

Project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES

The Project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES (LIFE17 ESC/PT/000003) – Volunteer with European Solidarity Corps for Activities in Portugal with Ecological Sense – was created to give answer to a preparatory call of the LIFE programme in partnership with ESC – European Solidarity Corps. The project involves a consortium of nine partners in Portugal, that work towards nature conservation and tackles mainly the use of volunteers from ESC to work in nature.

The volunteering programmes offered in the project were designed to be long term and feature different types of tasks and activities related to environmental protection, nature, and biodiversity conservation, targeting Natura 2000 locations and species protected by the Birds and Habitats Directive.

Beneficiaries

MONTIS – Associação para a gestão e conservação da natureza – Coordination
APA ARH-Algarve – Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente
BCSD Portugal – Conselho Empresarial para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável
MARCA – Associação de Desenvolvimento Local
Município de Torres-Vedras
Plantar uma Árvore – Associação
Playsolutions – Audiovisuais
Rota Vicentina – Associação para a promoção do turismo de natureza na costa alentejana e vicentina
SPEA – Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves

Objectives and Actions of the project

The LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES aimed to:

- Deploy a minimum of 175 volunteers from the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme in activities for nature conservation
- Active involvement of nine Portuguese organisations with different objectives and national coverage in the deployment and management of ESC volunteers
- Increase opportunities for ESC volunteers with the objective of developing their potential, through experience and learning via a diverse range of activities to be carried out by each of the partners
- Increase internal capacity of partner organisations to complete their objectives
- Increase capacity and support of the LIFE project to develop, including a direct support to four LIFE projects in which some of the partner organisations are also involved
- Increase the capacity of raising awareness of the organisations that manage Nature 2000 locations
- Increase the cooperation and experience interchange between organisations, property owners, farmers, companies, etc.

Besides the main objectives of the project, each project beneficiary also had specific nature conservation and population enrolment actions such as: area of habitat protected,

area of invasive alien species controlled, autochthonous trees and shrubs produced and planted in conservation works, or number of community people involved in activities with ESC volunteers, external partner institutions (private and public) participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers, and so on.

To achieve these objectives, the project was divided into three main actions categories:

Actions A – Implementation Actions – Actions focused on the implementation of each partner work and volunteering programmes

Actions B – Communication and awareness rising – Actions focused on the communication and engagement with the project

Actions C – Project management and monitoring of the project progress – Actions focused on the management of the project, meetings and monitoring of Actions A and B

Results achieved

The LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project, from 2018 to 2021 has managed to welcome and work with 214 ESC volunteers corresponding to 17477 volunteering days and 24 nationalities.

Implementation Actions

- 171,85 ha of Area of habitats protected by the Habitats Directive improved
- 3,146 km of Length of Riparian Habitats improved/restored
- 160,03 ha of Area of IAS (Invasive Alien Species) controlled
- 12526 of Autochthonous trees and shrubs produced in nursery
- 37949 of Autochthonous trees planted on conservation works
- 67 Erosion control devices set in water lines with natural engineering works
- 294 km Length of interpretation trails maintained/restored for adequately directing tourists in nature/biodiversity sensitive areas
- 12441 local volunteers participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers
- 17 local landowners engaged in nature conservation activities following contacts with ESC volunteers
- 146 External Partner institutions (public, non-profit and private) participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers
- 5 LIFE funded projects engaged with ESC volunteers
- 18 activities organized and implemented by each volunteer received in BCSD Portugal
- 7 good practices sharing sessions among companies and their stakeholders
- 175 companies and stakeholder's representatives in the good practices sharing sessions
- 8 awareness-raising for young entrepreneurs and start-ups
- 142 entrepreneurs and start-ups representatives in the awareness-raising sessions
- 56 awareness-raising sessions for secondary school students
- 3457 secondary students in the awareness-raising sessions

Actions of communication and awareness rising

- 4633 website users
- 1427 Facebook page followers

- 7 media visits promoted
- 4 National TV news broadcasted
- 3 Radio news broadcasted
- 7 Press releases deployed
- 66 Press news
- 72 Similar organizations attending technical seminars
- 45% of volunteers sharing their experiences through specific events
- 10 Networking synthesis reports delivered
- 7 External LIFE project teams collaborated actively with LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES
- 9391 views of the projects Teaser's

AFTER-LIFE Plan – 2022 – 2027

In order to continue the work executed during the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project between 2018 and 2021, the nine partner beneficiaries foresee the development of a series of actions during 5 years after the end of the project in 2021.

