



MENTORING AND COACHING

WITHIN THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

*Common practices
under research*

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Introductions

The context of this research

This research provides a closer look at the current mentoring and coaching practices within the European Solidarity Corps programme. The research is part of the strategic initiative “Mentoring under construction”, initiated by the SALTO European Solidarity Corps together with the Romanian National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps in 2020. The initiative aims to support the development of quality in mentoring practices, as well as build an international community of mentors and coaches involved in the European Solidarity Corps programme.

The results of the research should provide better insights into the current concepts, practices, challenges, and needs concerning mentoring in Volunteering projects¹ and coaching in Solidarity projects². Ultimately, the research results should inform and inspire further actions by the relevant stakeholders, such as European Solidarity Corps National Agencies, SALTO Resource Centres and the organisations involved in the Programme. The research has been conducted by a team of three international experts with a long-standing history in the field of volunteering, coaching, and mentoring. They have been supported by SALTO European Solidarity Corps and National Agencies from Romania, Austria and France.

Aims and objectives

The main aim of the research was to explore the current realities of mentoring in Volunteering projects and coaching in Solidarity projects within the European Solidarity Corps programme. More specifically, the research has focused on:

- Exploring and deepening the current understanding of mentoring and coaching in the European Solidarity Corps programme
- Examining the current mentoring and coaching practices and the existing models of engaging mentors and coaches
- Identifying the main challenges and needs for further development of mentoring and coaching
- Mapping the existing resources and potential new resources to be developed, adapted, or transferred from other fields
- Providing recommendations and proposing measures for better understanding and quality development of mentoring and coaching in European Solidarity Corps

¹ Volunteering projects offer opportunities for young people to take part in solidarity activities contributing to the daily work of participating organisations, to the ultimate benefit of the communities within which the activities are carried out. Volunteering is a full-time unpaid activity that has a duration of up to 12 months. They can be realised as individual volunteering or volunteering in teams. (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2023)

² A Solidarity Project is a non-profit solidarity activity initiated, developed and implemented by young people themselves for a period from 2 to 12 months. It gives a group of minimum five young persons the chance to express solidarity by taking responsibility and committing themselves to bring positive change in their local community. (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2023)

Timeframe and methodology

This **exploratory research** has been conducted in the period from **June – December 2022**.

It has included:

- Desk research on the concepts of mentoring and coaching within the European Solidarity Corps and beyond, including the fields of business and other international volunteering programmes
- Two extensive online surveys, one for mentoring and one for coaching practices
- Six focus groups with representatives of mentors, coaches, trainers, and European Solidarity Corps National Agencies
- Desk research of the existing resources for mentoring and coaching within the Programme

Target groups and the research sample

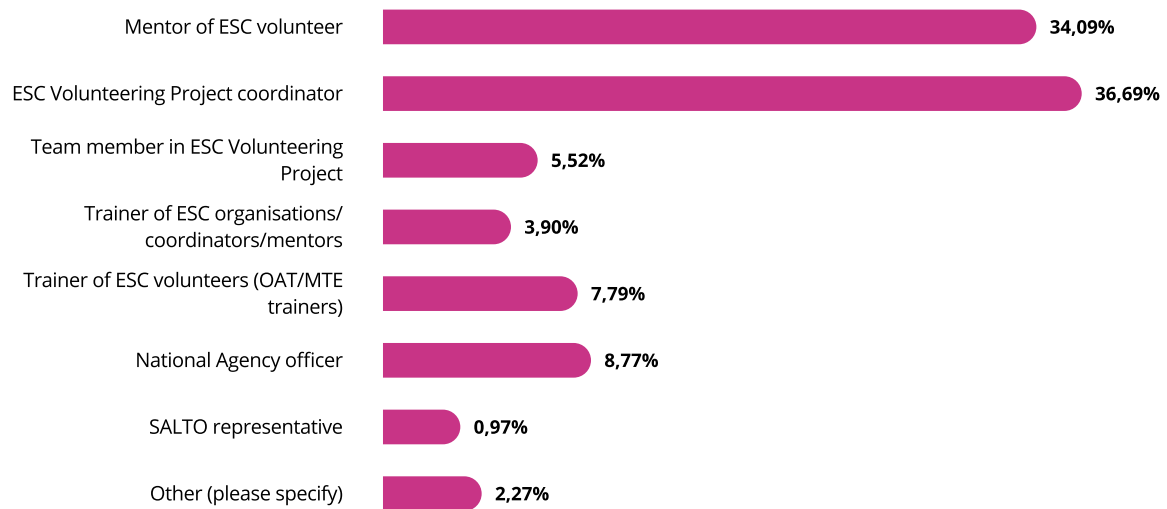
The research has targeted all key stakeholders in the community of practice around mentoring and coaching within the European Solidarity Corps, namely: mentors, coaches, project coordinators, team members, trainers, National Agencies and SALTO resource centres. The mentoring survey has been answered by **308 respondents** and the coaching one by **100 respondents**. The focus groups included 6 mentors, 5 coaches, 6 trainers, 7 organisation representatives and 5 National Agency representatives. Some focus groups have been held online and others have been conducted during the SoliDARE event in September 2022 in Romania.

Mentoring survey sample

In the mentoring survey, the majority of the sample has been represented by 105 mentors (34.09%) and 113 project coordinators (36.69%). This is followed by 36 trainers (11.69%) and 27 National Agency representatives (8.77%). The survey respondents are coming from 41 countries, including both Programme countries and the partner regions. The largest country-specific groups of survey respondents were coming from France, Romania, Turkey, and followed by Croatia, Bulgaria, Poland and Belgium.

The majority of the survey respondents (56.17%) come from the age group between 31-49 years of age. The majority of the respondents (50.32%) have been involved for 5+ years in European Solidarity Corps (including previous involvement in European Voluntary Service). There were only 12.01% of respondents with less than one year of involvement in the Programme.

Which role describes best your connection to the European Solidarity Corps?



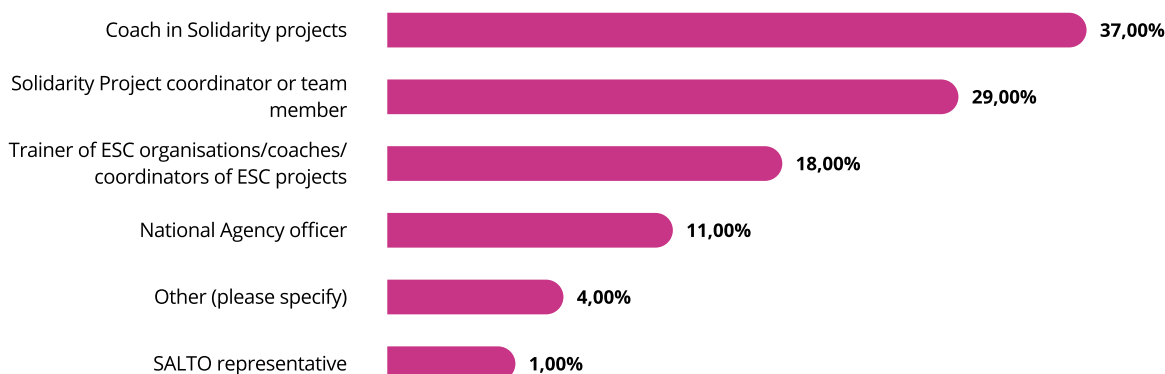
In the mentoring sample, amongst the representatives of the organisations involved in the Programme, almost 70% of them are engaged as Host Organisations³, followed by 54.32% of Lead Organisations and 44.44% of Support Organisations (for more information about the sample see Annex 1 of this report).

Coaching survey sample

Although in total the coaching survey had fewer respondents (which is quite understandable compared the volume of Volunteering projects vs. Solidarity projects), the distribution across the target groups follows a similar pattern. As shown in the graph below, the majority of the target group in the survey has included 37 coaches (37.00%) and 29 project coordinators (29.00%), which is followed by 18 trainers and 11 National Agency representatives. The survey respondents are based in 24 countries, with the largest representations from Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria, Croatia and France. 36% of the respondents have been involved in Solidarity projects for 2-4 years and 25% for 1-2 years. 27% of respondents claim to have the relevant experience for less than a year. Interestingly, on a separate question, 32% said 'yes' that they have been involved in the former Youth Initiatives action that existed before 2013. (For more information about the sample see Annex 2 of this report).

³ The current concept of Volunteering projects within the European Solidarity Corps requires 3 types of organisational involvement: Lead organisations that ensure effective coordination of the project in cooperation with all other participating, Hosting organisations which cover the full range of activities related to hosting a European Solidarity Corps volunteer and Support organisations who are responsible for supporting, preparing and/or training volunteers before departure. (for more information about these roles, see 'European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide' that is annually updated)

Which role describes best your connection to Solidarity projects in the European Solidarity Corps?



Following these characteristics of the two survey samples (that have been additionally boosted by the focus group participants), it is possible to state that the research has managed to ensure a good level of geographical spread, as well as the representation of all role-specific perspectives. In addition to that, the high level of experience with the programme, both with volunteering and solidarity projects, present in the sample can provide a good basis for relevant insights about the current mentoring and coaching practices and needs for their development.

Presentation of the results in the report

The results and insights from the research are presented in the following order:

The report starts with the outcomes of the **Desk research on concepts of mentoring and coaching**. This section starts by looking at the larger field, beyond the European Solidarity Corps. First, it provides an overview of the dominant understandings of mentoring and coaching in the field of business and international volunteering programmes, like Peace Corps or UN Volunteering. Then, it follows the exploration of the current concepts of mentoring and coaching within the European Solidarity Corps. It covers both the official programme documents, as well as numerous sources developed within the community of practice over the years.

The second section of the report presents the **results and insights about mentoring in Volunteering projects**, merging the results of the mentoring survey and the focus groups. It addresses the core research issues like Understanding mentoring, Mentoring in practice, the Contribution of mentoring to the project's impact, Quality in mentoring, Mentor competences, Inclusion through mentoring; reinforced mentorship, Working with mentors: challenges, recruiting and sustaining mentors and Needs for further development and support measures needed

The third section of the report presents the **results and insights about coaching in Solidarity projects**, merging the results of the coaching survey and the focus groups. It covers topics like Understanding coaching in ESC, Coaching in practice, Contribution of coaching to the project's impact, Quality in coaching, Coach competences, Inclusion through coaching; working with young people with fewer opportunities, Working with coaches: challenges, recruiting and sustaining coaches and Needs for further development and support measures needed

The fourth section of the report presents the **results of the mapping of the existing resources for mentoring and coaching**. This section of the written report is amended with a digital folder with a collection of mentoring and coaching resources

The final chapter of the report presents the **recommendations and proposals for further actions for mentoring and coaching development**. The recommendations are based on the identified needs and challenges and are addressing all key stakeholders.

In addition, several **annexes** provide more detailed information about the target groups and some interesting comparisons between mentoring and coaching in European Solidarity Corps



SECTION 1



***Desk research: Mentoring
and coaching in the European
Solidarity Corps ... and beyond.***

A. Mentoring and coaching – the past and the present

Mentoring as a practice of personal development support has a long history. It can be traced back to Ancient Greece. The word 'mentor' originates from the character Mentor from the renowned myth about Odysseus. In the story, Odysseus asks his teacher Mentor to take care of his son Telemachus, while he goes out to battle in the Trojan War. In the same myth, the Goddess of Wisdom Athena, disguised as Mentor, follows Telemachus in his search for his father. As pointed out by David Clutterbuck, the Goddess Athena acted as a very first mentor. In her approach, she would've left her 'mentees' to have their experience first and only afterwards engage them in a dialogue to learn from it.

Helping people learn better through dialogue remains one of the cornerstones of effective mentoring. Today, mentoring as a practice is present in many areas, such as academic studies, business, youth work and volunteering.

On the other hand, **coaching** is not as old as mentoring. The word 'coach' has been used for sports coaches for a long time, but the turning point in defining what is considered coaching today was the work of Tim Gallwey with tennis players in the '70s of the XX century. While observing the tennis players on the court, Tim Gallwey realised that they were playing two 'games' at the same time. In his work with them, he has shown how supporting tennis players in mastering their minds and transforming their thoughts during the play (what he called 'the inner game') can help them increase their performance on the court (i.e., in the 'the outer game'). Subsequently, a similar approach has been transferred from the sports field to the business leaders' coaching. Ever since working on the level of beliefs and mindsets has remained one of the core areas where coaches support their clients.

According to the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), there has been an exponential increase in the number of professional coaches worldwide in the last decade. Globally, it is estimated that there were approximately 71,000 coach practitioners in 2019, an increase of 33% on the 2015 estimate. Growth was especially strong in the emerging regions of Latin America and the Caribbean (+174%) and Eastern Europe (+40%). (2020 ICF Global Coaching Study). A very similar growth rate has been noticed both in the spheres of business coaching and life coaching.

In the context of **European youth programmes**, mentoring has been introduced as an integral part of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) that started as a pilot action in 1996. The notion of mentoring in EVS has been evolving in the subsequent years (1996-2017), following the general evolution of the youth programmes and the EVS, specifically. In its final stage, mentoring in EVS referred to personal, intercultural and learning support to international volunteers, participating in the voluntary service, either individually or as part of a group of volunteers. Mentoring in European youth programmes is also practised in the context of long-term training courses for trainers and youth workers¹, where it refers to additional individual support to training participants for enhancing their competence development.

¹ A good example of this kind of mentoring practice is included in the year-long Training of Trainers (ToT) curriculum that has been regularly offered since 1999 and in more recent YOCOMO training courses for youth workers, based on the ETS competence model for youth workers. For more information: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainercompetencedevelopment/tot/> and <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/tc-rc-nanetworktcs/yocomo/residential/>

The coaching has been introduced as part of the action called 'Youth Initiatives' that has been in place from 2000-2013 as part of the YOUTH programme (2000-2006) and Youth in Action Programme (2007-2013), where the role of the coach was to support and guide a group of young people in the realisation of their project idea, thus enhancing their active participation and practising active citizenship within their local community.

Since 2017, mentoring and coaching are to be found within the newly established programme called **European Solidarity Corps**. Mentoring support is built in the international Volunteering projects, while coaching is part of the Solidarity projects.

Since the main aim of this research is to explore the current understanding of these two types of support roles and how they are practised within the European Solidarity Corps, our first step in the journey was to identify what is already there. This has been done by conducting **desk research on existing definitions and approaches** within the Programme and beyond the youth field, especially in the field of business where these practices are particularly developed. In addition to that, the desk research brings insights from other volunteering programmes, specifically UN volunteering and Peace Corps. Taking a broader look at mentoring and coaching may provide new perspectives on how they are currently understood and approached within the European Solidarity Corps. It may also open the doorway for inspiration and transfer of the 'know-how' from these fields to stimulate their development in the Programme.



B. Mentoring and coaching in the business context

Coach asks. Mentor guides.

This would be the simplest way to explain the difference between coaching and mentoring in business. However, the reality is not that stereotypical; there are many nuances and different understandings of these two fields of support practices.

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) are the most influential professional bodies that are leading these debates in the field of business coaching. These two largest recognition bodies have been working on providing coaching qualifications, setting professional ethical standards and defining competencies of the professional practice. Although they have a similar role, their approach to coaching and mentoring slightly differs.

International Coaching Federation (ICF)

According to ICF, coaching is defined as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential.”



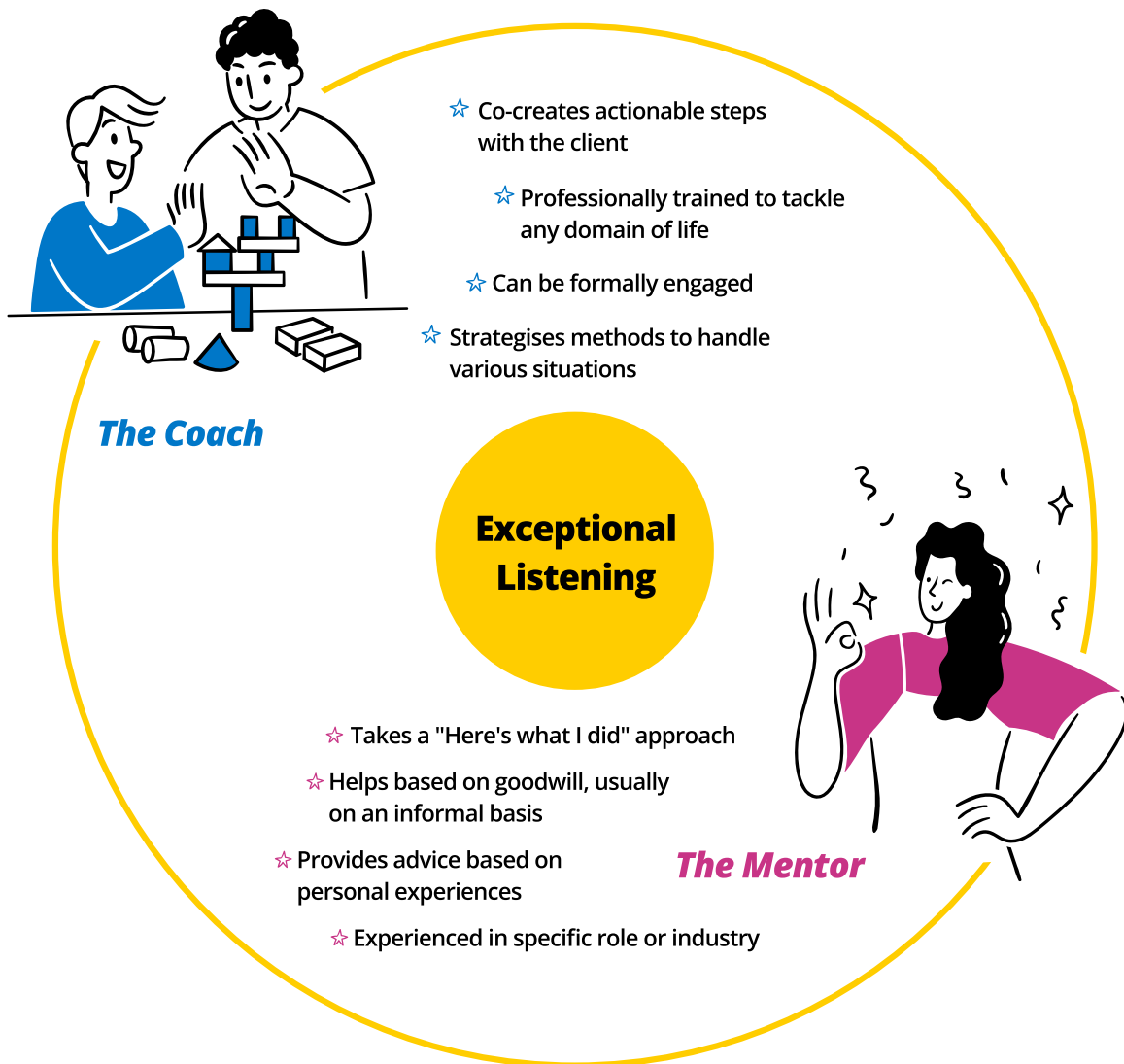
Coaching is defined as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential.”

International Coaching Federation (ICF)

At the same time, **mentoring** is seen as a process where a mentor is an expert who provides wisdom and guidance based on their own experience.² A mentor is usually a senior expert in a professional field or a more experienced colleague in a job role who is supporting a junior colleague in developing the necessary knowledge and skills for the role.

² Source: <https://coachingfederation.org/faqs>

The Coach vs The Mentor



Author unknown, Source: LinkedIn

This is a common distinction between coaching and mentoring in business. **Coaching is understood as non-directive support, where the coach uses questions as the main tools in the process, while mentoring is often seen as a more directive, transfer of know-how, from a more experienced colleague to a less experienced one.** Some coaching schools would also emphasise that coaching is more future-oriented than mentoring and it is not only about performance, but also about realising one's potential.

In recent years, in the field of business and executive coaching, we can identify **two major shifts**: from pure performance coaching towards working with the potential and from coaching that focuses on the individual only towards coaching that takes the whole system into account. At the same time, some authors argue that in order to deliver value to all levels of the organisation, there is a need to combine various coaching approaches (Hawkins, 2020).

„Coaching is unlocking people’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.“

Sir John Whitmore, Performance coaching

„Coaching is discovering one’s own potential, building awareness and empowering choice. It inspires people to find answers to their most important questions.“

L. Whitworth, K. Kimsey-House, Co-active coaching

“Systemic coaching is the coaching that prioritises the system and is informed by an understanding of the organising principles and deep patterns consistently observed in them“.

John Whittington, Systemic coaching

Finally, it is also widespread to distinguish **coaching as a professional practice** done by internal or external coaches and **coaching as a leadership style**, done by managers themselves in day-to-day relations with their employees.

Nevertheless, in its understanding of quality coaching, ICF underlines the following **competencies** professional coaches should demonstrate in their work³:

- | Demonstrates Ethical Practice
- | Embodies a Coaching Mindset
- | Establishes and Maintains Agreements
- | Cultivates Trust and Safety

³ Source: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies>

- | Maintains Presence
- | Listens Actively
- | Evokes Awareness
- | Facilitates Client Growth

(The updated ICF Core Competencies, November 2019)

European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)

The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) does not make such a sharp distinction between coaching and mentoring as ICF does. The EMCC rather sees them as one continuum of coaching and mentoring practices.



While revising their definition, EMCC recognised that **coaching and mentoring share many of the same characteristics**, lying along a structured conversational continuum.

Coaching & Mentoring:

"It is a professionally guided process that inspires clients to maximise their personal and professional potential. It is a structured, purposeful and transformational process, helping clients to see and test alternative ways for improvement of competence, decision making and enhancement of quality of life. Coach and Mentor and client work together in a partnering relationship on strictly confidential terms. In this relationship, clients are experts on the content & decision-making level; the coach & mentor is an expert in professionally guiding the process."

The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)

Within the EMCC, there is a prevailing opinion that both **coaching and mentoring ought to be non-directive (and are based on coaching skills), but that a difference arises in the level of relevant knowledge and willingness to contextualise and share this expertise.**

David Clutterbuck, one of the founders of EMCC, argues that mentoring is not about using own experiences to provide advice, but rather using them to provide context (Clutterbuck 2018). In his words *"neither coaching nor mentoring is telling people what to do, rather they are about helping them examine their actions in the light of their intentions"*. They are both helping people with the quality of their thinking. Clutterbuck argues that mentoring can be seen as "coaching plus"; where more insightful questions

come from a better understanding of the client's world.⁴ A mentor is a person who has been in that place already. However, in other words, what a mentor brings into the conversation is the context, not the advice. There is not so much difference in what coaches and mentors do, except that the mentors have a larger reservoir of relevant experience.

In reality, many practitioners are performing both roles, seamlessly transitioning from one type of intervention to the other one.

According to EMCC, the core **mentoring and coaching competencies**⁵ are:

- | Understanding Self
- | Commitment to Self-Development
- | Managing the Contract
- | Building the Relationship
- | Enabling Insight and Learning
- | Outcome and Action Orientation
- | Use of Models and Techniques
- | Evaluation

Team coaching, group coaching and group mentoring

Traditionally, coaching in the business world has been seen and practised as an individual activity. However, in recent years, we have witnessed increasing growth in team coaching. One of the main reasons for such development was coming from the fact that work has become much more team-based and subsequently managers experienced a greater need to coach their teams to become high performing.

According to Peter Hawkins, much of the growing interest in team coaching has come from a realisation of the limits of what can be achieved through individual coaching and leadership development, which can help create strong individual leaders but unaligned, poorly functioning leadership teams.

⁴ From Coach to Mentor with David Clutterbuck - International Coaching Week 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tY7ckc9e9h0>

⁵ EMCC competence framework: <https://www.emccglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/EMCC-competences-framework-v2-EN.pdf>

David Clutterbuck provides an exhaustive overview of **team coaching definitions** in the table below:

Hackman & Wageman (2005)	A direct intervention with a team intended to help members make coordinated and task-appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's work
Skiffington & Zeus (2000)	Facilitating problem-solving and conflict management, monitoring team performance and coordinating between the team and a more senior management sponsor
Clutterbuck (2007)	A learning intervention designed to increase the collective capability and performance of a group or team, through the application of the coaching principles of assisted reflection, analysis and motivation for change
Thornton (2010)	Coaching a team to achieve a common goal, paying attention to both individual performance and to group collaboration and performance
Hawkins (2011)	A process, by which a team coach works with a whole team, both when they are together and when they are apart, in order to help them improve their collective performance and how they work together, and also how they develop their collective leadership to more effectively engage with all their key stakeholder groups to jointly transform the wider business

Following the demand for team coaching and team coaches, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) has done work to amend the existing coaching competencies with those needed for coaching teams.

In their view, "team coaching is an experience that allows a team to work towards sustainable results and ongoing development. It is becoming an increasingly important intervention in corporate environments as high team performance requires aligning toward goals, remaining innovative, and adapting quickly to internal and external changes."

Their competence framework for team coaching called "Moving beyond one-to-one coaching"⁶ (ICF, 2020) includes several additional requirements for team coaches under the existing 8 coaching competencies.

Peter Hawkins (2018) also draws an interesting distinction between the practice of group **coaching** in comparison to team **coaching**:

⁶ ICF Team Coaching Competences: <https://coachingfederation.org/team-coaching-competencies>

Group Coaching

- The clients are individuals who are receiving coaching in a group setting.
- The goal is the development and learning of all the individual coachees, so they can better engage their Stakeholders.

Team Coaching

- The client is the team and not the individuals that make up the team.
- The primary goal is the development and learning of the team so that it can co-create greater value with and for all its stakeholders

Finally, it seems that generally, it is much more common to speak about **group mentoring** than team mentoring. There are many definitions and approaches as well here, but it would be possible that group mentoring is about mentoring a group of individuals, each of them working on their individual goal. As one of the providers of group mentoring points out *“Each mentee has their own learning and developmental goals, which may or may not be similar to the other mentees in the group. To help mentees achieve these learning goals, mentors will ask questions, share relevant stories, and complete learning activities. The group mentoring is a confidential, safe space for mentees to share their struggles.”*⁷

Lessons learnt about mentoring and coaching from the business context

Both coaching and mentoring have much longer traditions in the world of business than similar practices in the European youth programmes. The understanding of coaching and mentoring varies depending on the school and the tradition (above expressed by the two major certification bodies - ICF and EMCC). While ICF tends to be more distinct between those two, the EMCC makes these differences much softer and sees them rather as differences in the approach than different roles. However, if we take the sharper ICF distinction expressed in the statement *“Coach asks. Mentor guides.”*, we can immediately somewhat **reverse understanding of these roles as practised in the European Solidarity Corps** (and in the earlier actions like European Voluntary Service and Youth Initiatives). Typically, the mentor in the Volunteering projects would be more non-directive, focused on personal support and use mostly questions, while the coach in Solidarity projects is often someone who has much more experience in the topic, target group and project management than the group of young people and would more often act as a mentor in the business context.

Another interesting point is that, in the business context, **these practices are self-regulated by the professional field itself**. The practitioners have a voluntary possibility to undergo a thorough quality check leading to a professional certification or credential. These quality checks are based on the established **competence frameworks for coaches and mentors** and **ethical codes**. It would be worth looking at the potential and the possibilities to develop similar competence frameworks and ethical codes at the level of the European Solidarity Corps programme.

Finally, what we can also see in the business world is that mentoring and coaching are no longer understood as individual support activities only. The **growing practice of team and group coaching** might be very relevant to explore and learn from, when considering building capacities and development of competences for mentoring Volunteering Teams and for coaching groups of young people in Solidarity Projects.

⁷ Source: Mentoring Complete: <https://www.get.mentoringcomplete.com/blog/what-is-group-mentoring>

C. Mentoring and coaching in other international volunteering programmes

United Nations Volunteering: coaching for UN Volunteers

The **United Nations Volunteers** (UNV) programme contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. It was founded in 1970.

Currently, the programme is implemented by partners willing to integrate qualified, highly motivated and well-supported UN Volunteers into development programming and promote the value and global recognition of volunteerism. UNV is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

According to their Strategic Framework (2018-2021) UNV, through the placement of volunteers within the United Nations system and the promotion of volunteerism, will:

- contribute to raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda in remote areas and with marginalised populations.
- enable the monitoring of the Goals through citizen-driven qualitative and quantitative data collection.
- provide technical expertise to encourage conducive policy environments and opportunities for people to volunteer.
- help improve the delivery of services, and model behaviours to inspire others.

UNV also contributes to United Nations peace and humanitarian efforts, as illustrated in the **2,500 UN Volunteers** deployed each year of the 2015-2016 biennium in peacekeeping and special political missions in 17 countries.

Typically, UN Volunteers are mid-career professionals, with an average age of 35 years, who combine technical skills and professionalism with motivation and dedication.

The minimum number of years of professional experience required depends on the UN Volunteer category and can range from 0-2 years for UN Youth Volunteers to 15+ years for UN Expert Volunteers.

Apart from the clear humanitarian and social goals of the UNV programme, the **learning and development of volunteers are an integral part of the volunteer's placement**. As an essential part of the programme that supports volunteers learning, they have an appointed **supervisor** at the hosting organisation that takes care of the volunteer's performance plan, provides feedback and guidance and supports on-job learning.



In order to support the volunteer’s learning, the programme provides an **extensive toolkit**, that covers the complete volunteering cycle with several support tools and resources for each phase, including:

- | Onboarding training
- | Online learning on the UNV e-learning platform, before during and after the service⁸
- | Interactive formats for personal learning and development planning⁹
- | Handbook for reflection on volunteer’s learning¹⁰
- | Performance appraisal tools for volunteer and supervisor
- | Checklists for supervisor and the host organisation
- | Support resources for supervisors¹¹

Volunteer Reflection

In addition to all these, the volunteers are offered an optional possibility to engage with a **professional coach**. This service is managed by UN Volunteers Coachdesk.

The **coaching** provided is “a confidential, non-judgmental, safe space to understand and learn to deal with difficult emotions and thoughts, rediscover your strengths and cultivate resilience and wellbeing for you and your colleagues.”

As indicated by UN Volunteers Coachdesk, the coaching can be used for:

- | advance your professional development or career plans
- | improve your interpersonal communication
- | develop an effective relationship with your colleagues
- | work effectively in these changing times
- | develop your capacities and life skills
- | manage yourself and your work better
- | become an effective listener
- | handle difficult situations and conversations¹²



⁸ UNV e-learning platform: https://learning.unv.org/pluginfile.php/455591/mod_data/content/1612/UNV%20learning%20programmes%20for%20UN%20Volunteers.pdf

⁹ Volunteer Learning and Development plan: https://learning.unv.org/pluginfile.php/455591/mod_data/content/1703/UN_Volunteer_Learning_and_Development_Plan_OCT2021.pdf

¹⁰ UNV Volunteer Toolkit: https://toolkit.unv.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/UNV_Volunteer_Toolkit_Volunteer_Reflection.pdf

¹¹ UNV Volunteer Toolkit: <https://toolkit.unv.org/>

¹² UNV Coachdesk: <https://unv.coachdesk.nl/en/>

In addition to that, the coaching can help in overcoming what is limiting beliefs, creating healthier behaviours and increasing volunteers' confidence and a sense of purpose.

