

BROŽÚRA
ESC @ INEX



NOTES FROM VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES IN Slovakia



ESC - european solidarity corps, alebo po slovensky
EZS - európsky zbor solidarity.

Zaujímavý program, ktorý mladým ľuďom vo veku 18-30 rokov ponúka možnosti, ako spoznať nové projekty v zahraničí, niečo sa naučiť, ale aj ako obohatiť miestnu komunitu.

Touto brožúrou Vám chceme priblížiť ako sa cítili v roku 2022 dobrovoľníci v našej organizácii.

Hostovali sme 3 dobrovoľníkov: Konsta z Fínska, Chiara z Talianska, Iryna z Ukrajiny.

Vo svojich článkoch dobrovoľníci reflektujú svoj prežitý čas ako na projekte v organizácii INEX Slovakia, tak aj svoj voľný čas a možnosti, ktoré im Bratislava a okolie ponúka.

Prajeme Vám príjemné čítanie.

A finn in Slovakia

First expressions

10 days in Bratislava has already passed and it's time to write my first blog post!

Adaptation to the new living environment has progressed rapidly and successfully.

Here is my thoughts and few pictures.

Best regards, Konsta



A finn in Slovakia

First expressions

Welcome to read my first blog text! When I'm writing this first post, I've been in Bratislava for 10 days already and so much have happened.

Before I get into that, I must tell you that today is the first actually warm spring day, it is 19 degrees and people are enjoying the sun and eating ice cream and drinking kofola of course.

Kofola is Slovakia's own soft drink, which tastes little bit like coca-cola but there is also some herbal taste and it isn't that sweet. I think I'm going to drink kofola and kofola only during this project, it's so good :D



A Finn in Slovakia

First expressions

So like I said, a lot has happened. On the one hand, I have already learned and seen so many things so it feels like I would have been here much longer, but on the other hand, it is like I arrived just yesterday. Time has gone by so fast, and I believe that this almost 10 month journey will be spent in a flash.

During my first days I met everybody from the office and my mentor, and also my flatmate of course. Everybody has been very friendly and helpful, even though there might be a little difference between Inex team and other slovakians, since I don't speak Slovak language almost at all, some people are maybe afraid of using English.

Maybe soon I am able to have some kind of simple discussions in Slovak, since I already had my first Slovak lesson with my lovely teacher. The language seems really hard, but not impossible!

I am hearing the language every day and it is possible for me to use it in the stores for example, so maybe it will become at least a bit more natural for me. It took a while also to get my English going and to gain the courage to use it, but I think it is already way easier now after one week.

A finn in Slovakia

First expressions

During my first days in the office and back at my home office, I've had many presentations about Inex's different kind of activities.

Before I arrived, it was little bit blurry what are the activities, because there are many different kind of opportunities.

This office is very hard working and they really care about the quality of the operations. For example, now I understand what are the differences between educational or volunteering activities, or what does it mean to go to international workcamp.

I hope that when the summer arrives, we are able to do all of these great camps even though the war in Ukraine is throwing long shadows also upon our activities. Hopefully soon the war is over, and there is no more horror in our shared Europe, and we can promote and successfully have international participants from all over Europe.

OK - I don't want to write too long, so I'll continue on the next chapter. Next post is going to be about my first short trip from Bratislava

A finn in Slovakia

A two-day visit to Vienna

Because of the rather chilly weather, I decided to visit Vienna for two days. I found completely different kind of vibe compared to Bratislava, fascinating museums and a cool hostel.

Spring is finally here. I prefer to have four seasons, but every winter those last couple of months start to feel little bit too long. Finland is a country of supreme winter and summer's are also getting hotter and hotter every year.

Maybe here in Slovakia the seasons aren't that extreme, even though I already heard that it is possible to have even 35 degrees in middle summer. That is way too hot for me :D And by the way, you must know that Finnish people love to talk about weather. But anyways, because of the first few days were still quite cold, I decided to visit Vienna for one night trip. Before the warmer days it was nice to visit couple of art museums, which the city is known for.



