resource Management.

Keywords: International Volunteering Service; Motivation; Perceptions; Development; Outcomes.

JEL-codes: L3 Nonprofit Organizations and Public Enterprise.

Resumo

Este estudo tem por objetivo refletir sobre a experiência e motivação de jovens voluntários europeus, com idades entre os 18 e os 30 anos, que decidiram realizar uma experiência de serviço de voluntariado internacional através do programa European Solidarity Corps (ESC) da Comissão Europeia. Pretende, ainda, determinar se estes tencionam regressar ao seu país de origem ou ingressar numa carreira internacional. Este trabalho usa uma abordagem metodológica qualitativa e exploratória para capturar as histórias e vivências de 16 voluntários internacionais através de entrevistas semiestruturadas. A análise dos dados foi feita através do método de análise de conteúdo com o auxílio do software Nvivo® 12.

Os resultados mostram que os voluntários ingressaram num projeto de voluntariado por diversos fatores, sendo que os *drivers* "*social*" e "*status*" são os mais comuns, identificando vários *outcomes* do projeto, a maioria relacionada com estatuto e desenvolvimento pessoal. Os resultados sugerem que fazer voluntariado de e para um país desenvolvido pode contribuir para o desenvolvimento pessoal, mesmo que o choque cultural não seja significativo como no caso da ida para um país subdesenvolvido. Embora nem todos os voluntários tenham demonstrado interesse em seguir uma carreira internacional, todos reconheceram que este programa lhes deu competências que podem ser úteis no futuro caso sigam tal carreira. Ainda, os resultados sugerem que o programa ESC pode reduzir a indecisão em relação à carreira futura. As contribuições deste estudo categorizam-se em duas vertentes. A primeira é teórica, dado que este é um dos primeiros trabalhos que examina a experiência de jovens europeus que participam num projeto de voluntariado internacional dentro da Europa. A segunda é de gestão, visto que este estudo identifica as motivações por detrás da decisão de ser voluntário e os *outcomes* percebidos do programa, podendo ter diversas implicações para a Gestão de Recursos Humanos Internacional.

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1. Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing an unprecedented expansion of international volunteering service (IVS), both an increase in the number of volunteers as well as in sponsoring organizations (Sherraden et al., 2008). IVS can be described as an organized period of engagement and contribution to society by volunteers who work across an international border, in another country, or countries (Sherraden et al., 2008). The types of international volunteering services are quite diverse, and often differ dramatically in their activities, objectives, and designs (Allum, 2007). As IVS has expanded, it has also become more complex organizationally (Sherraden et al., 2006) with more programs worldwide across the non-profit, for-profit, and public sectors (McBride & Lough, 2010).

Non-profit and for-profit organizations differ in their mission and approach. The mission and purpose of a non-profit organization are to further enhance a social cause and provide a public benefit (Goulet & Frank, 2002), while a for-profit organization aims to generate profits and shareholders' value (George et al., 2021). To qualify as a non-profit, the organization must serve the public good in some way. Therefore, these organizations do not distribute profit to anything or anyone other than furthering the advancement of the organization (Goulet & Frank, 2002). Non-profit organizations are highly dependent on attracting, utilizing, and motivating, volunteers to accomplish their goals (Wymer, 1998). Contrastingly, most businesses are for-profit by selling a product and/or service to customers. In this type of organization, the business owner(s) earns an income and may also pay its shareholders and investors from the organization's profits (Heaslip, 2021). Since the 1990s, a growing number of 'for-profit' commercial firms have been established, offering fee-paying 'voluntary work' placements with, more recently, mainstream tour operators increasing the number of shorter, more vacation-like 'voluntourism' experiences (Jones, 2011) and gap years (Simpson, 2004). International Volunteer HQ and VidaEdu are examples of for-profit organizations that use and organize fee-paying IVS.

As internationalization and globalization intensify, there has been a demand for a labor force that is better prepared to work in international contexts and with people from different nations and cultures (Lough, 2015). People who volunteer internationally may acquire and develop an increasingly essential range of skills for global corporate labor markets. Such social and cultural capital mimics the career capital accumulated by employees in multinational firms who undertake overseas work placements (Jones, 2011). Due to this

need for global talent, many governments are changing their funding patterns and priorities for international service to better prepare young people. Over the past decade, public funding has been granted to a wide variety of private volunteer sending organizations (Lough, 2015) perhaps with the aim of providing service while enhancing the employability of young volunteers. It can be noted that participation in an IVS may reduce career indecision but is not a weapon against unemployment (Association of Voluntary Service Organizations [AVSO], 2007). Although it cannot be concluded that voluntary service leads to employment, there is evidence that it makes young people more employable, mainly through contributing to their overall personal growth (AVSO, 2007). In addition, employment-related motivation can vary with the socio-economic situation of the young volunteers and the outgoing country. Volunteers from countries with poor job prospects might be more interested in gathering relevant experience for later employment than the volunteers from more wealthy regions who might value outgoing countries culturally more challenging and adventurous (AVSO, 2007).

So far, most studies neglected the IVS for international understanding (Sherraden et al., 2006) and have largely underscored the people from "first-world" who volunteer in "third-world" countries, thus intentionally facing a more significant cultural shock (Fee & Gray, 2011; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; McCall, 1998; Simpson, 2004). According to McCall (1998) and Lough (2011), international volunteering assignments are not necessarily developmental, especially if what a person does in the host country is "more of the same" and the challenges presented by the location are mild. Personal development would require the relocation to countries and communities remarkably different in their economic, political, and moral orientations, so international volunteers would experience misunderstandings, make mistakes and *faux pas*, that would be triggers for their reflexivity and learning (Lough, 2011). Inversely, this research intends to assess if going from a "first-world" country to another close and well-developed country can also trigger personal development, and in that case, in which dimensions.

In such context, the main purposes of this research are to: (i) know the motives leading young people aged between 18-30 years to enroll in European Solidarity Corps; (ii) understand the experiences of international volunteers; and (iii) determine whether international volunteers intend to return to their home country after the voluntary experience or, instead, prefer to pursue an international career. This is a project led by the European Commission and created in 2018 with the purpose of promoting inclusion and diversity and

providing all young people equal access to international volunteering opportunities (European Commission [EC], 2021). Specifically, this study addresses the aforementioned research gap by further examining if young people who take part in this type of IVS aim to have an international career or if they enroll in this assignment, despite their career ambitions, and for the sake of adventure and cultural understanding. Therefore, this work aims to explore the viewpoints of international volunteers from different European countries and qualitatively identify, compare, and understand their motives and their perceptions of what they (will) benefit from an IVS.

For these purposes, volunteers from the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) were targeted, specifically those who were abroad for more than two months. The reasons for choosing this program are twofold. Firstly, the author herself was an international volunteer for the program, which influenced her interest in the topic as well as facilitated the contact with the organizing institution and volunteers. Secondly, the ESC project offers a European program that provides the possibility of taking a course on the host language (at least for those volunteers who spend two or more months abroad), which may increase participants' employability both at the origin and the destination country.

The contributions of this research are twofold. Firstly, it extends our understanding of the drivers leading young Europeans to enroll in ESC and their perceptions when applying. This is particularly insightful since most research to date has overlooked the experience of IVS from and to developed countries, including volunteering across Europe. Secondly, the findings assist in understanding how an IVS can help volunteers in developing and acquiring skills valuable for an international career.

The first section of this dissertation, after this introduction, presents a comprehensive literature review, including the definition and differences between different types of volunteering. This section also summarizes the relevant literature on the motivation of volunteers. In the second section, the methodology of this research is explained. The next chapter presents the main research findings, followed by the discussion. Finally, in the last section, the conclusions of this work are entailed, including the limitations and contributions of this research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of volunteering and its dimensions

According to Pereira et al. (2020), the 1970s, introduced a conceptual debate about what was a volunteering action and how it could be defined, so many theories emerged around that definition. For instance, Smith (1975, p. 247) defined volunteering action as "*the action of individuals, collectivities, or settlements insofar as it is characterized primarily by the seeking of psychic benefits (e.g., belongingness, esteem, self-actualization) and by being discretionary in nature [not determined primarily by biosocial factors (physiological compulsions in their socialized forms), coercive factors (sociopolitical compulsions backed by a threat of force), or direct remuneration (direct, high-probability payment or benefits of an economic sort)]*". Although this definition draws upon the motivational theory of Maslow (1954) it does not gather consensus (Pereira et al., 2020), especially because it overlooks the fact that a volunteering experience can be 'protean' assuming different shapes and characteristics.

Herein, the approach of volunteerism adopted is that of Cnaan et al. (1996), which emphasizes the "*free choice of a structured and unpaid activity that benefits strangers*". Cnaan et al. (1996) identified four dimensions to qualify a volunteering activity: (i) freely chosen, rather than compulsory; (ii) unpaid, or only the expenses are paid, rather than fully paid; (iii) structured, i.e., via or as part of an organization, rather than unstructured; and (iv) beneficial for strangers, rather than for friends/relatives or self. When an activity does not fulfill one dimension, it is usually not accounted as volunteering. For example, looking after a family member does not meet the final criterion, so is not considered volunteering. Therefore, only an activity that satisfies well all the dimensions qualify as volunteering (Cnaan et al., 1996).

In 2001, Perry and Imperial added one more dimension - intensity - to the above four to define voluntary service (Perry & Imperial, 2001). This fifth dimension is a particularly important part of the definition of voluntary service. This criterion means that voluntary service is usually more structured than volunteering because it takes place for a fixed period and is based on an agreement that provides all the parties involved a framework of rules and procedures that inform all the partners about their duties and rights. This implies a more formal definition of objectives and means, which is usually implemented by specialized organizations that people can join to respond to their wish of volunteering (AVSO, 2007).

When it comes to international volunteering what differentiates it from traditional volunteering is that the first is outside of one's home country (McBride & Lough, 2010).

The terms (i) Volunteering; (ii) Volunteering Service; (iii) International Volunteering; and (iv) IVS are better contrasted in Table 1.

	Volunteering	Volunteering Service	International Volunteering	International Volunteering Service
Freely chosen	✓	✓	✓	✓
Unpaid	✓	✓	✓	✓
Structured	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beneficial for Strangers	✓	✓	✓	✓
For a Fixed Period of Time		✓		✓
Regulation	Mild	Substantial	Mild	Substantial
Site	Home Country	Home Country	Outside the volunteer home country	Outside the volunteer home country

Table 1 - The similarities and differences between the different types of volunteering. Adapted from Cnaan et al. (1996); Mcbride and Lough (2010); Penner (2004); Sherraden et al. (2008).

2.2. International Volunteering Service (IVS)

According to Sherraden et al. (2006), there are two main categories of IVS based on its aims, such as: (i) international understanding; and/or (ii) development and relief. These two types have distinct implications for the nature of the volunteer service, program design, funding, support, and relationships with host communities and impacts on volunteers and hosts. The former focuses on recruiting unskilled and inexperienced (usually younger) volunteers to participate in programs designed to build connections across national borders, develop intercultural sensitivity, and tolerance, increase global consciousness, encourage international solidarity, and promote international peace and understanding (Sherraden et al., 2006). As for the latter, it targets skilled and experienced (usually older) technicians and professionals who provide expertise to communities and nations where skill-based assistance is needed. Although the boundaries between these types of IVS can be blurry, the academic

research on IVS for international understanding has been largely neglected (Sherraden et al., 2006), which corroborates the relevance of this study in the context of the European Solidarity Corps.

2.3. The European Solidarity Corps (ESC)

The ESC is a program from the European Commission (EC) that offers an opportunity for young people aged between 18 and 30 years to make a *"meaningful commitment to society, gain priceless experience, and foster new skills"* (EC, 2021). It covers a broad range of areas, such as education, integration of migrants, environmental challenges, prevention of natural disasters, youth activities, and humanitarian aid - a new expansion for 2021-2027. It also supports national and local actors to cope with different societal challenges and crises. The program used to include traineeships and jobs, but these two were suspended. Along these lines, the new ESC program (2021-2027) only focuses on volunteering and solidarity projects (EC, 2021).

