



COMMUNITY IMPACT IN LEARNING MOBILITY PROJECTS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE



Editorial info

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Contents

Overview	4
Why is community impact important?	4
Why are we talking about Community Impact right now?	4
1. What does community actually mean?	5
What is a community?	5
Communities in learning mobility projects	5
Different communities in a Learning Mobility Project	5
2. What is impact?	7
3. How do we experience community impact?	9
4. How to know if the impact is there	10
5. Community impact in Solidarity Corps Projects	13
Possible Effects from all types and formats of Solidarity Corps Projects	13
Elements for quality community impact	14
Different examples of Community impact for different project types in the European Solidarity Corps	15
6. Good practices on learning mobility for more and stronger community impact	17
How to increase community impact?	17
What can you do practically?	19
Who else can you include from the community?	19
References	26
Acknowledgements	27

What is impact? What does community actually mean?! What do we already know? What do we need to know in order to improve? How is impact ensured, measured and evaluated? Which sectors of our work are aware of this information, and who else needs to know? How much do the decision-makers know about the change that our projects can make? How can policy be changed by proof of community impact? ...

Overview

Community impact is becoming **more and more relevant in learning mobility projects**. The European Solidarity Corps balances personal and professional competence development with a local-to-international solidarity focus. The difference that European Solidarity Corps projects make, and how they affect the communities involved, needs to be researched and shown.

The European Solidarity Corps SALTO Resource Centre is a member of the European Platform for Learning Mobility (EPLM), which links together practice, policy, research and the needs of young people, to improve the quality and sustainability of learning mobility for all in Europe. We want to translate the important parts of recent research into a practical tool accessible by all people in the youth work field.

Community impact has become more urgent after the effects of COVID-19 and Lockdown. Actions and activities at local level have increased dramatically to help support communities. Youth work is changing, the online world and digital skills needed have increased in importance. The concept of going abroad for long-term mobility can seem a far-away dream for many. The focus of learning mobility in Europe will necessarily have to change, at least for the short term - and also the importance of the focus on 'community'.

The **following information can help you** when you are creating your projects, applying for funding, analysing what changed because of your project - or even what hasn't changed in order to adjust your approach and plan new projects or interventions to create more positive change in your community. We hope it helps make 'community impact' clearer for more people. We also hope that it starts a process of finding a common definition, and then inspires you how to use it and build on it.

Sharing the knowledge, awareness and potential of community impact of learning mobility projects to a wider audience is important. We hope this tool helps you do that.

Why is community impact important?

Understanding and assess how impact unfolds at the community level is really important.

With effective assessment tools, we can understand how learning mobilities impact communities. Then we can showcase the good work that is done and recognise it. We can change and improve existing (and future) learning mobility projects. We can adapt current and future projects and programmes to have more impact.

Why are we talking about Community Impact right now?

The added angle of community impact, as part of the European Solidarity Corps, has been a new thing for many organisations. In the move from EVS to the European Solidarity Corps, volunteering in Europe has shifted its focus and purpose. It is coming back to a **sense of service** and rebalancing the emphasis that was there related to personal competence development: community has become important again!

With the renewal of the [European Solidarity Corps Programme 2021 - 2027](#), this emphasis will continue. The European Union youth strategy "Engaging, connecting and empowering young people: a new EU youth strategy" points out the importance of "encourag[ing] young people to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and **positive change for communities across Europe**, inspired by EU values and a European identity" ([European Commission 2018](#))."

Even with restricted movements, community impact can still be found at a very local level or online. 'Community' is becoming the frame that many projects and activities are linked to. We hope this Practical Guide provides an introductory frame for people to understand what 'Community Impact is' and a few first steps on how to increase it in projects with and for young people.

1. What does community actually mean?

A community is different from a social group. A social group consists of two or more people who regularly interact and share mutual expectations and a common identity (Barkan, 2012), but a community includes more of a sense of belonging.

A community is different from an organisation. An organisation is a group of people that share agreed objectives or goals together (Greenberg and Baron, 1995, p. 11)

What is a community?

A community is a **social or cultural group larger than one's immediate circle** (family and friends), **rooted in a sense of belonging**. It's made up of many social groups and different organisations. It isn't just about the physical and goes beyond a physical scope.

A community can be understood as "an **informally organised social entity which is characterized by a sense of identity**." (Brieger, 2006, p. 4) Communities can include a specific geographical area (neighborhood, city, country, or group of countries, etc.) but it can also be more than that (ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, political etc).

Some academics frame the concept as something that is an encounter rather than an entity, indeed related to the identity or interests of the individual rather than a physical area/space. More than an entity, a community can be an attitude of responsibility that connects and brings people together through an encounter (face-to-face, online, blended). It has an empathetic element, of '**being-for and feeling-for the other**' (Todd, 2004, p.337).

Communities in learning mobility projects

Sending and host communities have a crucial role in youth work, voluntary activities and learning mobility. They are the environments that the young person grows in. The community is where the needs of any project are felt and researched from, and where the impact and results of a project are felt afterwards.