The Peace Corps

The **Peace Corps**¹³ volunteering programme was established in the US by President John F. Kennedy in 1960.



Its mission is to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals:

- | To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
- | To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
- | To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Currently, the programme offers two types of volunteering:

- | **Peace Corps Volunteer**, with a service period of 2 years plus 3 months of training. It is recommended for college grads, retirees, career changers and anyone looking to make a difference in the world.
- | **Peace Corps Response Volunteer** (formerly called "Crisis Corps"), with a service period between 3–12 months. It targets experienced professionals and seasoned experts ready to use their skills to help communities abroad.

The Peace Corps begins by designing a country program strategy at each post. Following the philosophy "if you are working alone, you are not doing development", each country-specific Peace Corps programme is developed in a participatory way. In that process, it is essential to identify the right partners who can represent the voices of key stakeholders in that context. The programme development starts from the local needs and considers the national policies, as well.

As part of the programme, the volunteers are entitled to receive some training courses, including pre-service training, technical training, language training, cross-cultural training, health training and safety and security training.

Concerning personal support for the volunteers, the Peace Corps programme does not speak about mentors and coaches but involves two roles - **supervisors** and **counterparts**. As outlined in the "Working with supervisors and counterparts" manual, the two roles are described as follows:

A **Supervisor** is a person in a leadership capacity in the host country organisation or agency that is the primary sponsor of the Volunteer's site assignments and projects. They give structure to the Volunteer's assignment and opportunities for feedback. The supervisor is sometimes considered the Volunteer's "boss," as in the case of a school principal or an NGO director. The Supervisor usually comes from the formal sponsor organisation that the Volunteer has been assigned to. There are farmer associations,

¹³ About Peace Corps: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/>

parent-teacher associations, cooperatives, chambers of commerce, community organisations, local, regional, or national non-governmental service organisations, or local, regional, or national government agencies or ministries. The function of the Supervisor is to oversee the volunteer's work. A Supervisor may or may not be a Counterpart for the Volunteer, depending upon the situation. Volunteers work on their reports with their supervisors, request feedback, make requests for leaves of absence, and generally keep their supervisors informed of their activities.

Possible Supervisor's tasks:

- | To provide structure, advice, and guidance for the Volunteer's placement
- | To reinforce the link between Peace Corps projects and the Volunteer assignment
- | To understand Peace Corps policy and procedures
- | To introduce the Volunteer to the community and to Counterpart(s)
- | To provide feedback on safety and security issues
- | To assist in finding housing, if possible
- | To provide a job framework and work activities for the Volunteer
- | To assist the Volunteer in identifying critical Counterparts
- | To design work plans with the Volunteer
- | To work with the Volunteer on reports
- | To assist the Volunteer in formalising leaves of absence
- | To assess job performance with the Volunteer
- | To give the Volunteer feedback on work and cultural activities
- | To work with the Volunteer on meeting personal and professional goals
- | To partner with the Volunteer in developing community projects
- | To collaborate with program managers and other program and training staff on project and training needs
- | To provide support in emergencies
- | To provide advice and training for the Peace Corps

Counterparts fulfil the capacity-building aspect of the Volunteers' work. Volunteers and Counterparts share their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Counterparts come from a network of people and groups that Volunteers connect with through their jobs, community or individual activities. They may be professional colleagues, members of organisations or committees, or community members. Volunteers may have more than one Counterpart, and, over time, Volunteers' Counterparts may change. This change is common and normal. Counterparts are in many ways a reflection of the communities in which Volunteers serve and the changes that occur within these communities.

In a somewhat different function, Counterparts are those people who work with Volunteers and jointly learn through experience how to do something new within the local cultural context with enough competence and confidence to transfer their learning (in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to others. They are often carry-on activities after a Volunteer has left an assignment. They may have one or many of the following roles as they work with Volunteers:

Possible Counterpart roles:

- | To serve as a partner in development
- | To develop and implement programs and projects with the Volunteer
- | To contribute to the sustainability of a program or project
- | To be a cultural informant
- | To ensure that local needs are recognized and met
- | To act as a resource for people and things
- | To provide feedback on safety and security issues
- | To exchange technical skills
- | To share their knowledge, skills, and attitudes with others in their communities
- | To continue to build local capacity after the Volunteer has left

It is also interesting that different Peace Corps partners around the world use a **variety of terms for Counterparts**, such as: Homologue, First contact or initial contact person, Community partner, Formal Counterpart, Informal Counterpart and Cultural informant or 'coach'. It is often the case that the Supervisors themselves often act as Counterparts for Volunteers.

In addition to the official part of the programme, the associations¹⁴ of returned Peace Corps volunteers are offering additional mentoring opportunities. They are invited to both become a mentor for other volunteers or be mentored. The mentorship program is voluntary and deliberately designed to be flexible and fit within their own schedule. Those involved can dedicate as much time as they would like to the program. The organisation estimates that most participants will spend **1-2 hours per month** on meetings and conversations between the mentor-mentee as well as other mentorship activities.¹⁵

For example, **Atlanta Area Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Group offers** three types of mentoring¹⁶:

Pre-Service Mentoring aims at interested and outgoing volunteers and is provided by the returned Volunteer mentors who can give honest advice, listen to the concerns, help through the decision process, through the rough patches and finally, to prepare to leave for service.

¹⁴ The Atlanta Area Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Association: <https://www.aarpcv.org/cpages/index>

¹⁵ The RPCV/W Mentoring Programme: <https://www.rpcvw.org/mentoring>

¹⁶ Types of mentoring: <https://www.aarpcv.org/cpages/mentoring-readjustment>

Readjustment Mentoring - to support the readjustment of the returning Peace Corps Volunteers to life back home. The mentors can help recently returned PCVs readjust and navigate the process of coming back or simply provide a sympathetic ear.

Career Mentoring - for those recently returning, considering Peace Corps, or have been returned now for some time, the member community contains a deep wealth of professional experience. The career mentoring aims to support matching you with an RPCV in your target career industry who can share their personal experience navigating and working in that industry with you.

Lessons learnt about mentoring and coaching from other volunteering programmes

Although the presented programmes, UNV and Peace Corps, target different profiles of volunteers than the European Solidarity Corps, there is a lot to learn and exchange in terms of mentoring and coaching practices.

The two programmes provide **various types of support persons for the volunteers** fulfilling different support roles (e.g. supervisors, counterparts, mentors and coaches) that work with the volunteer. Some of these roles are part of the “standard” set-up, while others are left to the volunteers to decide if to use them or not. Needless to say that such variety creates a possibility to accommodate the various needs of the volunteers.

Particularly in Peace Corps, there is a strong emphasis on the **personal support of volunteers during the whole project cycle: before, during and after the service**. Apart from the support during the service, the Peace Corps organisations provide specific types of mentoring before and after the service (Pre-service, Re-adjustment and Career mentoring). Although it is not a new idea in European volunteering programmes, it might be useful to consider (re)introducing the roles of “sending mentors” and “returning mentors” in the European Solidarity Corps. In addition to that, introducing optional career coaching for the returned European Solidarity Corps volunteers would be an interesting option to consider.

In addition to personal support, these volunteering programmes provide specific **support structures for the volunteers** (e.g. e-learning platform, CoachDesk, returning volunteers associations, etc.) and **volunteer support tools** (e.g. UNV volunteers toolkit, Reflection diaries, etc.). Although there are many existing resources and tools in the European Solidarity Corps, these ‘external’ resources could be used as additional inspiration, when considering future developments.

Finally, apart from coaching and mentoring, the two programmes provide very useful resources for the persons from the host organisations working as **supervisors** for the volunteers. These resources provide guidance for assisting the volunteers in setting their own goals, organising and following volunteers’ tasks and providing feedback. Certainly, these kinds of tools and processes could not be transferred without adjustment to the context of the Programme, but might rather support reflection about what are the actual needs of supervisors in the European solidarity corps.

D. Mentoring in European Solidarity Corps

Official definition: how mentoring is addressed in the Programme

Mentoring in the European Solidarity Corps Programme (ESC) is seen as a **quality measure** in implementing European Solidarity Corps Volunteering projects. The current format of mentoring is based on the concept that has been developed within the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which was implemented in the years 1996-2017.

Mentoring in European Solidarity Corps

“Personal support through mentoring should be provided to all participants in volunteering activities. Mentoring consists of regular meetings between the mentor appointed by the host or support organization and the participant, within as well as outside the place where the activity takes place. The meetings should focus on the personal wellbeing of the participants and should also guide and provide support to the volunteers in identifying the learning acquired during their experience. Mentoring is targeted towards the individual participant and thus the content and frequency of the meetings will vary according to the individual needs. Possible topics of mentoring meetings: personal wellbeing, wellbeing in the team, satisfaction with the tasks, practicalities, etc.”

(European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2023 p.75)

The official descriptions of mentors' role, responsibilities and tasks in the Programme guides of the two programmes have always been to some extent vague and insufficient for the users. As a result, beneficiaries and other stakeholders involved in EVS/ESC projects started to develop a variety of manuals, guidebooks, toolkits and other supporting materials. They aimed to explain the mentoring concept, the need to include it in volunteering projects and equip both mentors and organisations with tools, references and tips on how to do it effectively. Similarly, this research could be seen as part of the sectoral attempts to clarify the mentoring framework offered to beneficiaries in ESC projects, as well as to provide them with workable guidelines for enhancing their mentoring practices.

The programme application procedures that might also bear a connection to the mentoring process are the Quality Label Application, but also the Project Application, when requesting funding for a particular Volunteering Project.

According to the current rules of the Programme, obtaining a Quality Label is necessary to host volunteers within the ESC programme. While applying for it, organisations must reflect on **Quality and Support measures** and two questions directly linked with the mentoring aspect. Under the Volunteer Support section - *As a host organisation, what assistance are you planning to offer to volunteers during the activity? Please describe **how you will offer personal support, training and guidance** to your volunteers.*

Under the Learning and Development section - *Please describe the **measures you will put in place to embed a quality learning process** for the volunteers, with reference to specific skills and/or competences you expect volunteers to develop in the activities run by your organisation. Please provide details about the **role of the mentor** in the learning process and how the volunteers will be supported in organising their **reflection, identification and documentation of the learning outcomes acquired**, including through EU (Youthpass, Europass) or national validation tools. Please also describe the measures that you have foreseen for facilitating the integration of volunteers in a new country and/or in a new working environment. Your answer should be adapted to the role(s) you are applying for.*

Interestingly, within the current ESC project application form, there is no specific reference to mentoring (and this is a change from previous generations). There are questions more broadly referring to the learning process or personal support, but none specifically mention mentoring. Thus, any reference to mentoring can be guessed or implied. Experienced organisations still make explicit references to the mentor's role or how they offer and foster personal support, but others may not.

Other definitions of mentoring in volunteering projects

The Hopscotch to Quality in EVS 2.0 (edition 2, 2015), a comprehensive handbook on how to organise quality EVS projects, refers to mentoring as one of the crucial means to ensure the quality of the "learning service". The handbook's authors point out how the concept of mentoring has been evolving over the years: "In the very beginning, the focus on mentoring was around supporting volunteers' personal adjustment into the new environment, integration into the receiving organisation and assisting with the intercultural learning process. Recently, with a greater focus on competence development and learning, the expectations from mentors have been considerably increased." The authors recognise that mentors are required to act more as "facilitators of volunteer's learning", thus being able to guide volunteer's reflection on learning during the project and supporting them in self-assessment of the competences gained through the volunteering experience. This role of mentors has been particularly emphasised after the introduction of Youthpass, the instrument for recognition of competences gained in the projects funded by the Programme.

The **Hands-On Guide to Mentoring in EVS projects**, developed in 2012 by the Irish National Agency specifies: "A mentor in the European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme should be an **independent person** who will provide support for the volunteer(s) during their placements. The mentor will mainly focus on helping the volunteer to adapt to their new environment and will assist them in monitoring their progress with the EVS project in general."

Be the Hero, Be an EVS Mentor! is a Practical Guide for EVS Mentors developed by Latvian National Agency in 2013 which refers to the EVS mentor as being "a „crazy” person who likes to work with youngsters, is familiar with non-formal education and programme Youth in Action, a person who is motivated to support the volunteer in his/her learning process and as a guide in the unknown world of the hosting country."

The same guide indicates the role of a mentor, as being responsible for:

- | providing personal support
- | learning process support, helping to draft the learning plan
- | discussing the learning achievements with the volunteer
- | helping to organise the learning achievements in view of the Youthpass certificate
- | participating in the meeting with the coordinator and the volunteer to evaluate the project
- | and adapt the activities accordingly

Metaphorically, the Latvian guide states *“A mentor is like a shadow – invisible, but always there, helping to put various pictures together and see larger perspectives.”*

A very creative long-term project named “EVS Realm: Masters of the Learning Path”¹⁷ has created the **Treasure Box for Mentors and other Support-Persons in ESC Volunteering Projects**¹⁸. In the Treasure Box, mentoring is seen rather as a **longer-term planned process** within youth projects and an important pillar offering support for the volunteers. This support focuses particularly on the personal wellbeing of the young volunteer, alongside the learning support. At the same time, it complements the support provided by project coordinators and task-related managers, during working activities.

The project uses a metaphor of the realm, where ESC is a kingdom full of magical experiences and many inhabitants of many sorts, all bearing stories, life events and skills that make them special. *“We see ESC/EVS as an inspiring learning journey, where a lot of the responsibility for learning lies in the volunteer’s hands, but mentors and coordinators have important keys to open doors on this journey and they should know when and how to use these keys. They must understand the volunteers’ very diverse needs of support during their European volunteering experiences, in order to enhance their learning processes and to ensure an overall qualitative and satisfying project experience.”* Along these lines, mentors are the Masters of the Learning Path - *“people with special powers who can safely guide the travellers on these paths and help them reach their destinations with their bags full of riches”*.

The EVS Galaxy Guidebook for EVS Coordinators developed in 2016 gives the following definition of a mentor, also indicating specific tasks - *“The mentor is a person who personally supports the EVS volunteer during his/her stay in foreign country and help him/her with integration in the local community (support by finding friends, meeting of people from the local community, understanding local habits, traditions and culture. Mentor supports EVS volunteers mainly in personal and social life, with adaptation process in hosting country, his/her integration in local community, helps to reflect learning process, including intercultural aspects of EVS experience and gives support to EVS volunteer in case of conflict/crisis situations.”*

The EVSification Manual - Volunteer management in EVS projects¹⁹ (done by 3 organisations from Romania, Poland and Slovak Republic in another KA2 project) also describes the mentor role - *“Having a mentor or mentors in the EVS projects is not only one of conditions of implementing the EVS project but it is a “must”. Several guides and materials about EVS see the mentor as the **key actor** in EVS, because he or she is*

¹⁷ Key Action 2 project “EVS Realm: Masters of the Learning Path”, implemented by organisations from Romania, Cyprus, Poland and Belgium between 2017-2019.

¹⁸ Treasure Box for Mentors and other Support-Persons in ESC Volunteering Projects: <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/treasurebox-for-mentors.2656/>

¹⁹ The EVSification Manual - Volunteer management in EVS projects <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/evsification-manual-volunteer-management-in-evs-projects.1882/>

giving personal support to the volunteer and guides the volunteer in the hosting country and culture. Mentors support their volunteers/ friends socially, emotionally, culturally and learning-wise. They should create a supportive and trustworthy atmosphere in the process of setting and reaching volunteers' personal goals."

New narratives about mentoring emerging?

The **Mentoring Guide** published in 2019 by the Finnish National Agency for Education brings in very new elements to the official discourse on the role of the mentor. It is somehow reflecting the numerous discussions in the sector, but it also shows the effects of trainings for mentors developed by youth NGOs as a response to the perceived lack of clarity. The descriptions and approach in this guide indicate the new narrative for mentoring:

*"Mentoring means giving the volunteer personal support throughout their volunteering period. A mentor is a person **committed to this task** or a body named responsible for supporting the volunteer. The most central aspects of mentoring are supporting the young volunteer in leaving home, settling into the new country and in returning home. The aim of mentoring is to help the volunteer recognise factors that promote their employability and that strengthen their learning experience. For the volunteer and the participating organisations to receive as much joy and benefit as possible from the volunteering period, **mentoring should be invested in. It should not be done alone, but rather together with others.** This makes it more rewarding and fun, and it enables more diverse support for the volunteer. Mentoring can be organised by a group of adults and peers gathered together to support the volunteer and who have different tasks in the mentoring."*

This publication brings in a very interesting question: if we follow the increasing list of expectations from mentors in volunteering projects, does it make more sense to see the mentoring role as not necessarily fulfilled by a single mentor, but rather as a **'mentoring system'** around the volunteer? And would it simplify the process if several persons are involved in this mentoring system and complete different aspects of the volunteer support?

Mentoring and inclusion: reinforced mentorship

The inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities has always been one of European youth programmes' cornerstones and key priorities. There is no difference with the European Solidarity Corps where inclusion, as a priority, is mentioned in all programme objectives, in line with the adopted Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. This Strategy aims to help address the barriers different target groups may face in accessing such opportunities within Europe and beyond and some of the main barriers are listed and described.

In order to respond to these barriers, *"The Corps provides 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) to encourage the participation of young people with fewer opportunities and better cater for their specific needs. When designing their projects and activities, organisations should have an inclusive approach and make use of the available mechanisms to involve a diverse range of participants."* (European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2023, page 6). The European Solidarity Corps should also support projects and activities actively addressing the issue of inclusion and diversity more broadly in society.

In the context of Volunteering projects, one of the key support measures for inclusion is called “reinforced mentorship”.

‘Reinforced Mentorship’ is an intensified mentoring process that might be necessary to support young people with fewer opportunities, if they are not able to implement an activity independently or with normal mentoring or tutoring support. This type of mentoring is applicable to volunteering activities. Reinforced Mentorship involves closer contact, more frequent meetings and more time allocated to the implementation of tasks. This guarantees a step-by-step support of the participants during project activities as well as outside working hours. Reinforced Mentorship enables the participants to gain as much autonomy as possible, thus contributing to the successful implementation of the project.

ESC Programme Guide 2023 (page 76)

Within ESC projects - Volunteering Teams are targeted towards youth with fewer opportunities. They are solidarity activities that allow teams of participants coming from at least two different countries to volunteer together for a period between 2 weeks and 2 months. Such solidarity activities could especially contribute to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the European Solidarity Corps.

Furthermore, the ESC guide also foresees the option of funding additional activities as Preparatory visits to the venue of the volunteering activities, before the start of the activities, as a quality measure. *“The visits will be organised for activities involving young people with fewer opportunities or when the visit is necessary for the implementation of an activity with a strong inclusion dimension. Participants with fewer opportunities that will take part in the planned volunteering activities can be involved in the visit, in order to help with their preparation and involve them in activity design so that their needs are taken into account from the start.”* (European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2023 p.19).

Budget-wise, ESC provides for **Inclusion support** - as a contribution to costs incurred by organisations related to reinforced mentorship, i.e., the preparation, implementation and follow-up of tailor-made activities to support participation of young people with fewer opportunities. This grant is a grant provided per day per participant, based on the host country and the duration of the activity per participant with fewer opportunities.

There is also a provision of exceptional costs for inclusion, which are granted under certain conditions *“For exceptional costs for reinforced mentorship, applicants must justify that the standard funding rules (“Inclusion support” unit cost per day per participant) do not cover at least 80 % of the costs incurred. If awarded, the exceptional costs to support the participation of young people with fewer opportunities will replace the inclusion support grant.”* (European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2023 p.26)

Despite these clear references to inclusion as a major priority of the programmes and the provision of reinforced mentorship as additional support for youth with fewer opportunities, there are practically no other support materials that can guide or equip mentors with needed tools, approaches or competences to deal with the various needs of young people with fewer opportunities. This is a very broad category of youngsters, with very diverse needs of guidance and support and no one mentor can

handle the multitude of challenges the young people are going through, without a dedicated training and preparation process. Some NGOs in the sector have tried to develop mentor competences that can support their involvement in reinforced mentorship, in various training programmes. However, there is still much more to be achieved in this area.

Practice shows that in most cases, when reinforced mentorship is needed and included in the project (from the phase of project design and submission), hosting organisations try to involve a **professional mentor**, that has a psychology/coaching/therapy background and can respond to the volunteer's needs in a structured manner, based on their studies or previous expertise.

Mentoring in Volunteering projects - conclusions

By looking at all these definitions and references to mentoring, in various selected resources, we can already identify the main topics of debate and search for greater clarity - both on the mentors' side as well as on the side of the organisations:

The role of the mentor

The role of the mentor is usually quite **unclear and vague**, left to the organisation to define - it varies a lot depending on:

- The understanding of the host organisation and how much they prepare the mentor for this role.

- The capacity of the local players to become mentors (language ability, interest, time availability, willingness to learn and acquire the needed mentoring competences, etc).

- The general set-up of the mentoring relationship (as done by HO, NA or previous inherited practices).

Support is seen as the main task or the role - and there is a different perspective on the type of support offered and its content, correlated also to the different moments within the project flow.

Mentor-Volunteer relationship

The **setup** of the mentoring relationship - the way it is prepared, built up and sustained and also how the organisation and the project coordinator understand it and encourages it.

The friendly nature of the mentoring relationship is always one of the major dilemmas, as it is linked with the topic of setting **boundaries** and clarifying the role a mentor has for their mentees. It is on a spectrum that ranges from a friend who spends time with them in the local community to a professional guide and role-model, that asks difficult questions and inspires.

The need for **reciprocity** within the relationship - which can determine the success of the mentoring process and influences motivation on both sides.

Mentoring practice

There is a strong focus on the need for mentors to **adapt** their work, methods, approach and intensity to the needs of each volunteer.

Non-formal education is highly encouraged as a general approach for mentors, but some of them need specific training for this.

Often mentors have the role of a “**guide**” - first on the local level, in their host community, among different opportunities of free time or integration in the local community, later on among choices and options of better use of their time, reflection activities or introspection and insights into their own development.

Competences of a mentor

The role of **listening** - as one of the first duties mentors have and one of the most appreciated qualities volunteers notice in mentors.

Reflection as a main tool in mentoring - which requires a clear set of competences and techniques of facilitating reflection for creating awareness of learning.

Mentors offer a variety of **perspectives** that can expand the horizons of the volunteers, help them see and develop different views and understand the world around them in a more holistic way.

A key need for an efficient mentoring process is a **trustworthy atmosphere** that must be created and nurtured

Mentors are expected to help formulate and then observe volunteer’s personal goals, within a more **structured personal learning process** that not all volunteers recognize as needed or relevant for them.

The setting for mentoring to work

The requirement is that the mentor is **independent** of the organisation and the coordinator/supervisor, to be able to keep neutrality and mediate when needed.

Mentors are asked to **monitor** the progress of their volunteers’ learning, reaching of goals or integration, but also that of their own intervention.

Mentoring is not a series of activities or a one-time task, it is a **process** that requires planning, monitoring, and improving.

There are many references to the experience of the volunteers as a **learning journey**, on which the mentor accompanies the volunteer and is ready to create situations of analysis and reflection that can generate meaning.

Mentoring is a process that requires development, trust-building and involvement on both sides and a lot of the success of the relationship relies on the **willingness** of both parts (especially volunteers) to invest in this relationship - for this to happen, mentoring has to be embraced, acknowledged and defined by all the organisations involved in a volunteering project.

It is often advised that the mentor should be a different person than the project coordinator and that the mentor is recruited outside the organisation (or at least not engaged in the same project with the volunteer), to ensure **neutrality** - this aspect is clearly imposed by some NAs, while merely suggested by others, or not even mentioned by a few.

Motivation, recognition and development of mentors

Mentors also need to be **motivated** to perform well and unfortunately, both organisations and volunteers sometimes overlook this need.

Even if not from the beginning, in the last years the mentor is seen more and more as a **key actor** in the success of a project - at least in the way the manuals, guides and references are formulated (although, not yet in the majority of the implemented projects).

All reviews and analyses indicate the need of mentors for **more training and guidance** to first understand and then be capable to perform their role. At the same time, mentors need peer support, debriefing about their performance and the situations they deal with, as well as being appreciated for their work.

Many mentors are volunteers themselves, not being paid for this activity - this brings an **added requirement of attention** in how they are treated and engaged by the hosting organisations (which unfortunately is often a neglected aspect).

The issue of paying or not paying mentors for this activity is still under debate, although more voices in the past years have agreed that **financial support** for mentors would increase their commitment and could help transform the relationship from a casual/friendly/spontaneous one, to a more planned/structured/effective one.

Mentoring challenges

There are cases in which **volunteers reject or refuse** the mentoring process because they feel they do not need this type of support. It is still to be determined how much of these reactions come from a lack of need and the independency of volunteers and how much can be attributed to an improper way of framing the mentoring dimension, lack of preparation of mentors or general disinterest in developing this process on the hosting organisation's side.

Some mentors make it very casual and friendly; others (less) transform it into a professional role. Thus, **the focus and objectives of the mentoring relationship vary**, from integration into the local community to personal well-being or guidance in learning awareness and recognition, quite rarely managing to cover both areas of support.

Selection and recruitment of mentors

Often, **mentors are selected from among former volunteers** and this approach usually proves to be a successful one, allowing mentors to use their previous volunteering experience as inspiration for their role, to put themselves much more easily in the shoes of their mentees and be more willing to look for ways to support and improve their own set of competences to better serve their volunteers.

The general perception is that **the profile of the mentor** needs to be a specific one - a very communicative person, usually older than the volunteer (or at best around the same age), ready to support the volunteer in all ways possible and very available to respond to volunteer's calls or to solve issues for them - this perception is combated during the trainings offered to volunteers (On Arrival Training, Mid-Term Meeting, even Pre-Departure training, in some cases), but once again, in the end, it depends a lot on the way the entire mentoring dimension is being presented and promoted from the project start, by the hosting organisation.

New perspectives and initiatives

A rather rarely recognised form of mentoring is that of a **Sending Mentor** - placed in the Support organisation that is responsible to prepare and send the volunteer abroad. A sending mentor will keep in close contact with the volunteer while he/she is away, will support from a distance, offering guidance, asking questions, creating a space of reflection and dialogue, allowing the volunteer to feel comfortable, to overcome issues or difficulties, to reignite motivation when needed.

In past years there have been several attempts to create **communities of mentors**, as their need for peer support and exchange of good practices has become more visible and more frequently stated - especially during events and trainings. Some NAs have managed to create pools of mentors or mentor-specific events, thus investing more time, networking and support in their mentors on the national level. At the European level, the European community of mentors has been created by SALTO ESC Resource Centre "Mentoring under Construction" which proves to be a space of interaction, mutual support, exchanges and debates on relevant topics for mentors.

In 2021 and 2022, research on training courses offered for mentors in ESC was done in France. It explored the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of the training courses provided by the French National Agency. The study reveals the unclarity of the mentoring definition under the ESC framework. It confirms that **training courses contribute significantly to the quality of mentoring and support practices** in the Programme. However, it corresponds more with the individual (mentors) rather than the organisations' needs. Also, mentors' needs vary depending on their experience. Beginners would like to explore the role of a mentor, whereas experienced ones aim at sharing experiences and good practices, which is something the present research has also revealed. The study gives various recommendations on the content and scope of mentor training courses. For example, **recognition** of mentors' learning outcomes during training courses could be raised by creating a "label" for mentors or "open badges" throughout the learning path. The study is an interesting example of good practice aiming at improving the educational offer to support the programme implementation and can be inspiring for other National Agencies.²⁰

There is a growing understanding in the field that due to the ever-increasing list of expectations from the mentors in volunteering projects, there is **a need to make a paradigm shift** and start talking about "mentoring" instead of "mentors"; where the mentoring support would be provided by a "mentoring system" around the volunteer, rather than a single person occupying the mentor role.

²⁰ The summary of the main results (in French and English) have been published on the website of the French NA (ESC programme): <https://www.corpseuropeensolidarite.fr/sites/default/files/2022-11/Pr%C3%A9sentation%20visuelle%20-%20%C3%89tude%20tuteurs%20ENG.pdf>

The **pandemic** was an **incredibly intense challenge** for mentoring activities and pushed mentors to look for alternative ways to play their role - in the absence or limited presence of direct contact - many were forced to reinvent themselves, to look for creative activities that can be done online, to gather all their energy and ideas to spur the interest of volunteers, to keep them engaged, to mobilise them - it has not been easy and many mentors testify they lost contact with their volunteers or that their relationships faded. However, on the bright side, getting used to partly online mentoring has brought the opportunity of creating pairs of mentors-mentees across borders, especially in communities where mentors are hard to find (rural or isolated areas, with no available volunteers to become mentors, or no people speaking a common language with the ESC volunteers). It opened **a new opportunity** for innovative mentoring mechanisms.

E. Coaching in European Solidarity Corps

Coaching in the youth work context

The word coaching is not very often used in international youth work. In the youth context, it is associated more with the business world and sports as presented in this study's introduction. Therefore, the sources are limited.

In psychology, the term coaching developed from focusing on **unlocking a personal potential** and **maximising performance** to underline a relationship of possibilities based on **trust** between a coach and a "client" (Lai, Passamore, Stopforth 2018). While youth coaching can be understood as **encouraging young people's personal development and providing guidelines for their future** (Hoggard 2022).

Passamore and Fillery-Travis (2011) define coaching as *"a Socratic-based dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (client) where the majority of interventions used by the facilitator are open questions which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant"*.

The only publication on coaching in youth initiatives is based on positive psychology and youth coaching approaches. It defines coaching as **a dialogue between a coach and young people or activities aiming at releasing the potential of groups and individuals** (Coaching Youth Initiatives 2012 p. 32). This definition is broad and might contain different approaches. Undoubtedly, it is a process in which young people can develop knowledge, skills and attitudes with the help of a third person.

Coaching in EU youth programmes - a brief history

The origins of coaching in EU youth programmes go back to YOUTH (2000 -2006) and Youth in Action (YiA 2007-2013), where this term was presented in so-called Youth Initiatives. They were youth-led projects that encouraged youth participation and supported changes in local communities.

A coach was *"a **resource person** who has youth work and/or Youth Initiatives experience to accompany groups of young people, facilitate the learning process and support their participation"* (Youth in Action Programme Guide 2012). Coaching was seen as a **partnership** between young people participating in the youth initiative project and a coach they invited. Their role was mainly supportive and encouraging in the creative process of youth participation. *"Coaching honours young people as the experts in the project and believes that every young person is creative, resourceful, and whole. Therefore, **a coach should listen, observe and customise their approach to young people's needs**. A coach should: discover, clarify, and align with what young people want to achieve; encourage young people's self-discovery; elicit young people-generated solutions and strategies, and hold young people responsible and accountable."* (Ibidem). Although the coach was supposed to stay outside the youth initiative, they were helping young people with all stages of the project, including learning, monitoring, and evaluation.

The Guide clearly stated **who the coach was not**: a project leader, consultant/adviser, a member of the group carrying out the project, a professional trainer/expert providing only technical support in a specific field, legal representative of the project (Ibidem).