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) preceded the ESC and functioned from 1996 to 2018 (EC, 2017; European Solidarity Corps, 2021). This initial project aimed to give young people with fewer opportunities the chance to participate in long-term learning mobility (Devlin et al., 2017). It reached more than 100 000 people from different countries in Europe and neighboring regions (EC, 2017). Howbeit, after 20 years of operation, it was concluded that it was being mainly used by resourceful groups of young people (for example, students in higher education, for gap years, and even graduates seeking to optimize their CVs), whereas underprivileged young people were scarce between the participants (Devlin et al., 2017). Research published in April 2013 by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) showed that 74% of the participants were women and 77.8% held a higher education diploma. Moreover, 72.3% lived in a city with more than 100 000 inhabitants, and 79% already had some experience in the labor market (Wit-Jeżowki, 2013).

Since the ESC replaced EVS, over 280 000 young people expressed interest in joining an ESC project by registering on the website. Until 2020, 25 911 participated in volunteering projects, of which 8 629 took place in solidarity projects, and 39% of the participants were young people with fewer opportunities (European Solidarity Corps, 2021).

The volunteering activities organized by the ESC are open to young people who legally reside in one of the EU Member States and organizations established in them, but also from 27 participating partner countries, such as Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus,

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Norway, Palestine, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and Ukraine (EC, 2020).

The volunteering projects for international understanding, which are the focus of this research, provide young people with the opportunity to contribute to the daily life of specialized organizations in solidarity activities that benefit the communities. These activities can occur either abroad or in the participant's home country. While individual volunteering can last up to 12 months, team volunteering usually lasts between two weeks and two months (EC, 2021). Given the aims of the present study, only individual experiences taken abroad for longer than two months are considered.

The program promotes inclusion and diversity and aims to provide all young people equal access to international volunteering opportunities, by providing accessible and flexible formats of activities, additional financial support, as well as a range of support measures (e.g., general and language training, insurance, support before and after solidarity activities, administrative assistance), encouraging the participation of young people with fewer opportunities, i.e., with disabilities, health problems, educational difficulties, cultural differences, social, economic obstacles and/or geographical obstacles (Devlin et al., 2017; EC, 2021). The total costs of the volunteering projects are covered by the funds of Erasmus+, which include travel, accommodation, food, and a small allowance for personal expenses. In addition to this coverage, the volunteers also have health insurance that will ensure possible medical expenses, such as medicine and doctor visits, among others (Youth Cluster, 2021).

With a dedicated budget of 1.009 billion euros for 2021-2027, the new European Solidarity Corps program will provide IVS funding for at least 270 000 young people. The program's ambition is not only to be more inclusive but also ecologically greener and more digital (EC, 2021). The program will also allow young people, from 18 to 35, to volunteer in the humanitarian aid field across the world, and for the first time. It will provide emergency aid based on the fundamental principles of neutrality, humanity, independence, and impartiality, helping to deliver assistance, relief, and protection where it is most needed (EC, 2021).

When a person goes abroad for individual volunteering, there are two types of organizations involved: a supporting organization based in the volunteer's home country that will prepare for the experience abroad (i.e., 'sending organization'), and a host organization

that will receive and help the volunteer in the destination country (European Solidarity Corps, 2021). Volunteers in the humanitarian aid field are trained and prepared to ensure that they have the necessary skills to effectively help people in distress (EC, 2021). This type of IVS is inserted in the development and relief category, which is out of the scope of this research.

2.4. Why do people volunteer? The motivations of the volunteers

Given the pro-bono nature of volunteer labor, it is crucial to understand why people get involved in such time-consuming activities (Prouteau & Wolff, 2006). For over 40 years, researchers have been engaged in discovering what could motivate volunteering (Chaddha & Rai, 2016). Understanding the volunteers' motivations is relevant to most aspects of the volunteering programs. Several studies suggest that, for example, the recruitment and setting of volunteers are more effective when the volunteering programs respond to the specific necessities and motivations of the participants (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). In this context, motivation is described as the reasoning, motivation or other factors that influence the behavior of the volunteers, this is, what are the drivers that make people volunteer (Pereira et al., 2020).

There are several different reasons people work without being paid (Finkelstien, 2009). Some alternative approaches tend to consider volunteering as a consumer good (when people pay to do volunteer work), like an investment in Human capital. At the same time, others consider it a means to achieve an extrinsic reward - a tangible and visible reward (Deci et al., 1999). The traditional research about volunteering indicates several motives why people enroll in volunteering projects (Pereira et al., 2020) that can be grouped into three frameworks: (i) two- and three- factor models; (ii) one dimension model; and (iii) multi-factor models (Chaddha & Rai, 2016).

2.4.1 *Two- and three-factor models*

For many years, researchers organized motivation as having two or three factors (Chaddha & Rai, 2016). Some examples of the two-factor models consider the following criteria: intrinsic and extrinsic (Herzberg, 1966) and altruistic and egoistic (Smith, 1981; Blanchard et al., 1995; Warburton et al., 2001).

Table 2 presents a summary of the main models.

Two-factor model	
Herzberg (1966)	Extrinsic and intrinsic
Smith (1981)	Altruistic and egoistic
Three-factor model	
Gidron (1978)	Personal, social, and indirectly economic benefits
McClelland (1961)	Achievement, affiliation, and power

Table 2 – Examples of two- and three-factor models.

The **two-factor models,** such as from Herzberg (1966) describes motivation as resulting from motivators and hygiene factors. On one hand, the presence of motivators, like the name indicates, encourages people to perform a certain task more strongly. A few examples of motivators are the sense of recognition and achievement, responsibility, growth, and the task itself. On the other hand, the absence of hygiene factors may decrease the productivity of the worker. These factors are not present in the task itself, but rather in its surrounding. They may include factors like security, work conditions, relationships, and the organization's policies (Herzberg, 1966).

The latter models consider egoistic motives, which are tangible rewards, and altruism motives, which are rewards that are intangible such as feeling good by helping others (Smith, 1981). Altruistic reasons are the most cited by volunteers (Mascarenhas et al., 2013), although this is considered controversial by several scholars (Pearce, 1993). Many researchers are skeptical about the reasons volunteers point out to explain the volunteering experience, because the true motivations can be much more complex than their desire to help others (Mascarenhas et al., 2013). According to Smith (1981) volunteers tend to enlist altruistic reasons as the predominant drivers for volunteering work, but the fact is that those reasons might not have such a fundamental role in the volunteering experience. Smith (1981) indicates that there is a social tendency in favor of having altruistic reasons for volunteering and that there is no pure altruism, but intrinsic rewards for altruistic acts. He also states that society values altruism and condemns the use of volunteering activities for egoistic objectives, like gaining a better social status, or for fun and socialization purposes. Nonetheless, the author does not undermine the interest that volunteers express in helping others. Mascarenhas et al. (2013) specifies that volunteers also report several egoistic motives for volunteering, which were identified in subsequent studies (e.g., Unstead-Joss, 2008; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Rehberg, 2005). Considering that volunteers work because of self-oriented motives and most of the time they do not give clear reasons for the work itself, the

idea that altruism is the essence of volunteering work is more of a utopic idea than an accurate description of reality (Mascarenhas et al., 2013).

As for the **three-factor models**, they can acknowledge the following factors (for example): (i) personal – opportunity to self-fulfilment, social - inter-personal relationships, and indirect economic benefits – gaining work-experience for the future or forming business connections (Gidron, 1978); (ii) achievement - a recurrent concern to excel, to do better for its own sake, for the intrinsic satisfaction of doing better, affiliation - preference for *"establishing, maintaining, and restoring a positive affective relationship with another person or persons"* (Koestner & McClelland, 1992, p. 205); and (iii) power - a recurrent preference or readiness for experiences of having impact, control, or influence over others and the world (McClelland, 1961). Around the 1990s, multi-factor models started to emerge (Chaddha & Rai, 2016).

2.4.2 *Uni-dimension models*

Uni-dimension models of motivation to volunteer postulates that *"volunteers act not from a single motive or a category of motives but from a combination of motives that can be described overall as "a rewarding experience"* (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991, p. 281). By the time of Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen's (1991) work, most researchers assumed that motivation was a two- or three-factor phenomenon. To test the unidimensional model, Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991) asked volunteers to rank the importance of 28 motives for volunteering. The study's findings indicate that when all the 28 motives were subjected to various types of factor analysis, most items (22) were grouped on one factor. The Unidimensional model proposes that people are motivated to volunteer by a meaningful whole that is relevant to them. According to the study*, "volunteers are both altruistic and egoistic"* (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991, p. 281), and these drivers combine to the attainment of a rewarding volunteering experience.

2.4.3 *Multi-factor model - Fischer and Schaffer (1993) eight-factor model*

By the end of the 1990s, several researchers have created multi-factorial models of volunteering motivations (Chaddha & Rai, 2016). For such a complex topic, Fischer and Schaffer (1993) found a multi-factor model, composed by eight drivers for volunteering work: (i) altruistic drivers - people want to help and do the right thing, as the main reason for their volunteer work; (ii) ideological drivers - volunteers claim (to have) specific motives or ideologies to engage in volunteer acts; (iii) selfish drivers - people engage in voluntary acts to satisfy ego needs, such as social approval; (iv) material drivers - includes benefits for the

person or family; (v) status drivers - the desire to obtain professional knowledge, to network and to be recognized (more common in people in the job market and students); (vi) social drivers - make friends and meet people; (vii) leisure drivers - for some people volunteer work is a way to spend their "free time"; (viii) personal growth and spiritual development, which can be important reasons for volunteering. According to the authors an international volunteer can be driven by the wish to help others and, at the same time, by the wish to travel, to learn about the world, for personal development, to seek an "adrenalin rush" or challenge, as well as to escape negative feelings (Fischer & Schaffer,1993). Subsequent research, such as the work of Rehberg (2005), confirmed this assumption and documented that most applicants display a combination of several drivers, while only 11% name altruism as the sole driving force behind their interest in international volunteering.

Several other studies (e.g., Unstead-Joss, 2008; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Rehberg, 2005) tried to document the motivations of volunteers. Table 3 presents information regarding the characteristics of the participants of the different studies, while Table 4 summarizes the drivers identified in these works according to the eight-factor model of Fischer and Schaffer (1993).

Study	Age (years)	Gender	Home Country	Host Region
Unstead-Joss (2008)	25 to 50	4 Female 8 Male	United Kingdom	Africa or Asia
Hudson and Inkson (2006)	29 to 67	27 Female 21 Male	New Zealand	South-East Asia, Africa, Pacific
Rehberg (2005)	Young people – average: 24	75 Male 43 Male	Switzerland	Not Specified

Table 3 – Categorization of the respondents in the studies of Unstead-Joss (2008); Hudson and Inkson (2006); Rehberg (2005).

As shown in Table 3, all the samples were composed by respondents from developed countries, with the studies of Unstead-Joss (2008) and Rehberg (2005) with participants from Europe, and Hudson and Inkson (2006) from Oceania. The study of Unstead-Joss (2008) had fewer participants when comparing to the other studies, and Rehberg (2005) had the highest number. The sample of Rehberg (2005) focused on young people, with the participants having an average of 24 years old, while the other studies mentioned had a wider age range. Regarding the host region, only Rehberg (2005) did not specify where the respondents applied/intended to apply. However, in Unstead-Joss (2008) and Hudson and Inkson (2006) the volunteers applied for underdeveloped regions, being from developed countries.