A finN in Slovakia

A two-day visit to Vienna

It is fun that Bratislava and Vienna are so close to each other. Traveling by bus will take only about an exact hour. When I was living in Espoo, which is a city right next to Helsinki, sometimes I traveled cirka 45 minutes to get from place A to place B, so for me here it feels almost like I have also full access to Vienna too because the distance is so short. It is also pretty cheap to travel there, especially if you book your ticket days before.

What was surprising to me in Vienna, was how expensive the museums were. It seemed a normal price to pay almost 15 euros on entrance fee to museum, which in opinion, is little bit too much from student. But nevertheless, on the other hand now I know why Vienna is known for these museums. They were awesome!



A finn in Slovakia

A two-day visit to Vienna

As a somekind of painting enthusiast, I enjoy visiting art museums that have art from 20th and 21st century. In the downtown area Vienna definitely felt like a bigger city, that has a longer history than for example Bratislava has. It was the capital city of the famous House of Habsburg that was one of the most important dynasties in Europe during the 2nd millennium.

Vienna is a very historical city full of old buildings that are popular sightseeing places, but for me they are not so interesting. Maybe because of the early spring, I was longing for smaller laid-back cafes and alleys. Of course, the city is huge so I just have to find the right places next time!



A finn in Slovakia

A two-day visit to Vienna

For accommodation, I tried this so called capsule hostel. I would recommend it! I felt like it was a good combination of hostel's publicity and capsule's privacy. In this hostel, there was about 10 capsules and it costed 37 euros. It would have been possible to accommodate hostels costing about 20 euros, but I wanted to try capsule for the experience since it was my first time. Capsules were "space" themed and there was small smart-tv, headphones and charger plugins inside.



A finn in Slovakia

A two-day visit to Vienna

During my project I want to explore and travel more on my own as a solo traveler. I have a believe that many people don't like to do it maybe because it is seen as an embarassing way to travel. Of course there are pros to travel with friends or family, but there is also pros to travel alone! It is therapeutic to wonder around museums or in a busy city center just by yourself and eat whenever or wherever you want. Also for example in hostels, there are many other solo travellers, so if you want to, I think it is possible to find friends to travel with :) So I encourage everyone to try it!



A finn in Slovakia

Spring time in April

First full month has passed and now I'm going to tell you about my thoughts and experiences during April. I've been doing work at the office, participated to my first training and visited Italy!

April started with the first leadership training. During the two-day training, we learned a lot of new things. It was a bit surprising how much there was to learn, even though some of the things had already been introduced to me or they were already familiar in some way. If I remember correctly, there were a total of eight participants in the leadership training and five INEX trainers.



A finn in Slovakia

Spring time in April

We had a group of just the right size. Although the content of the first training was more theory-oriented, I think the program had a suitable combination of learning by listening and watching, and on the other hand, we also got to do things in practice. The team spirit was excellent and everyone had fun, even though on Sunday we were quite tired after a long weekend.

For example, we learn about the manager's communication, responsibilities, competencies, and how to plan a schedule for the volunteer camp. We practiced speaking in English and how to evaluate activities in a formal or informal way.

During April, I have had time to properly settle in Bratislava. The city and the apartment have started to feel like a permanent place of residence. Waking up in Petržalka is no longer so special, but little by little, more and more ordinary. I have begun to understand that life is ultimately very similar regardless of the country or the city of the moment. I myself have at least had a slightly wrong idea about living abroad in the sense that everyday life would somehow be very special or different elsewhere than where I am.

A Finn in Slovakia

Spring time in April

I find that I tend to easily think that being somewhere else is something wonderful, when in reality it is not. And that's a good thing. This makes it easier to be satisfied with where you are at that moment. You don't always have to be somewhere else, doing something better. Life can be made better where it already is.

I have slowly begun to understand what kind of language Slovak is. A little progress has been made, although I can't say anything yet. Fortunately, the teacher seems to have a lot of patience, because it is needed. Perhaps she has already learned with previous ESC volunteers that Slovak is a very difficult language to learn.

However, it's fun to notice that you recognize some individual words from conversations, even if they are the simplest of all. One day when I ordered food in Slovak, I even got an answer in Slovak, so the seller thought I was a local. So something from the language lessons has stuck in my head, luckily. In the beginning, most of the energy went into learning the English language in order to make it flow as smoothly as possible. It was surprising how much difficulty there was in getting such easy rules into speech as personal pronouns or the use of singular and plural.