Sending and host communities are very often referred to as the geographical areas from where the young people, volunteers and learning mobility participants come from and go to, respectively. But remember - a community can also be defined in other ways, or even be online, so it's not only about neighbourhoods. Community impact might be experienced differently depending on whether the community is sending or welcoming new 'members', but community impact can be felt in both, hopefully bringing people together and enhancing an attitude of responsibility towards the common good.

Different communities in a Learning Mobility Project

When planning the community impact that your project might have, it is important to consider different communities:

1. Most of the time, impact on the community is achieved by **involving hosting community members** in the activities of learning mobility and direct interaction with the participants.
2. The "multiplier effect" impact is achieved by participants **taking action in their sending (home) communities**. This means that the participants improve their competences and acquire certain values during their mobility. Afterwards, they either get actively involved in various activities targeted at creating a more active, responsible and cohesive society, or they simply share their knowledge and newly-gained points of view with their families, friends and other peers.

3. For **online communities** impact can be seen through an increase in trust, better relationships, momentum and enthusiasm for future activity, linking the online and physical world that can start with nano-activism etc.

The impact on communities might embody itself not only indirectly involving the members of the communities in the actual activities, but also in visibility measures or in the dissemination of results targeting the hosting, home or online communities. As a result, these communities would be **engaged in and informed about the issues** that the organisers of the project intended to address and we could hope for an implied/indirect impact.

2. What is impact?

Taking action in a project generates an output. An output is different from impact, and there is a tendency to confuse the two.

What does impact mean?

Outputs are results, which were intended and achieved by a project. **Impact** is the **effect which those results have** on individuals, organisations, systems or policies. For example, an output of a training course is what a person learns during the course, while the impact is what the person does subsequently with that new learning. 'The numbers involved and the visits made are outputs but the impact is to be found in the increased intercultural awareness of the students or in their collective awareness of the heritage and culture of Europe' (Doyle 2011, p. 15).

It might also be the case that in some languages the translation of the English term *impact* makes it seem more complicated than it actually is. Therefore, sometimes it makes sense to simplify it a little bit and to think about **impact as a change**. In our case, the change that you can see in the community - where was the community before and where is it now? What has changed in it?

Types of impact¹

When considering the impact that learning mobility can have, there are several types of effects:

1. direct and indirect,
2. intended and unintended,
3. positive and negative.

Direct vs. indirect

Direct impact comes through the direct communication or activities in the community. For example, volunteering in a community of another ethnic group can have two effects: 1) a change caused by volunteering (for example, creating a new space in the community, building a playground or cleaning the forest) and 2) building friendships, networks and better understanding between the particular ethnic groups. In both cases, the effects are direct because they imply that people intervene in the host community and change the physical and/or social world with their presence and activities.

Indirect effects imply changes that happen due to the learning mobility project, but these effects do not occur through direct communication. For example, a higher number of young people going abroad from a community increases the chances of a friendship between young people from different ethnic groups. Therefore, we can imply that the activities bring a greater degree of acceptance of interethnic ties and encourages communication, exchange of values and a better understanding of each others' points of view in the communities. The difficult aspect of indirect impact is that while your learning mobility project is happening in the community, other processes are happening there too - the community is exposed to the news on the media, other projects, civic initiatives or political decisions. This makes it difficult to say that a concrete change happened in the community only because of your project. Therefore we propose to observe and document what else was happening on the community level at the same time as your project and then see if and how your project contributed to the change that you wanted to see.

When considering Community Impact, the indirect level is important to take into account. But, it is important to know that the indirect impact is very difficult to measure or even observe. Other

¹ This text is built on the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership publication "Desk Research on Indicators of Social Impact" by Severino et al. (2020)

influences might have affected that change too (outside of the project). Worth thinking about: does indirect impact happen more often to communities and organisations than individuals? So the three levels of individual, organisational and community are important to distinguish when considering indirect impact.

Intended vs. unintended

Intended effects include all changes that are expected and–planned by the learning mobility programme. They include the most common changes at several levels - from an individual, organisational to the community level - and all the effects that the programme organiser has planned in advance. For example, international volunteering may have intercultural learning in the sending and host community.

Unintended effects of a learning mobility are those that none of the planners counted on. For example, learning mobility can lead to the dismantling of the idealistic image some young people have of other nations and actually lead to a greater ethnic distance. When analysing the effects, it is important to recognise the unintended consequences, because if they are positive, then they should be taken into account, but if they are negative, then we should look for ways to exclude, minimize or address them.

Positive vs. negative

Experiences can be **positive** and their effects are usually planned. Intercultural learning, active participation, environmental activism, and other effects are just some of them. But there are also experiences that have **negative** consequences for the community. For example, an increasing number of learning mobility results in better skilled, more confident, autonomous young people who become more mobile therefore makes young people more likely to leave home communities forever or for a longer period of time (Oosterbeekw and Webbinkz, 2011, p. 348). This phenomenon, known as brain drain or capacity drain, leaves sending communities with lower performance and a changed demographic structure in the long run (because the traveller takes with them possible future marriages, births, jobs, contribution to the community etc.). Here it's important to keep in mind that the same process can be interpreted as positive and/or negative impact depending on your perspective, or if you are analysing the impact on the individual person or the impact on the community.