Drivers	Altruistic	Ideological	Selfish	Leisure	Material	Search for Personal Growth	Social	Status
Unstead-Joss (2008)[1]	Wanting to help people; Giving something back.	Escaping of western materialism; Rejecting of a particular political climate.	Running away; Satisfying their wish to travel; Wanting to be recognized as somebody who does the right thing.			Personal developing through a new challenge/an adventure.	Wanting to be in contact with a new culture.	Wanting to take a break from current job; Being helped for future careers.
Hudson and Inkson (2006)	Sharing Skills; Doing the right thing; Giving something back.		Doing it for themselves; Adventuring.			Searching for meaning; Being challenged.	Being in contact with a different culture.	Career moving.
Rehberg (2005)	Helping; Giving something back; Doing good.	Being geared to ethical values.	Feeling useful; Doing something different; Getting away.			Discovering or transcending personal limits.	Meeting new people; Making new friends; Being in contact with a new culture.	Learning or using foreign languages; Gaining experience; Getting professional orientation.

Table 4 – Eight-factor model in different studies.

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[1] Only considering the drivers to become international volunteer.

As shown in Table 4, the presence of altruistic, ideological, selfish, status and social drivers was clear, as well as the search for personal growth. However, the presence of materialistic and leisure drivers was not evident. For instance, Hudson and Inkson (2006) identified the presence of five of the eight drivers from Fischer and Schaffer (1993), with the ideological, leisure and materialistic drivers missing. For the altruistic drivers, the most common ones are wanting to help other people, giving something back, sharing skills, and doing the "right thing".

When it comes to ideological drivers, the ones identified by Unstead-Joss (2008) were the need of escaping "western" materialism and the rejection of a particular political climate, while Rehberg (2005) highlighted being geared to ethical values. As for selfish drivers, running away was a common driver in Unstead-Joss (2008) and Rehberg (2005) work, as well as a need to satisfy a travel wish, wanting to be recognized as someone who does the "right thing", and feeling better with self. Concerning the status drivers, learning or practicing foreign languages, gaining experience and professional orientation/clarification were denoted.

Regarding social drivers, meeting a new culture was evidenced in the three studies, but meeting new people and making new friends were more present in Rehberg (2005). Unstead-Joss (2008) noticed that, considering the drivers to become international volunteers, meeting people was not something respondents mentioned voluntarily, but that would be agreed upon when asked. Concerning search for personal growth as a driver, personal development through a new challenge/adventure was common in Unstead-Joss (2008) and Hudson and Inkson (2006), while the last one added the "search for meaning" as a driving force. Rehberg (2005) identified discovering or transcending personal limits.

In sum, the aforementioned models underline a common motive – the desire to travel and see the world – which was not considered a leisure driver because this motive was not couple with having free time. Contrastingly, Chen and Chen (2011), who studied international volunteering tourism, found the leisure motive to be a common driver. The volunteers claimed they have enrolled in the volunteering experience because of the unique style of the trip. They said that the volunteer experience was a better way to get to know the real-life and culture of the locals, and that they would not get to know just the more touristic places/activities, like in most leisure trips (Chen & Chen, 2011). Caissie and Halpenny (2003) found that the participants in volunteering tourism focused more on themselves than in

altruistic reasons and expected their trip to fulfill a higher need (like self-actualization) and the basic needs of relaxation and stimulation.

Something worth noting is that the drivers may vary, depending on the population studied. For example, Okun and Schultz (2003) further examined the relationship between age and the drivers of volunteers. Their study found that age is positively associated with social motivations and inversely associated with career and "*wanting to learn more about the world*" (Okun & Schultz, 2003, p. 231) motivations. This finding suggests that older volunteers are less motivated by career motives than younger volunteers, and that the social motive is more important among older volunteers. These assumptions were later supported by the studies of Dávila and Diaz-Morales (2009) and Lough et al. (2014). Given that the sample of the present study is composed by European international volunteers aged between 18-30, one expects to find stronger leisure, developmental, social, and status drivers.

2.5. Who are the volunteers? Socio-demographical characteristics

According to Cnaan et al. (1996) the perception of what is a volunteer depends on the relative costs and benefits to the volunteer – the greater the net costs to the volunteer, the purer the volunteering activity and, therefore, the more the participant is a "real volunteer". The identification of the sociodemographic characteristics of the volunteers is a relevant field of study, as these variables may help predict the level of voluntary willingness (Bussell & Forbes, 2002).

The volunteers comprise a very diverse and active group in a wide range of contexts and characteristics. As such, volunteers cannot be defined as a large and homogenous group of people, as they are of all different ages and social and economic backgrounds, with diverse experiences and skills (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Nonetheless, Wymer (1998) suggests that it is possible to segment the full group of volunteers in subgroups with common aspects/characteristics. For such, the volunteers can be divided by the level of their **educational completion**, as those who volunteer are more likely to have a higher education level and higher incomes (Riecken et al., 1995). Also, they can be segmented by **gender**, as several studies show that women volunteer more than men (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Finally, the group can be split by **age**, since individuals with a certain age are more likely to volunteer than younger people (Tschirthart, 1998). It has also been shown that **family background** in volunteering experiences is significant (Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Southby et al., 2019). It seems that parents who do not volunteer, do not hold strong social justice values, and/or do

not see volunteering as part of their identity, are likely to dissuade youth volunteering (Southby et al., 2019). Individuals are influenced by their **social environments** across the lifespan, including norms, values, customs, and habits, which all affect volunteering behavior (Southby et al., 2019). Smith (1999) found some differences in **employment status** among the younger volunteers, as those who work in part-time are more likely to get involved in these activities when compared to those who work full-time or do not work at all.

When it comes to international volunteering, its unique features make it less accessible to certain groups of people (McBride & Lough, 2010). In this case, even when individuals have an interest in volunteering, they may not have access to the volunteer international roles (Sherraden et al., 2008). Compared to domestic volunteers in the United States, international volunteers were more likely to be male, young, foreign-born, highly educated, not employed full-time, and without dependent children (McBride & Lough, 2010). Therefore, the likelihood of volunteering internationally can vary by personal characteristics, life roles, and social and economic status (McBride & Lough, 2010).

2.6. Barriers to volunteering

To participate in volunteering projects, one must invest time, money, and effort, as well as have to have a certain level of skill (Southby et al., 2019). Nichols and King (1998) state that a greater number of people would participate in volunteering experiences if they did not have work-related commitments. Other reasons include parenthood responsibilities, looking after the home, not being informed about the volunteering occasions, education engagements, taking care of an elderly relative, disability conditions, and age (Southby et al., 2019; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Ogunye & Parker, 2015).

The potential obstacles among older people include poor health and physical debility, poverty, stigma, low range of acquired skills, poor transport, time constraints, inadequate volunteer management, and other caring responsibilities (Southby et al., 2019). As for younger people, the two main barriers for not considering doing volunteerism that are pointed in the literature are an insufficient institutional support and not being approached and convinced into participating (Smith, 1999; Southby et al., 2019).

Moreover, the literature illustrates that young people may have a negative impression of volunteering, and not having time to apply for these activities (Smith, 1999; Southby et al., 2019).

The different obstacles for men and women can have a **gender** element, as their motives for volunteering may be distinct. It is pointed out that it may be required to women a greater portion of their 'free time' when comparing to men (Southby et al., 2019). Also, it is stated that women are generally time and occupational constrained to a greater extent due to housework and other caring responsibilities and are more likely to receive less support from their employers (Southby et al., 2019; Silver & Goldscheider, 1994).

People from **minority or ethnic groups** are also more constrained to participate in volunteering experiences, as their access to volunteering infrastructures may be vetoed, they may be disaffected within the volunteering organizations and environments, they may have a less extent of skills and resources to volunteer and can experience fewer positive consequences of volunteering (Southby et al., 2019; Fegan & Cook, 2014).

Regarding **people with disabilities**, an important barrier to consider is the attitude that others may express towards these individuals, which includes the stigma associated with impairments and the wrong perception that disabled people have little or nothing to offer, or even that supporting someone with a disability spends too many resources (Southby et al., 2019).

Even considering that volunteering is a mechanism for an individual to boost its personal, social, financial, and cultural resources and knowledge to surpass exclusion, it is also a resource consuming activity: those with **less resources** are more likely to not volunteer and, consequently, not gain the associated benefits (Southby et al., 2019; Cattan et al., 2011; Smith, 1999; Nicol, 2012).

Considering what is said above, and applying it to international volunteering, the implications are straightforward: those who have fewer opportunities to do international volunteering are older adults, women, ethnic and racial minorities, people with any kind of physical disabilities, including people with lower incomes and those who have work commitments and cannot take time off (Sherraden et al., 2008). It is important to note that volunteer prevalence is not only an individual choice (Wilson & Musick, 1997), but in fact it is also affected by what other people are thinking and doing. Wilson (2012) argues that volunteerism is based on the combination of several factors, such as people's subjective dispositions (like individual personality traits, purposes, attitudes, norms, and moral compass), as well as personal resources (not just financial), life course experiences, and the social context one is inserted into. This is consistent with the three states to volunteering

from Bales (1996), which are: (i) the predisposition to volunteer; (ii) the process of making the decision to do it; and lastly (iii) the volunteering itself.

2.7. The importance of volunteer work

Volunteering can be considered an activity that brings health and well-being benefits to those who get involved with communities and society in general (Southby et al., 2019). The volunteer service, and all that involves, have attracted an increasing awareness to being potentially valuable for young people (Moore & Allen, 1996). It is chiefly presented as a learning experience for youngsters, adolescents, and young adults (Mangold, 2012). As for older adults, it is considered as a fulfilment experience as it accomplishes the desire to be active (Tschirthart, 1998).

In the context of Human Resources, and as internationalization and globalization intensify, there has been a demand for a labor force that is better prepared to work in international contexts and with people from different nations and cultures (Lough, 2015). Which enhances the importance of volunteering, as volunteer work is considered to be a method of acquiring intercultural knowledge and competence (Lough, 2011), which in the words of Deardorff (2006, pp. 247–248) is "*the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes*". People who volunteer encounter new cultures, behaviors and values when working side-by-side with foreign people (Lough, 2011). Intercultural competence involves many aspects as the knowledge of the language and culture of the host-country, but also affective and behavioral skills like empathy for other people, charisma, and the management of anxiety and uncertainty (Matveev & Milter, 2004). The latter is considered a key skill in today's global society and marketplace to help companies achieve competitive advantages in the global economy (Matveev & Milter, 2004). Jones (2011) argues the social and cultural capital that international volunteers may acquire during their assignment may have parallelism with the career capital accumulated by corporate expatriates.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodological approach and procedures of data collection

This project examines the experience of international European volunteers, exploring the motives leading young people aged between 18-30 years to enroll in European Solidarity Corps. It also aims to determine whether international volunteers intend to return to their home country after the voluntary experience, if they prefer to pursue an international career. To do so, a qualitative method was employed. Qualitative research relies on extensive interaction with the people being studied, often allowing researchers to uncover unexpected or unanticipated information, which is not possible in quantitative methods (Wong, 2008). Also, a qualitative method allows one to explore the perspective and meaning of experiences, seek insight and identify the social structures or processes that explain people's behavioral meaning (Mays, 2000). Besides, that is a common approach in this field of studies (Chen & Chen, 2011; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Matos & Fernandes, 2021; Unstead-Joss, 2008), which corroborates its reliability.

In this study, the key motivations, objectives, perceptions, and outcomes of the volunteers who participated in the ESC program were investigated by understanding and interpreting participants' points of view. Data was collected through 16 semi-structured virtual interviews (for details regarding the interview script see Appendix 1), with former and actual international volunteers from the ESC. The main criterium to select the participants of this study was to be eligible to participate in an ESC project. On a first approach, several organizations from Europe were reached to assess for possible candidates who were willing to participate in this research project. After selecting some initial candidates, a snowball approach was adopted, i.e., the participants provided information about other possible volunteers who could join this study. All interviews were recorded under the participants' permission and lasted between 45 to 75 minutes. At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked to fill out a google forms (Appendix 2) with some social-demographic questions used to characterize the sample. Finally, the audio files were later faithfully transcribed, resulting in 91 pages of transcripts, which were subject to thematic content analysis.