A finn in Slovakia

Spring time in April

Now sometimes I notice that even the thoughts flow in English, so you don't have to translate everything in your head before speaking, which is quite heavy and slow.

At the office, I have done many different small tasks. The use of Canva has become familiar. It's fun to use because I get to fulfill my inner graphic designer tendencies. Visuality is interesting to me, and it's nice to be able to combine it even in small things, such as a Facebook post or preparing an infosheet.

Nowadays, when the video services TikTok and Instagram reels have taken over social media users, I was able to plan and publish my and also INEX's first Reel video, which turned out to be quite successful for a perfectionist.



A finn in Slovakia

Spring time in April

I already knew before that social media is a very important part of almost every field of working life today, but now I'm only experiencing it in practice. During the month I have planned my own workshop, or in other words INEX messenger, the topic of which I chose people's short attention span and its development in the age of social media.



Iryna

My first month as an ESC volunteer at INEX - June

Hello, dear blog readers! My name is Iryna and I want to share with you about my first month as volunteer in Inex.

June was very saturated with different events. I attended demo camp in Banska Stiavnica where we had training for camp leaders with many games, workshops about intercultural learning, conflict resolution, motivation, theory of games, financial management. We also helped in the garden of Scout house.

Then I was at on-arrival training, where I meet other ESC volunteers from different organizations in Slovakia. We learned more about European Solidarity Corp, program Erasmus +, sharing about our hosting organizations and our project. The most expected part was the hiking to the High Tatras.



Iryna

My first month as an ESC volunteer at INEX - June

I attended activity Naše Mesto at Základná škola Lachova, that was organized by INEX Slovakia, and volunteers from MUZIKER.sk, KPMG Slovensko helped. In this activity we were: painting the fence, trimming a hedge, cleaning flower beds in the school yard and in front of the school and also, we cleaned sidewalks and park in front of the school from leaves, cones.

Then I hosted tea meeting where I presented my country - Ukraine, its history, food, culture and traditions.

As I will lead summer camp I should prepare for it. So, I had some leader training and other preparation activities.



Iryna

My first month as an ESC volunteer at INEX - June

During my first days in the office, I had many presentations about INEX, its activities and about Slovakia. Colleagues in office are very nice and they care about the quality of everything what they do. For example, last weeks I experienced that Monika do her best to prepare me for my first workcamp and other girls are ready to help at any moment and answer all my question.



Iryna

ESC project five months after beginning

As I wrote before I had preparation before leading 2 work camps. It was training for the leaders, attending demo camp in Banská Štiavnica.

Also, one part of my preparation was to try how it's to be a volunteer in a workcamp. For me it was first INEX summer volunteering camp of the season 2022 in small village Lukovištia. We were helping with preparatory work for renovation of the old school to the art center and with environmental work around the village Lukovištia.

After learning what things should be done before, during and after workcamp my co-leader Chiara and I started to prepare all things for workcamps. So, we contacted local partner and volunteers, created info sheet, prepared a framework program for workcamp.

Iryna

ESC project five months after beginning

After this we were waiting for the beginning of our first workcamp where we will be leaders.

Finally, 7th of August we started social workcamp in Prešov. Where we were helping with activities, games, trips for clients of OZ Barlička. We had volunteers from: Mexico, Israel, Spain, Slovenia and Italy. During free time we spent great time with volunteers together playing games, visited town nearby Košice, went on the trips in the center of city Prešov and Calvary Complex in Prešov.

We played games and talked with the Seniors. With the youth, we had activities such as: walking, dancing and singing, origami, drawing. Activity that I liked most was festival of cultures. Where we prepared traditional food from our countries and after tried it.

Iryna

ESC project five months after beginning

The 4th of September we started our second workcamp in Bratislava where we helped DSS Integra with their clients and activities for them. We had only two volunteers from Italy and France but we spent good time together during volunteering and free time activities. During volunteering activities, we were cooking, talking, dancing and doing sports activities with clients DSS Integra.

After volunteering activities, we visited the city center, the botanical garden, the Bratislava and the Devin castle.