3. How do we experience community impact?

Community impact might be experienced differently, depending if the community is hosting new members, is sending members away or if a person comes back after the mobility more experienced and more skilled.

Different levels at which community impact can be felt

Connection to (and impact on) the community through non-formal and informal learning is an important part of the learning mobility of individuals.

In the [‘Making Waves’](#) SALTO publication on the impact of youth projects, **three types of impact** are described that can be achieved through youth projects:

1. “**Micro-level impact** focuses on the **project itself** – the participants of the project, young people in the youth organisations, the local community and partner organisations directly linked to the project.
2. **Meso-level impact** targets the **community more widely** – as opposed to the individual project; youth workers, mentors, multipliers, other organisations active in the youth sector, other stakeholders.
3. **Macro-level impact** is about **feeding policy developments** – at regional, national or European level, or at the level of the European programme, rather than at individual project level”

Some research shows (Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska, 2018) that many organisations focus on the micro level - most of the time exclusively on the participants of the project. The communities and meso and macro levels are often left on the side. The impact on the communities is often referred to as “**added impact**” - seen by some as possible ‘additional’ benefit, but not worth being the main focus.

More than personal change

Think more widely. It’s about encouraging the competence development of participants, and then seeing what they can change, do, effect with that new level of learning - in the local community where the project is happening, or afterwards when they return home. Due to their participation in the project, they changed themselves, and they made change happen. Think: ‘more than personal change!’.

Adding more dimensions to your impact assessment

The learning and personal development of participants is important. What young people gain is usually the main focus of impact assessment in a project. This is not a bad thing - the impact on the individual often translates into concrete actions and then into impact on the local or the societal level.

Ideally, the long-term effects of a mobility project in the local community lead to changes:

- in the individual;
- in the community;
- to all actors (even ‘informal ones’, like parents of participants, etc.);
- other systems (formal education structures, professional world, etc.).

4. How to know if the impact is there

(and when/how to measure it)

Decide what kind of change you want to see after your project. Think about what can be the best tool to measure this change. Use the same tool before, during and after the project. To see how the change is happening, include observation of the community in your project's monitoring strategy. The change that you will see in the answers before and after the project (or notes from the observation) will show the impact that your project had. (Practical Guide - Visual Slides)

Why measure?

'When designing policies, interventions, programmes, projects, activities and so forth, professionals need to know whether what is being done is likely to be of some help, and if so, to what extent. That extent may then be monitored to illustrate the impact. Without being naïve about the ways in which policy and practice interventions are actually shaped, we assert that sound evidence on and from young people offers a better base than ideology or intuition.' (Petkovic et al. 2019: 6)

How does this apply to my project, you ask? Let's say you are planning a Solidarity project with an aim to bring the community together for (by) building a playground. The aim is clear. The impact that you expect is that the members of that community will get to know each other, might build friendships, might get inspired by achieving something together, might start developing other activities, might join forces to solve other issues they are facing, etc.

This is a lot of 'might', so in order for you to know if it happened, you will need evidence. Real proof that the activities that you have implemented have worked in the way that you planned. And if they didn't, it is also important to know where the issues were, how to adjust the actions, plan other activities that would lead to the change that you wanted to see. Having evidence that your activities make a difference could also help you to prove the funding bodies that your activities are worth financing. It also gives a level of recognition to the participants, their friends and family and others in the community, that the project they were involved in was a positive thing.

What does measure mean?

To measure usually means to gather evidence which allows us to see if something has changed - for better or for worse. Or if, and to which extent, something complies with particular indicators. Impact can be defined through the **if... then...** type of statement. Although it seems an easy answer to this question in the social world, it is usually very difficult to isolate the effects or impact of some actions, especially multidimensional youth projects. In measuring the community impact of Learning Mobility, the difficult part is to assess if the change that happened in people's lives or perceptions is connected to the actual Learning Mobility or if it was influenced by other experiences. Therefore, we cannot say that "something has shifted in a community only because it was exposed to Learning Mobility" or "it was X that changed this situation or helped this person learn". What we can say, for example, is that "before the project the community members were reserved about foreigners; after the project they have expressed curiosity to speak more to people from other countries."

When to measure?

BEFORE: If you want to measure if something has changed, you need to see where it started from, where it ended, and mark the difference. That means that the thinking and preparation beforehand is very important. Without a baseline measurement, you can't measure any effect or change - only people's opinions. Talk to other stakeholders about what social change means to them - make sure you are measuring and reporting on the right things.

DURING: Daily or mid-term evaluations and reflections are important to measure progress as you go along, and to take time to consider what impact the project is having. Remember that these should include intended and non-intended changes - leave space for the open questions like 'what else is going on? What other effects are happening?'

AFTER: Directly after the project has finished, it's important to reflect back on what has happened. And a while afterwards, in follow-up measurement, the long-term impact can really start to be measured. Remember that any longer-term measuring for learning mobility projects would probably need to be done remotely/online, so consider who would that exclude?

Some more resources are available on the Quality! Mobility App, on how to [measure the effects](#) of your project, do an [impact evaluation](#) and how to decide [what](#) to evaluate.

What tools can we use to measure the community impact?