3.2. Participants

Overall, 16 international volunteers were interviewed, 11 women (68.75%) and five men (31.25%). The nationalities of the volunteers were diverse and varied from Austrian (6.25%), Bulgarian (6.25%), Danish (6.25%), French (12.5%), German (6.25%), Italian (6.25%), Latvian (18.75%), Norwegian (6.25%), Portuguese (6.25%), Romanian (6.25%), Slovak (6.25%) and Spanish (12.5%).

Table 5 summarizes the characteristics of the sample under study, while Appendix 3 has more detailed information about participants.

Volunteers Code	Age (years)	Gender	Nationality	Home Country	Host Country	Duration (months)
V01	25	Female	Denmark	Denmark	Germany	12
V02	19	Female	Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Germany	12
V03	22	Male	France	France	Poland	10
V04	24	Female	Romania	Romania	Czech Republic	9
V05	25	Female	Slovakia	Slovakia	Czech Republic	10
V06	23	Male	Spain	Spain	Poland	11
V07	22	Female	Latvia	Latvia	Czech Republic	12
V08	26	Female	Latvia	Latvia	Iceland	6
V09	28	Female	Italy	Italy	Germany	9
V10	20	Female	Germany	Germany	Spain	7
V11	28	Female	France	France	Czech Republic	12
V12	19	Female	Austria	Austria	Czech Republic	5.5
V13	20	Female	Norway	Norway	Germany	4
V14	29	Male	Portugal	Portugal	Czech Republic	6
V15	27	Male	Latvia	Latvia	Portugal	12
V16	28	Male	Spain	Spain	United Kingdom	12

Table 5 – Participants' characteristics.

As shown, the participants enrolled in international volunteering projects in seven different European host countries, namely: Czech Republic (37.5%), Germany (25%), Iceland (6.25%), Poland (12.5%), Portugal (6.25%), Spain (6.25%) and the United Kingdom (6.25%). 68.75% of the participants had already finished their project at the time of the interview, while 31.25% were still doing it (V01, V02, V03, V10, V16), which was a requirement to take part in the research. By the time they enrolled in the project, five

volunteers had a bachelor's degree, another five had already completed their master's degree, and the rest of the participants had completed high school or a similar degree.

Eight of the 16 volunteers (50%) claimed to know other international volunteering programs. The ESC project was the first international volunteering experience for 12 of the 16 participants (75%), even though, for some of these, it was not the first experience abroad, as some mentioned having participated in the Erasmus+ program during their studies, training courses and youth exchanges. Of the four participants who had already had an international volunteering experience, two enrolled in ESC short-term projects, and the other two participated in international volunteering programs not funded by the European Union.

The participants were also asked about their professional situation when they applied for the long-term ESC project, which varied. Eight volunteers were unemployed (50%), and four were studying (25%). For the remaining, one had just finished his studies, another one was working in a field related to her studies, one was doing an international volunteering project in Scotland (not ESC), and the other volunteer was working as a farmer.

3.3. Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis with the aid of the software NVivo® 12 was used to analyze the transcripts. The software was used to register the themes, categories, and codes employed in the study, as well as all the patterns and relations between them. In a first instance, each main theme was registered mimicking the semi-structured interview guide prepared before. Then, a coding approach was used to categorize and analyze the results. In this approach, the different piece of data was labelled with a short name/description that both identifies and summarizes the segments of data (Charmaz, 2006). The outline of this approach is the following: the segments of data were sliced and mapped by qualitative codes, which then propose an analytic label/handle in order to develop conjectures for interpreting each slice of data. Part of the themes and codes were subcategorized where a clear hierarchical structure was evidenced and, by doing so, the information was more easily sorted, understanding the main ideas and associations between the themes/categories. In the end, an analytic frame was built (Charmaz, 2006), and all the transcripts were dully coded.

The following section contains the description of the results, where direct quotes are presented to better demonstrate the participants' feelings and ideas.

4.   Findings

This study has three main research aims: (i) knowing the motives leading young people aged between 18-30 years to enroll in European Solidarity Corps; (ii) understanding the experiences of international volunteers; and (iii) determining whether international volunteers intend to return to their home country after the voluntary experience or, instead, prefer to pursue an international career. Therefore, this chapter presents the key findings related to each research aim, following the key themes that emerged from the content analysis of the interviews. Furthermore, it includes descriptions of the experiences abroad of the participants. Appendix 4 presents the final coding structure.

There are five main categories, namely: (i) previous experience and knowledge; (ii) motivation; (iii) project; (iv) feelings and perceptions towards the project; and (v) outcomes.

4.1.   What are the main motives leading volunteers to enroll?

By drawing upon the literature of international volunteering and respective motivations, specifically Fischer and Schaffer (1993) multi-factor model, one presumed multiple motivations to enroll in an IVS. The main motivations are presented in Table 6.

	Main motivations	Main drivers
Applying for the project	Topic of the project Location Leaving the comfort zone Uncertainty of the future Language	Status Social Selfish Search for personal growth
During the project	Being in a multicultural environment Project Wanting to develop	Social Status Altruistic
Other volunteers	Escaping Professional experience Having a break	Status Selfish Search for personal growth

Table 6 – Main motivations in the different categories.

4.1.1   *Motivations to apply for the project*

When asked about the **reasons to choose an ESC program**, two of the listed reasons were: (i) not having to invest their own money or not even having to have some savings (in contrast to other international volunteering programs); and the fact that (ii) the

program included a health insurance that made them feel more secure. The following quote illustrates these reasons:

V07: *"If I apply for a volunteering project, I really wish to have some safety, since I do not receive any money from it. If I do not have any health insurance and something happens, how can I take care of myself without any money?".*

Other reasons pointed by the participants were related to the accessibility and trustworthiness of the ESC projects, the fair working hours, and the dense variety of different subjects and projects to apply to. One of the volunteers who lived in a rural area in their home country also indicated that he chose the program to connect with other young people:

V06: *"… when I was at home, in my village, I would not find anyone younger than 40 years old, so it was really nice to come to this project. The age limit of this project is 30 years old.".*

Regarding the **motivations to apply** for the project, 30 reasons were presented by the volunteers, with Table 7 presenting the number of verbalizations.

		Verbalizations	Volunteers
Motivation to apply	IVS Project	113	16
	ESC Project	19	16

Table 7 – Verbalizations regarding the motivations to apply for the project.

The most common drivers were related to **"the topic of the project"**, mentioned by 13 out of the 16 volunteers and **"the location where the project was"**, mentioned by nine participants. The following quotes illustrate these two drivers, respectively:

V08: *"It was the project description, the aim of the project that was the biggest motivator, biggest clue, why should I apply (…) I already had the experience of organizing youth exchanges and some different non-formal events, and also meeting international people while studying abroad and in different settings. So, it wasn't for me like "I just want to go abroad anywhere, and European Commission will pay for me.".*

V09: *"I was studying German and I wanted to go to a German-speaking country, either Germany or Austria, so yeah, that was also a thing that I considered when I applied.".*

"Leaving the comfort zone", **"being confused about what to do in the future"**, and **"the language"** were pointed by five participants each. "*Helping others*", "*giving something back*" or "*doing something meaningful*" were brought up only by four (25%) of the 16 participants in this study. Also related to altruistic drivers, one volunteer said that she applied for the project because it was about nature conservation.

"*Having a hard time to find a job*", "*escaping*", "*having a new experience*", "*becoming independent*", "*gaining professional experience*" and "*not having anything to do at home*" were other motivations the volunteers mentioned.

Since volunteers were first asked why they applied for the IVS project and only after why they chose the ESC, it was clear that most of the time, the reasons why they decided to apply for the IVS related to it being an ESC project. However, not all the drivers from the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993) were identified. Table 8 summarizes the ones pointed in the interviewees.

Drivers	Examples	Verbalizations[2]	Volunteers
Altruistic	Helping other people Giving something back Doing something meaningful Nature conservation	5	5
Ideological	Identifying with the values of the organization/project	8	5
Selfish	Escaping Travelling Being with partner from host country	13	6
Leisure	Not having anything to do at home	2	2
Material		0	0
Search for personal growth	Being with self and rediscover Working on personality traits Leaving comfort zone Seeking inner peace	11	6
Social	Experiencing community living Being part of an international community Meeting other culture	19	10
Status	Learning/improving a language Getting professional experience Gaining skills for future career Reducing career indecision	46	16

Table 8 - Drivers for volunteering to ESC according the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993).

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[2] The numbers presented on the table reflect the number of times a certain driver was verbalized.

As shown, a total of 104 verbalizations (from the 113 mentioned in Table 6), were consistent with the eight-factor model. Sometimes the topic of the project was characterized as a status driver, others as an ideological or even as an altruistic driver, according to participants own interpretation, as clarified in Table 9.

Topic of the project	
Status	**V03:** *"The project itself, I want to do social work, and I never worked with adults with mental disabilities, so when I saw this announcement, I said OK the project description sounds very interesting and sounds very concrete.".*
Altruistic	**V07:** *"…nature conservation, I mean, are you kidding?! It felt like a dream.".*
Ideological	**V11:** *"…on the job ad, they were sharing some values, that really resonate with me…".*

Table 9 - Distribution of the topic of the project as a driver.

The location was also one motivation that was not always characterized in the same driver, as shown in Table 10.

Location of the project	
Egoistic	**V04:** *"The second reason was the location of the project, Brno, it was close to Vienna, Cracow, and I love travelling, so it was very good.".*
Status	**V09:** *"I was studying German and I wanted to go to a German-speaking country, either Germany or Austria, so yeah, that was also a thing that I considered when I applied.".*
Social	**V15:** *"As I come from the North of Europe, the fact that the project was on the other side of Europe [Portugal] was very interesting and appealing, exotic, and warmer in mentality, weather, and environment. That was definitely the main factor.".*

Table 10 – Distribution of the location as a driver.

Motivations such *"recommendation of friends"* (two verbalizations), *"conditions of the ESC"* (six verbalizations) – such as being accessible and easy to apply, having many projects from which you can chose, *"being related with the Erasmus program/European Union"* (1 verbalization) were motivations not presented in Table 8 even though they were mentioned as motivations to apply for the IVS project in Table 7.

4.1.2 *Motivations during the project*

Regarding the **motivations during the project**, not all the volunteers identified any change. From the 16 interviewed, 11 (68.75%) had something to add. Some realized that **"the project had more to give them than they were expecting in the first place"**. For example, V01, identified *"learning German"* and *"living in Germany"* as the primary motivations

for applying to the volunteer project. While doing it, the volunteer realized that many more things motivate her, such as **"the social aspect"** and *"the life outside of the volunteering work"*:

> **V01**: *"To learn German is still a main goal, but I realize there is a lot more. With other volunteers and we are doing a lot of stuff (…) In the weekends we spend a lot of time together! I joined a choir, (…). All the things are happening outside of work.".*

Some of the other volunteers realized that they would like to **"improve some characteristic or skill",** or that they would like to "*learn something, due to the environment where they were living*", as the following participants explain:

> **V07**: *"I think in the middle part of the project I realized that something I really needed to learn was "how to cope with differences in people that I am with" and COVID made it really intense because with it I couldn't really meet other people and I couldn't escape communication. You know, I was living in a house with people, and it would be really weird if I just isolated myself from them.".*

> **V02**: *"I also want to learn more about kids; I realized it's kind of fascinating the way they communicate, the way they learn to communicate and to do different things.".*

There were also volunteers who identified *"the environment where they were inserted"* and/or *"the structure of the volunteer work"* as a motivation factor.

