

SOCIAL INNOVATION VILLAGE

Fundão & Penamacor, Portugal

innovationvillage.eu

Long-Term Individual Volunteering

European Solidarity Corps • 6–12 months

June 2026 – July 2027



1. Welcome to Innovation Village

Welcome! You are about to join a small, passionate team working in one of Portugal's most beautiful yet underserved regions — the interior Beira Baixa. Innovation Village is a social innovation organisation based between Fundão and Penamacor, addressing interconnected community challenges through hands-on solidarity action.

As a long-term ESC volunteer, you are not a visitor or a tourist. You will be a genuine team member — contributing to real community needs, developing recognised competences, and experiencing authentic rural Portuguese life.

This infopack covers everything you need to know before, during and after your placement. Read it carefully and bring your questions to your first video call with our team.

2. About Social Innovation Village

Social Innovation Village brings together volunteers, communities, and local organisations to tackle real social challenges in central Portugal's interior — through technology, sustainable housing, and grassroots community work.



Our Mission

Enable young people to contribute meaningfully to society while developing personal, professional, and civic competences through hands-on solidarity activities.

Our Three Pillars

- Innovation for Good — digital literacy, technology access, open-source solutions for communities
- Sustainable Housing — community-led affordable housing using eco-friendly methods, WikiHouse construction
- Community Empowerment — youth engagement, support for vulnerable populations, democratic participation

Our Region

We are based in the Fundão municipality and Penamacor, in central Portugal's interior. This is a beautiful, rural area characterised by mountain landscapes, traditional villages, and tight-knit communities. It also faces real challenges: an ageing population, rural depopulation, digital exclusion, and housing pressures.

Your presence here matters. You will be working on real problems with real people — not a simulation.

Our Team

Your Personal Mentor	Your first call for wellbeing, personal concerns, and emergencies. We provide a confidential space for reflection and are available 24/7.
Your Volunteer Coordinator	Volunteer coordinator and operational contact. A former ESC volunteer. Manages your day-to-day coordination, activities, and scheduling.
Your Programme Lead	Designs your learning framework, keeps activities engaging and impactful, and guides your Youthpass process.
Our Partnerships Lead	Oversees organisational quality, partner relationships, and ESC programme compliance.

3. Your Volunteering Role

Individual volunteers at Innovation Village are placed in one of two activity streams depending on your interests, skills, and our current programme needs. Both streams run for up to 10 months (approximately 300 activity days), starting in June 2026.

Stream A — Digital Bridges: Technology for Social Inclusion

You will work as a Digital Inclusion Facilitator — helping excluded community members (elderly residents, unemployed youth, immigrant families) to access and use technology with confidence. This is not an IT technician role; you are a patient educator and community connector.

Typical weekly schedule:

- Monday–Tuesday: One-on-one digital literacy sessions (4–6 sessions per day)
- Wednesday: Small-group workshop + community drop-in support hours
- Thursday: Learning material development + coordination meetings
- Friday: Community outreach, team meeting, and reflection

Key tasks include teaching essentials (email, video calls, online government services, banking), developing multilingual guides, and staffing community technology access points at local libraries and senior centres.

Stream B — Sustainable Futures: Housing & Environmental Innovation

You will contribute to hands-on sustainable building projects — learning and applying eco-friendly construction methods including open-source WikiHouse systems, natural materials (timber, straw, clay), CNC fabrication, and renewable energy installation. You will also facilitate community workshops sharing these techniques.

Typical time split:

- 50% hands-on construction and fabrication on site
- 25% community education and workshops
- 15% documentation and open-source knowledge sharing
- 10% design, planning, and coordination support

Construction work is conducted under qualified professional supervision at all times. Comprehensive safety training is provided before you begin any site work.

What You Will NOT Be Doing

To be clear about what ESC volunteering is not:

- You will not replace any paid staff member or perform essential operational tasks
- You will not be asked to fulfill academic credits or vocational training requirements
- You will not work more than 30 hours per week
- You are not cheap labour — you are a supported learner contributing to solidarity

4. Learning, Development & Youthpass

Individual Learning Agreement

Within your first week, you and your mentor will create a personalised Individual Learning Agreement (ILA) aligned to the Youthpass competence framework. This outlines the specific skills and competences you aim to develop, the activities that will contribute to each, and how your progress will be evaluated.

Youthpass

All volunteers receive a Youthpass certificate at the end of their placement. This is an EU-recognised document validating your learning and competence development across eight key areas. Your mentor will work with you throughout — not just at the end — via monthly Youthpass working sessions documenting concrete examples of your growth.

