

Start ESC

GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS

DRAGASANI, ROMANIA



WELCOME TO APDD

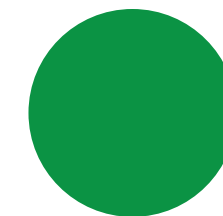


- APDD – Asociația Pro Dezvoltare DACIA is a non-governmental, non-profit organization based in Drăgășani, Romania, dedicated to supporting community development and empowering young people through education, volunteering, and active civic participation. Our organization works closely with local communities to identify real needs and to create initiatives that encourage social involvement, solidarity, and personal growth.
- A major focus of our work is youth work and non-formal education. Through local and international projects, we offer young people opportunities to develop practical skills, gain professional experience, and increase their employability. We promote learning through experience, teamwork, and intercultural exchange, helping participants better understand both themselves and the communities they live in.

APDD

About Dragasani

Drăgășani is a charming town located in southern Romania, known for its rich history, vibrant culture, and beautiful surroundings. Nestled in the heart of Vâlcea County, the town offers a mix of traditional Romanian life and modern community initiatives, making it a welcoming place for international volunteers. With its local markets, historic landmarks, and nearby vineyards, Drăgășani gives visitors a true taste of Romanian culture and hospitality.



Life in Drăgășani is relaxed and community-oriented. People are friendly and eager to share local traditions, festivals, and cuisine with newcomers. The town and its surroundings provide plenty of opportunities for exploration, from scenic walks along the Olt River to visits to nearby villages and natural attractions.

For volunteers, Drăgășani is not only a base for learning and professional development but also a place to connect with the community, practice intercultural exchange, and enjoy a meaningful and immersive experience in Romanian life. Its combination of peaceful living, cultural richness, and local warmth makes it an ideal environment for personal growth and volunteering.

Start: European Solidarity Corps (Start ESC)

Start: European Solidarity Corps (Start ESC) is an Erasmus+ European Solidarity Corps project focused on education and training, employment, and entrepreneurship, designed to respond to both community needs and the evolving challenges young people face in today's dynamic labor market. The project also places a strong emphasis on environmental responsibility, promoting sustainable values and green practices as an essential part of active citizenship and community development.

Start ESC aims to innovatively combine the ongoing activities of the host organization that support the local youth community with meaningful learning opportunities for volunteers, contributing to their personal and professional development. Through practical involvement, non-formal education, and community-based actions, volunteers gain hands-on experience while actively contributing to social inclusion, solidarity, and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles, such as responsible consumption, waste reduction, and environmentally friendly daily practices.

MAIN PROJECT THEMES

The main project themes are built around the needs of the local community and the host organization, while also addressing the individual learning goals and professional development needs of the volunteers, with two volunteers participating from each partner organization. Start ESC serves as a tool for promoting volunteering as a pathway to development, supporting young people in their career orientation, encouraging entrepreneurial thinking, boosting employability, and fostering a long-term commitment to sustainability and environmental awareness in a constantly evolving labor market.

What Is the European Solidarity Corps (ESC)?

- The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is an initiative of the European Union that offers young people the opportunity to engage in solidarity activities that benefit communities across Europe and beyond. ESC supports young people aged 18 to 30 who wish to contribute to society while developing valuable personal, social, and professional skills through volunteering, traineeships, and solidarity projects.
- Through the European Solidarity Corps, participants take part in non-formal learning experiences in areas such as education, social inclusion, culture, youth work, environmental protection, and community development. Volunteering activities are designed to respond to real social needs, while encouraging active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, and mutual understanding among young people from different countries and backgrounds.
- At the same time, ESC places a strong emphasis on learning, personal growth, and sustainability. Participants receive support before, during, and after their volunteering experience, including mentoring, language learning, and the Youthpass certificate, which recognizes the competences acquired. By promoting solidarity, inclusion, and environmentally responsible practices, the European Solidarity Corps empowers young people to become engaged, responsible, and active members of society.



What Is It Like to Be an ESC Volunteer?