> **V16**: *"The work is kind of active and we always have the opportunity to do different stuff, and just the atmosphere in the center and thinking about the purpose of what we do motivates me to do the things that need to be done.".*

> **V13**: *"(…) it went from neutral kindergarten experience, to positive, even though we had a lot of lockdowns, the environment was really, really great.".*

Two volunteers said that aside from the ESC mission, they also started to participate in other projects related to helping refugees and people with disabilities. A volunteer who was enrolled in another international volunteering program before the ESC claimed that her motivation was not as high as it was in the beginning, even though she did not see it because

of the project, but to the fact that she started volunteering right after high school. Now she would like to continue to pursue her studies.

V10: "*I think I would like to study and do something for my future, that would have impact on my future. This also has impact on my future, but something that I go step by step and achieve something. That's why I think my motivation is not as high as it was in the beginning. But it is not related to the work/project, it is more like a personal thing.*".

Table 11 summarizes the motivations mentioned above according to the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993).

Drivers	Examples	Verbalizations[3]	Volunteers
Altruistic	Participating in other volunteering projects	2	2
Ideological		0	0
Selfish	Location of the project	1	1
Leisure		0	0
Material		0	0
Search for personal growth	Wanting to develop personal skills	1	1
Social	Environment of the project International environment Social life	5	5
Status	Learning/improving a language Working Wanting to develop competences	3	3

Table 11 – Drivers during the project according the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993).

4.1.3   *Motivations of the other volunteers*

When it comes to the **motivations of the other volunteers**, seven participants (43.75%) claimed that the motivations amongst other volunteers were similar. Three said that the motivations of the other volunteers were not identical to their own, and four believed that there were different motivations.

Table 12 couples the "motivators of others" according to the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993).

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[3] The numbers presented on the table reflect the number of times a certain driver was verbalized.

Drivers	Examples	Verbalizations[4]	Volunteers
Altruistic	Helping others	1	1
Ideological	Resonating, as a scout, with the values of the project	2	2
Selfish	Escaping Travelling Being with partner of the host country	14	14
Leisure	Not doing anything at the home country	1	1
Material	Having stability	1	1
Search for personal growth	Having personal redemption Leaving comfort zone	5	5
Social	Joining a multicultural environment Partying	4	3
Status	Learning/improving a language Gaining professional experience	17	15

Table 12 - Drivers from the other volunteers according the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993).

As shown in Table 12, the driver more commonly identified by the volunteers when classifying the motivation of other volunteers was the status one, with 17 verbalizations by 15 volunteers. The next in line is the selfish driver, with 14 verbalizations made by 14 volunteers.

The motivation which was pointed out more times was **"escaping",** being mentioned by six of the 16 volunteers (37.5%).

V06: *"Well, I think people usually want to escape from their reality. I have been talking with a lot of people doing the ESC program and the truth is that everybody wants to escape from something.".*

V12: *"I think some of the people in my project also had the feeling of wanting to escape.".*

The next most mentioned motivation of other volunteers was to **"take a break"** and **"gain professional experience"**, with four volunteers mentioning each one. *"Not knowing what to do in the future"* or *"not knowing what to do"* were also reasons the participants perceived from other volunteers. Only one participant perceived an altruistic driver – *"Help other people"* – from their peers.

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[4] The numbers presented on the table reflect the number of times a certain driver was verbalized.

Probably the most unexpected motivation mentioned for international volunteer work was **"having stability"**. As mentioned before, the ESC program covers some costs such as accommodation and travel from the home country to the host country (and back) and gives the volunteers pocket money for their basic needs. This was a stability condition for some volunteers:

V05: *"I think the motivation of one of the other girls was to find financial stability, because she couldn't find a job and she was looking for a stable place. We also had some income, so it was not like we were working for free for one year.".*

4.2. How participants perceive the volunteering experience?

4.2.1 *Project mission and relation with studies*

The participants had different working places during their ESC project. Table 13 summarizes the workplaces in question and their frequency.

Working place	Frequency
Cultural Center	4
Kindergarten	2
Office	2
Natural Park	2
Center for people with disabilities	1
Center that promotes international exchanges	1
Eco house	1
Library	1
Training Center	1

Table 13 – Distribution of the volunteers by working place.

The volunteers' responsibilities were also different. Cultural centers were mainly about organizing activities for people, while in the kindergarten, the volunteers would support the teachers. In the office, the volunteers had to deal with more administrative work, while in the natural park was more about forest management, taking care of the natural reserve, and the hiking paths. In the center for people with disabilities, the volunteer supported the therapist, proposed activities, and organized workshops. In the center that promotes international exchanges, the primary responsibilities were to support people interested in going abroad and organizing activities. The Eco house also had activities for people from outside the organization, which the volunteer would also have to support, but the main tasks

were "manual work", such as gardening and building houses for birds. In the library, the main task was to take care of the book rentals, and in the training center was to host and create activities for the participants of the courses.

Three of the volunteers, who already had a bachelor's degree (or higher), said that the project was not related to their field of studies, while seven found a relation between them.

V14 (Bachelor's in Economics): *"Everything that was on the job description captivated me, especially working in nature in a more relaxed environment."*.

V09 (Master's in Philosophy): *"I never had my own garden, so I never knew where the food I was eating where came from. So, I thought it was going to be very useful how to plant things, how to take care of things… in the Eco house we learn how to recycle basically anything… So, I was thinking I was going to gain ideas for an eco-sustainable lifestyle."*.

In this case, V14 and V09 were interested in nature topics, and for that reason they applied for the project in the Natural Park and in the Eco house, even though it was not directly related with their studies. For some, being related to their field of studies was a reason for choosing such project.

V04 (Bachelor in Sociology): *"It was really related to my field of study, and I thought I could be more useful in such project. They had many more programs related to working with kids or elderly people, like social care work, but I thought I would be better doing interviews and staying at the office."*.

Some of those who did their project after high school chose the project to see if that were something they would like to do in the future, and therefore, pursue their studies in the project area. For example, V13 applied for many different degrees when she finished high school. Instead of going to university, she enrolled in a project in a kindergarten to understand if it were something she would like to pursue later in life. After finishing her project, she felt more confident when applying for her degree:

V13: *"I was the only one who did it before starting their studies and to figure out if this was really something that I wanted to do."*. (…) *"I applied confidently to the bachelor's I am doing right now. Now I know that I like this, and I only applied for this – children's education."*.

4.2.2 *Satisfaction with the volunteering experience*

When sharing their experiences, most volunteers were satisfied with the social aspect of it, not only with the other volunteers but also with the locals:

V12: *"I enjoyed the most the time I spent with my co-workers and with the other volunteers I met. In the Czech Republic, there is a huge "beer culture" which really brought people together several times a week to "grab a beer", share experiences and so on…".*

V05: *"I loved meeting the locals at the end of the project, they were great!".*

Other factors commonly mentioned by the volunteers were *"the location"*, *"the acceptance they felt from others"*, *"learning new things"*, and *"the project topic"*. The *"living conditions"*, *"the multicultural environment"*, and *"life outside work"* were also pinpointed.

"Getting to know a new culture", *"having free time"*, *"freedom"*, *"the warmth of people"*, *"the host organization"*, *"travelling"*, *"being responsible for something"*, *"being able to participate in workshops"*, *"the fact that the volunteering description was accurate"*, *"cooking"*, and *"the diversity of tasks proposed by the organization"* were mentioned by one volunteer each.

When asked if there was something they did not necessarily enjoy, not all the participants could identify something. Among what was mentioned, *bad experiences with their boss or superiors* were the aspect mentioned more often (five out of the 16). Two volunteers claimed that the volunteering description mismatched reality, a dissatisfaction factor since expectations were not fulfilled. Bad experiences with flatmates and the organization were also mentioned by two participants.

V11: *"Well, I think the job description mismatched reality. I was expecting to enroll in an organization very open minded and with some values that I really resonate with, but when I arrived at the project, it was nothing like that (…) So I think my expectations were not fulfilled.".*

"Having no privacy", *"lousy communication between the host organization and the workplace"*, *"hard to relate to locals"*, *"coldness of people"*, *"the co-workers"*, *"the context of the war"*, *"bad experiences with other volunteers"*, *"work-related situations"*, *"expectations not being fulfilled"*, *"isolation"* and *"racism episodes"* were mentioned by one volunteer each.

V03: *"We are a lot in one flat, sometimes it can be challenging to cope with life with a lot of people, and it could be difficult to have your own private space. We are two in one room. So private life in the flat can be challenging. I never lived like this before.".*

V12: *"What I did not enjoy was the time we spent at the office because sometimes was a bit boring since we did not have much to do and, although sometimes we could find our own "work", other times was not possible due to everything being in Czech (or Slovak) and that made simple things like going to the Post Office harder/impossible as people there did not understand English.".*

From the 16 volunteers, 12 (75%) said confidently that participating in the project did not make them feel like they were missing out on something.

V02: *"I do not feel I am missing something. Sometimes I feel that I didn't take the easy path. Therefore, sometimes I feel it can be a little difficult to relate to my friends (ex-classmates, for example) - they are in university, in their classes, and it's so different from what I am doing. And some people in my country see what I am doing as wasting time. It's not that common there. So sometimes it may be hard to have to defend myself and have to prove how much I learnt in the past couple of months, but no, I never felt that I was missing out on something because of being in the project. Actually, is the opposite, I feel like I am gaining something that I would never gain if I went to university and spend 6 hours sitting in a desk per day.".*

V14: *"No, no.... maybe if I were in a volunteering project where I didn't receive any money, I would be thinking a lot about that factor. But since we were earning for our expenses and there was something extra on the side, I never felt I was missing out on something.".*

V15: *"No, not while doing the project, but before doing it yes. I felt sometimes that the decision of going for the project was not secure as I felt that I would probably miss out on something [by going]. But I was definitely wrong, I gained so much.".*

V04: *"No, not at all (…) I did the best decision when participating in this project and having this experience. I strongly recommend applying for international volunteering projects!".*

Two participants said they felt like missing out on something, notably at particular moments and because of the COVID-19 pandemic during the time she was doing her ESC:

V16: *"Maybe at some specific moment, it could be that I thought "I could be elsewhere or doing another thing", but it was in a very specific moment, I think in general, I would totally say no.".*

V13: *"Yes, sure, but that was not because of the project, but because of corona. I couldn't go home to my sister's graduation, but that was not because of the project, was because of COVID.".*

And finally, there was one volunteer who seemed not to be very satisfied with the project in which she enrolled, although she did not know what she could have been (or done) instead:

V11: *"I would say that at some points I was a little disappointed (…) I took this project maybe too quickly, and I could have searched more. But at the same time, I do not know… You can't just "if", because if you do "if, if, if", at some point I started to think that, but I would never know. Maybe if I had never chosen this project, I never would be able to stay in the Czech Republic, and I would be more disappointed. So, I do not know how to have these points of view.".*

4.3. What are the main international volunteering outcomes?

The outcomes were divided into three categories (i) expected outcomes when applying for the project; (ii) outcomes for the volunteers; and (iii) outcomes for others (the host community). Table 14 summarizes the findings. In the next chapter is discussed how these outcomes are related to the existent literature.

	Main outcomes
Expected when applying	Learning/improving a language Contacting with a new culture Acquiring professional experience Being in a multicultural environment Meeting new people/make some friends
For the participants	Gaining valuable experience for their career Learning/improving a language Gaining enlightenment about future choices Meeting new people/making friends
For other volunteers	Organizing activities for local community Acquiring cultural understanding

Table 14 – Main outcomes in the different categories.