The presentation of the works will be divided by beneficiaries, taking in account the intervention sites, to better tackle the conservation works and volunteer's enrolment in nature conservation, both main goals of LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES and include a budget foreseen to achieve this plan.

BCSD Portugal		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sensibilization and raising awareness for environmental causes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None 	Personnel Costs – 24 142,19€

BCSD Portugal will continue the Project through its strategic objective of raising awareness in the business community regarding the integration of natural capital in business management. Raising awareness of natural capital is an essential issue that must be considered within the ESG perspective, whether as a risk or a sustainability strategy. BCSD foresee to continue to ensure the dissemination of conservation works and measures for a more sustainable business using the brochure done within the project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES.

MARCA – Associação de Desenvolvimento Local		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget foreseen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Control and irradiation of IAS species in Montemor-o-Novo intervention sites - Restore of natural habitats and semi-natural habitats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National volunteering programmes of short and long duration - Youth volunteering programmes - Local volunteering 	Personnel Costs – 7500€ per year External Assistance – 1500€ per year Consumables – 3000€ per year

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International workcamps - Volunteering activities for adults, institutions and companies 	
--	---	--

MARCA will continue to develop volunteering programmes for nature conservation such as the ones presented above, continuing the partnerships already established and new ones with national entities (schools, companies, associations, municipalities, NGOs) and European entities (mainly NGO's) and resorting to national and European funding with programmes such as European Solidarity Corps and European Youth Foundation.

Continuing the dynamism of volunteering, in particular youth volunteering, will allow to raise awareness of environmental issues of the territorial context where MARCA-ADL is inserted.

It is expected that the conservation works presented, involving the volunteers received under such programmes will be developed in Montemor-o-Novo county, continuing the conservation works done under LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES.

These monitoring and/or intervention on previous conservation work is of the utmost importance to ensure its effects in the medium-long term and to monitor the possibility of new threats.

MONTIS – Associação para a Gestão e Conservação da Natureza		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance of the works done under the project - Continuation of habitat restoration of the areas under the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term volunteering programmes - Workcamps - Activities with general community - Activities with partnerships of youth associations 	Personal costs – 120 000€ Travel and volunteer expenses – 150 000€ Consumables and communication – 12 000€

The involvement of volunteers in nature conservation has always been one of MONTIS focus, to involve who is interested in giving a hand to nature. LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES has allowed the association to have a long-term team on the field working on a continuous scope on the conservation tasks of the areas managed by MONTIS.

Alongside the advanced regarding the restoration of the ecosystem, having a permanent team has also opened the community to new partnerships (companies, youth associations, etc), and a better enrolment with the participants in activities.

MONTIS will continue to receive international and national volunteers for nature conservation works throughout projects such as European Solidarity Corps, Youth Exchanges, Erasmus + on long-term volunteering projects. In parallel the association will continue to promote volunteering activities and workcamps focused on nature

conservation with youth associations, companies, general community, and other partnerships.

The continuation of these volunteering programmed, will allow the progress and maintenance of the work done by the volunteers of LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES on the areas under the association’s management, mainly in Vouzela, São Pedro do sul, Arouca and Pampilhosa da Serra county. MONTIS will resort to projects, donations, crowdfunding campaigns, memberships to finance the continuation of volunteers for nature conservation teams.

Município de Torres Vedras		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance of the areas intervened with the project - Implementation of conservation project in the municipality’ and parishes’ properties - Control of invasive alien species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteering actions for the local community - Sensibilization actions for the population 	Consumables (such as tools)– 6000€ Autochthonous trees and shrubs to plant – 6500€ Personnel Costs – 15000€

The Municipality of Torres Vedras will continue to develop volunteering activities open to the local community focused on nature conservation, as well as raising awareness actions regarding the importance of maintenance and increase of biodiversity and habitat quality of the local forest ecosystems. These activities will be ensured by the Municipality’s employees and local volunteers from schools, associations, companies and the parishes of the county. The volunteering programmes to be developed will be mainly of short duration and will contribute to the maintenance of the areas intervened with LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES in Torres Vedras county and from which many are part of Nature 2000 Network, such as: Paisagem Protegida das Serras do Socorro e Archeira.