Online Language Support (OLS)

As your placement is 6+ months, you qualify for the EU's Online Language Support platform. You will complete a Portuguese language assessment at the start and end of your placement, with access to a personalised online course throughout. Your mentor will check in monthly on your progress.

Portuguese Language Classes

In addition to OLS, we organise weekly in-person Portuguese group classes adapted to volunteer levels. You will also benefit from natural immersion through daily community interactions, shopping, local events, and your activities.

Training and Evaluation Cycle (TEC)

The Portuguese National Agency (PT02) organises on-arrival, mid-term, and final evaluation trainings for ESC volunteers. Participation is fully supported by SIV — we will cover costs, arrange transport, and give you time off work to attend.

Ongoing Learning Activities

- Weekly reflection sessions (structured, with your mentor)
- Skill workshops: digital tools, construction techniques, facilitation, communication
- Intercultural learning sessions with other volunteers
- Guest expert sessions from community partners
- Optional learning journal (not mandatory but encouraged)
- Mid-term evaluation (Month 3–4): formal review of progress and adjustment of objectives

Competences You Can Expect to Develop

Depending on your stream:

- Communication and digital pedagogy (Digital Bridges)
- Technical sustainable building skills, CNC operation (Sustainable Futures)
- Intercultural competence and adaptability
- Social and civic competence — working with vulnerable groups
- Sense of initiative — planning activities and solving real problems
- Cultural awareness through daily immersion in rural Portugal

5. Practical Conditions

Duration & Hours

Placement duration	Up to 10 months (approx. 300 activity days)
Project window	1 June 2026 – 31 July 2027
Working hours	Maximum 38 hours per week, 5 days
Rest days	2 days per week + Portuguese public holidays
Annual leave	2 days per month of volunteering
Arrival intakes	Approximately April and September (staggered)

Accommodation

SIV owns two residential properties where volunteers are hosted. You will be assigned based on your activity location.

- Property 1 – Penamacor town centre (Rua da Serra 39): 4 large bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, fully-equipped kitchen, living room. Walking distance to shops, healthcare, transport, restaurants, and cultural facilities.
- Property 2 – Fundão area (Enxames, Rua Senhora do Fastio 38): 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, kitchen, living room, large exterior area. Walking distance to our office, train station, and mini-market.

Individual volunteers receive a private room or share with one other person maximum. Both properties include quality beds and bedding, heating and ventilation, hot water, WiFi throughout, fire safety equipment, and secure entry. Regular cleaning is provided.

Food

You receive a monthly food allowance for independent grocery shopping. Both properties have fully-equipped kitchens with everything you need. Shared cooking is a daily highlight — a natural space for cultural exchange with your housemates.



Pocket Money / Allowance

You will receive the standard ESC Portugal monthly pocket money allowance, paid reliably by bank transfer. We will assist you to open a Portuguese bank account on arrival, or arrange an alternative payment method.

Local Transport

Both properties are located close to daily needs on foot. For activity sites and partner locations, SIV provides:

- Organisational vehicle for group travel to partner sites
- Bicycles for local sustainable transport (within 5–10 km)
- Monthly public transport passes for regular independent travel
- Reimbursement of activity-related travel expenses

Note: Public bus connections in rural areas are infrequent (2–4 daily). We plan activities and schedules around this reality.

Arrival

We arrange airport pickup from Porto or Lisbon airport (approximately 2–3 hours away). Coordinate your arrival date and flight details with our team at least two weeks before you travel.

6. Health, Insurance & Safety

ESC Insurance

All ESC volunteers are covered by the mandatory ESC insurance scheme (managed through the national agency), which includes medical treatment, hospitalisation, emergency dental care, repatriation, and civil liability. Your coverage documentation will be verified and provided to you before your placement begins.

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

If you are a citizen of an EU/EEA country, please ensure your EHIC is valid before departure. This provides access to the Portuguese national health system. We will help you register with the local health centre (centro de saúde) upon arrival.

Healthcare Access

Both Fundão and Penamacor have primary health centres, pharmacies, and medical services. Fundão has a hospital with emergency services. Staff will accompany you to your first appointments and help with translation and navigation.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

We take mental health seriously. Regular wellbeing check-ins with your personal mentor are built into the programme. If you need additional support, we connect you with counselling services in your own language (remote or in-person). If you go through a difficult period, we adjust your workload without stigma. Early departure is always an option if necessary.

Safety

For construction activities, comprehensive safety training is mandatory before you begin any site work. You will always work under qualified professional supervision and with appropriate personal protective equipment. No volunteer is ever asked to take inappropriate risks.

