myESNcareer: Validation of Competences

The main aim of the project is to develop a validation process based on collected hard data to better understand and measure the development of our volunteers to be able to validate their competences to make them more employable and competitive on a labor market. The process started with desk research and revision of prior research, tools and documents done in and outside ESN - we have researched and mapped the validation initiatives, created an HR map, created a competence inventory based on KSA framework accompanied by performance indicators, , developed and pilot-tested the validation process, and gradually started to developed a validation service for the volunteers based on four validation phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

Our mission is enrichment of society through international students.

Rationale and target groups

Besides helping exchange students, meeting other young people from all over the world and creating bonds, learning is an incredibly valuable aspect of volunteering in ESN.

Building a space and creating opportunities for our volunteers to learn is a way of investing into the sustainability of our organisation, as well as developing, motivating and retaining volunteers. Learning is one of the main motivating factors for our volunteers to stay involved and become more engaged in ESN - their experiences in ESN contribute to their employability and can make them stand out in an ocean of job seekers in a very competitive job market. In ESN, volunteers can acquire and develop new competences, improve existing ones, take on different tasks and responsibilities and use different opportunities for their personal and professional development. Therefore, the main aim of the validation process is to have a structured learning process for our volunteers so we can track the competences they acquire and/or develop in ESN to be able to validate them in the organisation in order to make our volunteers more employable and competitive on a labour market.

Results and Outcomes

In order to make the process applicable for 15,000 volunteers across 42 national and 500+ local organisations, ESN is developing a validation service that would be accessible to the volunteers. This service would be called myESNcareer service and would be coordinated by a pool of members specifically trained to coordinate the validation process for the volunteers. This way, ESN can offer employability-related services to the wider network and to the volunteers who aren't ready to take part in the myESNcareer service. This type of a process and this service specifically can improve motivation and retention of volunteers and it can also be used for recruitment and knowledge retention. Our aim is to make the volunteers more aware of their development in real time to help them have a better volunteering and learning experience inside of the organisation, as well as to make sure that they are capable of explaining their ESN-related experiences when applying for other learning opportunities so that they would have an extra edge in comparison to the other candidates.

Objectives and innovation

The main milestones were: desk research (internal and external sources), creating an HR map for Erasmus Student Network (roles in ESN and in how many work fields can they be classified in), creating a competence inventory (development of knowledge, skills and attitudes and performance indicators for 80+ competences), designing competence frameworks (education framework, HR framework, finance and partnerships framework, communication framework, IT framework, and projects and events framework), designing the validation process, conducting a focus group and pilot-testing the validation process for the volunteers of ESN International.

Activities

ESN collected and analysed the researches, projects and initiatives carried out by various stakeholders and organisations, and analysed the practices and initiatives by our local and national organisations, created the HR map and mapped the leadership positions and analysed the skills acquisition questionnaire, focusing on positions and fields of work. Afterwards, we opened the call for the focus group on the validation of volunteer work where local and national organisations could apply for participation. In the end, 29 local and 7 national organisations from Italy, Hungary, Spain, France, Bulgaria, United Kingdom, Portugal, Serbia, Romania, Greece, Croatia, Sweden, Norway and Moldova have volunteered to take part in the focus group. We have developed a competency framework and later on, competency inventory. We have identified and developed the competences based on the position we have in ESN, tasks that volunteers carry out and skills they have acquired on their positions. For the documentation and assessment phases, we have designed a self-assessment survey, a performance tracking document, learning journal and portfolio templates for different fields of work, as well as a portfolio manual in order to highlight the benefits and the importance of documenting and keeping track of the progress.

Perspectives

The work done so far and the next steps will help ESN to work on the advocacy framework and rejoin the efforts in regards to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, tackle the connection between the competence-oriented learning in ESN and employability of volunteers, tackle the use of the data collected when it comes to the volunteer development for the recruitment needs and use the outcomes of the process for the creation of the international HR strategy. To have 15 000 volunteers assess and record their development based on the opportunities they were offered and took in ESN provides a solid foundation for further research and advocacy when it comes to the correlation between volunteer activities and competence acquisition, as well as recognition of non-formal and informal learning.