In order to measure impact you do not need to be a professional researcher. Anyone can do it - and you too :) You can construct the tools that would allow you to see the change in the community that is of particular interest for you, your organisation, your project. As someone smart once wrote - 'if you can describe it, you can measure it!'. Here is some help:

Quantitative research tools help to measure and assess the level to which something has changed. It can be done with:

- Questionnaires before and after the activity or a project;
- Measurements before and after the activity or project (for example assessing quantitative change - did more initiatives emerge after the project? In this example, you could assess the existing data on the number of activities that took place, for instance, in the year before the activity/project started and then the ones that took place a year after the activity/project ended. Another option can be to use rating scales, for example, to assess if the members of the community feel that the project/initiative improved a specific aspect. Think about the following statement: "This mobility project promoted the participation of local young people in volunteering". The scale to measure this could set as options 1 (strongly disagree); 2 (somewhat disagree); 3 (neither agree nor disagree); 4 (somewhat agree); and 5 (strongly agree). This would give you an idea on how the members of that community position themselves based on the different (scale) options, so you can quantify it and interpret it, namely to improve your future activity/projects or to replicate it with adaptations.

Qualitative tools can help us understand the experiences, processes, assigned meanings and look into community impact more in depth with:

- Case studies;
- Observation;
- Longitudinal studies with a group of young people and communities which are exposed to Learning Mobility;
- In-depth interviews before and after Learning Mobility;
- Focus group discussions with representatives of a community before and after the Learning Mobility;
- Any other creative research tools (photo, video, diaries, etc.) that you can do before and after the Learning Mobility to see if there is a change and what kind it is.

There is no ideal type of impact evaluation that can be appropriately applied to all contexts. In most cases, you will most likely need to combine both quantitative and qualitative tools. In any case, because community impact is such a broad and complex topic, it is important to consider a **methodology that is 'fit for purpose'**. Be specific about the particular aspect/dimension of

community impact that you wish to assess and measure. Do research before and after the project, then compare the results, according to the resources available and the size of your project. Don't get discouraged by massive longitudinal studies, sometimes the solution might be as simple as to collect interviews in the community before and after the project with the key points that you would need to assess. This might also be done remotely through online surveys, interviews or focus groups with representatives of the local community. Make sure you involve the community members and not only the people from your organisation to talk about the community impact.

To understand about youth research, and how it can be used in learning mobility projects, check "[Youth Research: The Essentials](#)". It should help with the usefulness, scope and purpose of research on youth, and how different people can make use of it.

What about things that aren't measurable?

Be aware that not all evaluation results are directly measurable - but this does not mean that they don't exist. What can you [do about it](#)? Make them more visible, highlight dimensions of the outcomes that can be difficult to quantify, describe evidence to show them and to analyse their complexity.

5. Community impact in European Solidarity Corps Projects

There are many ways for the different European Solidarity Corps project types to impact the community. Participants themselves are very often the primary target group of a European Solidarity Corps project - for them as individuals to learn, develop competences and experience new things. However, projects are not held in a vacuum. Simply having 'new' people staying in the community can have an effect. And the activities and projects, planned or unplanned, can affect the locality.

Possible Effects from all types and formats of European Solidarity Corps Projects

A good project is based on the need of the community, and once problems are identified, ideas can build on how to approach that need. The first step of having a **raised awareness** of locals of the specific chosen cause or need, means that already something has changed.

Many European Solidarity Corps projects have a specific aim to improve something **physically** in a community - a youth club, a playground, a community space, educating others etc. Some examples of this are: infrastructure can be improved - both existing, or something new; the local environment can be worked on, to become cleaner, more protected, or given a fresh lick of paint. Learning mobility projects can also have an effect on people's health (for participants, and non-participants), related to their physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being.

Part of many people's understanding of the concept of solidarity is standing with others and working with and for others to make a positive change in society. This can be shown in the effects of some types of solidarity actions in the community that have a longer-term **system change**. This can be a more sustainable change, aiming to change the cause, not just helping to deal with the effect (e.g. changing the local policy about garbage recycling, not just picking up plastic litter that is discarded). Working to adjust policies, procedures and processes with an aim for things to work differently in the future, preferably with more inclusion of others within the system or an increase in the services provided to a wider audience, can equalise disadvantages through the increase of social justice. Specific identified problems can have their resources increased - human, financial, materials, energies, etc. Increasing the sense of community cohesion is an effect in itself, which can lead to (and the impact can be shown through) an increase in the feeling of safety, for example. Strengthened and improved participation of young people means they can create change themselves through their actions, and that their voice can be heard through engagement with policy makers to make a change that reverberates on a wider meso level (or even meta level!) in the community.

The stronger connections and relationships between different actors and stakeholders in the community can lead to improved level of trust and win-win relationships of mutual benefit that come through an increase of **social capital**. This can be within the same group (bonding) or bridging to a different group of people.

The **participants** directly involved in a European Solidarity Corps project often have new experiences that challenge themselves out of their comfort zone, and help them learn and develop new knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. This competence development is the output of a project. What they do with this change in themselves - the change they make because they have changed, what the increase in competence affects - becomes the impact of the project. For example, further involvement in other activities, volunteering, organisations or projects after the European Solidarity Corps experience has finished, or later on an increased involvement in education, employment, training etc.