In 2014 all EU Educational Programmes were gathered in one programme, and Erasmus+ was launched. This programme did not support Youth Initiatives projects. The European Solidarity Corps programme (ESC) was announced in 2016 and gradually launched, becoming a separate programme that includes Solidarity Projects, as one of its actions. By the design and the spirit of this action, Solidarity Projects resemble the former Youth Initiatives format. However, ESC programme brought in the additional solidarity dimension, as well as other programme priorities such as: inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action, and participation in democratic life.

Coach in Youth Initiatives vs Coach in Solidarity Projects: a resource person, mediator, educator, adviser?

The role of a coach in Solidarity Projects resembles the one in Youth Initiatives. The coach is defined as *“a resource person – not a member of the group - who supports young people in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of a Solidarity Project”* (European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2023, p. 103). The programme guide loosely outlines the coach’s potential tasks without details, which gives a wide field for interpretation.

*“The coach **empowers** the group of young people in those areas and topics they need support in, in order to successfully implement the project by themselves and can play different roles based on the needs of the group. This could be done through regular coaching sessions throughout the project period, punctual trainings on specific topics or a combination of both. The coach can provide advice on having a quality learning process and assist in identifying and documenting learning outcomes at the end of the project”* (European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2023, p. 45). Contrary to Youth Initiatives, the role of the coach as an **advisor** is allowed in Solidarity Projects in the learning process.

The coach concept is understood broadly and seems to be ambiguous. Their involvement should be adjusted to the needs of young people in the particular project and defined before applying. On the one hand, they might set aims for learning and may take the role of a trainer by delivering sessions and workshops on various topics. On the other, they are expected to be mediators in conflicts and stay impartial, neutral and objective. Coaches should remain outside of the project; however, they are expected to support young people’s learning process, which could be challenging to fulfil. Often coaches are members of the applicant organisation. Sometimes they might even be responsible for monitoring the quality of the projects. Therefore, combining these roles might be tricky.

In the ESC Programme Guide, common coaching principles are not explained. There are no references to any resources for coaches. While the YiA Programme Guide listed who the coach was not, this content is missing in ESC. The involvement of the coach in Solidarity Projects is not obligatory.

There is no publication tackling the roles of coaches purely in Solidarity Projects, therefore referral to coaching in Youth Initiatives will be utilised in this study. The most comprehensive study devoted to coaching in EU educational programmes is still **The Coaching youth initiatives. Guide for supporting youth participation**, published in 2006 and embedded in Youth Programme (2000-2006). It referred to Youth Initiatives and was prepared by the SALTO Youth Initiatives with the cooperation of experienced

youth trainers. Most of its developments can also be used as a source of knowledge regarding coaching in the ESC context. It covers processes related to coaching and presents tools and tips to support it, including good practices and examples. It proposes coaching principles that help release the potential of young people. The coach should identify their resources, understand themselves, take responsibility, have a choice and provide learning opportunities (Coaching Youth Initiatives p. 43). At the same time *“by supporting young people in a specific way, this person first of all aims at the personal development of young people by using a variety of methods or creating opportunities to participate in different programmes or activities”* (Ibidem p. 33).

The **Coaching Youth Initiatives** covers the challenges that coaches might face during the process. The authors discuss the autonomy of young people and, at the same time, external factors that tend to have a substantial impact on them. Therefore the problematic task for coaches is to *“find a balance between the rights of young people to gain their own experiences, coaches motivation to be as helpful as possible and the interests of donors and supporting organisations (...) Therefore we see the role of a coach in this system as a mediator, somebody who gives enough space for youth development provides protection against being used as an instrument of organisational interests and keeps an eye on the proper amount of support that is needed to add to resources the young people have themselves.”* (Coaching Youth Initiatives p. 42).

Although The Coaching Guide consists of many valuable tips on conducting the coaching process in Youth Initiatives, it requires updates, links to the solidarity concept and Programmes priorities such as inclusion and diversity, sustainability, digital transformation and participation.

Coaching in Solidarity projects – conclusions

Based on the content of the Programme Guides, the conclusion might be drawn that **the role of a coach in the Youth in Action Programme was more specific than in the ESC Programme**. The ESC Programme Guide lacks information about the coaching process. The description in it of the coach comes down to two paragraphs. The coach is limited to 12 working days during the project duration.

A literature review on coaching shows the lack of updated or new studies and recommendations explicitly devoted to the coaches' work with young people in Solidarity Projects. There are **no quality criteria available** nor are there examples of good practices regarding the work of coaches in this context.



SECTION 2

Mentoring in Volunteering projects: research results

Understanding of Mentoring

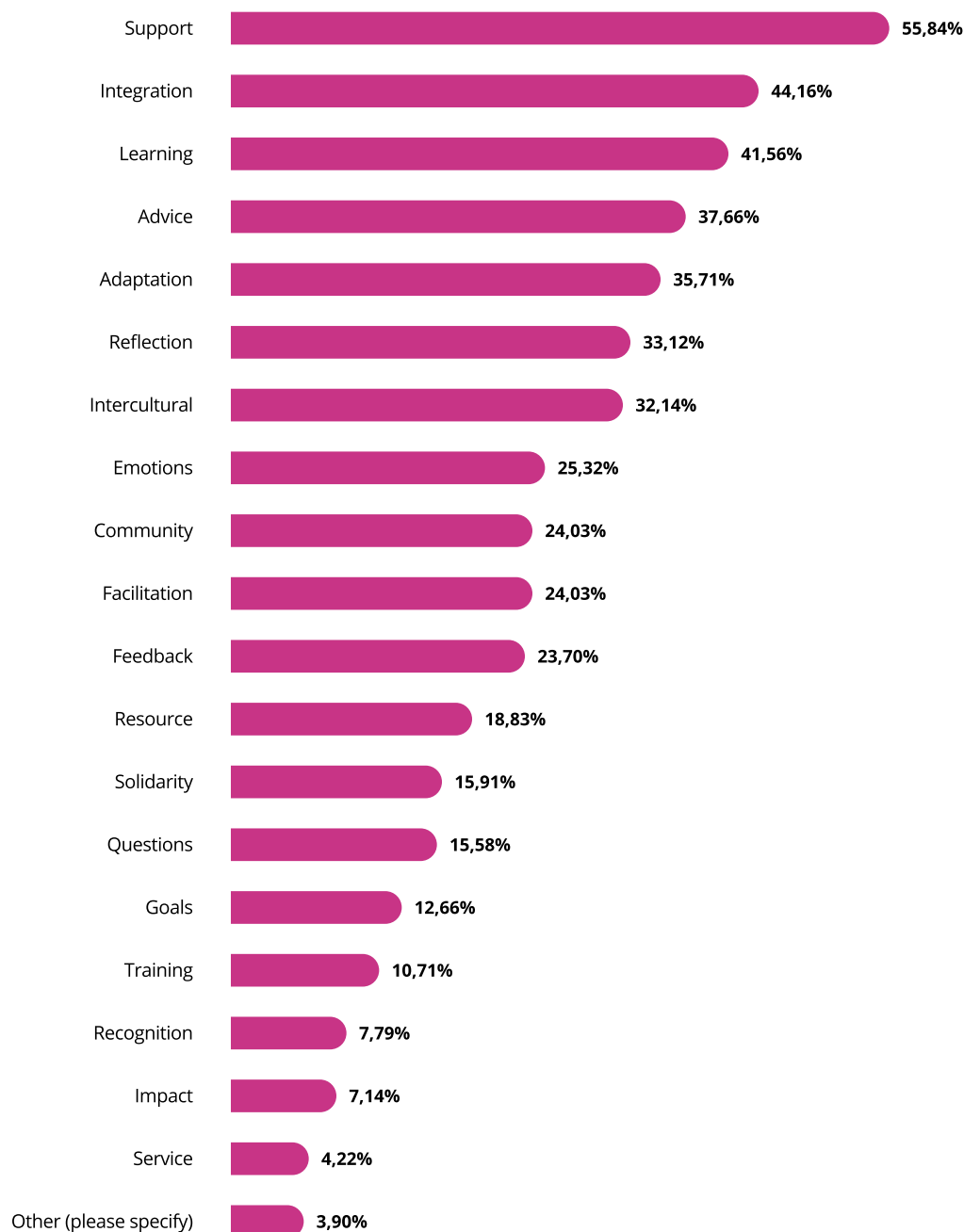
We set out in this research to explore and deepen the understanding of the mentoring practice in ESC projects, to comprehend how it is seen by different target groups and to grasp perceptions of what it is and is not.



At a first glance, **Support** is seen as the major association with mentoring, with more than 55% of survey respondents choosing it, but also many mentors, organisation representatives and trainers mentioned it in the focus groups. Many relate mentoring with Integration (44.16%), Learning (41.56%), Advice (37.66%), Reflection (33.12%), Facilitation (24.03%) and Feedback (23.70%). Only 7.14% - i.e. 22 respondents - see mentoring practice directly associated with impact. Other associations listed are in the sphere of the communication process – listening/understanding/accompanying.

What keywords best describe your understanding of the mentoring practice in the European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects?

select maximum 5



On the other hand, mentors, trainers and organisations in the focus group associated mentoring with words like relationship, motivation, challenge, guidance, cooperation, responsibility, reciprocity, and needs-oriented, but also characteristics or qualities such as trust, flexibility, resilience, authentic or patience or even more transversal processes such as self-reflection, preparation, sharing experiences or inspiring the passion for learning.

It is much more interesting though to look at the perceived **functions of a mentor**, which indicate deeper understanding of the role of the mentors.

A very thorough description of the mentoring functions was offered by a trainer for mentors, volunteers and organisations in ESC and other volunteering programs (such as EU Aid Volunteers), based on her observations and experience.

“Mentoring in European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects is the unity of these four functions, presented in this order, based on how frequently they take place:

Integration - helping volunteers enter the local community, helping their intercultural learning, supporting their daily life

Trouble-shooting / Crisis management - the mentor is the person to call when something happens, the “911 person” for the volunteer

Mediation - mentioned in the programme guide, but a function more difficult to perform, which requires specific competences in the mentors

Learning support - seen as an extremely important function, however, one that requires an additional level of expertise”.

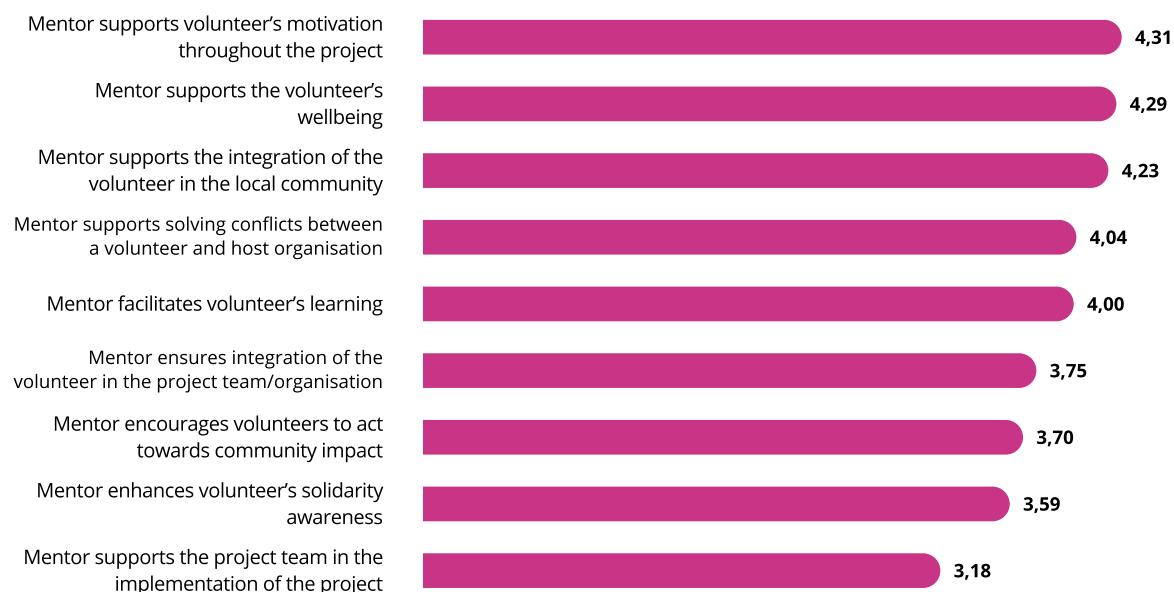


It is important to notice, however, that not all these 4 functions are present in every project and the focus also depends on how the organisations structure the projects and what they focus on more regarding the mentor involvement (sometimes the integration, other times the learning and many other times the mediation or trouble-shooting in case of emergencies). Therefore, it all depends on how the role is designed, set up and explained to the mentors.

In our survey, we identified 9 potential functions of the mentor - the top 5 functions considered as absolutely essential by more than 100 respondents were those below, strongly resembling the 4 functions listed above by one of the experts interviewed.

- | Supporting volunteer’s motivation throughout the project
- | Supporting the volunteer’s wellbeing
- | Supporting the integration of the volunteer in the local community
- | Supporting solving conflicts between a volunteer and host organisation
- | Facilitating volunteer’s learning

In your opinion, how important are the following functions of a mentor in ESC volunteering projects?



The survey also revealed other important functions that may transcend the operational dimension of the mentor role in the project implementation phases. For instance, more than 60% of respondents saw that the role of the mentor to encourage volunteers to act towards community impact is very important or absolutely essential. 184 respondents saw it very important or absolutely essential that mentors enhance volunteers' solidarity awareness. Taking a deeper look at the profile of these 184 respondents we can see 66.66% of mentors and 57.52% of coordinators think this is either very important or essential. However, for other target groups, the situation is different - only 1/3 NAs that responded believe this is very important and none of them believes it is essential. Also, none of the trainers of ESC organisations thinks it is an essential function.

At the same time, other respondents indicated that *"sometimes the mentor could be a **liaison** with other local stakeholders"*, enhancing the strong bond that a mentor can create between the volunteers and the local community. Others remarked that *"mentors can be also **mediators** in-between the volunteer, host and coordinator, so sometimes mentors are mentors to all parties involved"* and this idea has also been noted by 45.45% of the respondents that view as very important or absolutely essential that the **mentor supports the project team** in the implementation of the project.

The views are split however, some organisations may see and treat the mentor as a key team member, while others will consider the role as an additional one and not give it such high importance. This perception was also confirmed by some NA representatives in the focus group, who pointed out that one of the challenges in dealing with mentoring is the general misunderstanding of what mentoring is *"From the organisations' point of view, they see it sometimes like an added extra that it is really not that important, not that essential"*.

There is a big debate around the connection between the mentor and the hosting organisation. To what extent should they be affiliated with the host/lead organisation or should they be completely outside of the organisation. There are varying practices around this topic in the different countries

and organisations implementing ESC projects. In some cases, the National Agencies have particular requirements that mentors are completely external and not connected to the organisations hosting the volunteers. In contrast, in other cases, it is encouraged for mentors to still be linked with the hosting organisation, to be able to be more anchored in the reality of the volunteer when offering support or guidance. What is clearly seen as an essential principle is that mentors and coordinators should be distinct persons, to allow for the mediation function to be performed, when needed. But the level of proximity of the mentor towards the hosting organisation and the core team implementing the project is still up for debate and there are pro and con arguments for both options.

One of the trainers we interviewed gave a very intriguing view of the mentors outside the organisation. He saw that many volunteers need to actually learn something work-related in the context of their projects, and this goal is not supported by how the program is designed. The perception of the mentor can also be of a person who you want to learn from - to tap into their experience and competence. Whoever is the person in the work relation that offers volunteers this professional development will become their mentor, even if not bearing this name. *“When reflecting on mentoring within the programme, I found odd the vision that we have here a workplace, but the mentor is not connected to it. The mentor is more for the overall process but disconnected from the work. Everyone would like to have more focus on the work part, the serving part - which is now the solidarity part - and to strengthen it, but the mentor is not connected to this - so I am wondering how this should work?”*

The issue pointed out was related to terminology, as the “mentor” term itself has different connotations and is perceived differently, not just because of different languages or cultural associations or practices, but also across the different volunteering programs. In fact, In the EU Aid Volunteers program, offering humanitarian aid volunteering missions - the functions of mentoring are completely different: *“Even if we use the same word, the requirement is technically a person that is responsible for the work to be done and the line between mentoring and coordinating, distance and proximity is almost erased”* (a trainer).

In some countries, there is a simultaneous use of the terms “tutor” and “mentor” and sometimes they overlap or they refer to the same role (as confirmed by one NA during the focus group, but also by several mentors and representatives of the organisations). At other times these two terms mean different things, the tutor often being similar to a coordinator, or dealing with task management and daily activities, but being closer to the volunteer than the general project or organisation coordinator. We see that the word “mentor” can mean different things and it has a multitude of understandings. At the same time, using other words to describe the role confuses in some cases and re-emphasizes the need for a reconsideration of how the role is named or detailed (which has been touched upon by many of the target groups).

In the words of one host and support organisation representative - *“Whenever we touch the mentoring definition, it is confusing because even though we have guidelines from the Commission, even though it is not 100% defined, people feel that they can’t fit in this paradigm, the organisations don’t have capacity.”*

The lack of understanding concerning the role of the mentor, how it is defined and what the job entails or what the requirements are is not just confusing for how mentoring is implemented in practice, it is also a cause identified as problematic in finding or retaining mentors, as shown in the surveys where almost 40% of respondents indicated this challenge.

What comes out as a potential solution to the debate and some of the issues pointed out is the **flexibility** in how the mentor role is designed. It is clear ESC projects vary a lot because of numerous factors - the size and type of the organisations implementing them, the topics and activities included in the projects, the people involved, the different levels of capacity and so on. On top of these, the vastly different approach and understanding of mentoring and the mentor role makes projects very different from place to place.

The way out of the large contradictions around the mentoring role could be to not start from roles, but from the needs, an idea confirmed by trainers during the focus group. *“As an organisation, one needs to go a step backwards and wonder what are the aspects of support that the volunteers need and think about - to whom are you delegating this?”* Then once more, the main functions entrusted to the mentors will also indicate the type of support system put in place. *“If you focus on trouble-shooting and mediating, it is totally necessary that somebody neutral from outside can intervene and it needs to be a strong person. If I am switching on facilitating and learning, having for facilitating the learning someone who is outside the organisation - it is absurd! The danger is - that the mentor is outside, he/she is focused on general aspects of learning (learning journey, the growing, the development, personal growth), not much on the working, because of not being connected”.*

It is clear that when it comes to the understanding of the mentor role, this is surrounded by serious confusion which was noticeable in all the areas that were explored. It was pointed out in the surveys, but also in the focus groups with mentors and trainers. What stands out as one of the main repetitive ideas is the mentoring role is far more complex than what a single person can perform, especially if not employed for this position, as it is the case most often, since mentors are usually volunteers themselves.

This is revealed and confirmed in the desk research (see pages 30-39) and it is re-iterated by several participants in our study.

“Think about what support is needed and then think about what persons we delegate this to - we may call them mentors or support - persons, but maybe we need more people than one.”

(a trainer)

Organisation representatives participating in our focus groups also agreed:

“Honestly, I think it’s a lot for an unpaid job” (a project coordinator)

“It is too much for one person so we work with mentors in a bit different way. There are too many expectations for one person. It can be overwhelming to have so much on one’s shoulders” (ESC project coordinator in a lead organisation)

“Do not seek all the mentor qualities within one person. A team around the volunteer might be better.” (survey participant)

Moreover, it seems in the training courses for mentors provided by the French National Agency, the mentors themselves pointed out the idea that *“it would be suitable to have 2 different persons taking care of the 2 different aspects - someone taking into account the personal dimension (the intercultural experience, the integration, conflict management with other volunteers or colleagues) and someone in charge of coordinating the activities of the volunteers in everyday life, but also of the support for self-reflection, to avoid a conflict”* (a trainer)

A mentor and project coordinator in Italy described their experience in dividing the mentoring role into 2 separate dimensions *“We had a **learning mentor**, somebody already in the field supporting the volunteers in the learning process dimension, constantly checking how the process is going and a **social mentor** - someone who was a peer - to help volunteers in the local community (find the main points of interest, explore surroundings, go on day trips, understand how the city works, what are the discounts, the documents needed - some tricks from locals more than what is included in an info pack). The social mentor is more of an exploration/leisure mentor - someone closer in terms of age, to act as a peer for the support and inclusion and also helping the organisation in making the experience and the new city more inclusive”*.

Mentoring in practice

Being so loosely defined and framed, mentoring is implemented in very different ways across organisations, countries and projects. Besides the fact that it heavily depends on the capacity of mentors and organisations, mentoring in practice is also a constantly changing process and needs to be adapted to the needs, requirements and situations of each volunteer, in each specific phase of their evolution. This leaves a lot of room for experimenting, learning, adjusting, testing, changing and improving for the mentors. In fact, many of those we interviewed confirmed they are learning by doing, most of the time on their own, sometimes with the support and guidance of their organisations. While some mentors design their intervention with the objective of following the volunteer’s learning process and training themselves in being ready to respond and adapt according to what the volunteers are experiencing, there are other mentors who work without any plan in mind, having meetings to socialise with the volunteers and be there for them, building the relationship gradually, but not following a set of topics to cover and mostly waiting for the volunteers to ask for meet-ups or support.

In terms of **the way the mentoring position is defined** by the organisation hosting the volunteers, there are usually three options.

Some mentors work based on a **contract**, with a set of requirements defined, being paid for their work or doing a voluntary activity but within a framework that the hosting organisation has at least briefly defined.

On the other hand, we found many examples of mentors that do not make any formal agreements with their organisations, they define the work verbally or rely on **mutual understanding and trust**, with a general perception they are there to support and take care of the international volunteers. This works well when the mentor knows the organisation and is not a beginner in supporting other people, knowing what to expect and juggling at least a few different tools and techniques to accompany, encourage or empower the volunteers, when needed. In these cases, personal support and wellbeing of the volunteers as a general Programme description of the mentor role is translated into the actions, flexibility and readiness of the mentor to support, when needed, even if no formal agreement exists.

There are cases when there is no agreement, but also not much guidance or monitoring from the side of the organisation in how the mentor is performing. Mentors are **left on their own** to define what and how to do it, which is most often discouraging rather than empowering.

When analysing the setup of the mentoring support system, the models put in practice also differ a lot. We have already mentioned the preference of more and more organisations and mentors to look at the mentoring dimension, rather as a **transversal support process** than a one-person responsibility. The clarity in the roles is therefore essential for avoiding misunderstandings or frustrations, but also for an enhanced experience for all sides. As already pointed out, the way tasks are split among the different people inside and outside the organisation is not so important as ensuring all the needs of the volunteers are covered, while the project is efficiently implemented.

Looking at the views expressed during the focus groups, we can see mentors are encouraged and expected to develop a secure and comfortable environment for the volunteers to learn, grow, adapt and become autonomous. In some cases, mentors are still learning to allow their volunteers to dive into the learning by doing experience, without being too directive or getting too involved with the actions of their volunteers. In the words of one interviewed mentor, *“the mentoring relationship resembles very much - a dance. It is a very nice movement in the learning and the self-development process and very important for elaborating emotions”*.

One interviewee considered that *“the mentoring process is **creating a safe environment** to reflect on ways to deal with the organisation, with the other volunteers, deal with conflicts, fulfil some learning objectives. The mentor can have a non-directive approach and sometimes a directive one - I sometimes feel the mentors have the tendency to do more themselves and not give this space for the volunteers to find their own solutions, so the volunteers tend to go to the mentor to fix an issue.”* (a trainer of mentors and coach for youth workers and youth)

The need for allowing volunteers to act, experiment and even make mistakes in order to learn, is also emphasised by one project coordinator. *“Volunteers shouldn’t be dependent on mentors. The balance is needed. Volunteers come for a project to experience and learn. **Mentors can’t be overprotective**. Opportunity for learning should be there and space for learning by doing. Also, volunteers should be aware that their actions have consequences. There is a person who helps them but often, this line is thin.”* This links to the issue of **boundaries**, one of the biggest challenges in the mentoring relationship and a constant topic of debate among mentors and those supporting the development of the mentoring practice.

Quoting one of the mentors we interviewed *“It is hard to really write down what the task of a mentor is - because you need to react to people, who are different and have different needs. It is more important to try to set a frame and some borders, so mentors don’t feel they have to support volunteers 24/7, if anything difficult happens. We are not trained in this, we are not psychotherapists, there need to be clear borders where the tasks of the mentor stop”*. In fact, the topic of **ethics for mentors**, very much linked with the element of boundaries and limits of the mentoring relationship needs more exploring and has been indicated in the list of learning opportunities to be created by over 50 survey respondents (18,71%).

Even though there is no clear set of principles or ethical standards for mentoring in ESC, many of the publications, guidelines and manuals developed on the topic indicate a few straightforward pieces of **advice**:

Mentors are not available 24/7 and should not become the persons to call for any type of issue or difficulty encountered.

Mentors are not parents or guardians of the volunteers - these are adults and responsible for their own actions.

Mentors are not therapists or professional psychologists (unless specifically included as such for volunteers with fewer opportunities, under reinforced mentorship schemes or based on medically-proven needs of volunteers, in which case specialists are required, beyond the designed role of the ESC mentor).

Mentors do not get involved in romantic relationships with the volunteers they support.

Mentors should be extremely cautious to the way their role is perceived by volunteers, completely avoiding the abuse of power and other risks associated with it (such as sexual harassment).

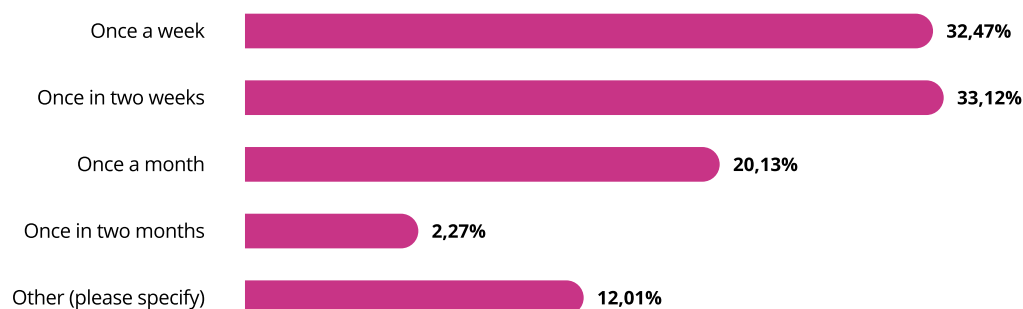
Mentors should inform coordinators when volunteers require more targeted support, when boundaries are broken or the information disclosed in mentoring meetings has an impact on the overall project implementation.

As a general rule and good practice, boundaries and relationship limits should be discussed and agreed upon between the volunteers and their mentors, in the beginning of their cooperation and regularly assessed and updated, if needed.

When looking at the **frequency of mentoring meetings** – the views are quite balanced, indicating this is very dependable on the situation in each project, the experience and practice of the mentors, but also the needs of the volunteers. Most respondents said the meetings should best be organised once in 2 weeks (102 respondents) or once in a week (100 respondents), indicating a preference for more frequent meetings, especially in the beginning of the project (and towards its end), decreasing the frequency during the project – when they would be relying more on the expressed or observed needs of the volunteers. But usually many would indicate having a mentor meeting at least once a month. Others point out the practice of having one formal/deeper/general evaluation meeting once per month and then also meet-ups/catch-up meetings, so more casual discussions, organised more often. The key point is for the mentor to be ready to adapt, an idea confirmed in interviews with both mentors and trainers.

*“I see the **mentor is very adaptable** - depending totally on the conditions of the organisation they are working with”. (a trainer)*

In your opinion and experience, what is the optimal frequency of mentoring meetings with individual volunteers in long-term volunteering projects?



Another element to consider is that the relationship is being built throughout this mix of formal and informal meetings between the volunteers and the mentor. To avoid misunderstandings of the role, there is a need to invest time, energy and commitment in **gradually building this relationship** instead of using the mentor only when crises appear. As one NA representative declared *“Volunteers assume that the mentor is someone they need to speak with when they are in trouble or have a problem, and they leave it until they have a problem to contact the person, instead of building the relationship with the mentor all along.”*

Besides the frequency of the meetings, what is more relevant is the content of the mentoring meetings, the issues discussed. One NA representative pointed out the need for meaningful content of the meetings: *“Organisations should not create the feeling in the volunteers that it is something they have to do and impose on them to meet the mentors. **It is important to find a good balance between frequency and quality of these meetings**”*

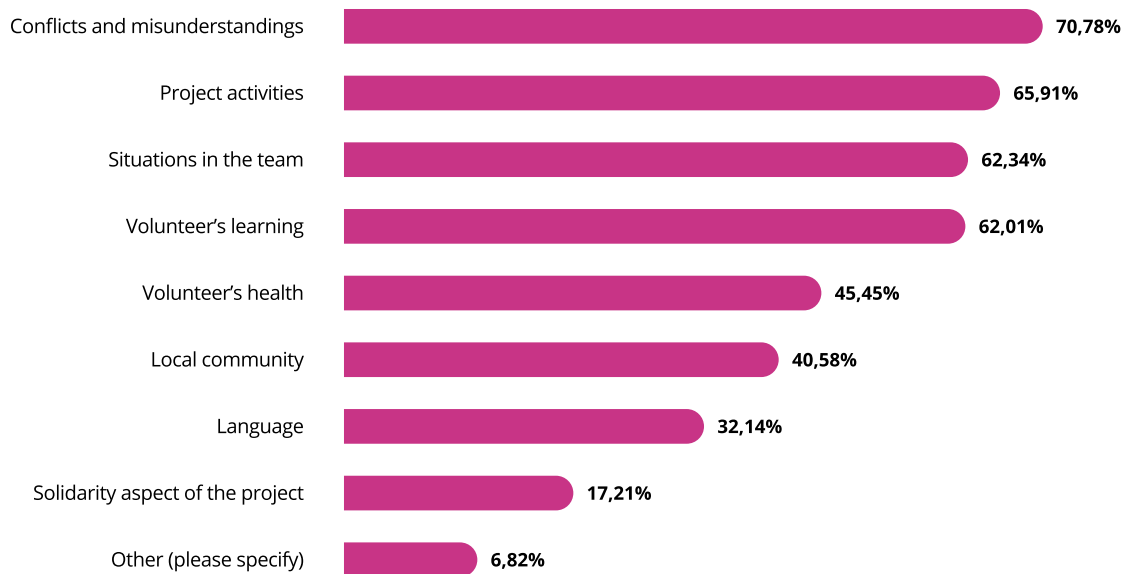
When we look at the **topics addressed in mentoring** – most of them relate to the **mediation** function of the mentoring role (conflicts, misunderstandings, situations in the team, daily life matters) or to **learning**. Thus, most mentoring meetings cover topics such as:

- | Conflicts and misunderstandings – over 70%
- | Project activities – over 65%
- | Situations in the team – over 62%
- | Volunteers learning – over 62%

It is interesting to notice valuable topics related to the self-discovery and self-awareness being mentioned in mentoring meetings. It is done by the volunteer, when they connect recent happenings in their personal lives and how the project and the volunteering experience can arouse the different realisations about their own decision-making process, which is supported by mentors.

From your experience, what are the most common topics addressed in mentoring meetings with the volunteers?