Right after workcamp I had mid-term training where I met some people from on-arrival training that I had three months ago. It was very good time with familiar people in spa-town Trenčianske Teplice. There we had good time for relax and talking.

Iryna

ESC project five months after beginning

19th and 21st of September INEX took part in the week of volunteering. During which we and several volunteers cleaned our office and made order in the stock house. We held volunteer activities at ZŠ Lachova where volunteers from Dell Technologies and NielsenIQ helped: paint the fence; sow grass around the running track.

So, after four months being at an ESC project and part of Inex Slovakia I met many people from European countries, after communicating with them my horizons broadened and I began to look at some things completely differently, I gained new experience in communicating with other people, as well as being a leader and responsible for a group of people. This summer I visited many cities in Slovakia, which I really liked.



Iryna

Final article of the ESC project "Summer leader"

At the end of September, we had a meeting with the leaders of all INEX Slovakia summer camps, called "Potáborka." During this activity we discussed this year's workcamp season, ways of studying as new leaders, our workcamps - situations that happened and our reactions to them, problems that we had and how we solved them and also ways how to improve future camps.

We also received certificates from accredited training. After this part we spent few hours in bowling. Where we played good game and had time for talking.

In October we also held a "Creative tea meeting". We met new people and also those we already knew. It was good to meet and talk with people from Ukraine and Slovakia. During this meeting we learned how to make brooches using different materials, such as felt and beads and how to weave bracelets of friendship.



Iryna

Final article of the ESC project "Summer leader"

Part of our office with other volunteers helped to fill in medical cards in health center for refugees from Ukraine at Rovniankova street.

I was part of a preparation team for the Tea Meeting focused on bag and other cloth coloring which we had in November and was happy to participate at creative Christmas event in December.

I shot a video that is part of the theme: "Meet INEX Office" You can see it [here](#) and learn more about my journey as an ESC volunteer.

After living in Bratislava for nine months and traveling around I understand that I want to stay here. So, I started to look for a job here. And as people says: "who seeks - finds". Therefore, unfortunately, I am leaving the project, but I am not leaving Slovakia, and I hope for further cooperation with Inex Slovakia.



Iryna

Final article of the ESC project "Summer leader"

So, after reflecting on myself and project, finishing the Youthpass and thinking about the competencies I have gained during the ESC project "Summer leader," it is time to say thank you and goodbye.



Chiara

My first experience as an ESC volunteer

Hello there! My name is Chiara, I am from Italy and it is almost one month that I am here :) as a volunteer within the European Solidarity Corps Programme.

It is almost a month since I arrived in Bratislava and I have already done a lot of experiences. During the first week here I worked in the office and I had the training for leaders. It is my first time working in an office and before I got here, I was scared of not being able to. But, as soon as I got here, I immediately felt better because everyone in the office was always available, kind and ready to answer any questions.

During the very first day, they organized a barbecue and I have to say, other than good food :) they helped me translating from Slovak to English and I felt part of the conversation!



Chiara

My first experience as an ESC volunteer

It is my first time in Slovakia but I love it already! Bratislava is a beautiful city, but above all it's not too big and I love the fact that you can walk around it. One of my favorite things is that in every corner there is a garden or a park where you can sit and enjoy a book. Although I have been here for almost a month, I have to admit that there are still several things that are new to me; for example, public transport that works and is on time, which in Italy is really difficult to have, and I noticed how many families and especially young parents there are... now I understand better why Italy is called a country of old people!

After the first week in Bratislava, I left for my first workcamp ever of which I will always have a beautiful memory! The workcamp was in Lukovištia a small village in the middle of Slovakia with a breathtaking landscape, and we were 5 volunteers





Chiara


My first experience as an ESC volunteer

The aim of the project was renovating an old school, so we cut the grass, cut the trees and plants, dug and take care of the trees which had been planted prior to our arrival. I enjoyed the job even if sometimes was hard.

I met beautiful people and we had a lot of fun; we played a lot of cards games and we were almost never on our phones which was the best part. We shared a lot of fun facts about our cultures as well as food, especially on "Feasts of Cultures".

One of the best parts for me was sleeping in a tent. I had already done it in the past but this time was magical because for most of the evenings it rained and it felt unreal.