It's not just those that participate directly in a project that experience change. There are many **other members of the community** that can be affected by a European Solidarity Corps project too:

- people that connect directly to the participant as they take part in preparation activities - such as their family, parents, their friends, their peers at school, or others they are in contact

- through other activities (sport, music, organisations etc);
- staff at the applicant organisation that are involved in thinking through the project, and those that are not directly involved, but observe it or are affected by it;
- those who are involved or impact by the project - by the change that the project makes - which could be other NGOs involved as partners in the project, who are contributing something or helping make it happen somehow, by the suppliers/venues that are used by the project, or by the target audience of the project events/activities;
- people that are affected by the results of the project - those that use the new facilities that are built, or are affected by the output or outcome of a project;
- people that are aware of the project - who might see a poster or walk past a street party.

There are definitely more effects of European Solidarity Corps activities and projects. These above are just a few that could help you think of what to change for yours.

Elements for quality community impact

There are some transversal aspects of community impact that can improve its value. Here are a few to start building on and to spark ideas. You might think of more.

- Community impact of a European Solidarity Corps Project should be connected to the values of youth work (this differs in many places, but can include: voluntary involvement, centred around the engagement of the young person, working with respect to develop attitudes, skills, knowledge, behaviour and values, respecting difference and promoting participation). The project should also connect to the European values of respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.
- European Solidarity Corps projects elements must be based on an assessed and proven need in the community. The change that is made through the project must be something that needs to be changed in the first place. It might also be that other changes or impact is felt, that was unplanned. But the planned changes should reflect the original need of the project.
- [Research](#) was carried out by the SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre to find the common ground for the concept of 'Solidarity' (Bacliija Knoch and Nicodemi, 2020), asking practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and young people their opinion. Although no 'one' interpretation coalesced, a common ground was found of 4 main cornerstones and 7 supporting concepts. Projects related to the concept of Solidarity should therefore connect to: Inclusion, Human Rights, Active Citizenship and Empathy, as well as Social Justice, Strengthening communities, Responsibility, Equal Opportunities, Support, Active Participation and Volunteering.
- An inclusive approach is necessary for supporting young people with fewer opportunities. Community impact should reach outside the usual 'bubble', and allow for a wider effect to more people, including those that might not normally participate, or who need more support to be able to participate equally with others.
- Consideration should be given to the 'bonding' elements of the social capital of a community group (within the same group, building a stronger bond) and the 'bridging' elements - connecting outwards to other community group(s). "Following Putnam (1995, 2000) and Gittel and Vidal (1998), the bonding element (internal to a group) can be seen as exclusive, and the bridging element (reaching out to others) can be seen as inclusive."² Both these things can happen at the same time. Consider where the emphasis of social capital is for your project or process - within the same group, or bridging outwards to a different group? This can help improve the quality of your community impact.
- The change made through a project should be measured, against a baseline agreed on at the beginning, for both intended and non-intended consequences. Measure the planned objectives for your project - and also consider other effects (non-intended, unplanned, positive or negative). This is outlined in the Quality Framework for Learning Mobility (EPLM, 2018), principle 19.
- There are many levels that projects can impact - local, regional, national, European, global... It's important to consider, and frame, the level of impact. European Solidarity Corps projects

² Idem.

can have impact at all of these levels - or at more than one level at the same time.

- Impact and change should be aimed for in a long-term and sustainable way. Making the community impact something that has a wider impact (affecting as many people as possible), or a longer impact (e.g. on future generations) guarantees its durability and longevity.

Different examples of Community impact for different project types in the European Solidarity Corps

The different types of projects that can be funded by the European Solidarity Corps can have different types of impact on the community. Remember that all projects have a preparation, implementation and follow-up phase, and the impact can vary (or be expanded) for each of those. Impact of a project can be on a personal, organisational or community level, and sometimes focusing just on the community level can be a bit artificial, as often these levels are interdependent or interconnected.

Here are just some examples of how the different projects can change things on a community level (we are sure you can think of more):

Solidarity projects can have an impact in the community by:

The positive communal effect that the outcomes of the social action will have, as well as the process of the project benefiting the community from an increase of commitment, participation and active citizenship of the young people involved (and hopefully a reduction of any possible anti-social behaviour). It channels values, attitudes and behaviour into a positive direction. This brings European values and resources to the very local level.

The outcomes and impact of a solidarity project can raise the profile and visibility of an applicant organisation or group on the local or regional level. They can also expand the role, ethos and recognition of volunteering; improving cross-sectorial working and strengthening relationships between different actors in the community (eg. inter-generational connections) and thereby developing a wider eco-system of youth and community work and building social capital for the participant organisation(s) on the local/regional level.

Solidarity projects can reinforce communities of interest, or combined senses of identity around shared values or common objectives, and can increase community cohesion through social mixing of people with diverse identities.

Solidarity jobs and internships can have impact in the community by:

supporting the organisation or employer that is running the project. This project type increases the resources available, providing continuation after other (volunteering) funds are used thereby increasing sustainability and providing more support to the civil society sector. A job/internship project can increase the benefit that the organisation provides to the community, giving a longer-term effect to an individual project and increasing social capital on local and regional level. A job/internship can support a skills shortage in a sector or a place.