4.3.1 *Expected outcomes when applying for the project*

When asked about what the volunteers perceived to get from the international volunteering experience, 20 main perceptions were identified. **"Improving/learning a language"** was the one mentioned by the highest number of volunteers – seven out of the 16 (43.75%), said that with the project, they expected to learn or improve a language (sometimes not the one from the host country, but English, for example).

V06 (Spanish doing his project in Poland): *"For me it was important to have a better level of English…".*

V10 (German doing her project in Spain) *"I expected to learn Spanish and afterwards know how to speak Spanish fluently.".*

To **"getting to know a new culture"**, **"acquiring professional experience"**, **"being in a multicultural environment"**, and **"meeting new people/make some friends"** were next, with four out of the 16 volunteers identifying each of these perceptions. *"Having better understanding of a topic"*, *"having a new experience"*, *"gaining independence"*, and *"having a good time"* were mentioned by two out of the 16 volunteers.

Finally, *"experiencing community living"*, *"being braver"*, *"being challenged to maintain good physical conditions"*, *"gaining maturity"*, *"improving social skills"*, *"improving soft skills"*, *"understanding what to do career-wise"*, *"living off the grid"*, *"participating in non-formal education"*, *"having the opportunity to be responsible for something/ being in charge"* and *"getting the pocket money on time"* were respectively mentioned by one out of the 16 volunteers.

Three volunteers also said they didn't have expectations/high expectations regarding the project, because it was their first, as the following quotes illustrate:

V13: *"I went there with so low expectations, and not in a negative way, but I didn't really expect anything, so I couldn't get disappointed (…) I gained a lot from that year. It was my first year away from the place I grew up all my life.".*

V01: *"I did not have any expectations; I only knew that I was going to work… but it's good to know that there was much more than that.".*

4.3.2 *Outcomes for the participants*

Regarding the international volunteering project outcomes, more than 50 themes (and subcategories) were identified, and 191 references were made by the 16 volunteers. These subthemes reflect four major outcomes: (i) acquiring valuable experience for their career; (ii) improving/learning a language; (iii) getting enlightenment about future choices; and (iv) meeting new people/making friends.

The outcome most identified by the volunteers was **"acquiring valuable experience for their career"**, with 12 participants identifying competencies directly connected with their work and ***"learning/improving a language"*** was next, with nine of the 16 volunteers mentioning it.

V04: *"I conducted my first English-spoken interview there, which was leaving my comfort zone (…) I learned on how to conduct interviews, English skills, and be natural in the interviews (especially with shy people)."*.

V16: *"For my professional career if I want to do something with groups, I feel like I am totally prepared. Because here I get to observe different facilitators, different courses, different participants, and the way... how the activities work, how to manage the time, in that sense of groups, I feel like I am learning a lot, even though I may not participate that much in that side, as a facilitator, I am observing a lot and I think that is making me learn a lot and to know how to do it and how I would like to do it."*.

Seven volunteers identified having **realizations regarding what they want to do** (and not do) later in life. Six participants identified some **outcomes related to social life**, such as meeting new people, gaining new friends, or even gaining new followers on social media.

V05: *"I gained a lot of friends."*.

V06: *"Before coming I had 300 followers on Instagram, and now I have 500, which is much more, almost the double. And for me this means a lot, not because I care about the followers, but because it means I met a lot of people."*.

Five of the 16 volunteers mentioned that the project made them feel more **self-confident**, with some mentioning that being around so many different people make them feel more comfortable with themselves.

V12: *"I also feel more comfortable with myself, as I have met other people, very different people but also very similar people…"*.

V06: *"When I came, I had a problem with self-confidence, and I feel like this year here really helped me with that."*.

On highlight, two of the eleven volunteers who had already completed their project by the time they were interviewed said that **the project helped them to find a job**.

V09 (Found a job in home country): *"I didn't expect that the project could help really for finding a job and they were really impressed with my experience, so yeah, it really helped."*.

V06 (Found a job in host country): *"…during the interviews the people really appreciated the time that I spent in Poland. They thought it was super brave and that I had a good level of English, so it was really good for them."*.

From the 11 volunteers who already finished their project, six went back to their home country and the others were working or trying to find a job in the host country or studying in a different country.

From those who are still doing their project, at least one claims that she would like to stay in the host country after the project.

V02: *"I feel like I want to stay here after the project."*.

Table 15 shows a relation between the outcomes identified by the volunteers with the drivers from the eight-factor model of Fischer and Schaffer (1993). It is possible to point that most outcomes were related to the status driver, comprehending outcomes related to obtaining professional experience, improving, or gaining competencies, and having more clarity regarding the future career, with a total of 89 verbalizations. Outcomes related to

personal growth were also notably mentioned among the volunteers, with 59 verbalizations, being related to spirituality and personal development, i.e., maturity, independence, and adaptability. Social outcomes had 23 verbalizations, such as developing social skills, knowing a new culture and cultural understanding. As for altruistic outcomes, such as becoming more compassionate and empathic, and being more sensitive towards the war, there were 12 verbalizations. Ideological outcomes, such as having a different mindset, were mentioned by two volunteers. It was not possible to identify selfish, leisure nor material outcomes.

Outcomes such as being more anxious (one verbalization) and struggling with mental health (five verbalizations) are not presented in Table 15.

Drivers	Outcomes (examples)	Verbalizations[5]	Volunteers
Altruistic	Becoming more compassionate and empathic Being more sensitive towards the war	12	5
Ideological	Changing the mindset	2	2
Selfish		0	0
Leisure		0	0
Material		0	0
Search for personal growth	Getting cultural understanding Improving personal growth Being more mature, open minded and spiritual	59	14
Social	Acquiring social and relational skills Getting to know a new culture Making new friends	23	13
Status	Acquiring project management, leadership, and problem-solving skills Feeling more capable of working in a team Networking	89	16

Table 15 – Relation of the main outcomes with the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993).

The participants were asked **how the project prepared them for an international career**. The fact that the project encourages them to speak and practice their English (or the language of the host country) was the most common factor the volunteers identified that prepared them for an international career, also the fact that they had contact with people from many countries, with different costumes, and traditions was also identified as a factor, since they could learn about being accepting, to relate and understand different people.

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[5] The numbers presented on the table reflect the number of times a certain outcome was verbalized.

Adaptability was also commonly identified by the volunteers. Furthermore, the project showed them that they can live abroad.

V05 (Now working in the host country): *"I do not think I would go to Brno to work without having this international volunteering experience before. You know, I would have never decided to go from my home country to here."*.

V16: *"Well, I do not know if it's specific for an international career, but one thing I can see it clearly is to be able to practice my English for one year, I think it's a big improvement. And apart from that… getting used to interacting with people from different cultures, and to understand that and know things from different cultures and being used to work in that kind of settings… I think that would be useful for an international career."*.

From the 16 volunteers, 11 mentioned being able to identify changes in themselves since they started the project until the present moment. "Having a different or new interest" and/or "considering different goals as a result of the project" were also claimed by 11 participants.

V03: *"I didn't read that much before. Now I am interested in reading about the war, about conflicts. I feel like I am more curious."*.

V14: *"I started to be more interested in nature. I never looked at that topic from a future perspective, but now I do. Even if I continue to work in the field of my studies, I can work in organizations more related to nature and all of that."*.

V09: *"After the project, I realized I can do a lot of things, because I have a lot of skills. Also, because the project gives you the opportunity of improving yourself in many different ways. So, now I think I can try different things and then decide. Not like "ok, I graduated in philosophy and the only thing I can do is teach". No, it's not like that, I can try… I can try different things and eventually decide what I like more."*.

V08: *"After going to ESC, for me, a lot of things have changed completely, and also it became easier to not follow this idea of "I need to get job/husband/wife/babies". It opened me to not doing what society wants."*.

Most of the volunteers' expectations regarding what they would gain were met. However, sometimes, they got unexpected achievements. For example, before departing, V08 was expecting to develop professionally but ended up having a more significant personal growth than she had expected:

V08: *"I thought it was going to develop me very professionally, and then it turned out to be a very personal development. (…) Before going to the ESC, I had this pre-departure meeting and the lady that was leading was saying* **"you are not going to get the experience that you want, but the experience that you need."**.

Some volunteers also mentioned that not only after, but also while doing the project, when they visited their home or when they arrived home, they felt like something had changed, but they really could not say what changed, like there was a gap between the idea they had from home and what they found when they came back.

V08: *"It took me a while to understand what was happening. A lot of things happen in the project, and you are in this bubble, and then you come back home, and a lot happened in your home, and it is hard to express what changed in you (like visually). The first week of returning, people are still asking a lot of what happened, a lot of conversations... but life continues, and I still want to reflect on what happened, and there is no one to listen about this experience. That happened. That was hard."*.

V11: *"To be honest, I was in France a few weeks ago, I spent almost one month there, and I felt the gap. I do not know if you already had an international experience, but sometimes you feel that when you go abroad, and you feel that you change, and you can't really say how, but you feel the gap"*.

4.3.3 Outcomes for others

The participants identified a few outcomes that the host community received. Most of the volunteers stated that the local communities benefitted from the work done during

the project. Some participants become more self-aware of the characteristics that enable them to get results, e.g., their creativity, dynamism, physical condition, and effort (the last element was recognized by the volunteers that did their project in the natural park – V07 and V14).

A part of the research group talked about small projects in which they were fully responsible for their conception, organization, and realization. As an example, V04 pointed to the fact that, during her project, she created a booklet on how to be more sustainable in the city where she was working (Brno, in the Czech Republic) and that she made a video about that booklet and giving suggestions on being more sustainable. Another example is V06, who enlisted a part of his time to teach Spanish to the locals (in Poland).

Most of the projects involve, in their own particular way, the **creation of activities for the local community**. V09, even when working in the Eco house, tried to raise awareness for several topics when organizing activities for the community, such as feminism and gender equality.

V08 also pointed out that her main contribution to her project was when she was organizing and doing activities for the local community, stating that she was concerned but also motivated about creating a safer environment for people to express themselves freely.

V03 was doing his project by the time the conflict between Russia and Ukraine gained other proportions and decided to volunteer to help the refugees fleeing to Poland. V06 had already finished his project by that time. However, while doing it, he also volunteered to help people with different and difficult conditions, such as people with degenerative diseases or with some degree of incapacity.

Some volunteers pointed out that having an international person was helpful for the host community, as it **can help create multicultural understanding**. V02, who is doing her project in a kindergarten in a small city in Germany, stated that the multicultural environment is not as present there as in other cities of the hosting country (like Berlin or Frankfurt), but still believed that having a foreigner working with the children in the kindergarten can improve the feeling of acceptance between the children, not only due to having a different language but also because of the cultural (or other) differences. Moreover, she also stated that this made children more curious about the world around them, which, for some of them, is still very unknown.

V02: *"I am working in a very small place … probably I am the only foreigner these kids are going to meet for a while. Therefore, is very important for them to understand that there are people out there that do not speak their language, and they are not bad people, they just do not speak the same language, and it's ok. It teaches them, and especially because we are in the 21st century, they will meet someone that is not German and that does not speak German, and the sooner the better… And I am also helping other children, that are bilingual, children of immigrants by being another person that does not speak the language and that was born abroad. I share a lot of my culture with them. I share things about my country with them. They can point to Bulgaria on the map, in fact, they had a problem pointing to Germany when I first went there, and now they are like "here is Bulgaria, and here is Germany" and they just point to countries where other kids in the kindergarten were born and that is very funny, always… It makes them more curious about the world around them, it shows them that there are more countries. It is not only Germany. Sometimes they make questions about random countries. So now we have many more questions to answer when it comes to the world.".*

V06 believes that he can be a role model for those who want to have an international experience:

V06: *"I can be a model for other people that are thinking of going abroad.".*

5. Discussion

This study aims to: (i) know the motives leading young people aged between 18-30 years to enroll in European Solidarity Corps; (ii) understand the experiences of international volunteers; and (iii) determine whether international volunteers intend to return to their home country after the voluntary experience or, instead, prefer to pursue an international career.