For community and digital inclusion work, our safety focus is on psychological safety (never alone with vulnerable participants initially), data protection training, and clear escalation procedures for difficult situations.

7. Support & Mentoring

Before You Arrive

Once selected, you will:

- Receive a comprehensive digital welcome package (daily/weekly schedule, accommodation photos, packing list, cultural guide to Portugal, Portuguese basics, emergency contacts)
- Have an introductory video call with your coordinator or personal mentor to get acquainted and ask your questions
- Be introduced to your cohort via a WhatsApp group and connected with past volunteers (alumni) for honest advice
- Complete online pre-departure training covering the ESC programme, Portuguese culture, Youthpass, and safety basics
- Receive activity-specific preparation (e.g. construction safety fundamentals, safeguarding basics, digital pedagogy intro) depending on your stream
- Receive guidance on travel, insurance documentation, and what to bring

During Your Placement

Mentoring structure:

- Your Personal Mentor: your dedicated personal mentor for emotional support, wellbeing, cultural adjustment, and confidential concerns — available 24/7 for emergencies
- Your Volunteer Coordinator: responsible for activity-related supervision, scheduling, and coordination
- Weekly one-on-one mentor meetings (more frequently in your first month or if needed)
- Daily team meetings when working alongside other volunteers
- Monthly Youthpass reflection sessions with your Programme Lead
- Mid-term evaluation at Month 3–4

Community integration support:

- Accompanied registration with local health centre, post office, and bank on arrival
- Orientation tour of your location(s) and surrounding area
- Weekly Portuguese language classes
- Connections to local youth groups, sports, cultural events, and community activities
- Optional host family meal invitations for cultural immersion

If Something Goes Wrong

You have multiple reporting channels: your personal mentor, your coordinator, our partnerships lead, an anonymous feedback form, and direct National Agency contact. All concerns are taken seriously. We have a clear three-step conflict resolution process, and volunteer wellbeing always takes priority over project targets.

8. Local Life — What to Expect

The Area

Fundão is a small municipality of approximately 27,000 people in the Serra da Gardunha foothills — known for its cherry orchards, olive groves, and mountain landscapes. Penamacor is a quieter historic village about 30 km away. Both have all essential services: supermarkets, pharmacies, banks, cafes, restaurants, health centres.

Covilhã (a university city with more amenities, nightlife, and transport connections) is approximately 30–40 minutes away by car. Castelo Branco (the regional capital) is about 40 minutes. Lisbon is 2.5–3 hours.

Cost of Living

Interior Portugal is significantly cheaper than Lisbon or Porto. Your monthly food allowance will comfortably cover basic groceries. Eating out at local restaurants is affordable (a set lunch menu is typically €7–10). Public transport is inexpensive.

Language

The working language of SIV is English, and basic English is sufficient for your placement. Learning Portuguese is warmly encouraged and heavily supported — your local community interactions will happen in Portuguese, and locals greatly appreciate any effort you make with the language. We do not expect fluency.

Internet & Communication

Both properties have WiFi. Portuguese SIM cards with data are inexpensive and available at convenience stores. We recommend getting a SIM on or shortly after arrival (we can help with this).

Social Life

Rural life is quiet, community-oriented, and seasonal. This is genuinely different from city life — evenings and weekends centre on local cafés, community events, nature, and home cooking rather than nightlife. Past volunteers consistently describe this as a positive adjustment, but it is worth setting realistic expectations.

You will be living alongside other volunteers (cohorts are small — typically 2–6 individual volunteers at any time), which creates a natural peer support network.

Nature & Activities

The region offers excellent hiking, cycling, river swimming (the Zezere River), and mountain landscapes. The Estrela Natural Park — mainland Portugal's highest mountain — is less than an hour away. Winters are mild but can be cold and wet. Summers are hot and dry. Spring and autumn are beautiful.



9. The ESC Framework

Your Rights as an ESC Volunteer

- Accommodation and food (or food allowance) provided at no cost to you
- Monthly pocket money allowance
- Travel reimbursement to/from your home country (based on distance band)
- ESC insurance coverage throughout your placement
- ESC Info Kit and access to the ESC portal
- Language learning support (OLS for placements 6+ months)
- Participation in on-arrival, mid-term, and final evaluation trainings
- Youthpass certificate recognising your learning outcomes
- Clear volunteering agreement signed by both parties before you arrive
- Right to 2 rest days per week + public holidays
- The right to raise concerns with your National Agency at any time

Your Responsibilities

- Commit fully to your agreed volunteering period and tasks
- Communicate openly with your mentor and coordinator
- Participate in learning activities, reflection sessions, and TEC trainings
- Respect the community, your accommodation, and your colleagues
- Follow safety procedures, particularly for construction activities
- Contribute to Youthpass documentation throughout your placement
- Complete the General Online Training on the EU Academy platform

Volunteering Agreement

Before you begin, you will sign a volunteering agreement with SIV. This document outlines your tasks, learning objectives, support arrangements, rights and responsibilities, and ESC programme conditions. Please read it carefully before signing.