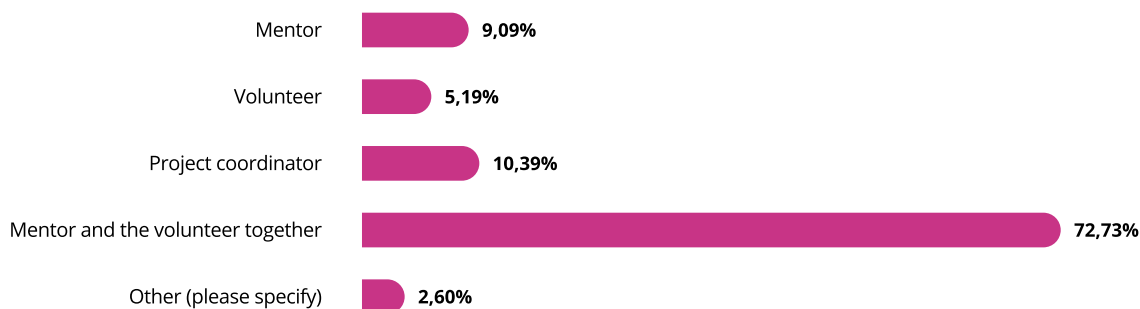
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According to the survey responses, **the solidarity aspect** of the project is not so much addressed in mentoring meetings, only 53 persons (17.21%) included it in their replies. In fact, when looking in more depth at the entire solidarity focus, we were surprised to see a relatively low reference to the solidarity element. On top of this, we noticed vagueness and difficulty in addressing questions asking if the solidarity focus brought by the ESC programme in 2018 had brought additional dimensions in projects and specifically in the mentoring practices. The difficulty in answering such questions may be linked to the relatively short time that has passed since the term and focus were introduced and not enough assessment of the actual impact of the paradigm shift. But at the same time, the underlying cause can be linked to a more systemic lack. As one NA representative pointed out - *"Solidarity' is not even in the award criteria. It is not strong enough. It is one of the objectives, but we are missing the real question about the solidarity dimension. And what are the societal needs? This is so weak now. Solidarity is just a word."*

Regarding the agenda for mentoring talks and who should establish it – the vast majority (over 72%) considered it a common task for the mentor and volunteer together, confirming the need for cooperation and equality and a balanced way of setting up the mentor-mentee cooperation. This was also emphasised by Belgium Flanders NA representative: *"The relationship between the mentor and volunteer should be more horizontal and equal. Mentor should not be the person telling the volunteer what to do, but rather someone to go into a dialogue with the volunteer."*

Who should set the agenda and the topics for the mentoring talks with the volunteer?



Interestingly, 32 respondents (a bit over 10%, mostly coordinators) considered the project coordinator should set this agenda which indicates very different models of approaching the entire mentoring dimension. This was confirmed by one Polish project coordinator stating *"Mentoring" is a tool created for this programme to protect volunteers. However, the scope depends on the organisation. **Each organisation has its own "mentoring practice" and uses this concept differently.***

Returning to the mentoring functions, the one most often ignored or diminished is the **learning support** offered by mentors. One trainer and project coordinator we interviewed defined mentoring as *"an ongoing support, thinking of the well-being of the volunteer, both socially and emotionally, but also in pursuit of a specific target, or goal, or result that would be fulfilling"*, thus indicating the presence of the learning dimension in the mentoring relationship. One of the respondents of the survey stated, *"The learning is owned by the volunteer, the mentor can only support and reflect with the volunteer"*, emphasising the important role a mentor has in accompanying the volunteer in the understanding and exploitation or interpretation of the learning taking place within the volunteering experience.

This function is many times insufficiently developed (if at all) because it requires a specific set of competences in the facilitation of learning, which rarely is required from typical mentors or consciously developed throughout the project, with not so many targeted trainings offered to the recruited mentors. In many cases, mentors are not even asked to get involved in the learning process, to follow, guide or assess it in any way, as this is considered **a specialised task**, not compatible with the profile of the volunteer mentors who are more frequently playing the role of a local community buddy.

This reality was also confirmed by a trainer of mentors, volunteers and organisations, as well as a mentor herself. *"The learning support is extremely important, but requires an additional level of expertise, and from my observation, this is hardly ever done by the mentor, usually it is done by someone else - because the person who has time for troubleshooting for a young person is not someone who has the time, energy and competence to also do the learning support"*. There was a survey respondent who even considered that the *"role of the mentor in guiding the learning process is just theoretical, so we should focus more on the role of community integration"*. At the same time, there are clearly not enough competences in the area of facilitation of learning, so training and more support is very much needed, as our survey results indicate - where the topic of Facilitation of learning of volunteers - has been indicated by 85 respondents as an important area of training and learning on which NAs and youth organisations should focus more.

As a result, because the list of tasks for mentors becomes too large for one person to fulfil and some organisations do not want to completely overlook the learning process, a potential solution would be to **“sharing these expectations between several persons, dividing different mentoring functions between them, such as learning support, integration into local community, etc. At the same time, coordinators also feel that they should be part of the learning support function, not just mentors.”**, as it was indicated by one NA representative during our focus group interview.

There was an interesting mention from one survey respondent who pinpointed the role of the learning facilitator – someone other than the mentor: *“At least 2 times per month, the volunteers can be supported by a learning facilitator who is a team member - under any role as long as there are the appropriate skills and resources. The learning facilitator is organising group reflection sessions, using non-formal educational methods and tools for reaching out to the objectives of the project mostly related to the personal learning and the key set of competences of the volunteers. The learning facilitator who is a team member is in contact with the mentor who also is a team member.”*

Contribution of Mentoring to the project's impact

Over 73% of respondents considered that **mentoring contributes** to a very high extent (80 respondents) or a high extent (146 respondents) **to the quality of the voluntary service**. This is a massive indication of the perceived importance of mentoring and the connection between mentoring and quality.

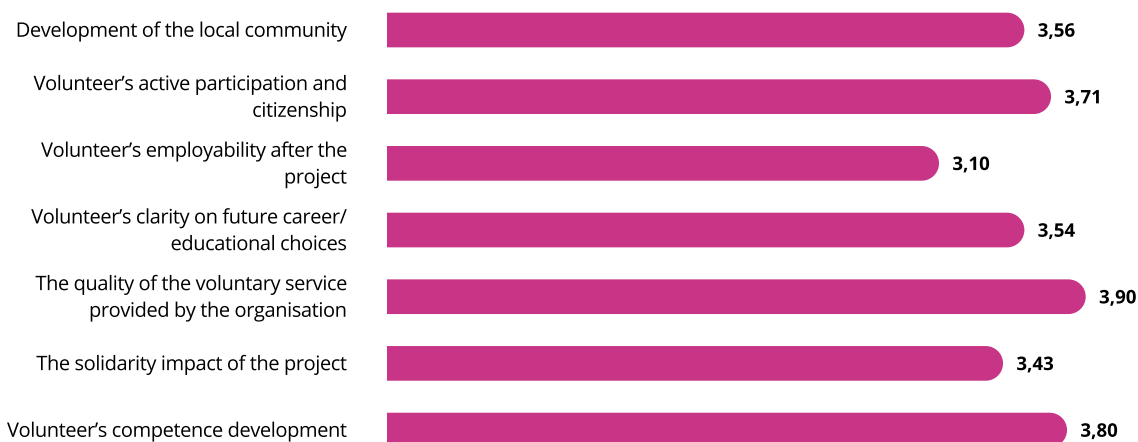
Almost 67% of respondents saw mentoring as an **important contributor to the development of volunteers' competences**. *“Mentorship helps me to understand the whole concept of volunteering, how it is from day to day. When we have a good relationship with our mentor, we discuss a lot how we can support volunteers”* declared an ESC project manager from a hosting organisation.

Mentoring is also considered to **impact volunteers' active participation and citizenship** – over 60% of respondents indicating it as a choice. In the words of one respondent, *“the mentor facilitates reflection and gives volunteers tools to step outside the victim role and towards independence”*. At the same time, hosting organisation representatives also pointed out the positive impact of mentors on their projects and the volunteers - *“The mentor is a profound resource for the volunteers”* or another one stating *“The mentor contributes towards the sense of belonging of the volunteers.”*

Interestingly, mentoring has an **impact also on the development of the local community**, according to the view of more than 165 respondents (over 53%). Some mentors also commented that their involvement as mentors can support newcomer organisations in learning how to better manage the relationship with the volunteers and the intercultural dimension their presence brings. Solidarity impact of the project is also seen as connected to mentoring, that highly contributes to this, as reported by 46% of respondents.

However, besides this data, there is not enough information collected to prove the direct contribution of mentoring to the project impact and this is not assessed or analysed by NAs nor is it evaluated by organisations at the end of their projects. In fact, one NA representative identified that one of the main challenges in dealing with mentoring is the 'added value' of mentoring for the results of the project. How much they are integrated in the project and how much they contribute to the overall empowerment of the volunteers is still to be defined and improved.

In your opinion, to what extent does mentoring contribute to the following aspects of ESC volunteering projects' impact?



Quality in Mentoring

One of the quality elements indicated by an NA representative was the **coherent involvement of the mentor** in the implementation of the overall project *"They need to develop continuous long-term cooperation with the host organisation, so the mentors feel as being a part of the project, not just a person who meets the volunteers. Mentors should be part in all phases of a project, so they can define their role better and contribute in a more **quality** way"*. On top of this, as one respondent pointed out - *"The mentor role in ESC projects is very well received, because it can be the eye from outside that sees things that the project team cannot see"*.

Another important quality element is linked with the ability of mentors to not interfere too much with the learning and development process of their volunteers, to **give the space** for the volunteers to find their own solutions - this was indicated both by mentors and by trainers. In connection with this, **flexibility** was mentioned several times as a big asset of mentors, combined with the **ability to use a variety of tools** and adapt them to the needs of volunteers. Great mentors are also those able to deal with the different emotions volunteers go through, either carried as burdens from before the project or developed during the intensively challenging experience. What mentors can do is help volunteers see things in a proper perspective and this is their useful contribution to the management of emotions volunteers must perform on their own.

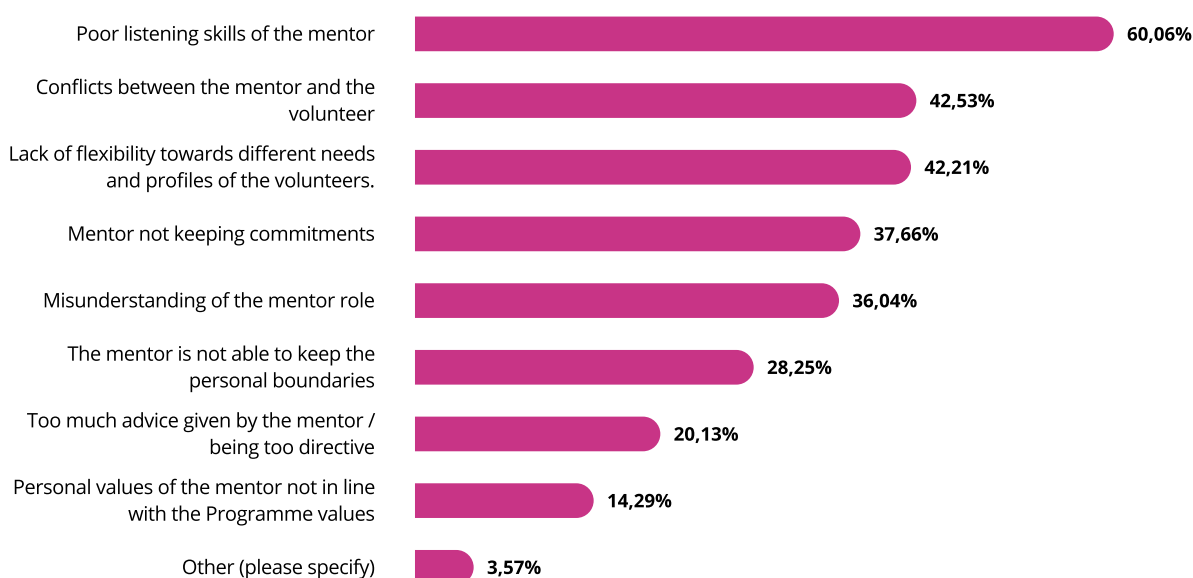
When asked what indicates a low-quality mentoring process, survey respondents usually indicated poor listening skills (60%), conflicts (42%) or lack of flexibility towards the different needs of the volunteers (42%), mirroring thus the most important competences expected to be found in mentors - where over 66% opted for listening skills, more than 54% indicated empathy and over 43% saw conflict resolution as a key competence of mentors.

There is also a clear indication that **misunderstanding of the mentoring role leads to low-quality mentoring**, as reflected by more than 110 respondents (36.04%). This was also confirmed by the mentors and trainers taking part in the focus groups.

An important aspect to remember is however that the **“Mentor is not solely responsible for mentoring”**, as one respondent answered, detailing further that *“many factors, not only mentor himself/herself influence the process of mentoring, such as the organisation and its structure, the target group, the volunteers’ skills and motivation”*

What are the signs of low-quality mentoring?

select maximum 3



Taking into account these survey responses, we can deduce that **quality in the mentoring process** is connected to:

- | Efficient communication with the volunteer, with a special focus on proper listening of the volunteer, their needs and challenges
- | Respectful relationship between mentors and volunteers and an efficient conflict-management approach, when difficulties in the relationship arise
- | A high degree of adaptability and flexibility manifested by mentors, considering the different needs of the volunteers, and adjusting to their very different profiles
- | Keeping commitments taken by the mentor
- | Clarity of the role of the mentor, both for the volunteer and for the mentor
- | Maintaining boundaries in the relationship between the mentor and the mentee
- | Refraining from offering too much advice for being too directive with the volunteers

Mentor Competences

When referring to the expectations and requirements from mentors, we always end up talking about the competences of mentors. As already indicated in other chapters, the profiles of mentors vary a lot, depending on a series of factors, but most of the times based on the general understanding of the mentor role within a certain organisation or for a specific project, combined with the general mentoring or support structure designed.

As a result, the set of competences required from a mentor can also differ extensively. Many times, research participants drew a direct connection between the lower level of competences and expectations from mentors and their unpaid involvement in the projects. *“We hire our mentor (pay wages) since the challenges of the volunteers in general demand qualifications,”* said one of the participants in our survey. At the same time, hosting organisation representatives indicate difficulties with the recruitment of mentors, due to a lack of financial support for mentors. The lack of motivation of mentors, associated with it being an unpaid role, was considered the second biggest challenge in engaging mentors, by over 47% of survey respondents.

One trainer stated that the expectations towards mentors are much lower than those for coordinators. This is thought to happen because mentors are usually volunteers, unpaid for their work and they do not come with a vast experience, but in the best case are ex-EVS/ex-ESC volunteers, contributing their little bit of wisdom to support newcomers. She also pointed out that the limitations of the programme and the Volunteering Strand within ESC - put certain things on a priority list for organisations. *“While mentors change quite often, coordinators stay and they have a list of requirements to fulfil and mentoring is not the first or second priority.”*

One challenge identified in engaging or keeping mentors was the fact that *“there is not a unitary approach to mentoring. Some mentors are paid which is normal and some mentors are not paid which is very unusual. Mentors are not volunteers. It should be included a clear budget for them. And ask mentors to have some professional skills, they cannot be 16, 17 years.”* In the view of this survey respondent - it should not be expected that mentors do all that is requested of them without being paid or professionally competent for this position, indicating the need for a set of skills and a proper amount of expertise that should be clearly remunerated.

When looking at the most important **competences expected from mentors**, survey respondents massively listed **listening skills** (chosen by 192 respondents - over 66%) and **empathy** (indicated by 157 people - over 54%). These responses can indicate the massive need of volunteers for support and understanding, which require also other skills connected to communication competence:

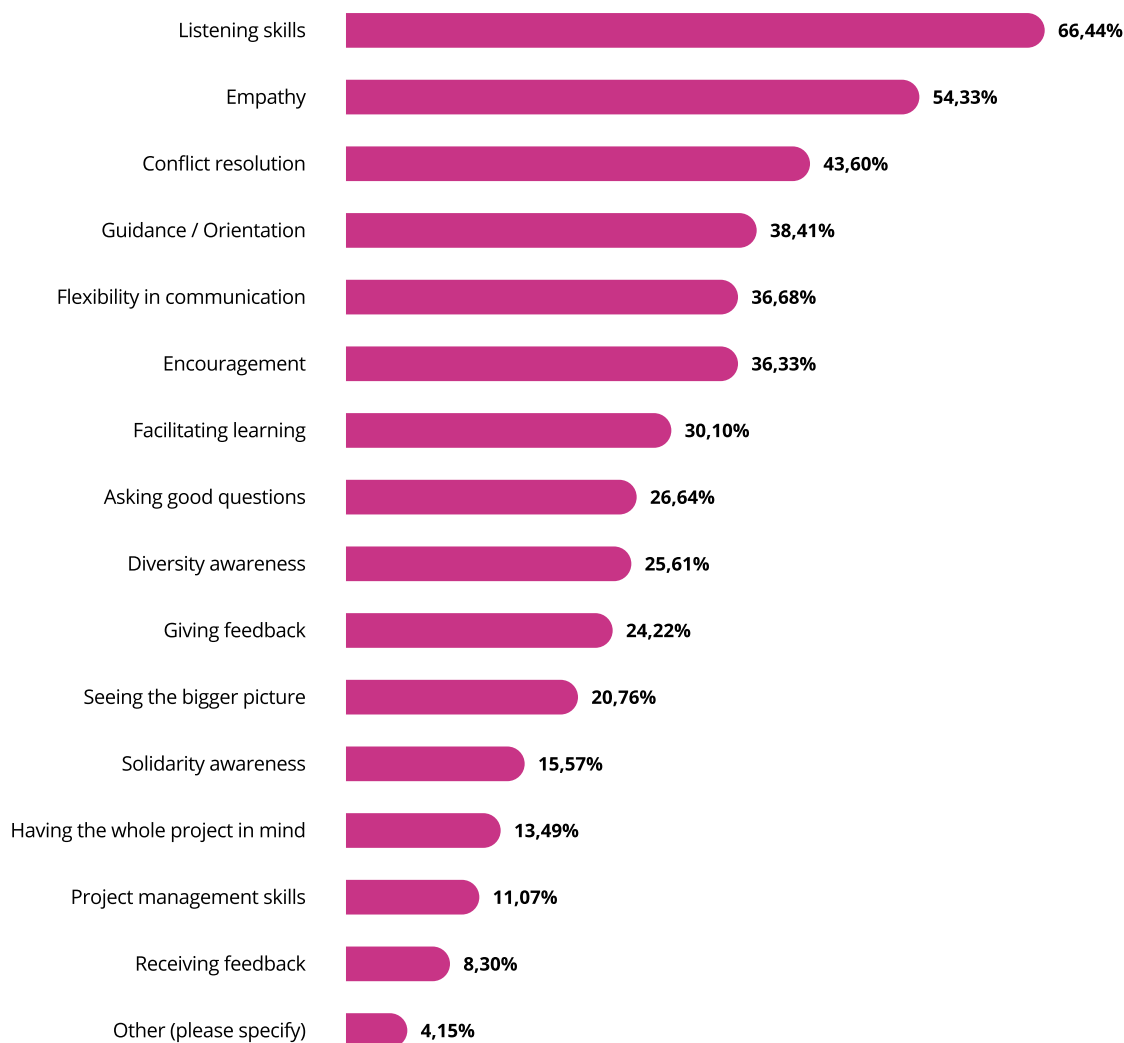
- Flexibility in communication (over 36%)
- Asking good questions (over 26%)
- Giving good feedback (over 24%)

However, there are also other types of competences respondents are looking for in the mentors, which can either be linked with the learning process, the empowerment of the volunteers or their sense of integration and acceptance:

- | Guidance/orientation (over 38%)
- | Encouragement (over 36%)
- | Facilitating learning (more than 30%)
- | Diversity awareness (more than 25%)

What are the most important competences needed for effective mentoring in the European Solidarity Corps?

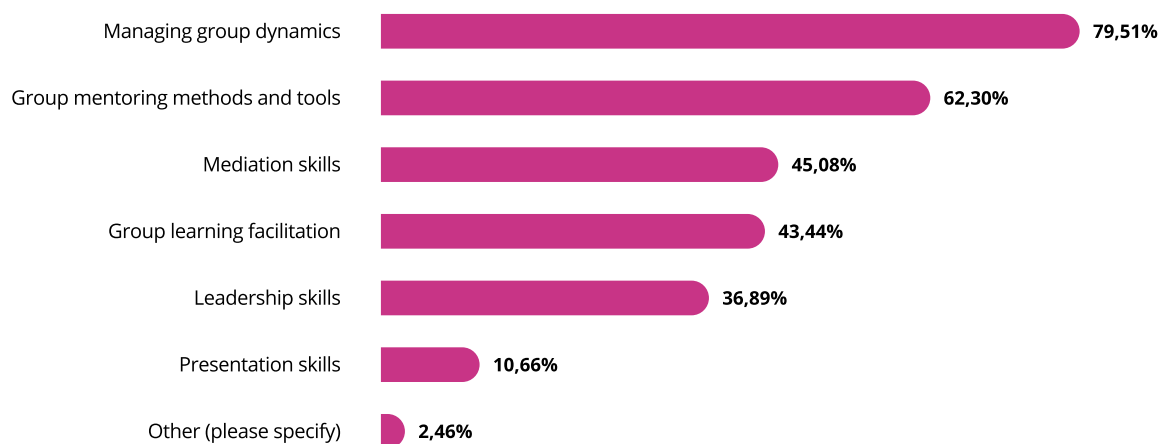
select maximum 5



Moreover, **when mentors are supporting teams of volunteers**, there are some additional competences needed. Out of the 122 respondents who were familiar with the process of mentoring volunteer teams, almost 80% saw the need for competences in managing group dynamics and more than 62% thought mentors would master group mentoring methods and tools. At the same time, mentors supporting groups of volunteers also are expected to have mediation skills (over 45%), skills in facilitating group learning (over 43%) as well as leadership skills (as seen by almost 37% of respondents - 45 people).

What are the top 3 additional essential competencies needed for mentoring teams of volunteers?

select maximum 3



An NA representative also pointed out that *“specific competences in handling mental health issues of young people are very welcome.”* However, the general feeling is that there is **not enough preoccupation with the qualifications and competencies needed by mentors to fulfil all their assigned or implied roles**. A recent trend was revealed by one of the interviewed trainers, who thought that *“some tasks are delegated to the mentor simply because he/she is there.”* - *“Since COVID, the mental health and wellbeing are delegated to the mentor as someone who is summarised as being the psychological support”*. This happens even if mentors are not trained or duly prepared to take on these additional and demanding tasks. Moreover, they are rarely supported enough to adapt their approaches or tools for the new pressures of the external conditions volunteers are faced with, or their emotional implications.

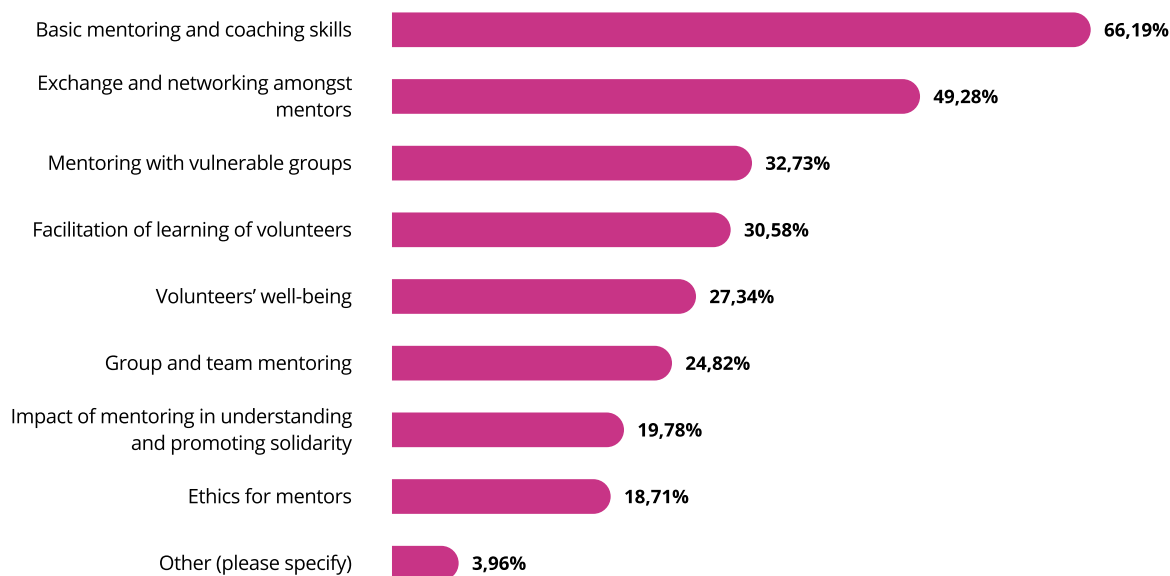
It is evident **mentors need and appreciate training**, as already pointed up above. We also took a look at the areas of training and learning where respondents considered more opportunities should be developed by NAs, SALTO offices and youth organisations. Over 66% of respondents saw a need in the area of **basic mentoring and coaching skills** (over 180 responses), while more than 49% indicated the area of **exchange and networking among mentors** as an important area to focus on.

Other important areas for training and learning were:

- | Mentoring with vulnerable groups - over 32%
- | Facilitation of learning of volunteers - over 30%
- | Volunteers' well-being - over 27%
- | Group and team mentoring - over 24%
- | Impact of mentoring in understanding and promoting solidarity - almost 20%
- | Ethics for mentors - almost 19%

In your opinion, what areas of training and learning for mentors are needed to be developed and provided by the National Agencies, SALTOs and youth organisations?

select maximum 3



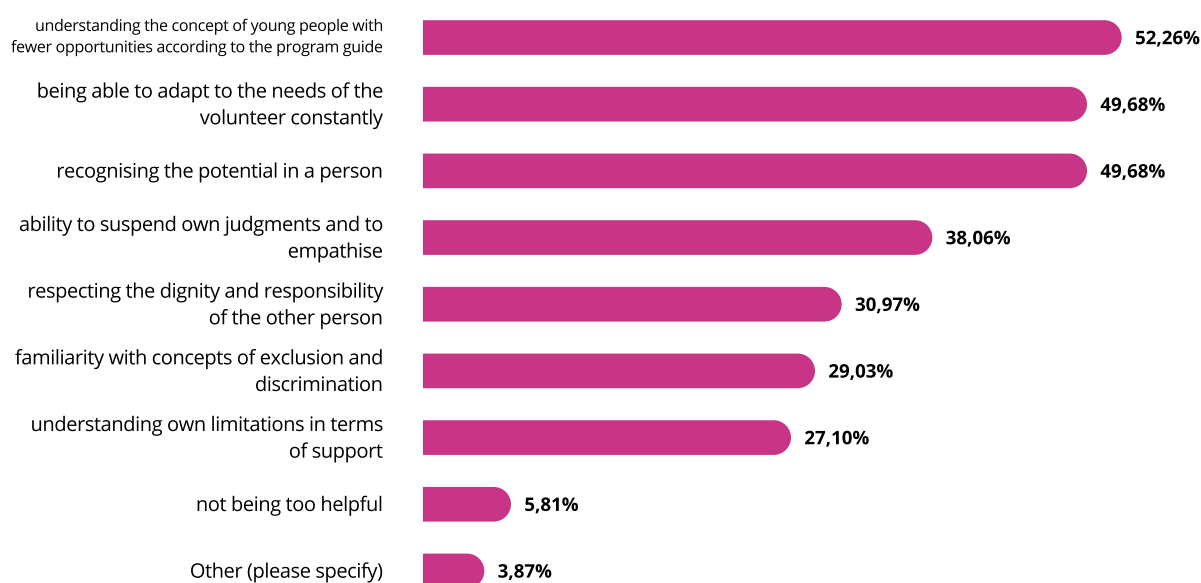
Inclusion through mentoring - Reinforced mentorship

168 respondents out of the total of 308 declared they are familiar with Reinforced mentorship. There were 155 who detailed their experience, over 52% (81 persons) mentioned that understanding the concept of young people with fewer opportunities according to the program guide is essential for quality reinforced mentorship. Other aspects considered essential were:

- | Being able to adapt to the needs of the volunteer constantly (77 responses)
- | Recognising the potential in a person (77 responses)
- | Ability to suspend own judgments and to empathise (59 responses)

What is essential for quality 'reinforced mentorship' when working with young people with fewer opportunities within volunteering projects?

select maximum 3



The **most effective support measures** mentioned by survey respondents and mentors interviewed were:

- More time, attention and flexibility is the number one suggestion, also identified by one interviewed NA - this related a lot to being ready to offer ongoing support, on-request meetings, regularly checking in and generally making sure the meetings are meaningful - (19 mentions)
- Close direct and qualitative contact and communication - ranging from presence and commitment, in-depth sessions on feelings, active listening and observation, face to face meetings and conversations, organising rather one-2-one support meetings, instead of group talks (13 mentions)
- Providing specialised support (6 mentions)
- Organising preparatory visits (including the host mentor, ensuring a better connection with the team, even teambuilding) and providing more support from the sending organisation, in preparing the volunteer before going abroad - (6 mentions)
- Ensuring a strong connection with the community and offering different activities on the side of the project - to bond with the mentor, to integrate informally (leisure activities, travels, visits, other project) - (5 mentions)
- Defining objectives and also challenges, setting achievable goals and linking them with the volunteers' motivation - (5 mentions)

Other solutions that can support in reinforced mentorship were:

- Providing professional training of the mentor, especially understanding better the inclusion and diversity topic
- Offering more language support and additional classes (also mentioned by one mentor of short-term volunteers)
- Defining a diversity and inclusion strategy

Besides looking at the potential suggestions and proposals, we must also analyse the **capacity to provide reinforced mentorship**. There is a clear need for training and learning more about ways of supporting vulnerable young people - 91 respondents of the survey (over 32%) see a need for NAs and youth organisations to provide more training on the topic of mentoring with vulnerable groups. Another 76 respondents (over 27%) would like to see more trainings or opportunities for learning being created on the topic of the Well-being of volunteers.

One clear conclusion is that ***“Reinforced mentorship should be a real tailor-made support! - Mentors don’t have to be experts in project management but have to have people skills”*** (NA representative). At the same time, it is not the sole responsibility of the mentor to support the young people who may need additional support. This should be **a commitment of the entire organisation** hosting the volunteer. Inclusion should become a generalised approach of the project in fact, starting from the way the volunteer is recruited and prepared by the support organisation and closely accompanied throughout the entire life-cycle of the project. *“Reinforced mentorship in our organisation was not offered by one single mentor and it did not mean just more often mentoring sessions, but in fact we were involving the whole staff and making sure that the volunteer has a network around, to keep them safe and make them feel they are*

in good hands and have people to hold on to. So when we had a situation, we created a mental health ring around the bullied volunteer and this helped her go nicely through the project.” (project coordinator).

What we also wanted to explore was the way in which the **solidarity dimension** is addressed and if the strong focus on solidarity has brought anything new, but there are not many mentions on this topic in the focus groups or the survey responses.