- Being an ESC volunteer is a unique opportunity to live, learn, and contribute in a new environment. Daily life combines structured volunteering activities with learning experiences and opportunities to explore the local community. Volunteers are involved in practical tasks that support the host organization and benefit the wider community, while also having time to engage in personal development, hobbies, and cultural exploration.
- Living in an intercultural environment is a core part of the experience. Volunteers work alongside peers from different countries, sharing ideas, perspectives, and approaches. This daily interaction fosters intercultural dialogue, adaptability, and teamwork, while giving volunteers a chance to build lasting friendships across borders.
- The learning process is largely non-formal, emphasizing hands-on experience, problem-solving, creativity, and reflection. Volunteers are encouraged to take initiative, participate actively, and use their skills in meaningful ways, which makes the journey both challenging and rewarding.



Learning & Impact Framework

LEARNING

ESC volunteering is designed to be a mutually beneficial experience. Volunteers gain valuable personal and professional skills, such as communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and initiative, which are recognized through the Youthpass certificate. This certificate provides formal documentation of learning outcomes achieved during the volunteering period.



IMPACT

At the same time, volunteers make a real difference in the local community, contributing to educational, social, cultural, and environmental projects. Their actions support community development, strengthen solidarity, and promote inclusion. Beyond technical skills, volunteers often experience personal growth, including increased confidence, independence, and a broader perspective on life and society.

VALUES OF THE PROJECT

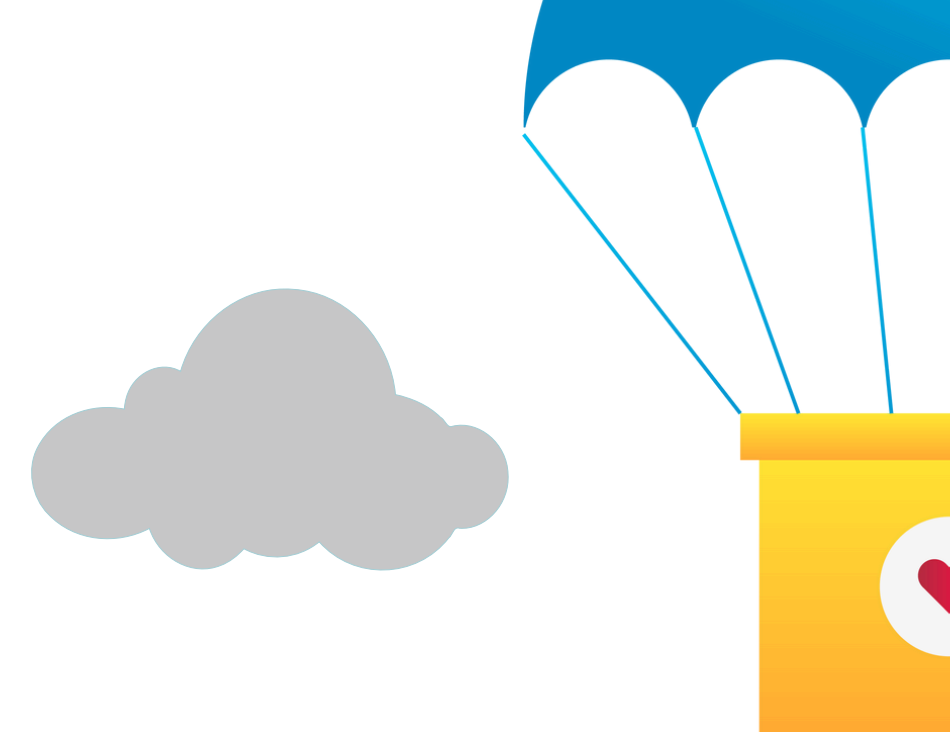
The Start ESC project is guided by core values that shape every activity and interaction:

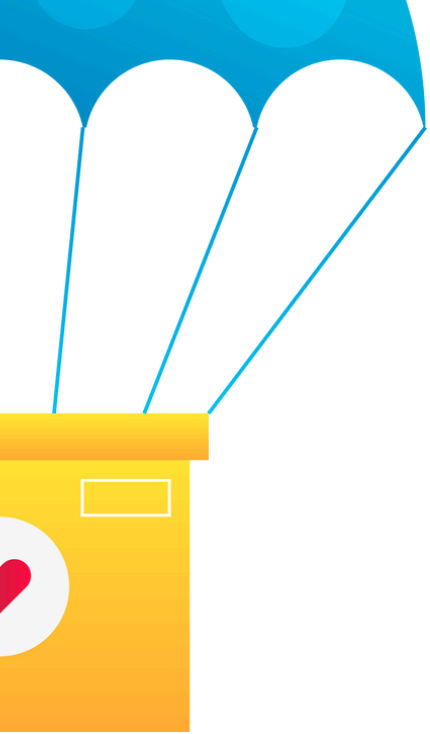
- Solidarity and inclusion – supporting communities and fostering a sense of belonging for all
- Intercultural dialogue – encouraging understanding and collaboration among people from diverse backgrounds
- Active citizenship – promoting social responsibility and engagement



- Sustainability and green practices – integrating environmentally friendly actions into daily life and projects
- Respect for diversity – appreciating and learning from differences, whether cultural, social, or personal

These values provide a framework that not only guides volunteers in their work but also inspires personal reflection and ethical decision-making throughout the ESC experience.





HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a practical and inspirational tool for new volunteers. It should be seen as guidance rather than strict rules, offering tips, insights, and reflections from past participants. Readers are encouraged to adapt suggestions to their own needs, reflect on their experiences, and create their own journey. Every volunteer's experience is unique, and this guide aims to prepare, support, and inspire rather than prescribe a fixed path. It provides a foundation for understanding the local context, project expectations, and the opportunities for learning, growth, and contribution.



VOICES FROM THE VOLUNTEERS

Every volunteering experience is unique, shaped by the people, community, and challenges encountered along the way. In this section, you will hear directly from the volunteers who participated in Start ESC. Their stories, reflections, and memories offer a personal glimpse into life in Drăgășani, the joys and challenges of volunteering, and the lessons learned throughout their journey.



Hiba, Morocco

Life in Drăgășani and Romania:

Living for one year in Drăgășani and Romania has been a unique and life-changing experience. Drăgășani is a small and quiet town, very different from big cities, which allowed me to feel closer to people and local life. Romania, in general, surprised me with its beautiful nature, kind people, rich traditions, and strong sense of community. At the beginning, everything felt new and challenging, but with time it became a place I could call home.

Lessons Learned:

During my stay, I learned many things both personally and professionally. I became more independent, patient, and adaptable, improved my communication skills, and learned to work effectively in a multicultural environment. I also developed a deeper understanding of empathy and teamwork, grew emotionally, and gained confidence in myself.

“Must-Do” Things in Romania:

- Try traditional Romanian food (sarmale, ciorbă, mămăligă, papanăși)
- Travel and explore cities like Bucharest, Brașov, Sibiu, or Cluj
- Spend time in nature (mountains, forests, rivers)
- Learn basic Romanian words – locals really appreciate it
- Take part in local events, holidays, and traditions
-

Tips for Living & Budgeting:

- Cook at home instead of eating out frequently
- Buy food from local markets and discount stores
- Plan trips in advance and use trains or buses
- Save a small amount each month for emergencies
- Track expenses to understand your spending



Focus Areas for Learning & Growth:

Be open-minded and active. Don't hesitate to ask questions, make mistakes, or step out of your comfort zone. Focus on learning from people, experiences, and challenges. Volunteering is not only about work, but also about personal growth and self-discovery.

Personal Memory:

The moments spent with people who became like family are very dear to me. Simple evenings, deep conversations, shared meals, laughter, and support during difficult times made my experience unforgettable. These memories will stay in my heart forever and are the most valuable part of my stay in Romania.

Erkan, Türkiye

Life in Drăgășani and Romania:

Living for one year in Drăgășani was a simple but meaningful experience. The town is small and quiet, which helped me adapt easily and focus on my volunteering activities. Romania felt welcoming, and I enjoyed discovering its culture, people, and traditions.