5.1. Motivations of the volunteers

By drawing upon the eight-factor model from Fischer and Schaffer (1993) we could identify several motives to join ESC. Although not all eight factors were mentioned, the findings confirm that all volunteers were driven by multiple factors. The experience itself was the most relevant, including the project conditions, and the location.

The **status driver** was the most mentioned by the participants of this study. Learning a new language, getting professional experience, or gaining necessary skills for future career, as stated before, were some of the motives for a volunteering project. Due to the age of the volunteers, one expected that the status driver would have a significant weight in deciding to volunteer, as per the findings of Okun and Schultz (2003). The authors found that age is inversely associated with the status drivers, i.e., younger people are usually more driven to wanting to develop/learn skills, to gain professional experience and network. This reasoning was greatly shared amongst the volunteers.

The **leisure driver** was not identified in the studies of Unstead-Joss (2008), Hudson and Inkson (2006), and Rehberg (2005), but, in this case, it was a reason presented to enroll in the project by two of the 16 volunteers, such as having free time/not having anything to do. This may be due to these volunteers' professional situation (who, at the time of application, were unemployed), as it may be a motivation to occupy their free time with a productive activity. One could presume that these drivers could mix with altruistic drivers, but this was the case only for one of these volunteers.

Regarding the **altruistic drivers**, only four of the 16 volunteers claimed that they enrolled in the project because they had the desire to help others, even though only one of them presented it as the main reason to enroll. The fact that most volunteers did not mention the desire to help others as a primary reason to volunteer may be associated with the nature of this activity, i.e., the helpfulness nature of volunteering towards strangers (one of its

dimensions). Then, it is plausible to assume that the volunteers had this intrinsic perception but failed to point it out. One volunteer identified the topic of the project – nature conservation – as something with significant weight in her decision to apply for the IVS, which was also characterized as an altruistic driver. The reason behind this may be due to the recent troublesome problems related to climate change and the necessity to be proactive in solving them.

The motivations to enroll in an ESC project may have some similarities with the reasons why people enroll in International Volunteering Tourism, who usually are not driven by altruistic reasons, but by **egoistic motives** (Caissie & Halpenny, 2003), such as **personal growth**, and **selfish drivers**, in this case working in personal traits, escaping and the desire to travel were some of the motivations mentioned. Something that these two kinds of volunteering programmes (ESC and International Volunteering Tourism) have in common, and that may explain why people applying to them have similar motivations, is the fact that they are usually for social understanding, and not for development and relief. Volunteering projects for social understanding usually recruit unskilled and inexperienced (usually younger) volunteers to participate (Sherraden et al., 2006), instead of skilled and experienced (usually older) technicians and professionals who would provide expertise to communities and nations where skill-based assistance is needed.

Ideological drivers, such as identifying with the values of the organization/project, were mentioned by five of the volunteers. It is fair to assume that the volunteers who did not identify these drivers applied for an international volunteering experience for the sake of having such experience, and not related to the values of the organization or project themselves. The ESC offers such a vast variety of volunteering projects (in different countries, organizations, themes, …), so the participants always have something to choose from.

None of the volunteers that participated in this study mentioned **material drivers** as one of the reasons to apply for their project, as not one of them identified one of their motivations as expecting to obtain benefits for themselves or their family, which is something similar to the studies previously mentioned - Unstead-Joss (2008); Hudson and Inkson (2006), and Rehberg (2005). This is understandable as the nature of such activity (i.e., volunteering) is not prone to acquire material possessions. Material drivers may be more common in "event volunteering", like music festivals, where the participant, with the purpose of freely entering such event, volunteers in its organization.

The **social driver** was also one of the most common drivers among the volunteers, as the desire to meet new people and be in a multicultural environment were some of the reasons presented by the volunteers to apply to an international volunteering project. This is in line with the own nature of the ESC program, as one of its goals is to promote diversity, inclusion, and the values of Europe. Okun and Schultz (2003) also found that age is positively associated with social motivations, i.e., older people tend to be more driven to meet other people. However, the results of the study do not support his claim.

When it comes to the **motivations while doing the project**, the **social driver** was the one that had more weight among the volunteers. It can be reasoned that the relationships not only between the volunteers themselves but also between the volunteers and the locals, are of great importance to maintain their motivation for volunteering.

5.2. Perceptions of the motivations of other volunteers

The volunteers' perceptions regarding the motivations of the other participants were not precisely in line with their own motivations. In this case, the altruistic driver was only mentioned by one of the 16 volunteers and the ideological driver was not prominent. The reasonings may be similar to the ones stated before, but one could assume the contrary, as people usually try to hide their egoistic motives and enhance the altruistic ones. It was possible to identify the presence of a **material driver** - as mentioned before, as one of the volunteers perceived that a participant of the program enrolled in it to have some degree of stability and a monthly living allowance. In this case, the **status and selfishness drivers** were the most mentioned ones by the volunteers, and the reasons may be similar to the ones previously mentioned. One can add, nonetheless, and regarding the **selfishness drivers**, that it is plausible to assume that the desire to travel (and the covered travel expenses by the ESC) and to escape (also related to the age range of the volunteers who, at that time, may have still been living with their parents) are important factors to motivate the volunteers in participating in these projects.

5.3. Outcomes of international volunteering

Regarding the outcomes of international volunteering, one can draw upon the expatriate literature to understand the findings. Comparing the motivations of the international volunteers who participated in this study with what typically leads a person in accepting an international role and become an expatriate, besides the job offer itself and the

financial motives (such as the salary/compensation and the expatriation package), some of the reasons are quite similar. For instance, the opportunity to have **new experiences** and **learning possibilities**, **personal interest in international experience**, **family and domestic issues** and the **location** of the assignment (Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Dickmann et al., 2008). Expatriate studies showed that international tasks give expatriates a chance to improve their intercultural competencies and enhance general management skills (Black et al., 1999; Dickmann & Harris, 2005), and indicated that career success in multinational enterprises is improved by developing cultural and leadership skills, and intercultural capabilities, which can be acquired through expatriation (Leung et al., 2014). When individuals face a new cultural environment, the differences between home and the host provide the necessary trigger to learn new skills and the behaviors to react appropriately to cross-cultural situations (Wang et al., 2016). As such, when the individuals are placed in another country, they must **acquire and develop new skills to fulfill the social expectations of the host community**, because managing within a foreign culture demands specific skills that are different from those that are effective at home (Templer, 2010; Wang et al., 2016).

When people move to a different country, they must deal with the tension associated with the relocation to a foreign environment and, subsequently, the problems of social segregation, family separation, and the uncertainties related to a future repatriation (Brown, 2008). The expatriates may also be more susceptible to emotional negativity, with feelings of frustration and anxiety more present, for being in an unfamiliar reality. As such, they must **strengthen their psychological well-being and develop adaptive skills by facing unknown situations** (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985), to accurately interpret the expectations of the locals and the behaviors in cross-cultural interactions (Adler & Aycan, 2018). In sum, they must learn how to connect effectively with host nationals (Chew, 2004; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

In this study, some volunteers recognized developing some of these skills, such as cultural understanding, being more accepting of others, adaptability, leadership and organizing skills, personal growth, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, the development of a new language, among others. Some participants also mentioned that they had to deal with feelings of isolation, or that they met an "ugly" part of themselves while out of their comfort zone or while they were in an unfamiliar reality, which made them learn how to deal

with those feelings. The volunteers recognized that dealing with these negative feelings was crucial for their personal development.

These findings meet what was previously stated by Jones (2011), that those who volunteer internationally might acquire and develop an increasingly essential range of skills for global corporate labor markets that have parallelism with the career capital accumulated by employees who undertake overseas work placements. Therefore, participating in an international volunteering project may be seen as an investment in human capital. To Becker (1993), human capital constitutes the amount of an individual's marketable knowledge and skills obtained by investing in education, training, and experiences that, in ultimate, are valuable to organizations and may influence the future income.

Another fact mentioned by the ESC international volunteers that is a familiar feeling among expatriates is the **difficulties/stress when returning to their home country** (Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Selmer, 1998). In this case, the problems may not be the same – as some expatriates may feel difficulties returning to their original job or their original company, sometimes feeling like they were forgotten or that now they are "on the side" (Selmer, 1998). This is not the case with international volunteers, although they feel a gap between the idea they had from home and what they found when they came back, which can lead to a reverse cultural shock. A volunteer suggested that the ESC should have a program for volunteers returning to their home country, which may parallel some companies' initiatives to repatriate their employees.

The impact that international experiences have on future career success is unclear (Ramaswami et al., 2016), as it may not be concluded that IVS necessarily leads to employment (AVSO, 2007). However, according to AVSO (2007), there is some evidence that it makes young people more employable, as it contributes to their personal growth, which is supported by this study's findings. Herein, several volunteers recognized that the project was useful to help them understand what they want in the future, what they like and what they do not like, which meets the findings of AVSO (2007), that participation in an IVS may **reduce career indecision**. Furthermore, the volunteers identified the development of crucial skills for the job market. The development of their English language skills, which was mentioned by most of the volunteers, is highly valued in the labor market specifically to be able to work in a multinational company or another country. For some volunteers, it was clear that participating in the ESC project contributed to the desire to have an international career or helped them accomplish it. However, others stated that even though they had the

desire to have the international volunteering experience, they were not interested, at least for now, in working in another country or having an international career – although they recognized that the project helped them develop some competences, such as the **language**, the **adaptability**, and the **cultural understanding**, which are relevant for an international career. Finally, the findings provide some support for the idea that **IVS can increase job prospects**. Although the number is not significant, two of the eleven volunteers who had already finished their project, recognized that participating in the ESC project helped them find a job and that the company recognized the skills they earned while doing the project.

It is controversial to presume that international volunteering experiences always bring value to the host community (Simpson, 2004). In this case, the volunteers who were interviewed were able to identify some of the value their presence and their work brought to the host community. One of the things mentioned by some of the volunteers was multicultural understanding. Given that this type of ESC project is an IVS for international understanding, it seems that the **volunteers perceived they contributed to the main goal of the project**, which is developing intercultural sensitivity and tolerance, increasing global consciousness, encouraging international solidarity, and promoting international peace and understanding (Sherraden et al., 2006). It is worth noting that all volunteers recommend an ESC project to others:

V06: *"… I never regret coming. Every day I woke up, I never said that day was not a good day. We had good and bad moments, but everything helped me learn a lot about how to deal with situations and everything… I feel like living abroad makes you grow and grow faster than if you were in your own country. Maybe because it makes you have diversity and different perspectives.".*

6. Conclusion

With an increasing number of people interested in volunteering internationally and the proliferation of organizations that sponsor it, the subject of international volunteering has gained attention among scholars. Despite the vast literature available on this subject, research focuses, essentially, on people from "first-world" countries who volunteer to "third-world" countries. Differently, this research examines whether going from a "first-world" country to another close and well-developed country can also trigger personal development, including the development of skills that increase the career capital and the employability of volunteers.

The results of this study highlight that the motives for young people to enroll in an ESC project are multiple and similar to those who participate in volunteering tourism (Caissie & Halpenny, 2003). **Altruistic, ideological** and **leisure drivers** were not common among the volunteers of this study, and **material drivers** were not mentioned. The desire to acquire professional experience or professional skills (**status drivers**) drove the participants of this study to choose an IVS project, and in some cases, the presence of **social, selfish** and **personal growth drivers** had a significant weight.

The motivations to enroll in a volunteering ESC project are somehow parallel to the motivations of corporate expatriates who accept the challenge of working and living in another country. It was possible to confirm that the outcomes of both international experiences have several similarities, as both international volunteers and expatriates have to face the struggles of living in a different country and adapting to a new reality. As an example, the stress after returning home was mentioned by international volunteers, which is also commonly mentioned by repatriates.