Some of the National Agencies interviewed declare there is not a lot of change - it was already possible to express solidarity in EVS - *“I don’t see any difference, only the word ‘solidarity’. EVS was a programme which already allowed young people to show their solidarity.”* Another one testified: *“I am not so sure if it made any difference compared to EVS. Solidarity factor was already there in EVS, just maybe not so explicit.”*

On the other hand, what has become visible is **a shift that makes inclusion a more difficult goal to achieve.**

“The way the Programme is promoted, makes it harder for inclusion. Now it focuses on young people finding the opportunities and the partnerships between the organisations are much less at the core of the programme. When the quality of the partnerships is less in the focus, it can have a negative impact on inclusion. The assumption is that the current programme is now focused more on the community needs (rather than on individual development), but the way it is structured promotes young people searching for opportunities, which can jeopardise the inclusion dimension of the programme.” (an NA representative)

Another NA representative stated: *“In comparison to EVS, the focus has shifted from the programme about young people and the development of the individual to solidarity, where everybody’s together. There is a shift from individual to collective, and maybe that watered down the support given to the individual.”*

Going closer to the grass-roots level, we also asked mentors how they deal with the solidarity topic in their mentoring meetings and their experiences on the ground reveal different realities and ways of relating to the concept of solidarity, but also a general difficulty in grasping its complexity.

Mentors referred not just to the solidarity expressed by the volunteers coming into a new culture, towards the local beneficiaries, but also to the solidarity manifested among the several volunteers in the teams, to one another and the need of solidarity towards volunteers themselves, especially from the organisations or communities that receive them.

As one mentor phrased it: *“This concept is very nice and correct politically - to work in solidarity with the community which the volunteers join, but also the organisations and the communities can try to be solidare with the volunteer who is coming not necessarily from a wellbeing or welfare situation and in many cases it is like that. **Just as mentoring, solidarity is also reciprocal.**”*

The task of the mentor is to address the topic, to talk with their volunteers, to prepare them regarding the socio-economic, historic or cultural context that defines their new living environment and that can pose challenges for them acting in a solidare way. *“Solidarity was not a question, it came very organic, though as a mentor I had to pay attention to make sure that volunteers clearly understand how the community they are arriving in is, how it functions”* (a mentor).

Other times, mentors noticed a reversed situation - the need to help volunteers understand they are not there to save the world or the local people. In helping them realise this, mentors have to support volunteers to notice and grasp the learning opportunities available, without sacrificing their own well-being, in the attempt to give too much support for the local community.

“My volunteers are very generous, nice and available all the time - they feel they have been doing a lot in the local community but see very little. Sometimes they have a very broad and extended concept of solidarity, even similar to the ‘white saviour complex’¹ in some cases - so my job then is to disambiguate this aspect. In other cases, volunteers become so frenetic, they do a lot, they feel they are saving, doing many things, being so active, but then they forget about themselves, about their goal - then I ask them - Besides helping, helping, helping and doing, doing, doing, what do you have in the end, what are you learning? When doing a reflection, the solidarity aspect should not be only for the others, but also for yourself, should be a mutual benefit and richness out of the experience”. (a mentor).

A visible need is to deconstruct the solidarity concept - here is what a mentor declares:

*“It is really **a difficult term for someone to understand** - I have used different names and labels to explain what it means, because it is not always self-evident. It can scare people. So I start talking about more general terms they know and are familiar with - about a sense of community, working together, cooperation and then I move towards the bigger content. I have learned and noticed there is some education to do with the word and the meaning of it. Hopefully these projects will also help in the long run”.*

Working with mentors: challenges, recruiting and sustaining mentors

When asked about **challenges in engaging mentors**, we see a large number of respondents indicating either lack of training (142 respondents) or lack of motivation, due to it being unpaid (136 respondents).

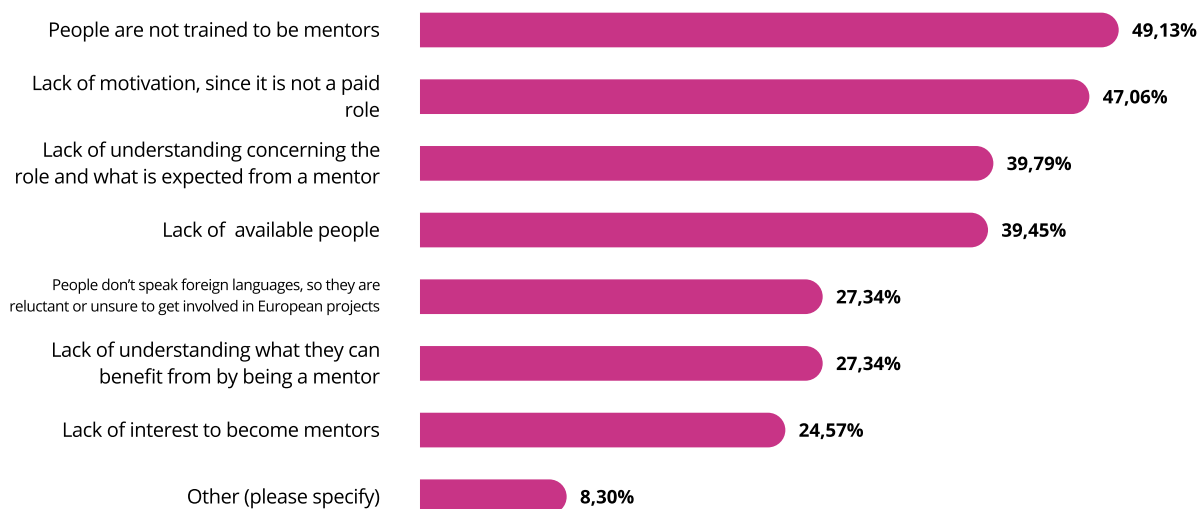
Other important difficulties that were mentioned:

- | Lack of understanding concerning the role and what is expected from a mentor - 115 responses
- | Lack of available people - 114 responses - which is sometimes connected also to the rural or more isolated areas, but not exclusively

¹ “The white saviour complex (also known as white saviorism) is an ideology that is acted upon when a White person, from a position of superiority, attempts to help or rescue a BIPOC (black, indigenous or people of colour) person or community.” <https://www.health.com/mind-body/health-diversity-inclusion/white-savior-complex>
BIPOC stands for black, indigenous or people of colour

What is the main challenge or difficulty in engaging mentors in your context?

select maximum 3



However, sometimes the difficulties in achieving the full potential of the mentor role are more complex than one or another of the factors identified. As one participant study reflected: *"I understand the mentor role is a very important one, but we have difficulties implementing it because of the criteria we need to accomplish. No matter who we select as a mentor (within the organisation, far away from everyday life of the organisation, experienced mentor, old volunteer, ex ESC volunteer, board member, independent somebody...) the volunteers don't 'use' the opportunities. They prefer to seek their peers more than an official mentor (and it is not for the lack of trying). But the peers cannot be valuable mentors on paper and here we are again at the beginning."* This can once again relate to how the mentor as a figure is perceived by volunteers or enforced within an organisational structure. It can sometimes become too formal or can be felt just as a requirement by volunteers, leading to rejection, instead of becoming an organic, dynamic or needs-oriented component of the project, which would be the task of the project coordinator to underline or enforce.

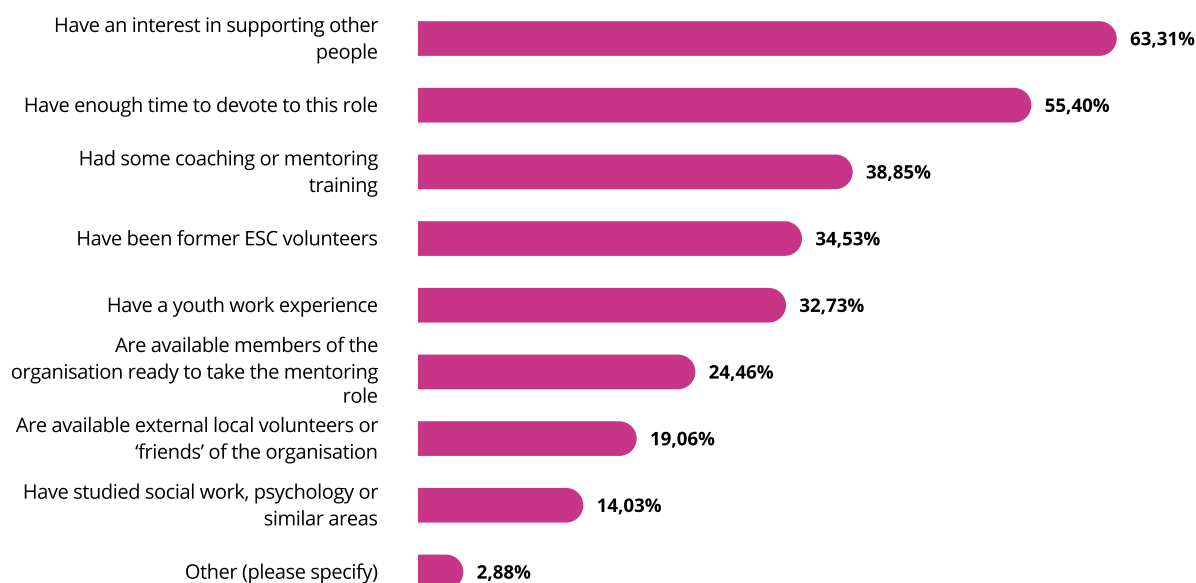
When looking at the **criteria suitable for recruiting mentors**, an overwhelming/decisive number of respondents (176 people) selected the interest in supporting other people, but also having enough time to devote to the role, an answer picked by more than 150 respondents of the study participants.

Other important requirements that would appear on a call for mentors of ESC volunteers would be:

- Previous mentoring or coaching training (as shown by 108 respondents)
- Previous experience as ESC volunteers (96 responses)
- Previous youth work experience (91 responses)

In your experience, what criteria are suitable for recruiting mentors?

select maximum 3



The answers in the graph above also indicate some of the well-known recruitment practices in real-life ESC projects, where mentors often come from within the organisation, being team members who are willing and ready to take the role of a mentor (over 24% of respondents indicated this option), or they are external local volunteers and friends of the organisation (situation indicated by more than 19% of respondents - over 50 people being familiar with this practice).

In sustaining the work of mentors, besides addressing their needs of support, which are detailed in a later chapter, organisations should also analyse their motivation for being mentors, and try to constantly keep this alive and fed by different activities done specifically to appreciate or encourage mentors. Some of the **key motivations** expressed by the mentors we interviewed related to:

The desire to support other people, to make sure the volunteers have a good or meaningful experience

The wish to share experience gathered and offer their skills or ability in supporting, comforting or empowering others

The thirst for learning new things or getting better at what they are good at

Learning more about themselves, personal growth and seeing themselves in a new light

The curiosity of being connected with an international context, with new people and new opportunities for discovery

The positive impact they can have on other people and being able to contribute to their experiences.

"I really enjoy seeing people grow - they are insecure at the beginning of the year, then I see them finding their way, knowing what they are good at, making good and bad experiences also - just seeing that people grow at the end of the year is really beautiful." (a mentor also working as ESC trainer)

Needs for further development and support measures needed

Lack of training was indicated as the number one challenge in engaging mentors - with over 140 people mentioning this. At the same time, the most effective way to sustain and improve the motivation of mentors in ESC was considered Training and learning opportunities for mentors, as chosen by more than 73% of respondents, which means over 200 people. Therefore, clearly **the need for training and competence development** is the most frequently noticed and mentioned need. This is confirmed by trainers of ESC mentors, volunteers and organisations, but also by NAs.

The second effective way to sustain the motivation of mentors is linked with the **financial remuneration of mentors for their work**, as indicated by over 53% of respondents. The need to pay mentors for their work is an idea that was repeated several times during our study and comes back in several of the questions we asked. It is an overarching topic and need of support which was indicated also as a recommendation towards the need of recognition for the mentors, but also being linked with the chance for increasing quality and sustainability of the mentoring practice.

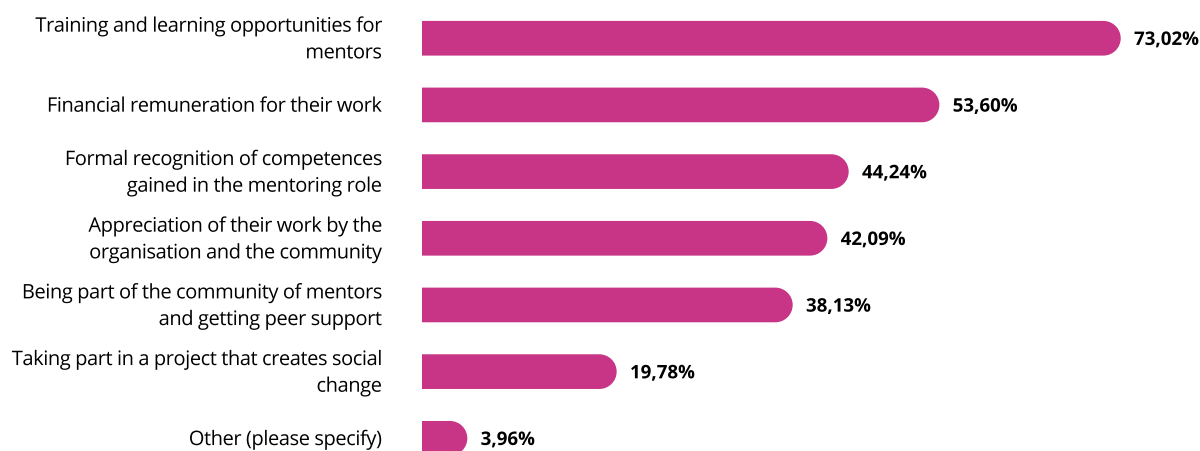
The third and fourth methods for improving mentors' motivation are linked with **validation** and **appreciation** - the formal recognition of competences gained by mentors (123 responses) and the appreciation of the mentors' work, both by the organisation and the community (117 responses).

At the same time, the need of belonging to a **community of practice** and of receiving **peer support** are also indicated among the potential motivating factors for mentors, in the views of 106 respondents.

Even if it has a much lower score, it is worth mentioning that taking part in a project that creates social change can be a powerful motivating factor for mentors, according to 55 respondents who picked this option as one of the 3 efficient ways of sustaining motivation.

In your opinion, what are the most effective ways to sustain and improve the motivation of mentors in ESC?

select maximum 3



All these responses have a massive effect on the potential recommendations towards the improvement of the mentoring practice and they are a clear indication for the need of training, support, payment and recognition.

When talking about the need for **recognition**, this was extremely vividly expressed by one mentor participating in the focus group: *"I have the feeling sometimes we are considered as extra, like something that is not really necessary, but nice to have. **Organisations somehow forget to thank us that we actually save projects for them**, keeping people in the process, mediating all the conflicts among everyone and helping parties survive cultural clashes and misunderstandings and I just have the feeling we are like rain falling from the sky - then when we get the job done we soak up in the soil, but we belong to no one. That is also a huge liberty, a big freedom, but in some cases, many cases throughout Europe it can be very scary."*

Another survey participant commented - *"It would be a great opportunity if mentoring will be brought to its real attention, as it is the main process in one's journey through ESC."*

When asked who should be offering the recognition, the answer was difficult to pinpoint, but in the end, it was a common conclusion that recognition and appreciation should be offered both by individuals - coordinators, volunteers and other team members - but also by the structures - organisations, NAs and SALTO offices.

*"We need support from all parties involved - we are all responsible to make sure that mentoring is considered as it has to be or as we would like it to be considered by everyone in these projects. **Recognition, just like mentoring, it is not a one-man show.**"* (a mentor)

We also looked at the connection between the ways of sustaining mentors' motivations and the support and resources that are available. The strong contribution of training in developing mentoring capacity is clearly confirmed by more than 67% of respondents who saw this as a current resource used to support mentors. At the same time, exchange of experiences among mentors are the second means

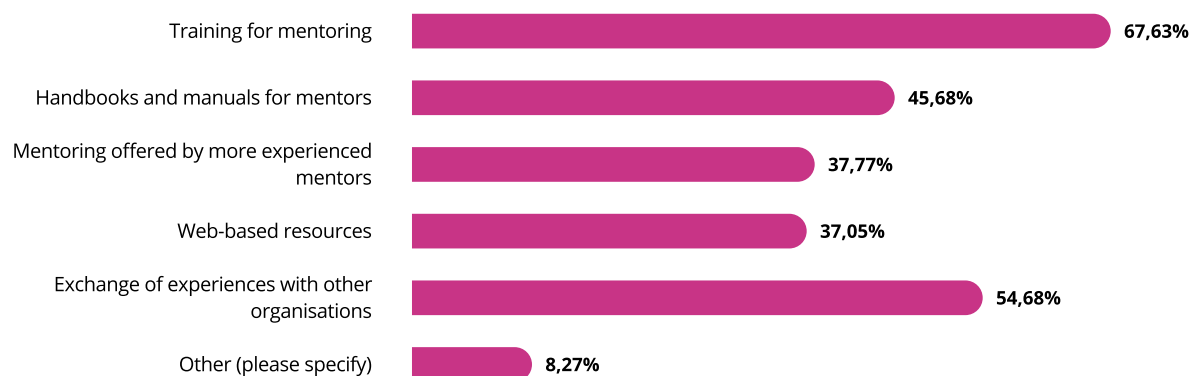
of support, as indicated by over 54% of participants in the survey, while handbooks and manuals are important resources used by more than 45% of respondents. Other valuable contributors to capacity building for mentors that were mentioned are: mentoring offered by more experienced mentors (105 respondents) and web-based resources (indicated by 103 respondents). 2 of the mentors interviewed in our focus group directly asked for a website or platform that can collect the information needed by mentors in one single place - both with tools and resources, but also with experiences shared by other mentors.

“It is important to have a network and a website with resources - there is a lot existing, but you cannot find it in one place, you have to look for it or find it from other people.” (a mentor and trainer)

“When I encourage other people to become mentors, I realise mentoring is a role that has a lot of responsibility for the wellbeing of others - it can be scary, so it takes a lot of convincing to keep going. I feel like I don’t know how to convince others to do it, even if they have a lot to gain for themselves - it could help if there would be more information available more easily, experiences from others to showcase it is a big thing, but not that big - you probably gain more from it than what it takes from you.” (a mentor and project coordinator)

What are the current resources used to develop mentoring capacities in your working context?

select all that apply



It is worth noticing that mentors also receive support and resources from the project coordinators and organisational leaders, from the team members in the hosting and even the supporting organisation, but also from national networks (such as Compagnons Bâtisseurs in France) or peer communities, such as Mentoring under Construction (already mentioned by mentors and organisations). In fact, there is a recognized **need for more interaction and exchange among mentors** and the communities of practice are the most comprehensive solution for such an exchange. 137 respondents in our survey in fact picked the area of “Exchange and networking amongst mentors” as an important training and learning area for mentors, where NAs, SALTOS, but also youth organisations should focus and develop more content and more opportunities.

From this perspective, the **Mentoring under Construction² (MuC) community** created by ESC SALTO Resource Center in 2020, with the support of the Romanian NA, has a wide range of resources and support offered to mentors all across Europe (from regular meet-ups, to podcasts, interactive debates, workshops with experts and informal community gatherings), generated in an attempt to develop a vibrant, supportive and diverse European community of mentors and support-people in ESC projects.

The support needed from coordinators is also noticed from the perspective of NA representatives. In fact, one NA representative indicated it as a *“challenge in mentoring, for coordinators to support the mentors properly and to reflect about what is the goal of this role and make explicit what is expected from a mentor.”*

As it was testified by mentors in our focus group, **mentors need a clear and sustained support from their organisations** in:

- defining the role, the requirements and expectations, the structure of the support system that is designed
- conveying the importance of the mentoring dimension towards the volunteers - explaining why it matters and how it completes their experience, besides the practical volunteering activities
- making space for the mentoring meetings and integrating the mentoring support in the volunteering experience

Without this, some mentors may feel lost or not enforced enough and many volunteers do not really make use of the mentor support they have available, seeing it just as an offer available among many other options, but not acknowledging its potential value.

To add on to this, the other type of support needed by mentors related to the content of their work, the difficulties and challenges they themselves go through, in tackling some of the hard or delicate issues their volunteers are confronted with, but also sometimes managing their own emotions. One of the mentors we interviewed clearly pointed out that what she was lacking was a **support system for mentors** - when she was in a difficult life phase, did not have the strength to reach out to volunteers, was not feeling well and could not perform the work, but in fact wanted to accomplish her task - her testimony was *“I did not have a feeling I could go to a person to talk about my need - that I am in this situation, but I still need to support people, how can I do this? What can I do maybe to rearrange it, to give it to someone else, till I am back on track?”*

In such cases, there should be more support offered from the coordinator or other members of the hosting or lead organisation, because mentors (whether volunteers or employed for this position) need to process and debrief their own work as mentors and support-persons. But at the same time, what could be very beneficial is the **peer support** of other mentors, coaches or youth workers - people who are involved in similar activities and can relate to the difficult experiences or can simply offer a piece of advice, information or a resource. As one mentor indicated - *“Fortunately we have a really good network here in Finland, an informal **network of mentors** - if I have something I need to know, I make a phone call - it is a very valuable thing. It is all about learning - People are different so you always need to act according to*

² Mentoring under Construction community <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/>

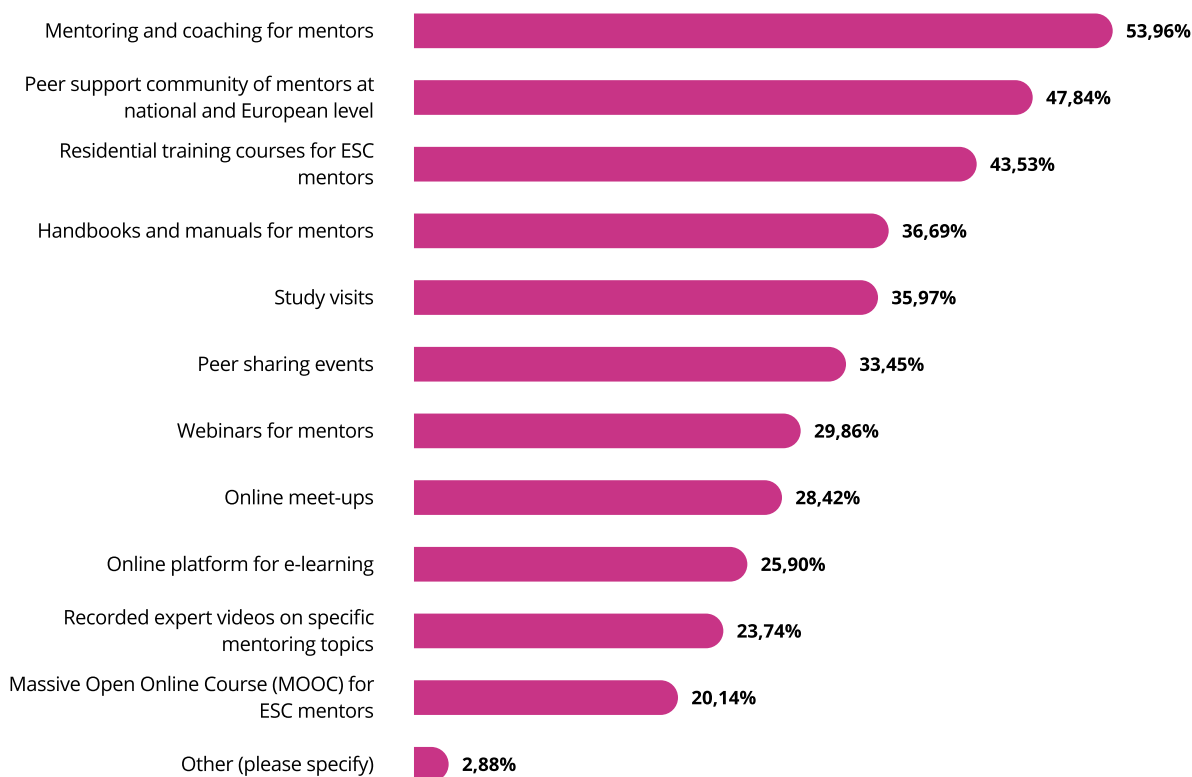
that. What I learn with one volunteer I probably cannot use with another one, so I always need to ask - I call colleagues, I have a discussion and it is solved."

When asked directly what types of support-measures and resources for mentors are needed to be developed and provided, the survey respondents massively indicated elements that have already been presented above:

- | Mentoring and coaching for mentors - as a support-measure - almost 54% (150 respondents)
- | Peer support community of mentors at national and European level - almost 48% (133 respondents)
- | Residential training courses for ESC mentors - over 43% (121 respondents)
- | Handbooks and manuals for mentors - over 36% (102 respondents)
- | Study visits - almost 36% (100 respondents)

In your opinion, what types of support-measures and resources for mentors are needed to be developed and provided?

select maximum 5



The other types of support-measures indicated are also not to be ignored:

- | Peer sharing events are wanted by 93 respondents
- | Webinars for mentors as well as online meetups were indicated by 83, respectively 79 respondents
- | Online platform for e-learning, as well as a MOOC for ESC mentors were chosen by 72, respectively 56 respondents
- | Recorded expert videos on specific mentoring topics are also a valid learning option for 66 people

Other needs for support that were clearly stated during the survey and focus groups are:

- | Having a unitary approach and redefining the role of the mentor in ESC projects to be more realistic
- | Developing a clear framework of what is the mentor's role
- | Creating events especially for the mentors' development
- | Offering an overview of the status of mentoring as an overall practice in the ESC program (a need that we hope to cover with the present research report)
- | Updating the mentor on the information provided in On Arrival Trainings and Mid Term meetings (from the TEC cycle), in order for them to work along with the volunteers later
- | Creating projects for local organisation so they can get money to support their mentors with above mentioned resources



SECTION 3

Coaching in Solidarity projects: research results



Insights about coaching in ESC Solidarity Projects

“A coach is what young people expect from them”

a coach in ESC solidarity projects

Data regarding coaching in the ESC programme were collected through desk research, surveys, focus group interviews with coaches, project coordinators, trainers, NAs' officers and participant observation during the SoliDare event, bringing together the ESC practitioners' community, in Timisoara, Romania in September 2022. 100 respondents from 24 countries took part in a survey. Among them were 37 coaches, 30 project coordinators or team members, 18 trainers, 11 National Agencies officers, 1 SALTO officer and 3 other stakeholders. 65% of the respondents were women. Most responses came from Romania (36), Turkiye (11) and Bulgaria (10). Most respondents (68%) are relatively new in the field and were not involved in Youth Initiatives (Youth in Action Programme 2007-2013). The sample is not representative of all ESC stakeholders and is based on 100 participants filling in a survey. It is difficult to make any generalisations, however the results of the research show some trends and examples of practice.

Understanding of coaching in ESC

“Coaching is facilitating the learning process, ensuring that the learning process is on track and supporting young people, ensuring that growth is happening”

a coach of ESC projects

Blurred concepts

“There is still a lack of clarity about what the role of a coach should be: is it someone who gives advice when it is needed, brings specific skills to the project or manages the whole project on behalf of the group?”
(NA officer)

The data included in desk research backs up the opinions of various stakeholders involved in the ESC and show that the concept of coaching in the ESC programme needs to be clarified and its understanding might need to be more accurate.

There needs to be a better understanding of the terms of project types in ESC. According to the Programme Guide, a coach is a person who supports young people in so-called solidarity projects. It is a particular type of project led by a group of young people and implemented locally for a period of maximum 12 months. However, as the whole programme is called European Solidarity Corps, many beneficiaries consider all projects implemented in the frame of it as “solidarity projects”. Therefore, coaches are often confused with mentors in volunteering projects, or persons supporting individual young people.

Finding a group working with solidarity projects with a solid understanding of the programme was challenging.

“A resource person – not a member of the group - who supports young people in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of a Solidarity Project” (European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide 2023, p. 103)

The definition of a coach in the context of ESC itself also causes **terminological problems**. It is broad and emphasises only one aspect of a coach’s work - support. However, support can be everything when working with young people.

“Coaching is a terrible label to give it, because it is not coaching, please! It is the worst expression one could find for what happens. It can be facilitating a group - moderating a group - bringing a group of youngsters together and coordinating it. Sometimes it may be also coaching, but it is as far from anything that I would call coaching that I can imagine” (a trainer)

As mentioned in the desk research part, a coach in a traditional understanding asks questions and accompanies the client in the creative process of their development. The practice shows that a coach in ESC, apart from these tasks, often has an expert and advisory role (more like a mentor) as well.

While the role of a coach is not widely introduced in the ESC Programme Guide, stakeholders dealing with the solidarity projects had to develop their own understandings and practices.

Roles and responsibilities of a coach

Support is the most recognisable role of a coach. However, the support is understood very broadly. This support may consist in explaining the idea for a project, assisting in project preparation, implementation, and monitoring of the project, managing group dynamics and conflicts, evaluating different stages of a project, advising and even running expert sessions for young people.

The programme doesn’t impose any borders on this support level, which might result in too much intervention from a coach and taking over the project and related responsibilities.

“The role depends on the support needs of young people. Sometimes it is the role of manager, sometimes trainer, expert, and leader. It is a mixture of roles that young people expect from coaches”. (a coach)

However, first of all, a coach should support the learning process of the participants. 82% of survey respondents indicated that facilitating participants’ learning is very important or absolutely essential in coaches’ work, and this function was top-rated. With this one, feedback and reflection are strongly linked.