10. How to Apply & Selection Process

Who We Are Looking For

We welcome volunteers from diverse backgrounds. No formal qualifications, specific educational level, or previous experience are required. We are looking for:

- Genuine motivation to contribute to community solidarity (not just to travel or boost a CV)
- Openness to rural life and a quieter pace
- Patience, flexibility, and willingness to learn by doing
- Basic English (Portuguese is a bonus but not required)
- A commitment to the full placement period

We actively prioritise applicants facing fewer opportunities: rural youth, NEETs, young people with economic disadvantage, or those facing social or educational barriers. At least 50% of our volunteers come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Application Process

- Register on the European Solidarity Corps Portal (europa.eu/youth/solidarity) and apply to our opportunity listing
- Or apply directly via our website: innovationvillage.eu — click 'Get Involved' and complete the short form
- Submit a motivation letter and basic application form
- Shortlisted candidates are invited to a friendly, conversational video interview with our team
- We check one reference (informative, not eliminatory)
- You are matched to a stream (Digital Bridges or Sustainable Futures) based on your interests and team needs
- Selected volunteers receive a detailed pre-departure welcome package

Timeline

We typically run two intake cycles — April/May and August/September. We review applications on a rolling basis and notify applicants within 3–4 weeks.

11. Frequently Asked Questions

Can I bring a partner or pet?

Partners may visit during your rest days and holiday leave, but cannot be hosted in volunteer accommodation. Pets cannot be accommodated. Please discuss specific situations with us before applying.

What if I want to leave early?

Early departure is always possible without stigma if circumstances change. We ask for as much notice as possible. There is no financial penalty, but we will need to report the early departure to the National Agency.

Can I work part-time elsewhere during my placement?

No. ESC volunteering is a full-time commitment. You cannot hold paid employment during your placement. You can receive pocket money from SIV (which is your ESC allowance — not a salary).

Do I need to speak Portuguese?

No. Basic English is sufficient. Learning Portuguese is warmly supported and strongly encouraged. Your daily community interactions will naturally help you improve.

What if I get sick?

ESC insurance covers you throughout your placement. Contact your personal mentor immediately if you fall ill — we help you access medical care and adjust your workload while you recover. Reach us anytime at connect@innovationvillage.eu or WhatsApp +351 910 060 505.

Is there WiFi at the accommodation?

Yes, both properties have WiFi throughout. We also recommend getting a local SIM with a data plan for use when out in the community.

What should I bring?

Your full welcome package includes a seasonal packing list. Key things: appropriate outdoor/work clothing for your stream, sturdy footwear (especially for construction), warm layers for winter evenings, any personal medications you need, and copies of your important documents (passport, EHIC, insurance).

Will there be other volunteers?

Yes — at any given time there are typically 2–6 individual volunteers at SIV, plus occasional team volunteering groups (2-month intensive teams). You will have a real peer community.

12. Key Contacts

Role	Person	When to contact
Personal mentor & 24/7 emergency	Your Personal Mentor	Wellbeing, personal concerns, conflicts, emergencies, cultural adjustment
Volunteer coordinator	Your Volunteer Coordinator	Scheduling, activities, logistics, daily coordination, pre-arrival
Programme & Youthpass	Your Programme Lead	Youthpass, learning activities, activity design, reflection sessions
Strategic / escalation	Our Partnerships Lead	Serious unresolved issues, partnership matters, strategic decisions
National Agency (PT02)	Erasmus+ Youth / ESC Portugal	Issues that cannot be resolved with the host organisation

Organisation Details

Legal name	Social Innovation Village – SIV – Associação Sem Fins Lucrativos
OID	E10372189
Quality Label ref.	2025-1-PT02-ESC50-QLA-000388831
Website	innovationvillage.eu
Apply / Get Involved	innovationvillage.eu -> get involved form
Email	connect@innovationvillage.eu
WhatsApp	+351 910 060 505
Main address	Rua Senhora do Fastio 38, 6230-820 Enxames, Fundão, Portugal
Second location	Rua da Serra 39, 6090-553 Penamacor, Portugal

We look forward to welcoming you to the Beira Baixa.

The Innovation Village Team