International, in-country and team volunteering can have an impact in the community by:

benefitting from the interculturality, such as increased competence in languages that a volunteer from abroad brings or sharing practice internationally/between communities. Having a different perspective, or someone with an alternative approach, can sometimes help a community reflect differently on their views and impressions around a need, highlighting strengths and weaknesses through the process. Hosting someone new in the community takes some understanding and adaptation, showing the positive impact on cultural/intercultural competence within communities.

The attitude of participation in social action projects in the community (which often the volunteers in European Solidarity Corps projects help initiate or deliver) can also positively impact the integration of those with fewer opportunities and promote social cohesion. Again, this is bringing European values such as inclusion down to local level. More (new) members of the community can be involved into volunteering activities and this can lead to better recognition of volunteering in the community.

The connection between volunteers and organisations in different communities can build social capital on the local, regional, national and international level and help communities to profit from shared resources/alternative funding sources, such as national or bilateral funding that is not available for all countries. It increases the sustainability of sending and hosting organisations and

therefore increases the long-term effects of the services and support they are able to give to the community where they are based. Volunteering funded through the European Solidarity Corps can also multiply the different communities to be impacted (sending, hosting, online communities etc).

Team volunteering has an obvious focus on team skills, especially for young people who are less privileged, and creates a 'community' in and of itself, with another layer of a sense of belonging: within the team itself (within the group).

On return back home after the experience, there is increased potential for different types of impact by the upskilled volunteer to a home community; the experiences and perspectives they bring back can lead to a development of global perspectives and raise development awareness in the wider community. Returning volunteers have the capability to impact their home (sending) community by shaping others' attitudes, changing mindsets, and bringing in alternative perspectives that were learned during their mobility project in a different community.

These are just some of the possibilities for specific European Solidarity Corps activities and their impact on the community. It should be noted that analysing the community impact a European Programme can have is a ripe area for research, mapping, exploring and measuring in itself - but outside of the scope of this introductory Practical Guide right now!

6. Good practices on learning mobility for more and stronger community impact

For more practical tips when organising learning mobility projects, check out www.qualitymobilty.app.

Here below are a few ideas from a few different perspectives. We hope they inspire your thinking, and get you to look at community impact differently. We hope you can build on them, and create even more ideas and ways to connect learning mobility projects (and all the processes before and after the activity) more to the community. It's organised in a HOW-WHAT-WHO logic. Ways how to prepare yourselves and your project to increase and improve community impact, what different practical ways you can do during the project, and who could be involved.

How to increase community impact?

Build quality connection to others

Involve host communities in your project implementation and facilitate **mutual learning** between participants and locals. This can be achieved by **supporting the initiatives** of other local groups and organisations and by increasing your **social capital**: new connections, networks and resources. Make use of the **public spaces** available and widen your reach by engaging local (young) people in some **programme activities**, always ensuring a **balance** between participants and locals. Be mindful of the **uniqueness** of hosting your project in that specific community and reflect and debrief with young people on how to **transfer** lessons learned into their own personal context when back home in their sending community. For local European Solidarity Projects, the young people are part of the community where the project happens - but can still reach out wider to others as part of the project, and afterwards.

Balance the competence in the project team

Make sure the staff member is ready and competent enough to **guide and mentor young people** to get involved in the project, fostering their **readiness to interact locally**. A good approach is to **empower young people's emotional and social competences** (self-esteem, resilience, ...).

Other useful tips: the staff should have a good level of **knowledge about** the local area/issues/needs/people and appropriate access to it; they should have resources to incorporate these needs into a programme; make sure that you have the right (balance of) **competence and resources** in the staff team; also, make sure to have a diverse team composition taking gender, inclusion aspects, age, etc into consideration.

Prepare participants

Start from the clear motivation and expectations of young people and recognise their ideas and views regarding the interactions with the local community. Prepare the group for the interactions: what to do or not to do, intercultural preparation, how to deal with local resources, surroundings, etc.

Cooperate with other sectors

First, **brainstorm** all the contacts who could be interested or affected by your project. You can then **reach out to other organisations** to inform them about the project and invite them to be connected to it. Your project will have more community impact if you **work together** with these other actors. Think: who can contribute through **common action** as part of your project? How can you find a **win-win** for this interaction, so both sides gain from being connected? Think about: **exchanging good practices** with each other, understanding what **social change means** for them, sharing the **needs assessment** of targeted groups and **involving** them at all times in your project's milestones (briefing, preparing, planning, implementing, follow-up and in the main decision-making processes). Create social media groups (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) not only for the participants in the learning mobility

but including other stakeholders as well. Think how to build **meaningful relationships** with people that have a specific role in the project - don't take their contribution for granted as a one-off. This will help build a more sustainable **social capital** for you and your organisation. Do intercultural and language preparation for everyone that might need it.

Work on inclusion

Include more young people who do not usually participate in learning mobility projects. Reach wider into the community to find them. Have someone directly activating and supporting the young people with fewer opportunities, with a problem-solving attitude to make sure that all who want to can participate. Have a way to collect everyone's **needs**, and enough resources to provide for those; make sure **equality is a value** throughout the project.