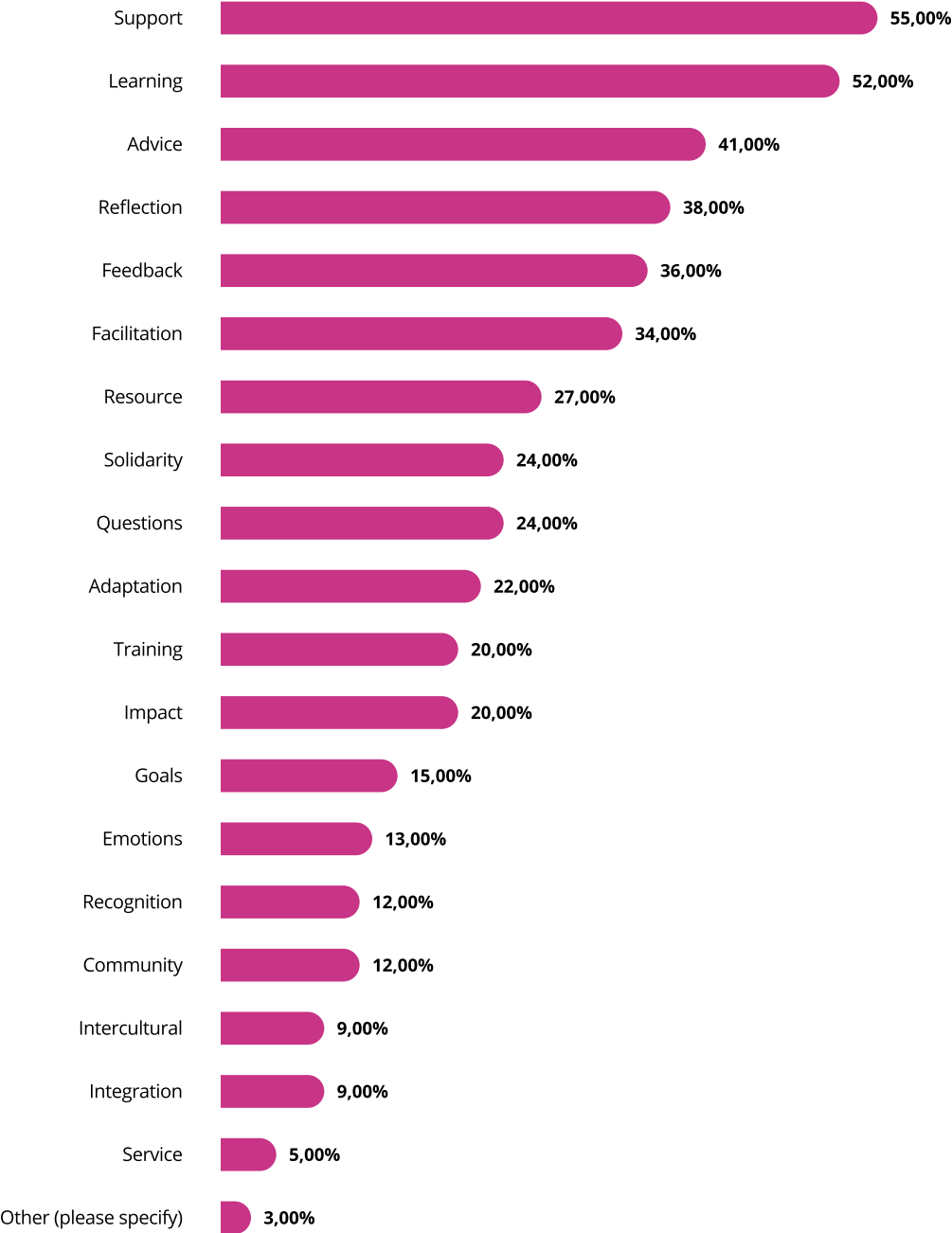


The respondents in the survey were asked to indicate a maximum of five words that describe their understanding of coaching. The fact that just over half of the participants indicated the most popular answers (support and learning) shows how vague this concept is and how it triggers various thoughts and concepts. **45% didn't mention *support*, the only defining word of this practice in the ESC Programme Guide, and 75% didn't indicate questions traditionally embedded in a coaching role.** Surprisingly, as many as **41% underlined the advisory role** of a coach, even though in the previous programme, Youth Initiatives, the coach was not an advisor, and advising was not recommended.



What are the keywords that best describe your understanding of coaching in Solidarity projects?

select maximum 5



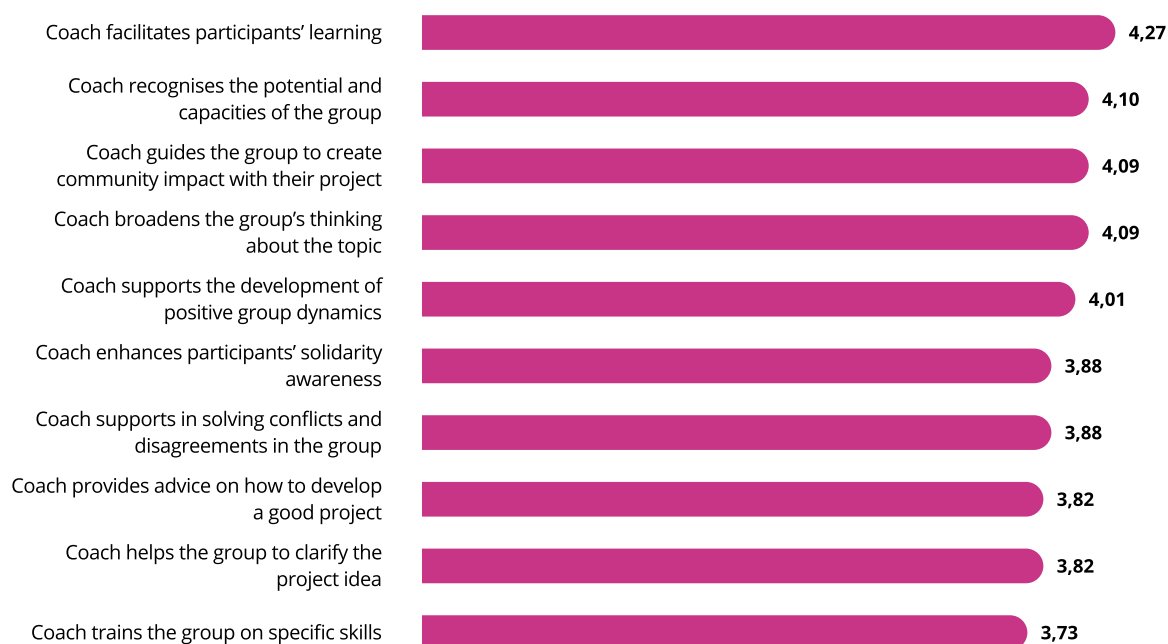
The following graph presents the weighted average of the answers regarding the importance of a coach's functions, where 1 meant not important at all, 3 average importance and 5 absolutely essential.

All of the functions were rated far beyond 3. Moreover, the rating difference between the answers is not significantly different, meaning that all the functions are important and, for many respondents, even essential. The list is quite long and still not exhaustive. In the open question additional functions were mentioned:

- | support with administrative issues
- | motivate young people
- | help gain self-confidence
- | teach young people soft skills
- | help with team building
- | evaluate the project and the process

This shows that the **functions of a coach in the ESC solidarity projects are complex and not homogenous.**

In your opinion, how important are the following functions of a coach in ESC Solidarity projects?



Focus group participants underlined **similarities between a coach and a youth worker**, listing the responsibilities and tasks. Often, they even equated these two positions. For them, the most important elements of a coach were empathy, empowerment, innovation, learning through feedback, sharing experience, support and facilitation. However, at the same time, they underlined that **a coach is also a trouble-shooter: helping with crises, conflicts and motivating young people**.

*“Support refers to the clear role of a youth worker: **nurturing what is in young people without imposing anything on them**. Bringing up the quality from within young people. Facilitating their development. Easing this process. My role as a coach was to make things easier for young people regarding project management, dealing with procedures and processes within a project.”* (a coach).

Trainers see the coach more as someone who provides a framework for a project and guides young people through all its stages. *“To me coaching is about giving the framework to an informal group of youngsters who need to be guided throughout a process”* (a trainer)

Coaching in practice

“I supported them (young people) before the coaching period. I started to help them from the beginning when they started with the application. I didn’t write a single word but I gave them the tools to do that. In the middle of the project, I started to leave more room for young people. You shouldn’t be a leader because the learning process is partially disrupted.” (a coach)

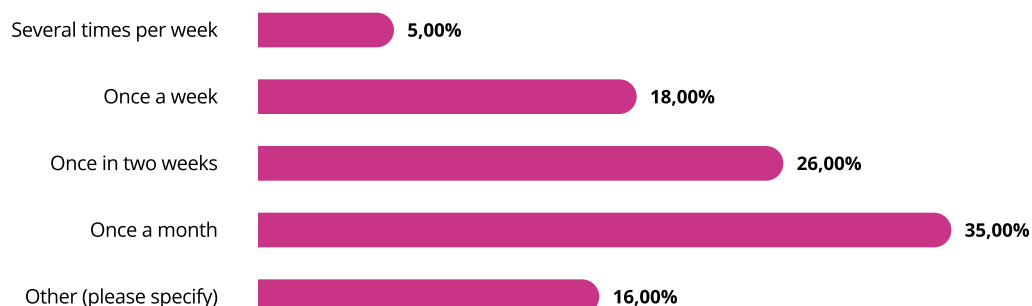
“The coach can support the participation of young people through different phases of the project (from the preparation and submission of the application to the evaluation of the project and the utilisation of its results, while their role is important in supporting the self-evaluation of the learning outcomes of each team member).” (comment in a survey)

There is a maximum of 12 working days allocated for coaches in ESC solidarity projects and the maximum duration of a project is 12 months. However, **many coaches choose to start their work with young people long before the application submission**. 42% of the respondents indicated that in their practice, a coach gets involved with a group of young people when they need support in clarifying ideas for a project. The coach meets with young people, discusses their ideas and tries to empower them to develop the project. Some coaches help young people with writing applications (10% of respondents). Even though this is not in line with the programme guidelines, they feel this is the right thing to do, especially with some young people with fewer opportunities, for whom putting their ideas for a project into words sometimes turns out to be beyond their abilities. Contributing towards preparing the application form is a way for coaches to empower young people and include them in this process. Sometimes, only with a coach’s involvement can young people have a chance to receive a grant and implement their ideas.

Many coaches start their work once the application is approved. The frequency of the meetings often depends on the needs of the groups; however, practice shows that they usually happen once or twice a month.



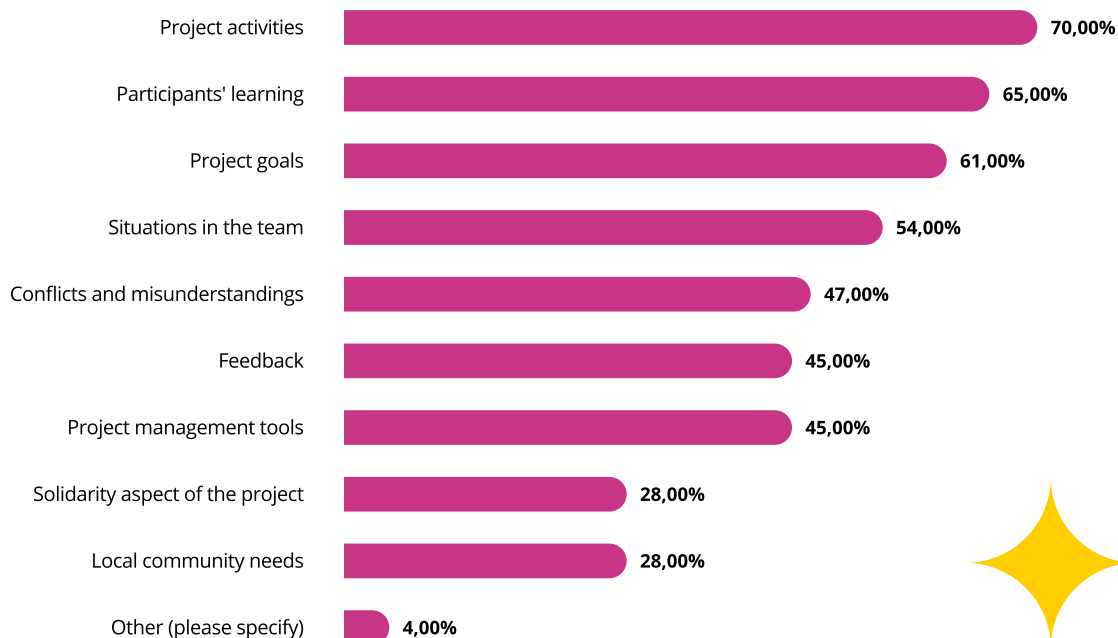
In your opinion, what is the optimal frequency of coaching meetings with the group of participants?



The **topics of meetings** with a coach vary depending on the needs of the young people and the theme of the project itself. They are often connected with project activities, goals and learning processes. Surprisingly the solidarity aspect of the project could be more prevalent in coaching practice. 72% of respondents didn't mark it among the most common topics addressed during the coaching meetings and found at least five more important topics.

From your experience, what are the most common topics addressed in coaching meetings with the young participants?

select maximum 5

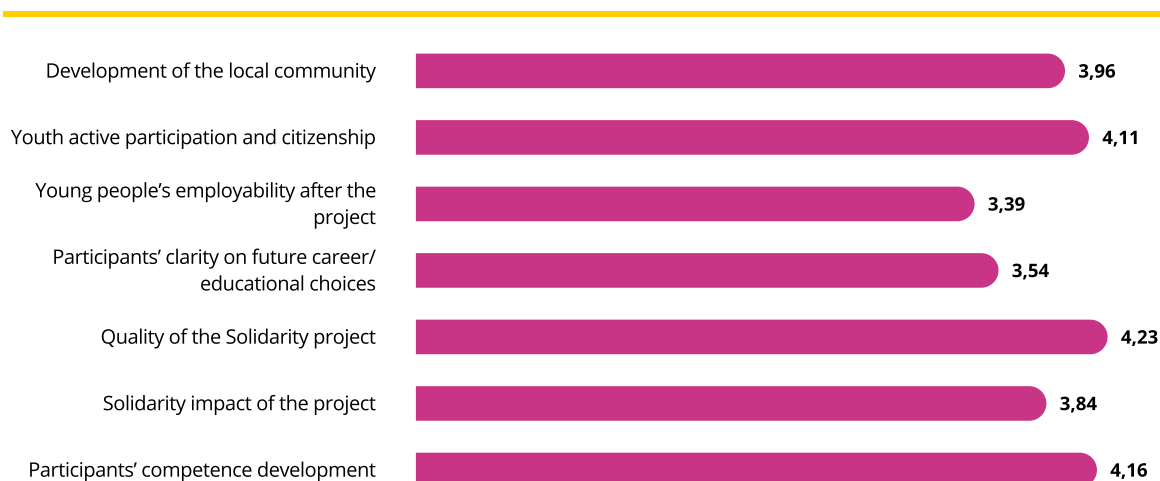


Contribution of coaching to a project's impact

The contribution of coaching to a project's impact is difficult to measure. We asked survey respondents about their opinions and, based on this, we can draw cautious conclusions that coaching significantly contributes to projects' impact. The following graph presents the weighted average of the answers regarding the contribution of coaching towards various aspects of Solidarity projects' impact, where 1 meant not at all, 3 to moderate extent and 5 to a high extent. All aspects were rated far beyond 3. The rating difference between the answers was not significantly different. This means that for the vast majority of the respondents, the contribution of coaching towards all listed aspects of the projects' impact is at least moderate, and for many is high or very high level.

The most important elements to which coaching contributes are the **quality of the projects** (86% indicated to a high or very high extent), **participants' competence development** (78% indicated to a high or very high extent) and **youth active participation and citizenship** (78%). The least impact of coaching respondents saw on young people's employability after the project (for 46% it was to a high or very high extent) and participants' clarity on future career/educational choices (52%).

In your opinion, to what extent does coaching contribute to the following aspects of Solidarity projects' impact?



One of the motivations to become a coach, pointed out by the focus group participants, was to help young people impact their local communities. Supporting them in this process is an essential feature of coaching. Furthermore, stakeholders who participated in the research emphasise that coaching affects various aspects of projects, significantly contributing towards the quality of the project and young people's learning process.

Quality in coaching and coach competences

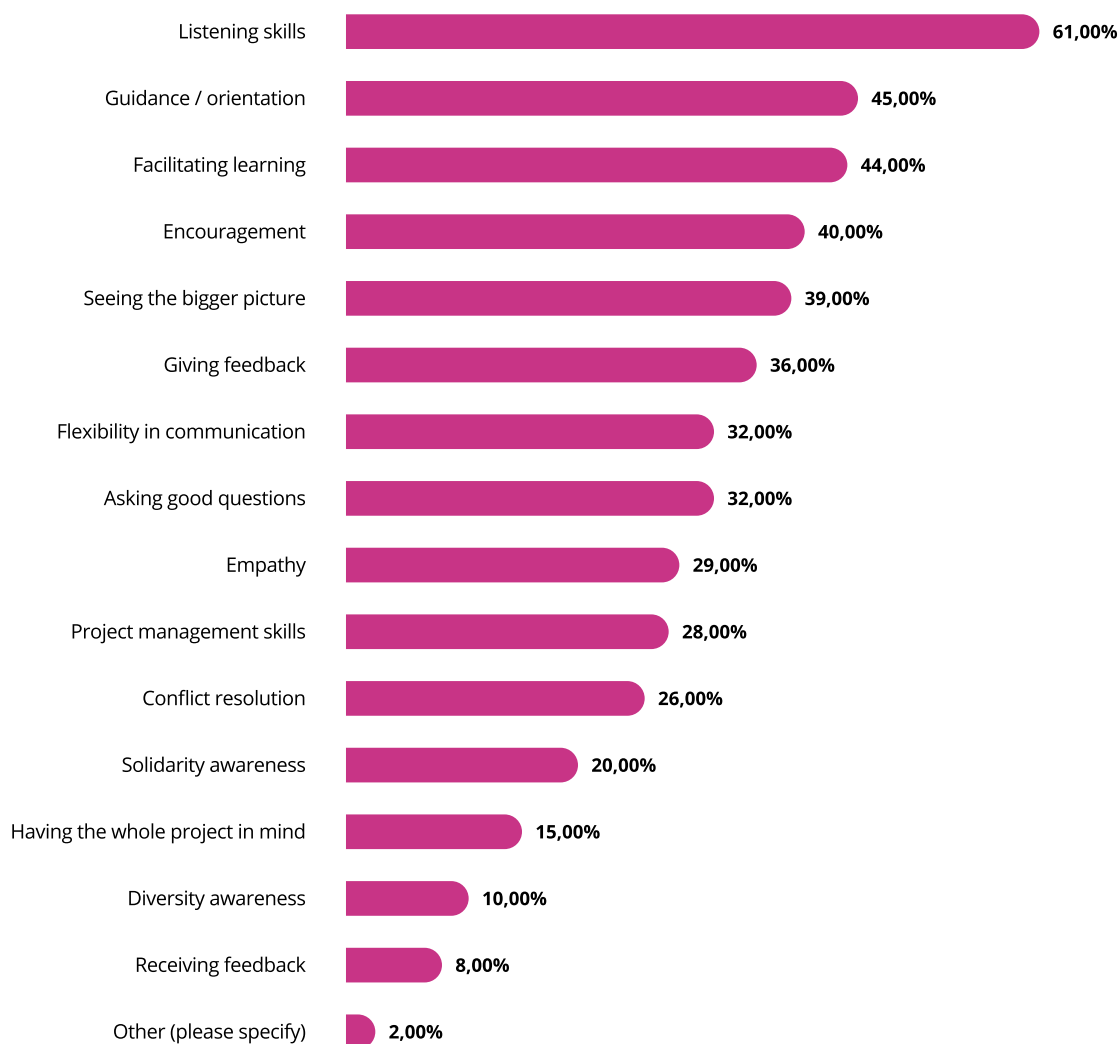
Misunderstanding the coach's role is one of the most significant themes when assessing the quality of coaching. **A coach shouldn't act like a project leader or team member.** The importance of sticking to boundaries in the process was emphasised, especially by coaches who participated in the focus group interviews.

Adjusting a coaching process to young people’s needs, strong listening skills, giving feedback and stimulating participants with questions so they can find their own solutions were highlighted as quality features in coaching. **A coach should focus on the group of young people involved in the project rather than on the target group of the project.**

Many **competencies** are expected from the coach. Participants of the focus groups indicated that they should be flexible with strong listening and facilitation skills, open towards mistakes, patient and simply like young people. They should know how to give feedback, work with emotions, guide young people, and contribute towards conflict transformation and project management.

What are the most important competences needed for effective coaching in Solidarity projects?

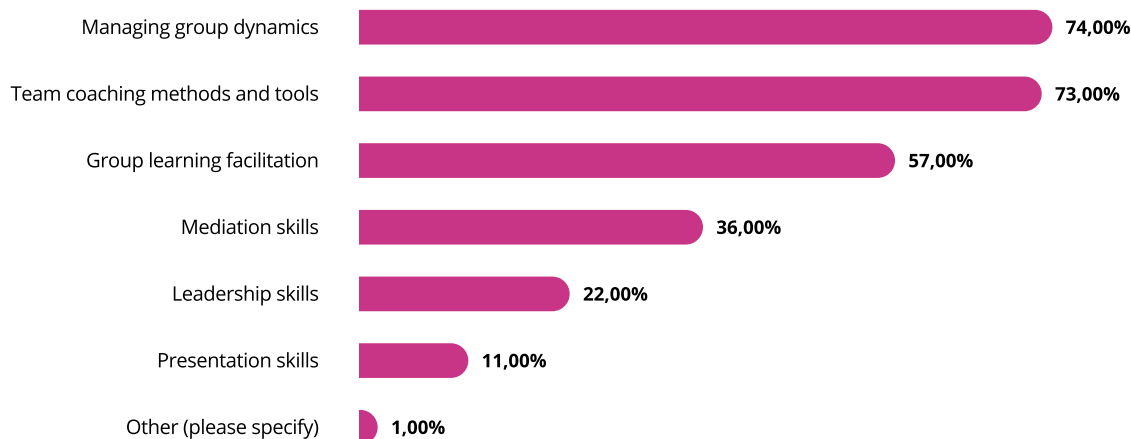
select maximum 5



Furthermore, as coaches work with groups, they should manage group dynamics. They need to know team coaching tools, facilitate group learning and mediate when necessary.

In your opinion, what are the top 3 additional essential competencies needed when coaching teams?

select maximum 3



Inclusion through coaching: working with young people with fewer opportunities

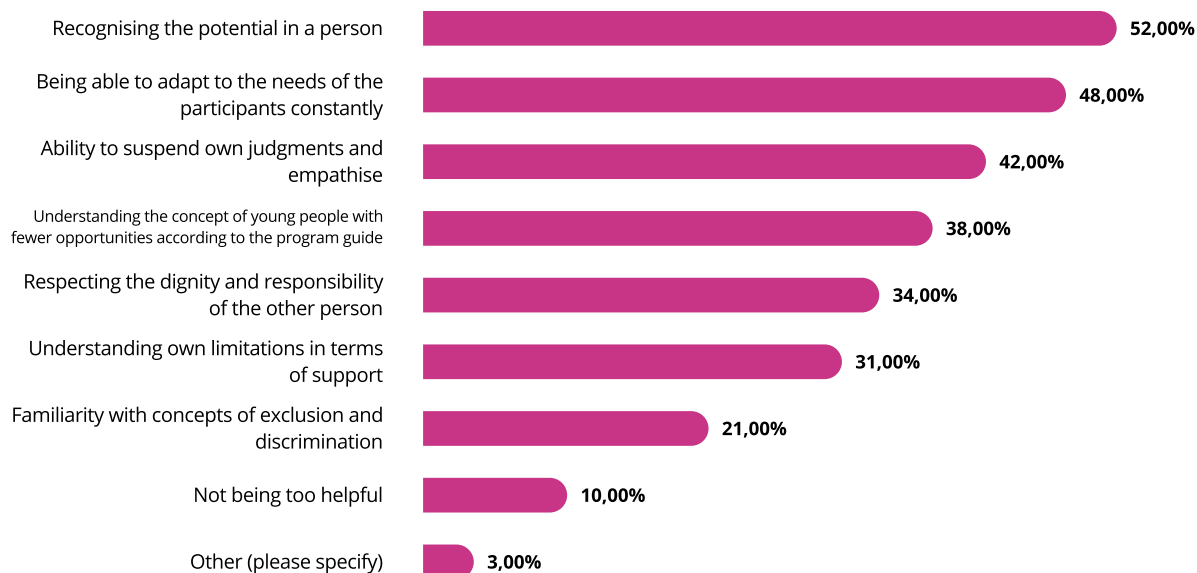
Coaching might be a powerful tool to raise the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. However, a paradox is seen in this process. Solidarity projects are expected to be youth-led at all project stages (idea, application submission, implementation, evaluation and reporting). However, young people with fewer opportunities might struggle with all the requirements and need support. Some coaches admitted that without their help with preparing the application form, the project would never get approval. The level of this help varies from guiding young people in writing the application to even in some cases writing the application on their behalf. ESC Solidarity projects are perceived as one of the few that young people can fully implement themselves. But not all young people have the same opportunities to do it and yet, at the end of the day, this is a competition and only the projects with the highest scores are approved.

To what extent then coaches should support the preparation of the project process? And **how to avoid taking over the project from young people?** Where is this line? These questions are controversial and responses from the field of practice vary. Some organisations openly admit that with coaches' help they make project applications on behalf of informal groupings of young people to increase the chance of receiving a grant. Some of the coaches help in writing the applications. Some do not write them, but discuss the questions included in the application with young people they guide.

At the same time, a coach should have even more competencies to contribute towards the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. For 52% of respondents, recognising the potential in a person and for 48% being able to adapt to the needs of the participants continually were marked as essential.

In your opinion, what is essential for quality coaching when working with young people with fewer opportunities within a Solidarity Project team?

select maximum 3



Coaching is a process that young people can decide whether they want it. It cannot be imposed. Thus, at the very beginning, young people should be aware of the coaching process and decide whether they need it. Unfortunately, many young people don't know about this opportunity.

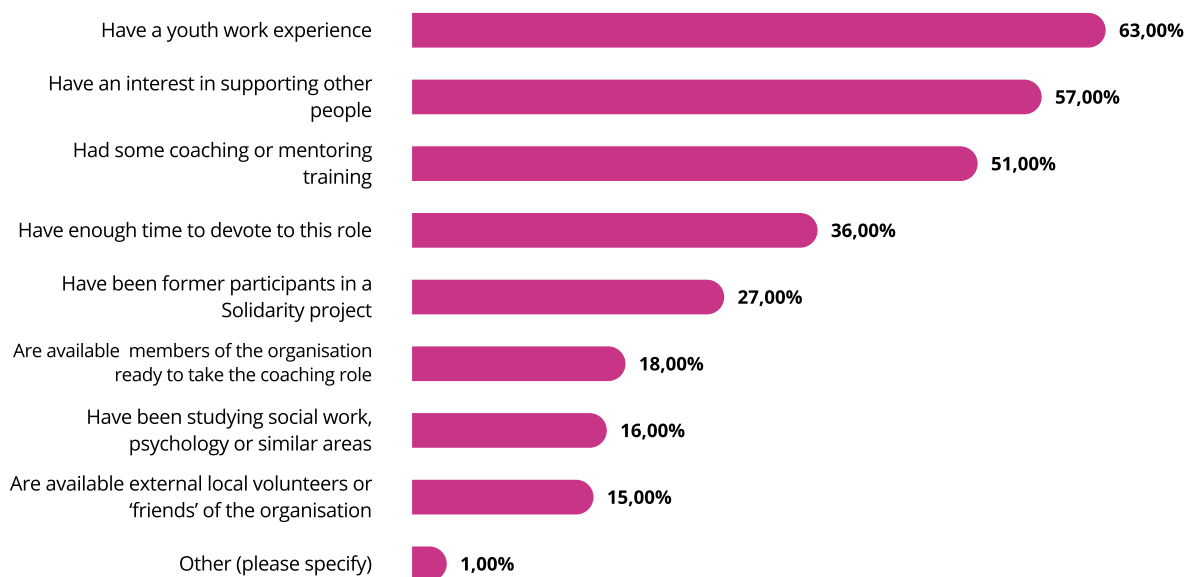
Working with coaches: challenges, recruiting and sustaining coaches

There are challenges with recruiting and sustaining coaches. As solidarity projects are youth-led, young people are expected to reach out to a coach themselves. This happens especially with informal groups; however, they struggle with knowing people with particular expertise. Measures to match young people with coaches are needed. **Lists of coaches working within the ESC programme or pools of coaches are missing.** Some organisations assign coaches from their staff or recruit former volunteers or members. Some coaches are invited by young people to join the project, based on their different roles or after seeing them perform and having a chance to know them in advance, which can provide some trust. For example, young people might participate in interesting training courses or workshops and afterwards ask a trainer to be their coach.

While recruiting coaches, previous youth work experience, interest in supporting other people and having some coaching or mentoring training are mainly taken into consideration. However, this picture is incomplete, as young people from informal groups didn't participate in the research. They are often the ones responsible for involving a coach in the project.

In your experience, what criteria are suitable to be used when recruiting coaches for Solidarity projects?

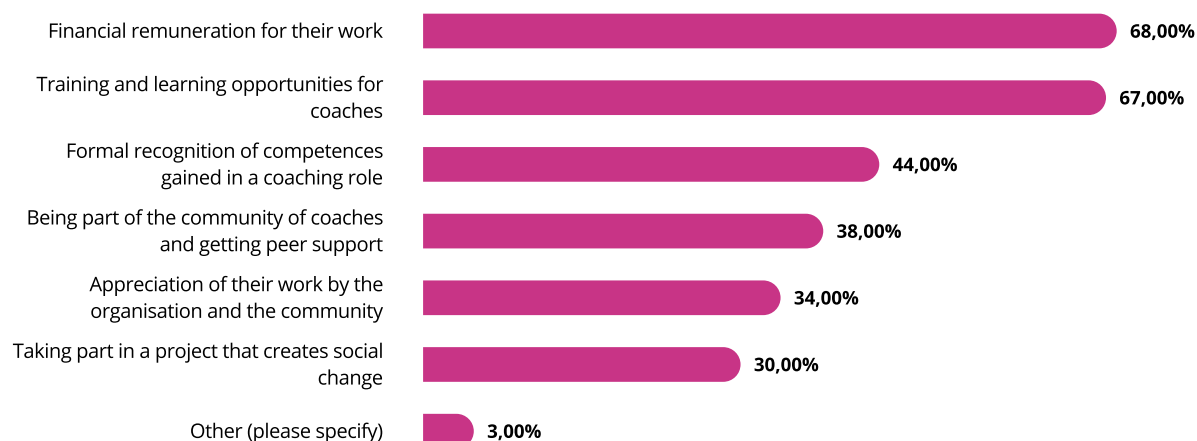
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Sustaining coaches is complicated, as it depends greatly on the organisation's structure and strategy and young people's readiness to implement solidarity projects. According to the opinions of focus groups and the survey's participants, **increasing financial gratification and provisioning training opportunities for personal growth could significantly influence the motivation of coaches** to continue their involvement in the ESC projects.

In your opinion, what are the most effective ways to sustain and improve the motivation of coaches in ESC?

select maximum 3



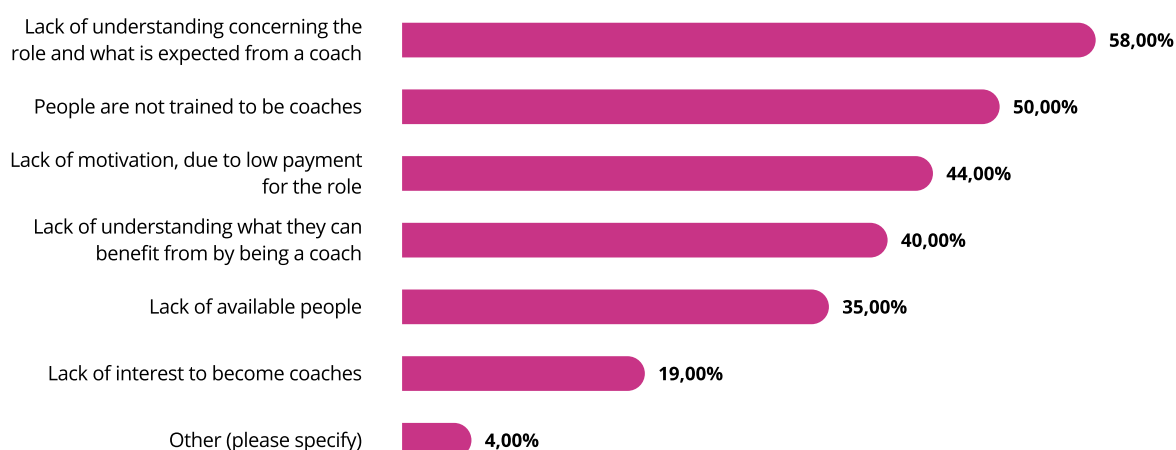
Project coordinators who participated in focus group interviews emphasised that they **struggle with finding appropriate coaches** due to misunderstanding specific coaching features in ESC, financial issues, difficulties with reaching the right people for this role and a lack of training courses and proper preparation for this role. The survey respondents confirmed similar problems. Almost 60% chose a lack of understanding concerning the role as the main challenge, along with a lack of trained people (50%) and financial issues (44%).