MTV will also continue the annual give-away of many native trees and shrubs as a measure to continue encouraging the population to plant native species.

Volunteering has allowed the Municipality of Torres Vedras to increase the interventions done on the areas of the county of nature interest. Volunteering, albeit in a more sporadic mode, will make possible to continue the work developed during the project and guarantee the success of the interventions carried out. In the same way, by carrying out nature conservation activities, on a voluntary basis, it will be possible to reinforce the importance of community collaboration in the maintenance of the intervention areas.

Plantar uma Árvore		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance of the works done under the project - Maintenance of the works done with partnerships during the project, such as Mata Nacional do Bussaco 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short-term volunteering programmes - Long-term volunteering programmes - Activities for local volunteers 	Personnel Costs – 200 005,50€ Travels – 15 392,24€ Consumables – 52 253,08€ Volunteering – 146 372,50€
---	--	---

Continuing with the volunteer programs is essential to consolidate the work done with LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES. The long-term volunteering of this project has brought more consistency to conservation work with two larger, more professional, and regular teams on the field, increasing the ability to coordinate local volunteer groups of punctual activities with more available monitors, and has also allowed the teams to start working in new areas not only in both the regions on the project (Sintra and Vila Pouca de Aguiar) but also nationally, with field trips on the continent and the five islands in Azores.

The LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES has increased Plantar uma Árvore's work scale by more than double and it is only possible to maintain the results in the medium-long term in the intervention areas while maintaining human resources with the current dimension. The five-year period, presented on the AFTER-LIFE plan, for most of the areas involved will allow management periods ranging between six and eleven years, increasing the potential for success and self-sufficiency in areas with well-developed plantations, benefited native regeneration, control of exotic species and high percentage of local voluntary groups sensitized and involved in actions on the group.

Plantar uma Árvore will continue to develop long-term volunteering programmes depending on opportunities, with partnerships such as European Solidarity Corps, short-term volunteering activities with engagement of local volunteers in the works foreseen to the intervention areas of the project, and the field trips concept developed during the project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES that will allow to continue the partnerships established nationally on continent and islands.

The work to be developed will continue to be supported by Parques de Sintra-Monte da Lua, Câmara Municipal de Cascais, Câmara Municipal de Sintra, ICNF, and Câmara Municipal de Vila Pouca de Aguiar.

Rota Vicentina		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Control of invasive alien species - Monitoring and maintenance of walking trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term volunteering programmes - Short-term volunteering programmes - Caretakers 	Personnel Costs - 97260€ Travel – 4800€ External Assistance – 54000€ Communication – 3240€ Consumables – 723200 € Insurance – 1800 € Others – 35400 €

Anchoring on the current experience of working with volunteers, local community and network of partners, including tourists, operators and national, regional and local public bodies, which ensure compatibility between tourism, nature and biodiversity conservation. With the identified activities, Rota Vicentina expect not only to improve compatibility between pedestrian tourism and conservation of the existing biodiversity but also to engage volunteers and other stakeholders with concrete conservation works, and to increase the knowledge about Natura 2000 protected areas.

Rota Vicentina will reinforce the current cooperation model for Natura 2000 conservation and responsible tourism. This action will explore Natura 2000 preservation and awareness about these protected areas and volunteering involvement along the Rota Vicentina Walking Trails. Thus, it will promote and maintain sustainable and responsible nature tourism, which is the motto of Rota Vicentina Association.

Rota Vicentina will continue with these different actions:

- Control of invasive flora species that exist along some stretches of the Fishermen’s Trail (mostly *Acacia sp* and some *Carpobrotus edulis*), which are invading adjacent areas, threatening protected natural habitats and species.

- Maintenance and restoration of the directional equipment and trail signage along Rota Vicentina trails, in order to improve their use by tourists, directing them along the right ways to walk and therefore avoiding the use of other trails and the potential negative effects on natural flora (which could compromise conservation targets for several populations of protected flora, including endemics, for which trampling is a current threat);

- Environmental awareness raising and engagement of local populations and tourists using Rota Vicentina trails.