Lessons Learned:

I improved my communication skills, especially through working with students and local people. I also learned basic Romanian, became more independent, and gained confidence through workshops, mentoring sessions, and everyday challenges.

“Must-Do” Things in Romania:

- Try Romanian traditional food like sarmale and papanasi
- Visit beautiful cities such as Sibiu, Brașov, and Cluj
- Explore the natural surroundings around Drăgășani, especially the vineyards
- Join local events and festivals to experience Romanian culture

Tips for Living & Budgeting:

- Cook at home as much as possible—it’s cheaper than eating out
- Plan your monthly budget during the first week
- Use buses or trains instead of taxis
- Don’t buy everything at once; wait and see what you truly need



Focus Areas for Learning & Growth:

Be open and proactive, get involved in activities, and don’t be afraid to ask questions. Learning some Romanian helps a lot. Use this year to develop your skills, meet people, and step out of your comfort zone.

Personal Memory:

One of my favorite memories is attending activities with local children and seeing them smile and enjoy the time we spent together. It made me feel that my work really had an impact.

Volkan, Türkiye

Life in Drăgășani and Romania:

Living for one year in Drăgășani was a simple but meaningful experience. The town is small and quiet, which helped me adapt easily and focus on my volunteering activities. Romania felt welcoming, and I enjoyed discovering its culture, people, and traditions.

Lessons Learned:

I improved my communication skills, especially through working with students and local people. I also learned basic Romanian, became more independent, and gained confidence through workshops, mentoring sessions, and everyday challenges.

“Must-Do” Things in Romania:

- Try Romanian traditional food like sarmale and papanasi
- Visit beautiful cities such as Sibiu, Brașov, and Cluj
- Explore the natural surroundings around Drăgășani, especially the vineyards
- Join local events and festivals to experience Romanian culture

Tips for Living & Budgeting:

- Cook at home as much as possible—it’s cheaper than eating out
- Plan your monthly budget during the first week
- Use buses or trains instead of taxis
- Don’t buy everything at once; wait and see what you truly need



Focus Areas for Learning & Growth:

Be open and proactive, get involved in activities, and don’t be afraid to ask questions. Learning some Romanian helps a lot. Use this year to develop your skills, meet people, and step out of your comfort zone.

Personal Memory:

One of my favorite memories is attending activities with local children and seeing them smile and enjoy the time we spent together. It made me feel that my work really had an impact.

Liviu, Romania

Welcome to Drăgășani

Drăgășani is a small, calm town in southern Romania, surrounded by beautiful vineyards. Life here moves slowly: mornings start early, afternoons are quiet, and evenings are perfect for walks, family time, and conversations with neighbors. People may seem reserved at first, but once you get to know them, they are warm and welcoming.

Good to Know

- The town is walkable; buses and trains are limited, and taxis are cheap and usually called by phone.
- Cash is important—shops close early, and Sundays are very quiet.
- Visit bakeries early and the local market for fresh, seasonal food.
- A simple “Bună ziua” goes a long way. If offered food or drink, tasting a little is polite.
- Patience is essential when adapting to local rhythms.

Don't Miss

- Local vineyards and wine
- Walks along the Olt River
- The market for fresh produce and local crafts
- Traditional food like sarmale, ciorbă, and cozonac

We're glad you're here—take your time and let Drăgășani reveal itself slowly.



Darius, Romania

Life in Drăgășani and Romania:

Living in Drăgășani is calm, familiar, and human-scale. This small town in southern Romania is surrounded by vineyards and gentle hills, where people still greet each other on the street. Life moves slower than in big cities: mornings start early, afternoons are quiet, and evenings are for family, walks, or sitting outside with neighbors. Romanians may seem reserved at first, but once you're known, you'll be treated warmly—often like family.

Romania as a whole is a mix of old and new: traditions are strong, hospitality is sincere, and daily life is practical rather than flashy. You'll notice pride in local food, wine, and stories, which make every visit or interaction meaningful.