Even though not all ESC volunteers had in mind the idea of developing an international career, they recognized that the project gave them the competencies and skills to do so if they later decided to follow such career. The ESC project has also shown to have a significant weight in reducing career indecision and helping young people to better understand what they want to do later in life and what path they want to pursue. The example of two volunteers participating in this study (V06 and V09) showed that the ESC projects in which they enrolled had a strong influence on finding a job after the project. All the volunteers recommended the project to others. Although not all moments were good, they recognized it was necessary for their development. The experience of living abroad and

dealing with so many different things from what they are used to made them grow in a way they could never grow if they stayed in their countries.

6.1. Research limitations and suggestions for future research

The study findings must be interpreted by considering the research limitations. A first limitation concerns the sample size, which makes it impossible to generalize the results. However, the main research aims were to address the personal experiences of ESC volunteers, so the exploratory nature of the study was fulfilled. Although the use of a non-probability sampling might bound the findings, it actually provided access to subjects difficult to target otherwise.

Even though some volunteers consider themselves a young person with fewer opportunities (see Appendix 3), it was mostly because of their life context and not because of having a disability. Therefore, future research could try to understand in what way the ESC is accessible to people with disabilities, as is intended by the program's mission.

Another limitation is related to the fact that not all the participants had finished their project, which means they may not yet have sufficient distance from the project to evaluate their experiences clearly and to its full extent. However, blending in the same sample volunteers who are abroad with other participants who had recently finished their project made possible to understand their viewpoints and compare how ESC really affected their lives, their jobs and career, the way they manage their interpersonal relationships, and how it affected the way they perceive the world. So, a suggestion for future research would be to study the long-term impacts of the project, employing a larger sample and a wider range of home/host countries.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

Firstly, it was shown that the ESC is inserted in the definition of an IVS, as it fits all the dimensions. Regarding understanding why people enroll in a pro-bono activity like volunteering, it was also possible to see that most volunteers display a combination of several drivers like Rehberg (2005) has concluded in his study. In this case, and by drawing upon the eight-factor model of Fischer and Schaffer (1993), it was possible to see that less than one of third of the volunteers (31.35%) identified altruistic drivers as a motivation to apply, which makes harder to agree with Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991) when they state that volunteers are both altruistic and egoistic. In this case, the motivations of the volunteers could be more

like those who do volunteer tourism, as Caissie and Halpenny (2003) found that the participants focused more on themselves than on altruistic reasons.

Furthermore, it was possible to verify that the ESC helps to overcome some of the barriers to international volunteering, as it gives financial support to the participants (and extra in case the person has some disability) and has many different projects, with different characteristics, for which the participants can apply.

This study contradicts McCall (1998) and Lough (2011) by showing that it is not necessary for the international volunteers to relocate to countries and communities remarkably different in their economic, political, and moral orientations to personally grow, as it was possible to assess that the volunteers identified they develop personally. Their development could also have parallel with those who undertake overseas work placements, which supports Jones (2011). Finally, this study validates AVSO (2007) by showing that an IVS can reduce career indecision.

6.3. Managerial contributions

This research has several contributions to International Human Resources Management, as it shows some of the motivations of young people to apply for an IVS. This may be useful for the organizations to attract and recruit volunteers, and for European policymakers to understand who the participants are, how they perceive the program, and their development during and after the project. It has also shown that an ESC project can help reduce career indecision while helping the participants develop and acquire skills highly appreciated today in the job market and by future employers. At the same time, it has shown to be beneficial to the host community, as having an international volunteer can help the locals develop cultural understanding.

To conclude, this study highlights that a new approach to international volunteering service for cultural understanding from one "first-world" country to another is possible. It was possible to identify that, in these experiences, international volunteers face situations that trigger personal development, as they also deal with the stress associated with the relocation and adapt to the new environment – a situation that parallels the business expatriates.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Interview script

Previous experience

1. Was it your first international volunteering experience?
2. Do you know other international volunteering programmes?

Motivations

3. Why did you choose an international volunteering program?
4. Why did you choose the ESC program?
5. What was the factor that had more weight when you decided that you wanted to do this project? (In case they do not refer to the country – did the host country impact your choice? If so, why did you choose X?)
6. What were your motivations when you applied for an international volunteering project?
7. Did those motivations change while you were doing the project?
8. How would you classify the motivations of the other volunteers of the project?

Mission role/responsibilities during the volunteering service

9. What are/were your primary responsibilities in the project?
10. How is the volunteering project related to your formation field/work field?
11. What do you think was your main contribution to this project? (for example, for the organization, for the local community, …).
12. (Do you think you are/were the one that beneficed more with this project, or do you think it was the organization that hosted you?)

Satisfaction

13. Until now, what you are enjoying the most, and what are you not necessarily enjoying?
14. Did something surprise you positively and/or negatively?
15. At any moment, did you feel that because you were doing this project, you were missing out on something?

Outcomes/Results of the mission

16. What were your perceptions about what you would gain/obtain with this project when you first applied?

17. Did that perception stay the same along with the project? Why?

18. What are the professional skills that you acquired with this international volunteering project?

19. In what way did this project prepare you for an international career?

20. Do you feel like you are a different person now compared to the person you were before starting the project?

21. What changed?

22. Do you consider that something changed in your interests and your ambitions? Can you please give an example of something that you noticed?

Recommendation

23. Would you recommend this project to someone?

24. What advice would you give to someone who is starting his project?

Appendix 2 – Google forms to categorize the population

Why do young Europeans enroll in international volunteering projects within Europe?

The responses from this Google Forms will be used for the following study, "Why do young Europeans enroll in international volunteering projects within Europe", which is a support work for my Master thesis in Economics and Human Resources Management at the University of Porto.

All the given information will be kept confidential and will not be used for other than the stated project.
The identity of the participants will not be disclosed at any time.

Thank you for taking the time to participate!

████████████████████ (não partilhado)
Mudar de conta

*Obrigatório

Name *

A sua resposta

Gender *

○ Female

○ Male

○ Other

○ Prefer not to say

Age *

Selecionar ▼

Nationality *

A sua resposta

Home country *

A sua resposta

Did you grow up in a... *

○ Rural Area

○ Urban Area

Host Country *

○ Germany

○ Poland

○ Outra: _____

During your ESC project you are/were living in a *

○ Rural Area

○ Urban Area

Did you speak/understand the language of your host country when you applied *
for the ESC project?

○ Yes and I was comfortable

○ Yes but I was not comfortable

○ No

Did you have/ are you having a language course related to the host country *
sponsored by the project?

○ Yes

○ No, it was a option but I didn't take it

○ No, it was not an option

What is/was the duration of your project *

A sua resposta

Are you closer to the ... of the project *

○ Beginning

○ Middle

○ End

Highest Education Degree *

○ High School or Similar

○ Bachelor

○ Master

○ PhD

Field of Studies *

A sua resposta

What was your situation when you applied for the ESC Project *

Selecionar ▼

If your answer in the previous question was other, can you please detail what was your situation

A sua resposta

By the time you applied to the project did you consider yourself a young person with fewer opportunities? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

Appendix 2 – Participants' characteristics

Code	Age	Gender	Home country	Grew in…	Education	Field of studies	Situation when applied	First experience as an IV?	During ESC lived/live in…	Knowledge of host language	Youngest have less opportunities?
V01	25	Female	Denmark	Rural	Bachelor	German literature, culture and history	University Student	Yes	Urban	Yes	No
V02	19	Female	Bulgaria	Urban	High School or similar	NA	High School Student	Yes	Urban	No	No
V03	22	Male	France	Urban	Bachelor	Sociology	University Student	No	Urban	No	No
V04	24	Female	Romania	Urban	Bachelor	Sociology	Unemployed	Yes	Urban	No	Yes
V05	25	Female	Slovakia	Urban	Master	International relations	Unemployed	Yes	Urban	Yes	Yes
V06	23	Male	Spain	Rural	Bachelor	Social Sciences	Farmer	Yes	Urban	No	Yes
V07	22	Female	Latvia	Rural	High School or similar	Environmental Design	Unemployed	Yes	Rural	No	No
V08	26	Female	Latvia	Rural	Bachelor	Sociology	Employed in a field related to studies	No	Urban	No	No
V09	28	Female	Italy	Rural	Master	Philosophy	Unemployed	No	Urban	Yes, but was not comfortable	Yes

Code	Age	Gender	Home country	Grew in…	Education	Field of studies	Situation when applied	First experience as an IV?	During ESC lived/live in…	Knowledge of host language	Youngest have less opportunities?
V10	20	Female	Germany	Urban	High School or similar	NA	IV in Scotland	No	Urban	Yes, but was not comfortable	No
V11	28	Female	France	Urban	Master	Mediation of Stage Arts	Unemployed	Yes	Rural	No	Yes
V12	19	Female	Austria	Urban	High School or similar	NA	Unemployed	Yes	Urban	No	No
V13	20	Female	Norway	Rural	High school or similar	NA	High school student	Yes	Urban	No	Yes
V14	29	Male	Portugal	Rural	Bachelor	Economics	Unemployed	Yes	Rural	No	Yes
V15	27	Male	Latvia	Rural	High School or Similar	Theatre	Unemployed	Yes	Urban	No	Yes
V16	28	Male	Spain	Urban	Master	Psychology	Recently finished studies	Yes	Rural	Yes	No

Appendix 3 – Coding structure

Tree Nodes	Previous experience and knowledge	Verbalizations related to the **previous experience** of the volunteers in other international volunteering projects or their knowledge of other programs
		Previous experience — Verbalizations related to previous experiences of the respondents as international volunteers
		Knowledge of other programs — Verbalizations related to the volunteers' knowledge of other international volunteering programs fall in this category

Tree Nodes	Motivation	Verbalizations related to the **motivation of the volunteers** to apply for an IVS and for the ESC, their **motivation during the project** and their **perceptions** regarding the motivation of the other volunteers
		Motivations to apply for the IVS — Verbalizations related to what made them want to apply for an IVS
		Motivations to apply for the ESC — Verbalizations to what made them want to apply for an ESC
		Motivations during the project — Verbalizations regarding the motivation of the volunteers during the project
		Motivations of other volunteers — Verbalizations related to the way the volunteers perceived the motivation of the other volunteers

Tree Nodes	Project	Verbalizations related to the **outcomes** the volunteers could identify so far and the **changes** they felt in themselves.
		Responsibilities — Verbalizations related to the responsibilities of the volunteers during the project and their main tasks
		Relation with field of studies — Verbalizations related to the way the project had a relation with the academic background of the volunteers

Tree Nodes	Feelings and perceptions towards the Project	Verbalizations regarding the **perceptions and expectations** of the volunteers **when applying** and **during** the project, their **expectations**, what **they enjoyed the most and the least** and their **recommendations** for other people		
		Perceptions	**When applying**	Verbalizations related to the perceptions of volunteers when they applied for the project fall in this category
			During the project	Verbalizations related to the perceptions of volunteers once they were doing the project
		Expectations		Verbalizations related to the expectations of the volunteers when they applied for the project
		Satisfaction		Verbalizations related to what the volunteers enjoyed the most about their experience and what surprised them positively
		Dissatisfaction		Verbalizations related to what the volunteers did not particularly enjoy and what surprised them negatively
		Recommendation		Verbalizations related to the recommendations the volunteers would give to other young people wanting to apply for an IVS project

Tree Nodes	Outcomes	Verbalizations related to the **outcomes** the volunteers could identify so far and the **changes** they felt in themselves.	
		Outcomes for them	Verbalizations related to what the volunteers identified as outcomes from their experiences as international volunteers, including changes in themselves or in their ambitions/interests
		Outcomes for the host organization/community	Verbalizations related to what the volunteers identified as outcomes for the host organization/community