We also went on Saturday at Teplý Vrch where we stayed for the afternoon and we also had pizza all together! The next day we went into the museum of the main city, Rimavská Sobota. We did a lot of interesting activities and the local partner was really available in every moment and he played with us too so he was part of the group. At the workcamp I had the opportunity to try some Slovak foods such as Bryndzové halušky, Goulash even if it is not really Slovak :), and a lot of Kofola!!



Chiara

My first experience as an ESC volunteer

I had one of the most memorable weeks of my life and the good part is that I am still in contact with some of the volunteers and maybe we will meet again during summer...

In august I will be leader of two different workcamps and I am so excited to try new experiences and to meet new people... I will update you guys!

Chiara



Chiara

My august adventure with summer camps

Hello there! A month has passed, and I became leader for my first time.

August is over and it was a month full of emotions!!!

During these 31 days I had the opportunity to visit Budapest, Vienna and Presov, and I loved all of them even if I stayed just one day... To be honest Presov was probably my favorite :)

My family came to visit me, and it was beautiful to show them the city and my favorite places. Also, I took them out for eating a traditional Slovak dinner and surprisingly they really loved it! You know... Italians think that the best food it is just in Italy :)

However, during the first few weeks I worked in the office organizing the last things for the workcamp and talking with the girls about my fears and expectations. I also posted my first quiz about Italy on Instagram and then I left Bratislava and lived the experience of my first workcamp as a leader.



Chiara

My august adventure with summer camps

Finally, I met the volunteers, and we started the Black Castle workcamp in Zlatno. It was a unique experience in the middle of nowhere, without phone signal and electricity. We were working at the ruins of Black Castle, living in a beautiful cottage, and having fun spending time together. This workcamp gave me the opportunity to fully connect with people and to live the present moment.

It was special because we were in contact with the locals even if we had the language barrier! I learnt so many things about cultures, the history of the Black Castle and I learnt how to start a bonfire!!! I wish I could stay more with the volunteers because I had so much fun with them.

Actually, with some of them, we met in Bratislava the day after the workcamp to spend more time together. I became really friend with a French girl and as she says "INEX organizes the most incredible workcamps with the funniest people!"



Chiara

My august adventure with summer camps

In the end, I enjoyed being a leader and I was ready thanks to the training and all the answers that the girls in the office gave to me, but the help of the local partner and my amazing co-leader, Shannelle was essential!

I still have a workcamp in September and a whole month ahead and I am ready to live it!

Chiara



Chiara

My last month of the ESC project

My journey ends with the end of September.

It all started with the last workcamp of the season, INTEGRA. We organized some activities for people with disabilities. It was definitely the workcamp in which I learnt more; it made me realize that the things that I consider as problems actually aren't. Also, how important it is to involve these people in our society.

This workcamp allowed me to challenge myself even more and I am really happy to have been a part of it. However, during the free time we visited the Bratislava city center, the botanical garden and the Devin castle. It was beautiful showing Bratislava to the volunteers!!



Chiara

My last month of the ESC project

The after-cleaning season was an activity during the Volunteer week that took place in the office after the workcamp. We cleaned and organized all the boxes with all the materials in the office.

Later, I took part on the training for ESC volunteers in Osrbliie. There I met other 16 volunteers; we shared our projects and our experiences and, of course, we end up becoming friends. I also saw some of them again later the training in Bratislava.

During the training I also had the opportunity to learn more about non-formal education, voluntary projects, Slovak culture and the right and responsibilities of an ESC volunteer. I loved how the two trainers taught us these topics. We were learning in an interactive way through activities and websites and it was a completely new way of learning for me!



Chiara

My last month of the ESC project

In my last days here, I had to complete some stuffs before my departure. I filmed a video, I evaluated my workcamps and my ESC project, I filled my youth pass certificate and of course I wrote this article. And now, it is time for me to go.

I will keep all the memories of the experiences that let me grow and understand more about myself during these 3 months.

I just wanted to thank everyone that I crossed in these 100 days that helped me to discover, explore and mature.

Chiara



Thank you

Thank you for your work! We wish you all the best in life. We hope that the activities you have experienced during the ESC project and all you share with INEX, your values and enthusiasm will move you forward.