SPEA – Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Birdlife monitoring - Support in back office work - Control of invasive species - Production of autochthonous plants in nursery - Maintenance of areas intervened in the project - Plantation of autochthonous species - Maintenance of paths and water lines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local volunteer scholarships - Partnership’ with schools - Volunteering Programmes from IPDJ - Long-term volunteering programmes - Short-term volunteering programmes 	Personnel Costs – 220 650€ Travel and volunteer expenses - 136 000€ Others – 750€

The involvement of volunteers has become a great asset as they have allowed the reinforcement of technical teams on the field and increase the work done in less of a time period. Having volunteers collaborate with SPEA has demonstrated the potential of

contributing to the education and training of young people to raise awareness to nature conservation.

SPEA will continue to develop several volunteering programmes on the areas intervened in the project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES, such as I SPA “Ilhas Berlengas” (PTZPE0009); SPA “Pico da Vara / Ribeira do Guilherme - Ilha de S. Miguel (PTZPE0033) and SCI “Serra da Tronqueira / Planalto dos Graminhais” (PTMIG0024); SPA “Lagoa Pequena” (PTZPE0049) and SCI “Fernão Ferro / Lagoa de Albufeira” (PTCON0054); SPA “Ria Formosa” (PTZPE0017), SCI “Ria Formosa/Castro Marim” (PTCON0013) ensuring the continuation of the conservation Works in these sites.

The recruitment of volunteers will pass by the offer of volunteering opportunities such as long-term volunteering funded by the European Solidarity Corps or Erasmus +, partnerships with Universities and local schools, short-term volunteering programmes such as workcamps, local volunteer scholarships or Portuguese sport and youth programmes.

APA – Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente		
Conservation works	Volunteer enrolment	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring of aquatic ecosystems - Control of invasive alien species Plantation of autochthonous species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of the project Voluntariado Ambiental para a Água (Environmental Volunteering for Water) - Educational actions - Environmental volunteering activities 	Personnel Costs – 20000€ Consumables – 4000€

APA – ARH Algarve within the scope of the Environmental Volunteering for Water (Voluntariado Ambiental para a Água) and similarly to the last few years, will continue to promote in the Algarve region the voluntary actions for nature conservation that started in an early stage of the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project.

In the coming years, we will continue to carry out these actions in the 16 municipalities of the Algarve in the areas already defined within the scope of LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES, or in other that may arise in the meantime proposed by our partners, or out of interest in the conservation of priority ecosystems. Special attention will be paid to the areas defined within the scope of this LIFE, since it is necessary to continue the conservation work already started, under penalty of regressing in the results achieved, for example regarding the control of invasive alien species.

APA-ARH Algarve will continue the nature conservation volunteering enrolment with the contribute of the municipalities, schools, centros de ciência vida (life science

centres), and other environmental association, a network that the work developed with LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES has helped increase and dynamize even more.

VOLUNTEER ESCAPES – The Brand

The incorporation of long-term volunteering, during these three years, in the dynamics of the beneficiary associations, made it possible to increase the extent of their work, not only at the physical level, managing to have a greater area worked on the restoration of ecosystems, but also an impact on the awareness of the society.

Some of the beneficiaries, such as Plantar uma Árvore, have even developed initiatives around the volunteers of this project, as is the case of the “VOLUNTEER ESCAPES Camps”. These work camps consisted of weeks of work in intervention areas, with very concrete objectives and where the local community could join for a whole week in the field work of the project volunteers. With these camps, it was possible to create more partnerships and establish a greater presence in strategic locations for nature conservation and support other projects.

As in P1A, several partners during the project noted the social benefits of the name “Voluntários ESCAPES”, and that the community associated this name with long-term volunteers who worked in nature in different entities, who lived in certain areas and who also brought economy and life to many more remote areas of work.

For this reason, for the investment of the 9 partners in this project during the last three years, for the investment of the 240 volunteers welcomed and the positive name of awareness that they managed to create, some partners, namely P1A, intend to continue, with other models and funding, to use the name “ Volunteer ESCAPES” as a long-term volunteering brand for nature conservation and maintain the dynamics of the volunteer camps and long-term volunteering created during the project.