Evaluation

You need to assess **how and if impact is there**. We showed you some ways to measure this in this Practical Guide. You could include the participants, organisations, contributing partners and locals in the process of reflecting on the impact of the learning mobility on them and their community. This is called **participatory research**. Consider also **longer-term** evaluation (more than a couple of weeks after the event), so remember to collect people's contact data (but be careful of GDPR)! Evaluation isn't something to think about after a project - it should be planned from the **beginning as an integral part**.

Promote common achievements

It is important to promote (and celebrate!) the **synergies and common achievements** that you create with the local community. Why not organise **public presentations** of experiences/results or results through a **round table or forum** and to **involve experts** on the topic, or **share the results or final product** of your project with them?

Respect the community

It is important that your project is not a **'bubble'** and that you fully respect the community. It is difficult to ensure positive community impact otherwise. You need to: understand the **community concerns and priorities** and support **collective** community decision-making processes; build on the existing traditional social practices of community cooperation (**don't impose solutions**); use a community-based approach, allowing the community to **express its needs and agency** regarding their own empowerment. The key is to be mindful, creative and humble and keep to the **Do No Harm** principle (i.e. not to exacerbate discrimination, stigmatisation or abuse of any kind).

Reintegration

(Positive) community impact in the host community where the project takes place is wonderful, but you can also expand it to reflect on participants and on the community they come from (sending community), and that is why community impact has so much potential. When someone returns home from a mobility project, plan with them how they will multiply their learning and what ideas they have for further change?

On an organisational level there can be learning and change too - how will the experience, new opportunities and lessons learned affect the daily offers and activities of both the hosting and sending organisations?

Sending community

The sending community has assets and strengths that should be identified and mobilised before, during and after the learning mobility project. The project can increase the sending organisation's capacity and resources too, and affect future decisions and actions it takes.

This will also allow you to improve its openness and resilience, through lessons learned.

Very important! Remember that there are no "size fits all" solutions, your community has its own identity, priorities, resources. Bring the added value of different communities together, but remember to be flexible and open to be able to maximise positive impact.

What can you do practically?

Do your project activities in/with the community

To have a positive impact on the community, think how to fully embrace it and engage with it. Some **practical ideas** that you can pick up on are: treasure hunts, city tours, charity work, interviews with locals, street art and other artistic initiatives, flash mobs, local wildlife conservation activities, sports events, cooking parties, street feasts, NGO markets or festivals, visits to young entrepreneurs, welcome parties with locals, local experts/associations on different topics in some projects activities, workshops in schools, local video or TV, etc... (the sky's the limit!)

Do activities with others outside the structured learning programme

Programme activities are important, yes, but non-programme activities are also a good way to maximise community impact. Consider organising **homestays** for participants, meetings with host families, **meetings for the wider family and friends** of the host participants, an intergenerational **lunch or dinner with locals** in a social café or bar. Also, **public (street) parties** are great initiatives.

Multiplier events

Not everyone that can benefit from the impact of your project can effectively participate (eg. time, scope, geographical, financial constraints). Prioritise organising multiplier events that will reach a **wider audience**. Some **ideas that you can elaborate from** are: to invite friends, family, neighbours, politicians, journalists, experts, school teachers, religious leaders, other NGOs.. to organise a longer time exhibitions of your project in community venues (library, town hall, community centres, local notice board, ...)

Who else can you include from the community?

Different people on different levels

No learning mobility project is an island so think how to connect on different levels with others.

Consider inviting **local politicians and stakeholders** to the project and suggest that they welcome your group in the Town Hall. Be careful not to encourage tokenism though - they should be involved before, during and after the project in a specific way or role. Other ideas are to invite **potential employers** to the final evaluation to see the skills learned by the group or to join other organisations with a similar mandate to yours but with different audiences, to widen your reach.

Connecting with other organisations can also result in **skills swaps**, so you can both benefit from different sets of expertise. Libraries, museums, schools and other NGOs are excellent partners which can support you to transmit project outcomes to the broader community (family, friends, teachers, etc...).

Think about the participants and their **circles of contact** - school, friends, hobbies etc. Maybe there are connections that can be made there?

Local participants that **participated in previous** or different projects surely have a lot to share, why not engage them in your current project?

Maximising positive impact is the goal - prioritise positive communication with different people with different backgrounds and mentalities to give better integration into the host environment, and help local people benefit from the intercultural learning experience.

And for some long-term impact? Leave something behind that will remind the community of your project/initiative - a memorial plaque? A tree planted? Artwork in a public space?

Other European Solidarity Corps potential applicants

Useful tip! Why not connect to organisations who could also be applicants to European Solidarity Corps, to work together as part of the same bigger community linking not only locally, but potentially connecting them to others internationally too, such as:

Informal groups of young people, church, mosque, chapel, synagogue, sports groups, school, scouts,

voluntary organisations, language school, travel agency, health systems (for young people who need extra support before or after the learning mobility), library, museums, peer groups in general...It can also be organisations working with the municipality, university, online community, etc.