Useful Tips for Newcomers

Transport:

- Drăgășani is walkable. For longer trips, buses and trains exist but are not always frequent, so planning ahead helps.
- Taxis are cheap; many are called by phone rather than through apps.

Money & Shops:

- Cash is still important, especially in small shops and markets.
- Most shops close early (around 7–8 pm), and Sundays are very quiet.

Food & Daily Life:

- Try local bakeries early in the morning; fresh bread disappears fast.
- Markets are best for fruits, vegetables, cheese, and honey.

Culture & Behavior:

- A simple “Bună ziua” (hello) goes a long way.
- If someone invites you to eat or drink, it's a sign of respect—at least taste a little.

Pace of Life:

- Things don't always happen fast. Patience is essential



Must-Visit / Must-Try

- Drăgășani vineyards – Famous for wine, especially Negru de Drăgășani. Even a simple visit or tasting tells you a lot about the region.
- Walks near the Olt River – Quiet, peaceful, and very local.
- Local market – Not fancy, but authentic and full of everyday Romanian life.
- Traditional food – Try sarmale (stuffed cabbage rolls), ciorbă (sour soup), and cozonac (sweet bread).

A Personal Memory

One evening in late summer, I was walking home while the smell of grapes and fermenting wine filled the air. Neighbors were sitting outside, talking, someone offered me a bunch of grapes over the fence, and a radio played old Romanian music in the background. Nothing special was happening—but that moment, simple and shared, felt like Drăgășani to me: quiet generosity, familiarity, and time slowing down just enough to notice it. We're glad you're here. Take your time, ask questions, and let the town reveal itself little by little.

Support, Mentoring, and Learning Opportunities

Throughout the Start ESC project, volunteers are supported by a dedicated team of coordinators and mentors, ensuring that their experience is both meaningful and well-guided. The project coordinator oversees the entire program, helping volunteers adapt to life in Drăgășani, navigate tasks, and connect with the community.

In addition, two mentors provide close guidance to each volunteer, offering personalized advice, monitoring progress, and facilitating reflection sessions. They are a constant point of support, helping volunteers develop professional skills, interpersonal abilities, and confidence throughout their stay.

Volunteers also have access to structured learning opportunities. During the project, participants take courses in Romanian language, which help them communicate effectively with locals and engage more fully in the community. By the end of the project, volunteers also attend career counseling sessions, designed to support their professional growth, reflect on skills acquired, and explore pathways for future employment or education.



This combination of coordinated mentoring, language learning, and career guidance ensures that every volunteer not only contributes to the local community but also leaves the project with personal growth, practical skills, and a clear sense of direction for the future.

A JOURNEY TO REMEMBER

YOUR TIME IN DRĂGĂȘANI IS THE START OF AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY OF PERSONAL GROWTH, FRIENDSHIP, AND DISCOVERY. LIVE FULLY, STAY CURIOUS, AND TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM THE PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND ENVIRONMENT AROUND YOU.

VOLUNTEERING IS A CHANCE NOT JUST TO HELP OTHERS, BUT ALSO TO DISCOVER YOURSELF. CHERISH THE MEMORIES YOU CREATE, THE LESSONS YOU LEARN, AND THE FRIENDSHIPS YOU FORM—THEY WILL STAY WITH YOU LONG AFTER YOUR TIME HERE ENDS.

THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF START ESC, AND FOR CONTRIBUTING YOUR ENERGY, IDEAS, AND HEART TO THE COMMUNITY.

GET IN TOUCH



apddacia@yahoo.com



<http://www.apdd.ro/>



Dragasani, Romania



This activity is part of the project Start ESC: Green and Inclusive Volunteering – Employment and Sustainable Development, co-funded by the European Union through the European Solidarity Corps and implemented by APDD (Asociația Pro Dezvoltare Dacia), Romania.

The views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or ANPCDEFP.
Neither the European Union nor ANPCDEFP can be held responsible for them.



Funded by the European Union.