National Agencies officers pointed out that in some cases, coaches are not focused on the project group but rather on the project’s target group. Some coaches cannot provide sufficient learning support for young people and focus too much on the project’s technical aspects or are experts in the content part.

Coaches admitted that they feel **disconnected from the National Agencies** and don’t get enough support. They underlined that this connection would help them to understand their role and expectations better and at the same time would serve to deepen rooting in the field. However, **often there is no communication between coaches and NAs, as NAs don’t encourage coaches to contact them.** They expect communication with young people instead. Furthermore, in most countries, there are no activities for coaches provided by NAs and no support or recognition for their work.

What are the main challenges in engaging coaches in your context?

select maximum 3



Needs for further development and support measures needed

Clarification of the terms

Although many stakeholders like that the role of a coach in ESC Solidarity projects is blurred, they see the **need for a more precise and accurate definition**. The clarification of the role would be beneficial for all parties involved in the project. It would help manage the expectations of coaches and young people and, at the same time, root the process in a common framework. It shouldn't be detailed, however, a common understanding of the term is needed.

One of the recommendations is to **reconsider the term "a coach" in the ESC Solidarity projects** context and perhaps replace it with a youth worker or learning facilitator.

The community of coaches

Coaches would benefit from a **shared space to exchange their experience and good practices**. Currently, residential events are preferred, however, online opportunities were also mentioned. Coaches lack study visits, events and meetings, which are essential for maintaining their motivation and professional growth, exchanging methods and tools and exploring various issues related to the topic.

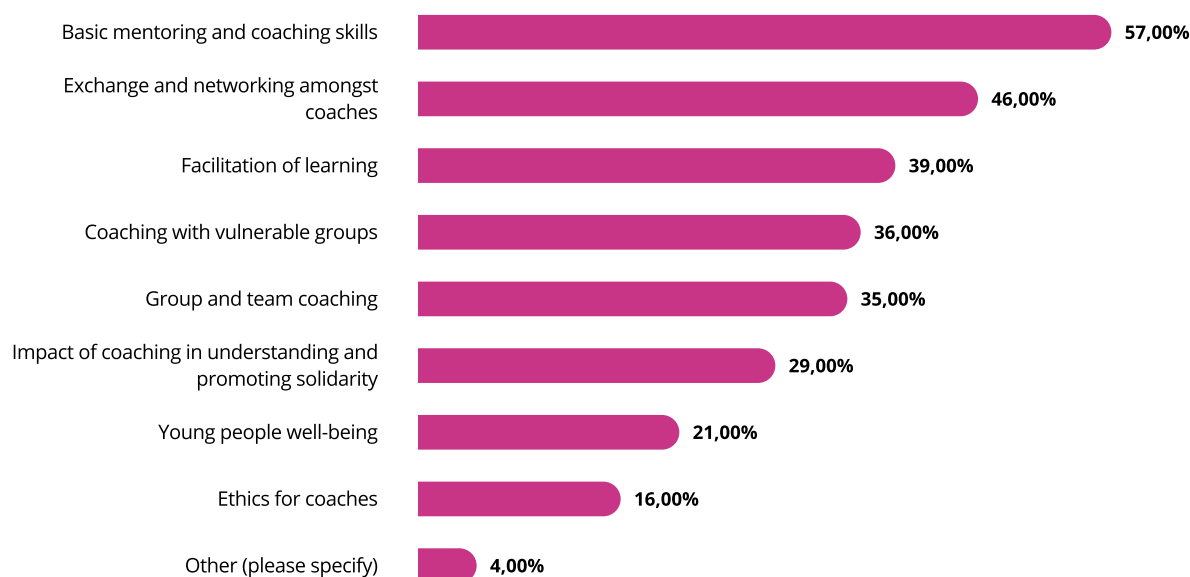
A list of coaches with suitable expertise who work in the ESC context would be helpful for young people to find proper support. At the same time, it would help coaches build their professional networks. This measure would also support recognition of this role in a broader context.

Training courses

Training courses for coaches would prepare them for working on ESC solidarity projects. There is a **need for introductory training courses on coaching**. They should focus on the specific skills, knowledge and attitudes that are expected from a coach: facilitation of learning, communication skills (with particular emphasis on active listening, giving feedback and asking the right questions), conflict management (mediation skills) and empowering and motivating. They could be done in-person or online, through webinars, MOOCs and various platforms.

In your opinion, what areas of training for coaches are needed to be developed and provided by the National Agencies, SALTOs and youth organisations?

select maximum 3



Financial issues

Currently, the pay for coaches is not commensurate with the amount of time needed for an effective group coaching process and many coaches work overtime. **More than twelve working days are needed** to fulfil all the requirements expected from a coach and guide a group through the process (preparation, supporting the ideas, twelve months of implementation, documenting learning outcomes and closing). Furthermore, in many countries, a coach's daily rate is inadequate to attract the skills and experience required. It has become unprofitable in recent years due to rising inflation and the economic situation. Thus, coaches are either very passionate about this role or compromise part of the requirements. The rate has remained the same since the beginning of the programme.

Understanding of coaching and recognition

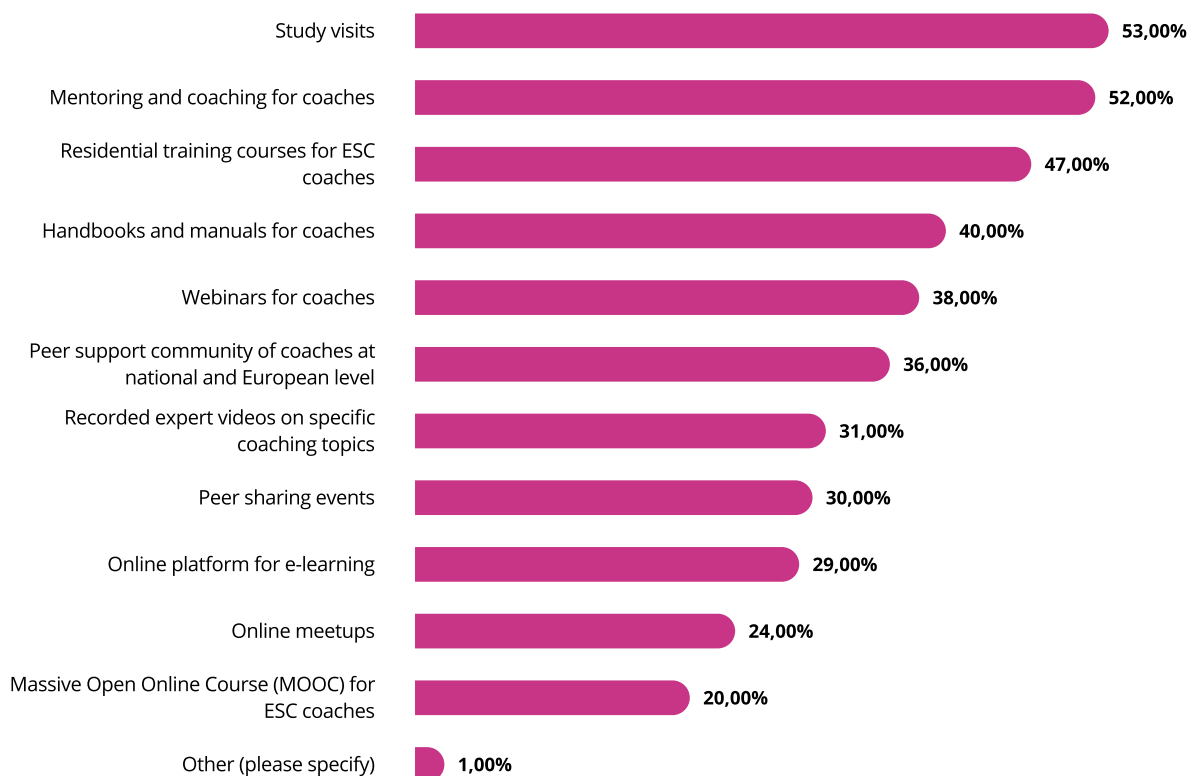
According to research participants, raising awareness about the benefits of being a coach in ESC could contribute positively towards recruiting and retaining coaches. Coaching groups of young people can be a great adventure and fun, but also an important learning opportunity for coaches. Seeing the development of young people was expressed as one of the most valuable and beneficial moments of this process for a coach.

A handbook devoted to coaching in ESC

Although many materials are available on coaching, there is **no handbook devoted to coaching in the ESC**. Practitioners underlined the need for guidelines and methodologies for coaching in this particular context. They requested a compendium with examples of good practices and short guidelines for coaches. The Coaching Guide for Youth Initiatives and Participation, published ten years ago, requires an update.

In your opinion, what types of support measures and resources for coaches are needed to be developed and provided?

select maximum 5





SECTION 4

Mapping existing resources



Over the past years, the extended community of practice dealing with European volunteering programs (both during EVS and now in ESC) has responded to a **constant need in the field**: that of creating and providing specific **resources to support the work of mentors** and other support-persons in ESC projects. This is a need that was also confirmed in our present study - handbooks and manuals for mentors are the second most used resource to develop mentoring capacities, as indicated by 45% of study participants (after the training for mentors). At the same time, when asked what types of support-measures and resources are needed to be developed and provided, over 36% of the respondents indicated handbooks and manuals.

The already existing resources come in a variety of formats, from manuals and guides for the mentor role to checklists, toolboxes, collections of activities, training designs, testimonials or mere guidelines. In past years, a lot of online (video and audio) resources have been created, offering insights, theoretical inputs, but also personal experience and perspectives from different experts in the field, that can serve the clear need of peer learning and exchange of knowledge that both mentors and coaches have highlighted.

The collection below is by no-means an exhaustive one, but it includes the most known or referenced resources currently available - some of them having been indicated by study participants who are practitioners in the field and use them in their daily work.

They all aim to serve the purpose of equipping mentors of ESC volunteers or coaches of youth in Solidarity projects with information, advice, methods and approaches that can ease their work and make it more efficient.

We have structured the identified existing resources in 4 categories:

Handbooks, guides or manuals - that usually provide ample overviews of the typical topics: what mentoring is, including short references to the role or tasks of a mentor, connected to project phases, how mentoring should be set up, situations mentors face or the competences they need to develop, references to the learning process.

Toolboxes and practical tools - collections of tools and hands-on activities that mentors can use in their work with volunteers - which can be a great asset for coaches as well. This sub-section also includes a few suggested notebooks or diaries that volunteers can use when documenting their learning experience in a volunteering project - with a variety of reflection and introspection activities which can be easily adapted by a coach that supports a group of youth in a Solidarity project.

Reference material (guidelines, brochures, info sheets) - more general reading material related to youthwork, Youthpass and recognition - which can provide an important framework setup for mentors and coaches as facilitators of learning processes. This sub-section also includes the short brochures or materials on mentoring that can be used as promotional materials when recruiting mentors or just giving a teaser of what the role entails.

Training materials on mentoring - a few training designs or curriculums that cover elements on how to train mentors for their tasks, which can be very useful for trainers in European projects, but also for organisations interested to offer training opportunities for their mentors, and why not coaches as well.

While the need for more, better or more up-to-date practical tools and hands-on activities to use with volunteers is a constant one in the mentoring or coaching field, it is important to know there is already a pool of materials that has been created and should be made available to mentors and coaches in ESC projects, to support their capacities.

Handbooks, Guides or Manuals

Title	Short content description	Author(s)	Where to find it
ESC Mentoring Guide (2019)	Presents in a straightforward way the main topics in mentoring related to each phase of the project (preparation, receiving the volunteer, during the project, preparation for returning home, the return and transforming learning to impact. It also includes a few suggested activities for mentors.	Finnish National Agency for Education Marko Kangas Jarkko Soininen	https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/mentoring-guide
Be the Hero, be an EVS Mentor – Practical Guide for EVS Mentors (2013)	An easy-to read manual for mentors covering topics like: who is a mentor, what is mentoring, 4 models of mentoring, how to build trust, detailing the theoretical part of some of the mentoring topics (intercultural awareness, Youthpass, conflicts), listing a few mentoring tools, looking at mentor's wellbeing and also containing small testimonials.	Latvian National Agency	http://www.movit.si/file-admin/movit/EVS_20_let/Mentors_handbook.pdf
Mentorship Handbook (2019)	A comprehensive manual that brings a different perspective on the mentoring topic, placing it in the larger scope of youth work (with information also on the profile of youth) and looking at some new topics, compared to other manuals - what is not mentoring (comparing to other support-processes), types of mentoring, detailing how mentoring is done as a coherent step-by-step process, addressing mentoring principles and ethics and approaching competences of mentors as well as the need for reciprocity in the mentoring relationship. It also includes valuable testimonials.	SEEYN - South East European Youth Network Dragan Atanasov Biljana Vasilevska Trajkoska	https://issuu.com/southeast-europeanyouth-network/docs/mentorship-handbook_-_electronic_version_final

Me+ntor Compendium (2018)	A handbook presenting a set of youth work tools that can be picked up by mentors, as well as 14 case studies on potential mentoring situations and how they were handled by several youth workers who created mentoring plans.	Partnership of organisations under Erasmus+ project	https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources/
Practical Guide – How to be a mentor in Euromed EVS projects (2015)	A guide approaching the typical topics on mentoring - Who is a mentor, responsibilities, profile of the mentor - how to make the right choice, mentor competences, role of the mentor, the person support to offer, challenges faced by mentors and a few tips to overcome them.	SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed Resource Center Justine Abi Saad, Saro Rossi	https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3117/03AW_SY%20Mentors%20guide.pdf
How to Guide for Mentors (in EVS) (2016)	Material to motivate new mentors, guiding them through their roles and responsibilities, reviewing advantages of being a mentor, ways to prepare in becoming a mentor, handling challenges, maintaining motivation.	Partnership of organisations	https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources
Mentorship Journey – Step-by-Step	A compact guide looking at what is mentoring about, using the metaphor of the hero journey - detailing the phases in the mentorship journey and how the mentee perceives them and also describing the work of the mentor in 5 phases of the project - it links to a list of tools that can be used in these project phases.	SEEYN - South East European Youth Network and partner organisations, within an Erasmus+ project	https://www.docdroid.net/WDSDB7v/mentorship-journey-step-by-step-pdf
GROWing SOLIDARE (2020)	A guide for informal groups and organisations implementing Solidarity projects, covering 3 chapters: Introduction on the solidarity concept, the philosophy of the ESC Programme, specifics of ESC projects 53 methods for Community-Based Projects, ranging from identifying and analysing the need to assessing the impact of a project - useful both for youth in a Solidarity project and organisations or volunteers in Volunteering projects 8 models of good practice selected to provide a grass-roots perspective on how to get the community involved in a change and how to act in solidarity.	ANPCDEFP - Romanian National Agency Maria Butyka Andreea Floroiu Ana-Maria Grădinariu Alisia Damian-Coantă	https://www.suntsolidar.eu/growing-solidare-solidarity-kit

Toolboxes and Practical Tools

Title	Short content description	Author	Where to find it
TreasureBox for Mentors and other support-persons in ESC Volunteering Projects (2019)	A practical set of 26 tools for mentors – structured in 4 categories of support: building a positive relationship with the project team; personal, emotional support and well being; problem-solving and support for personal development and the learning process. Besides the methods and tools, a few case studies are included, based on mentors’ real experiences, but also clarifications regarding the support-role, information on short-term mentoring processes and some practical advice for mentors.	Partnership of organisations under an Erasmus+ project	https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/treasure-box-for-mentors.2656/
MentorESC	A mentoring Tool platform - it includes some content sessions on mentoring (history, definitions, reflection activities for mentors themselves), as well as Metodoteca – a collection of methods to be used by mentors.	Partnership of organisations under an Erasmus+ funded project	https://mentoresc.weebly.com/
Meant to be a Mentor - Workbook for EVS Mentors (2015)	Describes EVS as a process of change, looking also at the role of the mentor and offering a series of tools to support the learning of the volunteer. Contains references to peer support among mentors.	Polish National Agency - Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FDES) Michael Kimmig	https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download_file-1300/2015%20EVS%20Meant%20%20be%20a%20Mentor.pdf
THOR-The Heart of Reflection - Tools for Reflection (2021)	It is a set of creative tools to be used in working on reflection and debriefing, printable set of cards, facilitators guide, web app – created using the methodology of Design Thinking. All can be used by mentors, coaches and also project coordinators.	Partnership of organisations under an Erasmus+ funded project	http://theheartof-reflection.com/
One2One Supporting Learning face to face (2018)	A publication for youth workers and mentors supporting learning individually, looking at the learning process, the difference between mentoring and coaching, reflection and instruments for one-to-one learning support.	SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre	https://www.youthpass.eu/downloads/13-62-276/Publication_121_Final.pdf

<p>Youthpass Unfolded - Practical tips and hands-on methods for making the most of the Youthpass process (2012)</p>	<p>A comprehensive guide that looks in detail at all the phases needed for issuing a relevant Youthpass certificate. It is divided in 2 parts – the Youthpass process (why learning matters and how it works) and Youthpass tools and Methods (20 proposed activities that mentors and coaches can successfully use with their volunteers and youth). The brochure has a valuable chapter on inclusion and how it can be approached in Youthpass and learning recognition.</p>	<p>SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre JUGEND fur Europa - German National Agency</p> <p>Paul Kloosterman Darko Markovic Juan Ratto-Nielsen</p>	<p>https://www.youthpass.eu/en/publications/youthpass-unfolded/</p>
<p>Valued by You, Valued by others - Improving the visibility of competences in Youthpass (2019)</p>	<p>A handbook that can help mentors make the use of Youthpass friendlier and more meaningful, stimulating the interest of their volunteers to experience the reflection process needed – details the recognition of learning in European Youthwork, linking to employability, offers advice for documenting competences and the role of the facilitator – suggest tools and activities to support the Youthpass self-assessment and also tips for self-assessment.</p>	<p>SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre</p> <p>Anita Silva Darko Markovic Paul Kloosterman</p>	<p>https://www.youthpass.eu/en/publications/valuedbyyou/</p>
<p>Learning - out-of-the-Box Youthpass Cards (2013, updated 2020)</p>	<p>A card game for mentors, coaches, trainers, project coordinators or any other youth workers. It can be used as a tool to address the topic of learning in a fun, engaging and inspiring way. The cards contain learning quotes that can be self-printed, there is a booklet with proposed activities and it can be adjusted to several learning or reflections contexts.</p>	<p>SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre JUGEND fur Europa - German National Agency</p> <p>Gisele Evrard Darko Markovic Gülesin Nemetlu-Ünal</p>	<p>https://www.youthpass.eu/en/publications/card-game/</p>
<p>The Motivation Kit - ideas for enhanced volunteer management</p>	<p>A set of suggestion cards that mentors, coordinators, even coaches - can use to uplift, maintain or stimulate the motivation of international volunteers. It has ideas of simple activities or actions support-persons can use when feeling stuck.</p>	<p>A group of participants in an Erasmus+ long-term training project</p>	<p>https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources/</p>



EVS Learning Notebook	A practical notebook that volunteers can use as a companion in their reflection during the volunteering experience - offering reflection activities and a focus on the learning taking place in each phase and detailing elements such as learning to learn, learning styles and interests, learning goals, Youthpass and recognition of learning. It contains an agenda for volunteers to plan and collect moments in their projects. Can be printed and used by volunteers and mentors in their working sessions.	Spanish National Agency and INJUVE Spanish Institute for Youth Patricia Eguía, Francisco Cañizares y Álvaro Díaz (Childhood and Youth Leisure Time Coordinator of Vallecas).	https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/evs-learning-note-book.1665/
VALUE - International Volunteer Competence Development and Support (2016)	A visual, playful guide for volunteers to follow their learning experience during an international volunteering project - has suggestions of activities and exercises (can be printed and filled in) - mentors can understand the phases of this experience and propose reflection activities to their volunteers or the use of the entire workbook.	Don Bosco Youth-Net Thomas Stevens	https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download-file-1367/2016_01%20Value.pdf
EVS logbook	A graphic diary to support volunteers follow, evaluate and keep track of their project - which can be personalised and filled in when needed.	Partnership of organisations under a Youth in Action project	https://tamonopatia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/newfiles/EVS_tool_lefkada.pdf
My EVS diary (2014)	A colourful graphic diary/calendar for volunteers, they can print and fill in during their volunteer experience, to track their learning and awareness. Contains also a small glossary of terms volunteers and mentors can use.	Partnership of organisations under an Erasmus+ funded project	https://mydiary.e-evs.eu/evs-diary/
Learning (to learn) in EVS - A self-reflection and learning tool	A simple worksheet for volunteers to fill in when planning and evaluating their learning experience (learning objectives, a learning plan, self-assessment) - mentors can also propose this to volunteers and use it creatively to stimulate reflection.	Darko Markovic	https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources/

<p>Mentoring and Pre-Departure Training in EVS - Ideas, tools and suggestions for practice (2016)</p>	<p>A handbook describing the EVS cycle and describing in more detail the role and need for a supporting organisation and the content and structure of a pre-departure training (PDT), offering a set of tools to be used in a PDT and then detailing the role and tasks of the mentor, addressing also topics such as key competences of mentors, boundaries in the relationship, case studies, mentoring mentors, etc.</p>	<p>Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani - Italian National Agency</p> <p>Laura Pierfelici</p>	<p>https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download-file-1722/Mentoring%20and%20Pre-Departure%20Training%20in%20Euro-pean%20Voluntary%20Service%20(EVS).pdf</p>
<p>Youth Participation Toolkit</p>	<p>It contains 12 modules that can support specific types of actions or projects of the EU youth programmes - each of them is usable as a freestanding resource - most being highly valuable for mentors and coaches. The content of each module serves to enhance participation using the opportunities provided by Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. All modules are informed by three issues of importance for youth participation today: Inclusion and Diversity, Digital transformations and Sustainability.</p>	<p>SALTO Participation and Information Center</p>	<p>https://participationpool.eu/toolkit/</p> <p>Module 10 - Solidarity Projects - https://participationpool.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Solidarity-Projects-1.pdf</p> <p>Module 11 - Volunteering https://participationpool.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Volunteering-1.pdf</p>
<p>Motive in Action (2018)</p>	<p>A coaching, leadership and participation tool, rooted in discovery-based learning and peer learning. It aims at analysing, understanding and increasing motivation, as a central element in any area of life.</p>	<p>Bruno Pizzini Desiree De Scisciolo</p>	<p>https://educationaltoolsportal.eu/educational-toolsportal/en/tools/mia-motive-action</p>

Reference Material (Guidelines, Brochures, Info Sheets)

Title	Short content description	Author	Where to find it
Mentoring under Construction (MuC) podcasts	The mentoring community created by SALTO ESC RC and Romanian NA in 2020 has produced a series of 8 podcasts covering topics of interest for mentors, coaches and other support-people in ESC projects.	SALTO ESC Resource Center	https://anchor.fm/m-u-c OR https://open.spotify.com/show/30UMpe-HmFrBdUe9Xw-0DygW
Mentoring under Construction (MuC) Documents	An online collection of resources, discussion points and insights resulting from the MuC events taking place since 2020, both online and face to face, developed to support the peer learning of mentors and other support-people in ESC projects.	SALTO ESC Resource Center	https://padlet.com/suntsolidareu/MentoringUnderConstruction
MOOC Solidarity (Youtube channel)	A collection of interesting video resources and guides, webinars, podcasts, interviews created and used during or after the MOOC course on the European Solidarity Corps program, constantly updated with topics of interest for all youth workers involved in ESC projects or supporting young people (includes references to coaching, mentoring, Humanitarian Aid in ESC, and others).	Irish National Agency and European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre	https://www.youtube.com/@mooc-solidarity205/videos
The Youthpass process and Learning to Learn - some ideas for practitioners (2010)	A useful paper for mentors to understand in more depth about the learning process and why it matters. It looks at the achievements of Youthpass and deepen the debate around learning to learn; it includes a few suggested further readings.	SALTO-Youth Training and Cooperation Resource Center JUGEND fur Europa - German National Agency Mark Taylor	https://www.youthpass.eu/downloads/13-62-54/TheYouthpass_Process_100923_S.pdf

<p>Youthpass for All - Recognition of learning, focusing on inclusion groups (2009, updated in 2012)</p>	<p>A handbook dedicated to the use of Youthpass for youth with fewer opportunities, also analysing the need to recognize competences developed in a non-formal context. It contains a Mini-Toolbox of suggested activities used in facilitation of learning.</p>	<p>SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion Resource Centre SALTO-YOUTH Training and Cooperation Resource Centre</p> <p>Kathy Schroeder Updated by: Marija Kljajic Rita Bergstein</p>	<p>https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources</p>
<p>Hands on guide to Mentoring in EVS projects</p>	<p>A 2-page brochure - what a mentor is, who can be a mentor, difference between mentor and supervisor, key qualities of mentors, the time commitment needed, the Youthpass process.</p>	<p>Leargas - Irish National Agency</p>	<p>https://www.skog.is/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/handson_evs_mentoring.pdf</p>
<p>8 steps Mentoring Cycle (2018)</p>	<p>A short leaflet describing the 8 steps in a mentoring cycle that follow the emotional phases a volunteer goes through in their volunteering experience.</p>	<p>A group of participants in an Erasmus+ long-term training project</p>	<p>https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources</p>
<p>EVS Adventure Travel Book</p>	<p>A practical guide for volunteers supporting them in their project phases, dedicated to those carrying out their service in the South Mediterranean cooperation (and exploring specificities). It covers practical arrangement, the learning process and intercultural learning, roles of the partner organisations, volunteer rights and duties, soft-skills references, the description of the Training cycle for volunteers.</p>	<p>SALTO Youth EuroMed Resource Center</p> <p>Johanna Reyer Mariem Ben Ltaifa</p>	<p>https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3309/-%20Def%20EVS%20Adventure%20Travel%20Book_5.pdf</p>
<p>Short-term Volunteering as a Door for Development (2020)</p>	<p>A guidebook looking at the specifics of short-term volunteering projects which are needed to be understood by youth workers and organisations hosting short-term volunteers. It contains experience-based advice coming from a Bulgarian organisation hosting volunteers. It includes a brief chapter on mentoring and information on the accreditation phase, partnerships in the project, as well as how to choose candidates, before detailing the main project phases and corresponding tasks.</p>	<p>Pepa Peneva Veleva</p>	<p>https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources</p>

Policy Recommendations for Improved ESC Quality (2019)	A set of policy recommendations to increase the quality of ESC volunteering projects by raising the quality and attention given to the mentoring process.	Partnership of organisations under an Erasmus+ funded project	https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/files/ugd/3ec99c_ce961158ae3f-4c0fb83b-58f5e91fdd8f.pdf?index=true
Youthpass Impact Study - Young people personal development and employability and the recognition of youth work	A reference material for mentors, coaches and project coordinators to read and understand the value of Youthpass, finding reasons and arguments to support their volunteers to go through the self-assessment experience. It also contains examples of Youthpass implementation.	The European Commission DG Education and Culture Marti Taru Paul Kloosterman	https://www.youthpass.eu/en/about-youthpass/youthpass-impact-study/

Training Resources on Mentoring

Title	Short content description	Author	Where to find it
Training Kit European practices of mentoring with young adults at risk of social disadvantage and school drop-out (2011)	Contains training modules on effective mentoring, the mentoring relationship, the role of the mentor in developing key competences, as well as case studies.	Associazione AIM - Agenzia Interculturale e Mobilità (Italy) and partners (within a Grundtvig project)	https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/mentoring/resources/
Mentors Initiation Journey Itinerary (2019)	A detailed training design for a 6-days training for mentors and other support-persons in ESC projects.	Partnership of organisations under an Erasmus+ funded project	https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/mentors-initiation-journey-itinerary.2655/

<p>ME+ESC Training Mentors in International Volunteering Projects (2020)</p>	<p>A brochure and website containing 2 training designs: Key Elements in ESC Mentoring Preparatory Training in ESC Mentoring It also contains a brief overview of mentoring in history, the European perspective on mentoring and roles of the project coordinator supporting the mentors.</p>	<p>Partnership of organisations under an Erasmus+ funded project</p>	<p>https://mentoresc.weebly.com/metodoteca.html</p>
<p>Training for Mentors in ESC Programme - online training course</p>	<p>A self-paced course for newcomers and experienced ESC mentors covering essentials of mentorship, competences and tools for self-improvement as a mentor.</p>	<p>Hellenic National Agency Erasmus+/ Youth & European Solidarity Corps</p>	<p>https://hop.salto-youth.net/courses/Mentors</p>
<p>Value-Based Learning in Youth Mobilities T-Kit (2022)</p>	<p>A valuable reference material for any and all facilitators of learning - a complex training kit that helps explore, discuss and explain, promote value-based learning and the explicit values at the core of European learning mobility programmes. The manual details the key values in learning, offering strong theoretical inputs and meaningful insights mentors or coaches can use to decodify some of the sometimes abstract concepts (including solidarity). It also analyses in depth facilitators of learning, importance of self-reflection, the impact of their work, their challenges. In the second part it lists activity description sheets that mentors or coaches can pick up and implement with their youth, including a template for printable value cards (BB Games Legacy project).</p>	<p>Council of Europe and European Commission Sérgio Gonçalves Snežana Bačlija Knoch Susie Nicodemi</p>	<p>https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-14-value-based-learning-in-mobility-projects</p>



SECTION 5
Insights and
Recommendations

The final chapter in this research report provides a summary of the **15 insights and suggestions for actions and new developments**. These recommendations sometimes address the field as a whole, aiming at raising the awareness of everyone involved, while in other cases they address concrete stakeholders, namely: the European Commission, the Network of ESC National Agencies, SALTO European Solidarity Corps or organisations involved in the realisation of projects funded by the Programme. The insights are presented together for mentoring and coaching, thus providing a point of comparison, allowing us to see where the needs of these two fields of practice meet and where they differ. Subsequently, the ones in charge can consider where the joint approach makes more sense than the separate strategies and vice versa.

Please note that this summary does not repeat all the detailed findings presented in the chapters above, but aims at providing the main messages that can be communicated in the relevant fora.

Roles, Competences and Ethics

Insight #1: Framing the confusion

The research clearly shows that **there are still strong ambiguities and unclarities regarding the role of a mentor and even more in the case of the coach in Solidarity projects**. The current definitions in the Programme guide are not sufficiently explanatory, which leads to very diverse understandings of these roles by organisations involved in the Programme, including National agencies themselves. The consequence of this situation results in blurry expectations from mentors, which can create confusion about their work and the relationship with volunteers and/or groups of young people in the case of coaching.