Support local organisations/social enterprises and businesses







An easy way to ensure support for key players in your community are to **consciously choose local organisations/social enterprises** for food, transport, materials, venues, services; to eat at small local restaurants or cafes; to use your grant to rent a venue that supports social/ educational work in the community (university, association, social enterprise or innovation hub, youth lab, etc...) and natural, cultural and sports centres for some programme activities.















7. More resources about community impact

What other tools and resources about the social impact of learning mobility are there?

The following table was compiled through the desk research to visualise the different tools and resources there are related to social impact. It is an excerpt from a much longer table which also includes civic engagement, quality, competence and youth policy. This section only focuses on 'social impact' itself. It does include links to the other pillars that were analysed in the desk research.

The tools and resources are hyperlinked so you can use this list as a resource. You can see that there is a lot to find under 'individual and organisational' level, but not so much on the community level. The gaps are self-evident:

Where to find some tools and resources?	Which type of tool/resource?						Connection to the EPLM key pillars?			
	Tool	Initiative	Academic	Official document	Web resource	News	Civic Engagement	Quality	Competences	Youth Policy and LM
Social impact of volunteer activity abroad							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕
Impact of mobility on the entrepreneurial skills							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Importance of learning mobility for future acceptance of diverse living							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Positive impact on education, career and social engagement of learning mobility							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Impact of study abroad experiences on living together in diverse societies							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Impact of mobility programmes on social inequity							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕

Positive effect of volunteer mobility on altruistic attitudes							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕
Development of EU mobility programmes to reach new groups							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕
Description of social impact and methods							⊖	⊕	⊖	⊖
Tools and resources in connection to social impact assessment							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
How to assess impact of projects							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Influence of low/medium season mobility on employment							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Mobility as tool to empower disadvantaged youth							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Impact of workcamps on volunteers and the community							⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖
Social impact of learning mobility on intercultural competences and employment							⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖

An invitation

Make community impact more down-to-Earth, relate it more directly to practice, with activities or provocative questions such as:

1. Define social impact in 3 words.
2. Define community in 1 word.
3. Go back to your favourite learning mobility experience. What were the 3 key things that you brought back to your community? What were the 3 key things that you wished that you would bring back to your community, but you did not?
4. Do you see the community that you belong to in the same way as the community as you go to? Why?
5. What do you think is the social impact of previous learning mobility projects/programmes that individuals (including you) took part on in responding to the challenges brought by COVID-19?
6. Should the social impact of learning mobility in communities be assessed somehow? What are the key 3 reasons why it should/should not?
7. A book that makes you think about social impact.
8. A song that makes you think about community.

Tools, Publications and more information on Community Impact

Tools

These are the tools that can be used by practitioners and explored by policy makers in order to understand the impact on the individuals and the social impact better and as a result pay greater attention to it in the work that is being done.

- **Maximise Your Impact: a Guide for Social Entrepreneurs.** The tool takes you step by step through what you want to change and how to measure it. How to engage with stakeholders, collect data and design things to maximise impact: <https://socialvalueint.org/social-value/standards-and-guidance/maximise-your-impact-a-guide-for-social-entrepreneurs/>
- **Impact+ Exercise** is a guidance to a workshop on measuring impact (with supporting video and tools to use) from the UK National Agency: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/impact-and-evaluation>

Helpful web pages related to evaluation and social impact

- **BetterEvaluation platform** includes the full range of monitoring and evaluation activities, frameworks, and systems, and includes evaluations of a project, program, policy, product, network, organisation, or strategy. Here you can find information on:
 - participatory evaluation: www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/participatory_evaluation
 - impact evaluation: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/impact_evaluation
 - developing programme theory: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/rainbow_framework/define/develop_programme_theory
- **Participative methods for monitoring and evaluation**
www.participatorymethods.org/resources/themes/monitoring-and-evaluation-37

Publications developed by SALTO, NAs or EPLM for international youth work projects

- **Making Waves - more impact with your projects.** A publication available in several languages on how to increase the impact that your project will/might have: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionpublications/makingwaves/>
- **Handbook on Quality in Learning Mobility** and **Q! App** on Quality in Learning Mobility are full of ideas to improve your project and the community impact of it:
 - Evaluation resources: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/139>
 - What to evaluate: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/140>
 - Measure the effects: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/181>
 - Impact evaluation: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/141>
 - Plan for more impact: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/89>
 - Be ready for the unexpected: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/62>
 - Set primary and secondary target groups: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/2>
 - Make links to hosting environment: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/resources/search/144>

- **T-kit on Educational Evaluation in youth work**, helping youth workers improve their competence in the theory and practice of evaluation: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-10-educational-evaluation-in-youth-work>
- **Cherry on the cake** is a handbook that explores all phases of Youth Exchanges and provides insights on what young people can learn in each phase, and how youth workers and youth leaders can facilitate the learning process: www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/cherry-on-the-cake/
- Article in the Coyote Magazine no. 24, May 2016 by Soren Kristensen on the **Effects of mobility and how to measure them**: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262328/02.pdf>
- **Youth work quality systems and frameworks in the European Union**: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/2017/improving-youth-work-your-guide-quality-development_en
- **Inspiring Quality Youth Work**: <http://intercityyouth.eu/iq-youth-work/>
- **Youth research: The Essentials**: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/research-on-youth>

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