

Voluntary Work Portfolio as a Pathway to Integration - project

Manual

Introduction

Voluntary Work Portfolio is created and produced during 2013–2015 as a co-operative project between three partners: University of Helsinki, Centre for Continuing Education (Finland), Volunteer Centre De Frivilliges Hus (Denmark) and Immigration and Migration Foundation Our People (Estonia). The project has been sponsored by Nordplus Adult. As a result after piloting and further developing the Voluntary Work Portfolio, it is now already available in English, Finnish, Estonian, Danish and Russian. The basis of the entire project has been to highlight the significance of voluntary work: activities and volunteering offers a great opportunity to get to know and familiarize oneself with the culture, get in contact with people, learn new skills and competences and also show and document the skills one already has. One of the assumptions here is also to bring up the fact, that likewise, the actor in the voluntary work field need to be open to take immigrants to be part of the work and that way also to be able to participate in activities within organizations and companies as well as the activities between those actors.

The portfolio is specifically aimed for those immigrant groups, which are most challenging for labor market, such as illiterate immigrants, who also need help in filling in the portfolio form. Going through the portfolio form with a counselor is a learning process itself and serves as a tool for self-reflection and documenting one's activities. In the process of volunteering the integration into work life or studies becomes easier, when one learns, not only language and culture, but also skills and competences needed in the society and work life. At its best, the portfolio supports and encourages to volunteering and thereby makes one a part of the society and lifelong learning process.

How to use the portfolio

To the portfolio an immigrant can, either independently or with the help of someone, document knowledge, competences, skills learned and experienced, during the volunteer work. It can also be used for job seeking or when applying to study, or while participating to various activities and functions. It can be an important and helpful way to show one's competences especially for those, who don't have any work experience or degree. In addition, it is a useful tool in social integration courses nationally offered to immigrants, since the planning for one's personal path to work life is

often carried out as a part of those courses.

The self-evaluation tool is recommended to be filled in individually or with someone, depending on the language skills one has. It can be done with a teacher or with a volunteer worker and counselor. It can also be used as a frame of reference when evaluating practical training or internship. The description of the work done and the clarification of skills (see 1. **Voluntary work** and 2. **Additional training and courses**) can be filled in, if needed, before the self-evaluation i.e. the competences, or after those. Whether one fills in sections 1. and 2. first, they may give a preview of what is expected from an employee in work life. On the other hand, gathering that information after the self-evaluation, one may get a useful summary, that will bring up how wide variety of skills and competences one in fact has.

Even though the Volunteer Work Portfolio is focusing on immigrants in particular, it can be used as a whole or as applicable document with many other groups or individuals for self-evaluation, as well as for teaching or counseling purposes with an individual. One can have the list of skills as a basis of a discussion and elaborate further from there according to the need of an individual. Groups, that would benefit from this kind of statements an evaluation, would be for example such as students at second language courses (social integration), senior students, and individuals with very little education or work experience.

The skills and competences are divided in topics and statements (for example: *I argue my views in groups*), to which one can answer by choosing one number on the scale from 1 to 4 (1 to a lesser degree, 2 in general, 3 to a greater extent, 4 to a high degree). After that there is a box, to which one can write down an example of how, where and when one has used that skill.

If the statement is irrelevant for some reason, one can choose option *Not relevant*. If, for example, one has not needed any written skills and the statement is *I am able to present information in written form* this option would be suitable one.

Note that numbers are not referring to any kind of scoring, but are simple there to show gradual development and evaluation from the beginner's skills to more confident use of skills. It is also noteworthy to mention that a counselor or a teacher can use the portfolio for creating a learning situation by explaining and clarifying vocabulary and wider related entities. The need for that may be serious, if the language skills of an individual are still in the beginner's level.

When the portfolio was planned and it started as a project, one hardly knew, how timely and useful tool it would be in a situation we find ourselves now: the number of immigrants is growing very fast at the moment. Our sincere hope this tool to be one way to open doors towards participating in work life.