As the Desk research shows, one of the ways to address the challenge of unclear roles is to consider developing **competence frameworks for European Solidarity Corps mentors and coaches** at the level of the Programme. The process of development of such competence frameworks might clarify the key functions to be performed by ESC mentors and coaches, as well as the competences needed to address these requirements. Such a competence framework should be both **concrete enough to strengthen the role clarity AND loose enough to encompass the diversity of mentoring/coaching practices and working contexts**. The Desk research shows that such competence frameworks can be also very beneficial for the recognition of mentor and coach competences, and could provide useful guidelines for designing training courses for mentors and coaches.

The research already provides some indication about possible “building blocks” of such a competence framework, such as listening skills and empathy, flexibility in communication, guidance/orientation, encouragement and facilitating learning. This can be complemented with inclusion-related competences mentioned below.

In addition to the competences, the role is also defined through its ethical principles and values. The research shows that the ethical issues become more relevant (along with the impact awareness) for mentors and coaches with longer involvement in the Programme. At the same time, the research also shows that **clear and agreed ethical principles would be beneficial for all involved: National Agencies, organisations, mentors/coaches and foremost – young people and volunteers**. It is possible to imagine the development of one ethical code for both roles, with slight adjustments for the context and terminology of each Programme action.

Insight #2: A shift from a mentor to a mentoring system?

Another reason for the existing unclarity in the mentor role is based on the inherited developments in the former European Voluntary Service, where the list of mentor functions and expectations have grown over the years. The current programme just adds up the solidarity dimension to the list. Instead of looking for superheroes that can provide complete support to the volunteers (e.g. integration into the local community, supporting wellbeing, facilitating learning and working on solidarity awareness), the organisation might think of making a shift - from a mentor to a mentoring system. In such cases, these mentoring functions could be split amongst more people involved with the volunteer. Both the desk research and the focus groups' results have indicated that such shifts have already happened in some organisations with positive results.

Sustaining motivation for mentoring and coaching

Insight #3: Know the obstacles that you are facing

The study indicates clear patterns about the main obstacles for engaging mentors and coaches in the ESC projects. In the case of mentors, two main obstacles are: "people are not trained to be mentors" and "people are not paid for the role". These two are followed by a "lack of understanding of the role and what is expected from the role".

In the case of coaching, the number one obstacle is a "lack of understanding of the role and what is expected from the coach", followed by "lack of training for coaches" and "low payment".

Insight #4: Learning (still) trumps money!

Contrary to the belief that financial remuneration will be the key element to boost and sustain the motivation of mentors, the opportunity to learn and develop in the role remains the number one motivator for being engaged as a mentor, chosen by 73.02% of respondents of the mentoring survey. Financial remuneration takes second place with 53.60% of respondents from the overall sample.

At the same time, the study shows that covering the costs that mentors might have while fulfilling the role and/or providing a small fee for their involvement can have a positive impact on their involvement and motivation.

Insight #5: Different motivational factors for juniors and seniors

Zooming in on the mentors alone shows that the years of engagement can be a distinguishing factor concerning the type of mentor motivation. Regardless of the length of their involvement, “learning and development” remains the number one motivator, like in the overall sample.

However, for mentors who are engaged for 2-4 years, being part of the community mentors is the second strongest motivator (chosen by 66.67% of mentors in this category). It is stronger than financial remuneration (chosen by 45.83% in this category). Interestingly, for the most experienced mentors who are engaged for more than 5 years getting formal recognition of competences that have gained in the mentor role becomes very important, as the second strongest motivator for them (chosen by 59.26% of mentors in this category). It is two times more important for this group than for the mentors with shorter experience.

In the case of coaches, the main two motivation factors are: “better payment” and having enough “training and learning opportunities”. Formal recognition of the competences gained through the coaching involvement takes the 3rd place.

Recognition of mentors and coaches

Insight #6 Recognition matters!

Mentors and coaches do very significant work for their projects and a tap on a shoulder is not enough. **The organisations should provide enough learning opportunities for mentors and coaches.** This should include sending them to specific mentor and coach training, in the country or abroad.

Some immediate solutions for the need to get mentor/coach competences better recognised could be to **use the current option in Youthpass that now allows creating certificates for “team members”, including mentors and coaches.** These certificates are more adjusted for youth workers since their self-assessment part is based on the ETS competence framework for youth workers¹, not Key competences for lifelong learning, which are used for the volunteers and participants.

The European Commission should reconsider the current financial rules of the Programme and create a possibility for mentors to get some financial remuneration for their work and the possibility to increase the fees for coaches.

¹ More information about Youthpass for ‘team members’ can be found here: <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/help/faqs/youthpass-for-team-members/>

Inclusion

Insight #7: How to include inclusion

Apart from the general focus on mentoring, the research has included a special focus on the practice of working with young people with fewer opportunities, also known as “reinforced mentorship”. The results of the surveys show that **reinforced mentorship includes more meetings, more thorough preparation, better psychological support, preparation of the host organisation, more variety of possible tasks and preparatory visits.**

The results suggest that the **three main core competences needed for reinforced mentoring are: “understanding of the concept of young people with fewer opportunities”, “recognising the potential in a person” and “being able to adapt to the needs of the volunteer constantly”.**

Similarly, in Solidarity projects, the most important inclusion-related competences of a coach are “recognising the potential of a person”, “being able to adapt to the needs of the participants” and “ability to suspend own judgements” and truly understand the participants’ needs.

Insights like this can provide **useful guidance for those designing training programmes for mentors and coaches aiming at the development of their inclusion-related competences.**

Insight #8: Don't forget the partnership!

An important point about inclusion in the European Solidarity Corps is expressed in the following quote from a focus group with National Agencies: *“The way the Programme is promoted makes it harder for inclusion. Now it focuses more on young people finding opportunities for themselves and **the partnerships between the organisations are much less at the core of the programme. When the quality of the partnerships is less in the focus, it can harm inclusion.**”* The assumption is that the current programme is now focused more on community needs (rather than on individual development), but the way it is structured promotes young people searching for opportunities, which can jeopardise the inclusion dimension of the programme.

It is therefore recommended for all stakeholders involved to **create spaces and structures for long-term partnerships between the inclusion-focused organisations**, being one of the key success factors for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in international volunteering programmes like this one.

Quality in mentoring and coaching

Insight #9: Poor quality is easy to spot

It is easy to recognise low quality mentoring and coaching. As the research shows, in the case of mentoring, **the main indicator of low quality is “poor listening skills of the mentor”, followed by “conflicts between the mentor and the volunteer” and “lack of mentor’s flexibility”** to adjust their approach towards different needs and profiles of the volunteers. In brief, good quality mentoring is not about one size fits all.

In the case of coaching, the main signal of bad quality is a misunderstanding of the role by the coach - when the coach stops being the coach but becomes a project leader or a team member of the project group. Other signs, like in the case of mentoring are - “poor listening skills” and “conflicts between the coach and the group of participants”.

Insight #10: Good quality is hard to get

When considering good quality mentoring and coaching, the trap is to fall into over-expecting and wishful thinking of some ideal support persons who are fully competent, motivated and available. This is usually a very frustrating exercise since such mentors and coaches are impossible to find. The research suggests that the **reality is rather that mentors and coaches need to grow in their competence and quality together with the organisations.** There is no magical solution here that would work in all cases and working contexts. The organisations committed to quality need to be attentive to mentors’ and coaches’ needs, experience and skills.

The Solidarity dimension in mentoring and coaching

Insight #11: Where did solidarity go?

Even though the Programme has “solidarity” in its title and promotes it as one of its core values, the research shows **large unclarity among the mentors and coaches to what extent “working on solidarity awareness” is part of their job description.** The results of the surveys show placing the “Enhancing volunteers’/young people’s solidarity awareness” through their work in the lower part of the lists of their core functions. It is fair to say that this function is a bit higher in priority in the case of coaching.

In addition to that, the research shows that **there is a missing link between mentoring and coaching as support measures, on one side, and the solidarity impact of the project on the other side.** It seems many mentors and coaches are wondering if solidarity is their business at all or if their main focus remains the personal development and well-being of the young people they work with.

A possible response to this situation might be **creating opportunities and community events for reflection about how to situate mentoring and coaching within the solidarity framework** and see if there are ways to enhance this awareness amongst mentors and coaches. In addition to this might be a question of **what competences mentors and coaches would need to contribute more consciously to the solidarity impact of their project.**

Needs and resources for development

Insight #12: Similar needs, but different learning opportunities

Both groups identify **similar needs and priorities for their learning and development, such as: training in mentoring and coaching skills, exchange of experiences with colleagues and developing their competences in the facilitation of learning.** There is a noticeable difference between these two roles concerning working with vulnerable groups. As the research shows, **there is a stronger interest in inclusion and well-being topics on the side of the mentors.**

However, **these two groups prefer different support measures** to be organised for them. While coaches are more focused on individual learning and prefer activities like study visits, training in coaching skills and individual mentoring. On the other side, mentoring development is more focused on mutual learning and more sharing-based. Support measures like **creating a peer-learning community and organising peer-sharing events have more relevance for mentors than coaches at this very moment.** Probably, the reason is that the mentoring field has more accumulated experience over the decades ready to be shared, while coaching is still 'under construction' in this Programme. Both groups agree that having some good coaching and mentoring handbooks would be very beneficial.

Insight #13: Face-to-face as an antidote for digital fatigue

Face-to-face learning events have a much stronger priority for both mentors and coaches. In both cases, the online learning resources are at the bottom of the list. Either due to the recent excessive developments of online tools or simply due to the 'digital fatigue' and loneliness in learning during the COVID times, the MOOCs and e-learning platforms are perceived as the least preferred formats for learning. In the case of consideration of the development of digital tools for mentors and coaches, according to the research results, live webinars are the most preferred digital learning option by the target groups.

Insights #14: To-do-list

In addition to what has been mentioned above, especially working on the competence framework and the ethical code, **SALTO ESC and the network of National Agencies should consider providing several support and development measures for mentors and coaches:**

Continue building the mentoring community of practices as already started under the “Mentoring under construction” initiative.

Establish standard and regularly provided training courses for mentoring and coaching skills including two-level training: basic and advanced. These courses should aim not only at competence development but also at enhancing mentor/coach recognition. For example, the successful completion of these courses could provide the participant with a special certificate and/or digital badge.

Create a training or webinar for ESC organisations dedicated on how to work with mentors and coaches, including topics like recruitment, setting expectations, monitoring their support work, providing learning opportunities and recognising their competences.

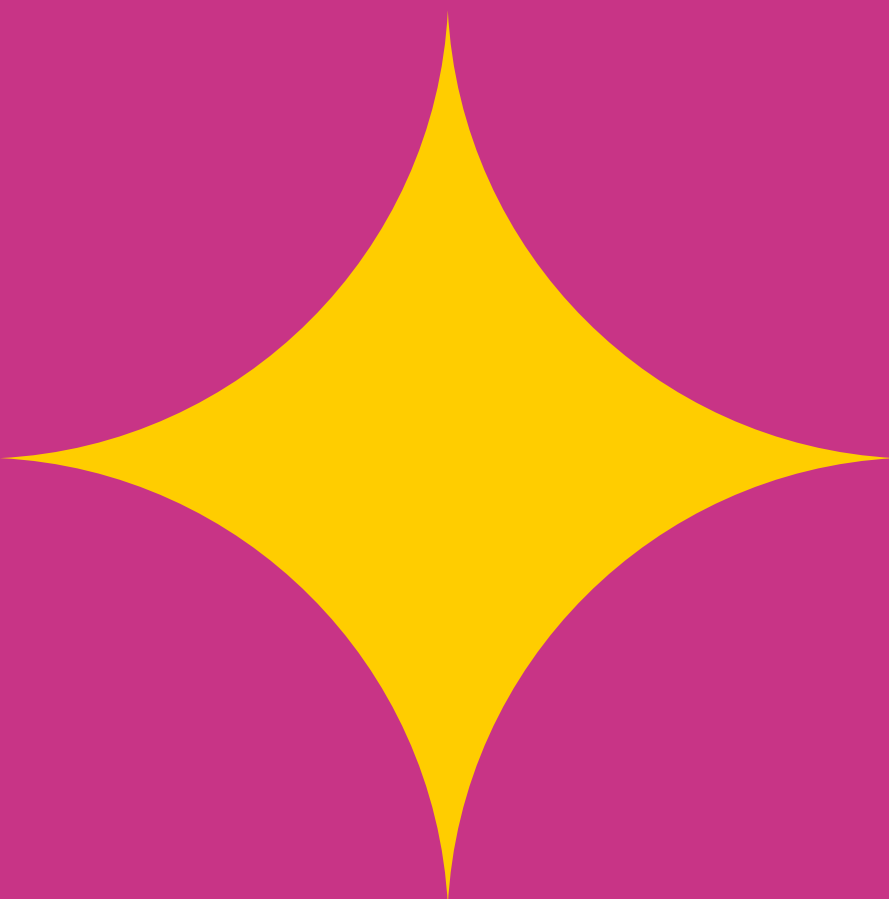
Set a mentoring scheme for mentors and coaches. This could take the form of pairing up more experienced ones with the newcomers or simply a reciprocal mentoring/coaching scheme between the peers.

Create a user-friendly web-based resources platform with mentoring and coaching tools in one place.

Develop a series of practical mentoring and coaching handbooks and video material, which may complement the existing resources in the field.



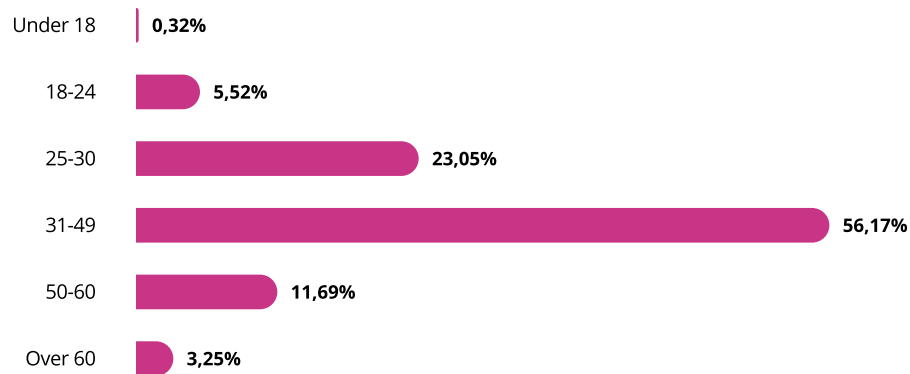
Annex



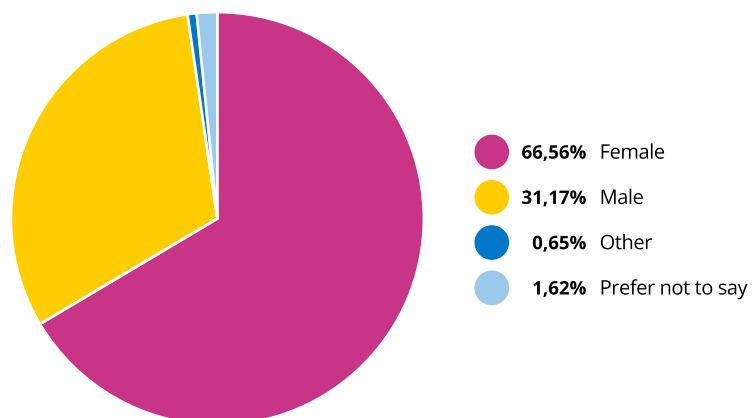
Annex 1.

Additional information about the sample in the mentoring survey

What is your age?



What is your gender?

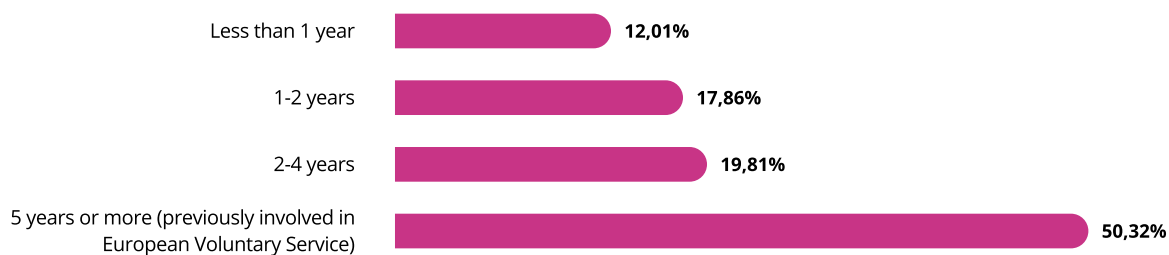


If you are part of an ESC organisation, in what role is your organisation involved in the European Solidarity Corps?

select all that apply



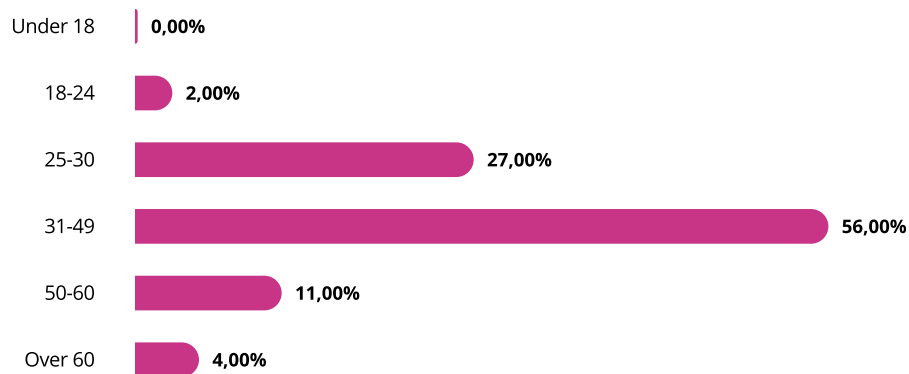
How long have you been involved in ESC?



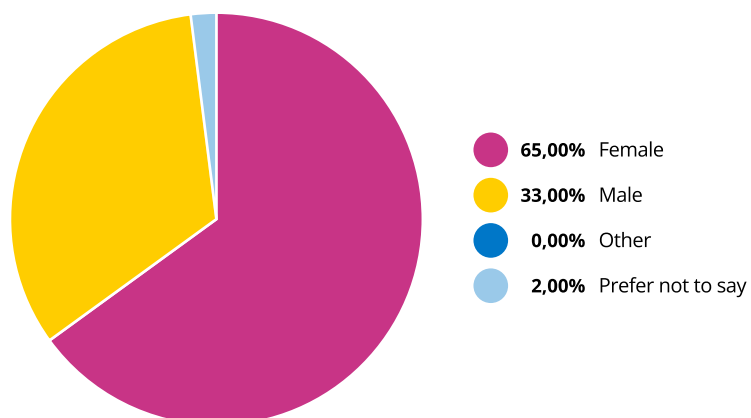
Annex 2.

Additional information about the sample in the coaching survey

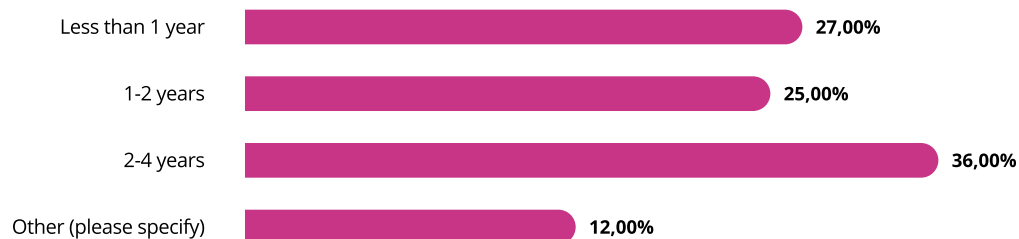
What is your age?



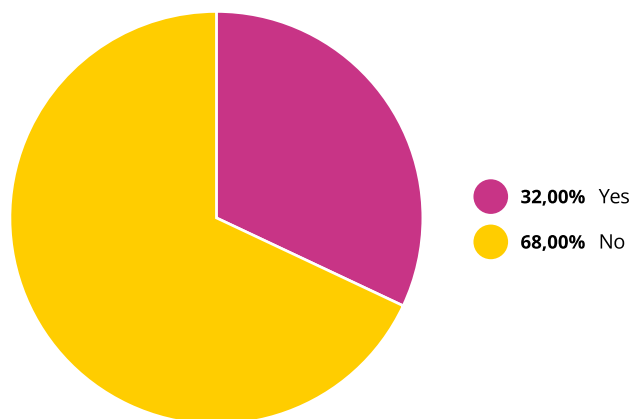
What is your gender?



How long have you been involved in Solidarity projects?



Have you been involved in the former Youth Initiatives action in YOUTH and Youth in Action programmes (before 2013)?



Annex 3.

Views on mentoring and coaching compared

The focus of the research was to explore mentoring and coaching separately as distinct practices in two different actions of the European Solidarity Corps. However, the comparison between the two can bring additional insights and look for possible **synergies** for competence development measures for mentors and coaches.

The preliminary findings from the Desk Research have suggested that the concepts of mentoring and coaching in the European Solidarity Corps might have a reverse meaning when compared to these practices outside the youth field, especially in the business context. The desk research suggested that the mentoring in ESC in its approach would be closer to business coaching (more non-directive, more asking questions, less providing advice); while coaching in Solidarity Projects would be closer to the concept of mentoring in the business context (more expert advice and guidance from a more experienced person, less asking questions).

However, the results of the surveys show a different picture. Perception of the two roles expressed in the selected keywords shows that they have 3 in common out of the top 5. Interestingly, apart from "Support" and "Learning", "Advice" has found its place in the top 5 in both roles. The "Questions" were much lower on the list in both cases. We might conclude that **giving advice** regarding the content of the project in the case of Solidarity projects or related to the volunteer's integration in the case of the Volunteering projects **still represents one of the main working methods in both roles**.

Top 5 keywords for mentoring	Top 5 keywords for coaching
Support	Support
Integration	Learning
Learning	Advice
Advice	Reflection
Adaptation	Feedback

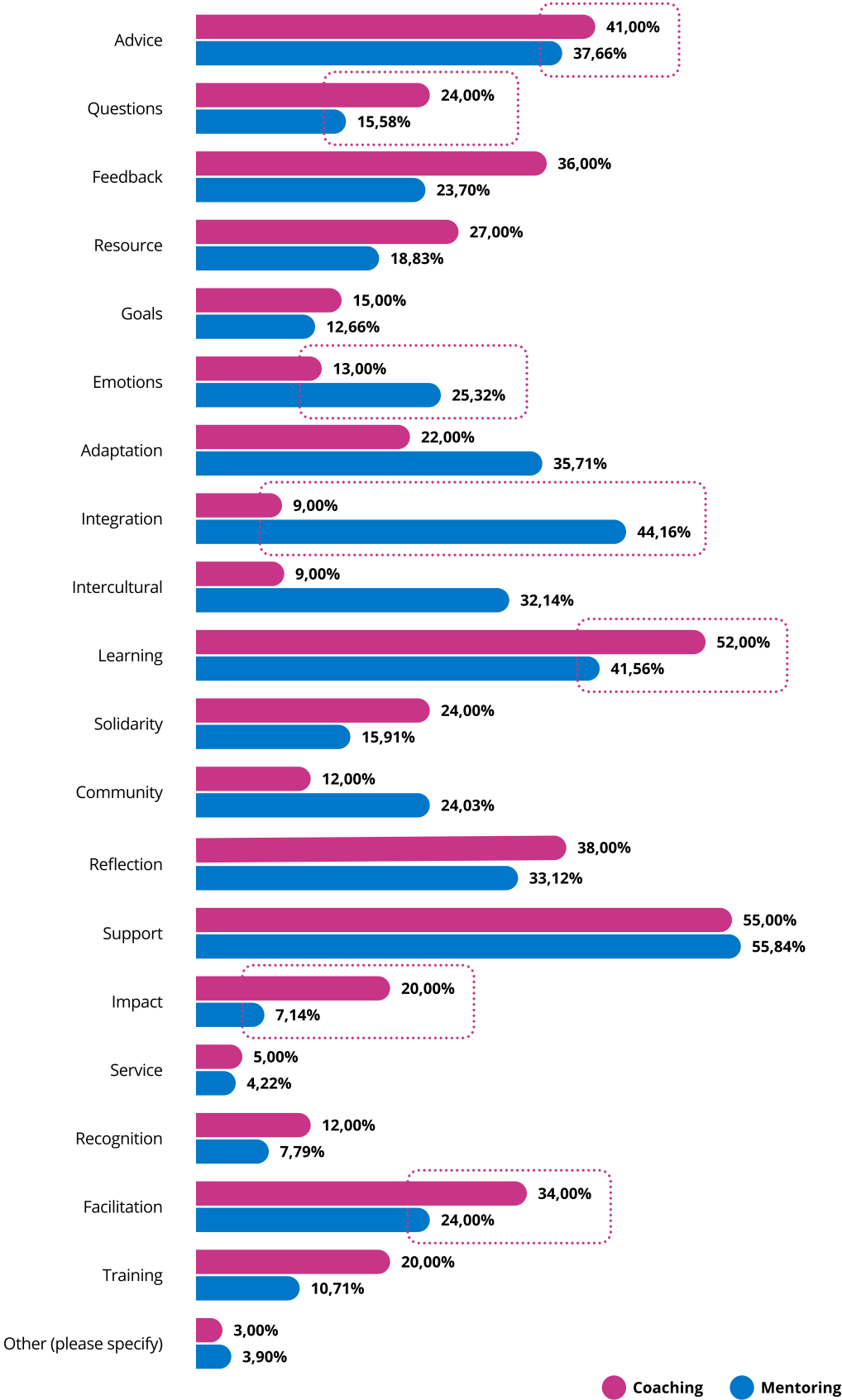
The comparisons in the graphs below have shown also additional interesting insights. It seems **where the two roles differ is in dealing with emotions, working with conflicts, and seeing the bigger picture**. The results of the surveys indicate that emotions are much more the mentor's business, hence a much stronger requirement for the competence of "empathy" than in the case of coaches. Similarly, "skills for conflict resolution" have a much higher priority in case of the mentoring process. At the same time, "seeing the bigger picture" is perceived as something much more important for coaches than for mentors.

To conclude, it seems that the main perceived distinction between the two roles in the European Solidarity Corps context is not on the dimension “Asking vs. Telling”, but rather on “People vs. Task”. It seems that the **mentors need to be more “people experts”, skilful in conflict resolution, while coaches need to be more “project experts”, with the bigger picture in mind**. That is maybe why also some of the coaches we interviewed resembled their role much more to that of a general youth worker, who does a lot of other things inside the project management process, as it unfolds.

On the flip side, this is also an invitation for reflection: *whether the Programme needs coaches with greater empathy and mentors who are able to have the bigger picture?*

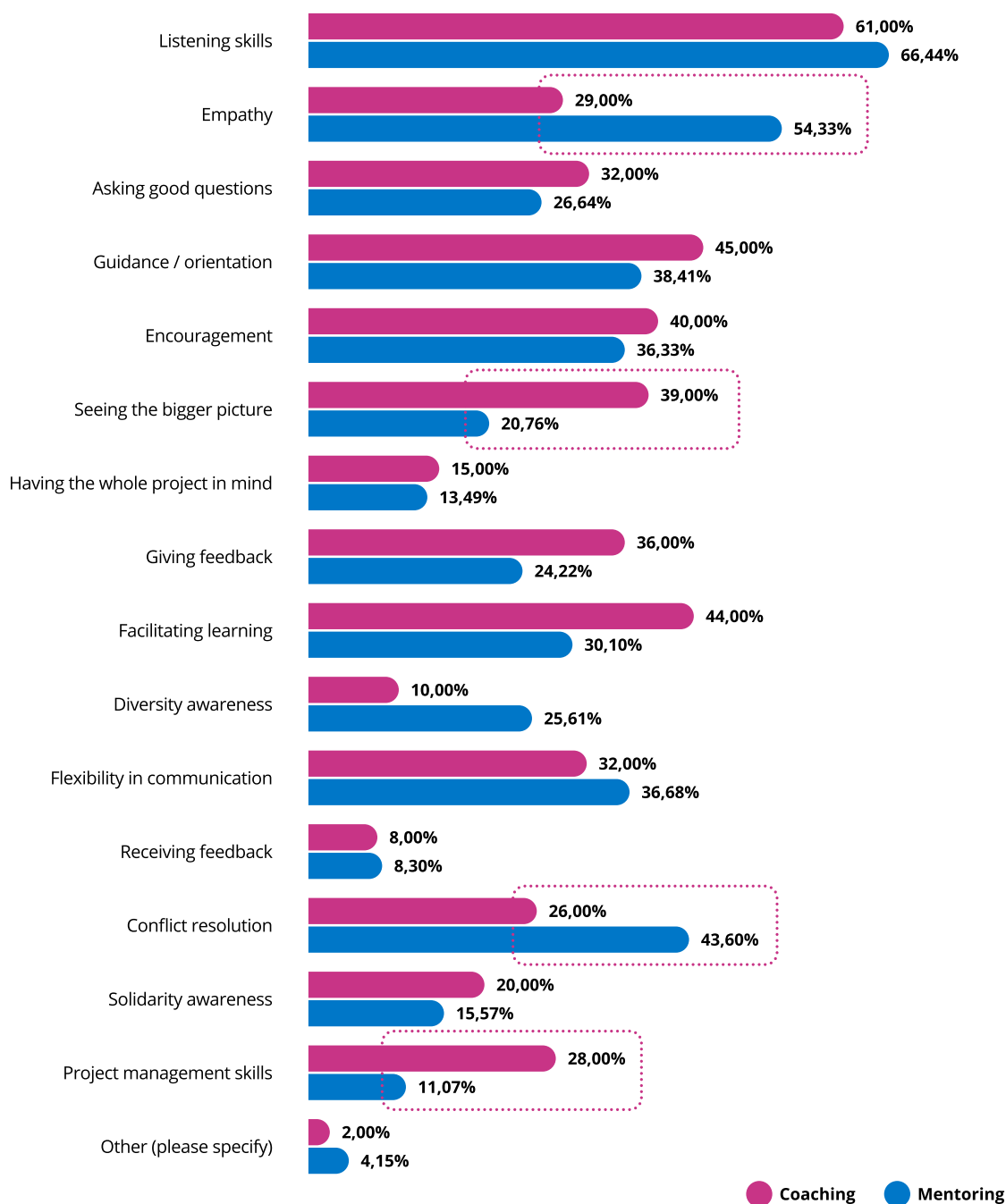
What are the keywords that best describe your understanding of coaching and mentoring?

select maximum 5



What are the most important competences needed for effective coaching or mentoring

select maximum 5



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SALTO European Solidarity Corps

SALTO ESC supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The mission is to explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European societies and to promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity. SALTO ESC coordinates networking activities, training, seminars and events that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact. By doing this, SALTO ESC contributes to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations.

SALTO ESC is hosted by OeAD. The OeAD is the national agency for the implementation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in Austria. SALTO ESC is part of a European network of SALTO Resource Centres with the mission to improve the quality and impact of the EU youth programmes as well as to support and develop European youth work.

Find us online at www.salto-youth.net, www.oead.at and www.salto-youth.net/solidarity

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