



Erasmus+



MIGRAFRICA

Case Report

Integration into the German Labor Market through Volunteering



INTRODUCTION

This report presents a personal account of integrating into the German labor market, focusing on the transition from an ESC volunteer to securing employment. It highlights key challenges, strategies for adaptation, and recommendations for young professionals seeking career opportunities in Germany.

MIGRATION BACKGROUND

Coming from Russia with a pedagogical background and a bachelor's degree in foreign language education, the decision to move to Germany in early 2023 was primarily motivated by the desire to gain real-world language practice and immerse in a new cultural environment. I started my journey as an au-pair, which allowed me to engage with native speakers and experience everyday life in a German household. Over time, I realized I wanted to stay longer—not just to improve my language skills, but to seek experiences aligned with my values. This motivation encouraged me to explore ways to contribute more actively to the society I was living in.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Lao Tzu



After completing my au-pair year, I knew I wasn't ready to return home. I felt that I still had more to learn and experience, and I wanted to grow professionally. I started looking into different options to stay in Germany. At one stage, I considered pursuing an IT Ausbildung and even went through a few interviews. But the more I thought about it, the clearer it became that this wasn't the right path for me. I wasn't looking to stay in Germany just for the sake of staying—I wanted to do something that made sense for me and reflected my interests.

That's when I came across the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteering program. I began searching for an organization that shared my values and offered a meaningful experience. That's how I found Migrafrica. Their mission to support people with migration backgrounds immediately stood out to me. I went through the application process and was successfully selected to join the team as a volunteer. The environment at Migrafrica was a great match—it was intercultural, dynamic, and full of opportunities to learn and contribute.

CHALLENGES IN INTEGRATING PROFESSIONALLY

Although I was enthusiastic to begin my volunteer work, I encountered a few obstacles in the beginning. One of the biggest challenges was navigating the language in a professional setting. While I already had a good level of German from my studies and au-pair experience, using it at work in professional and fast-paced conversations felt intimidating. I often found myself hesitating during meetings or informal chats, afraid I wouldn't find the right words.

At the same time, I was adjusting to a completely new work culture and trying to understand how things functioned inside a German NGO. Differences in language proficiency and prior work experience initially created barriers to full participation. However, I saw these as opportunities to develop my skills further and gradually became more confident in contributing to the team's work.

Instead of avoiding these challenges, I decided to face them directly. I pushed myself to speak more in German, even when it felt awkward. I started engaging in casual conversations with colleagues, asked questions when I didn't understand something, and slowly began to feel more confident. My team was very supportive, which helped a lot.

GROWTH, EMPLOYMENT, AND CURRENT ROLE

During my volunteer year, I had the opportunity to take part in different projects—the international ones, like supporting in organizing Erasmus+ training sessions and Youth Exchanges—as well as the national German project “Shine,” which focuses on empowering women with migration backgrounds.

In addition to my official responsibilities as a volunteer, I was always curious about the broader processes behind the organization. I actively took interest in how Migrafrica functioned beyond the scope of my assigned project. I wanted to understand how an NGO operates in Germany—how projects are financed, how applications are written, how teams are structured, and what goes into managing multiple initiatives at once.

This curiosity led me to regularly offer help with various tasks across departments. Whether it was sitting in on planning meetings, assisting with administrative work, or simply asking questions, I saw every moment as an opportunity to learn something new. This proactive mindset helped me not only develop a wider set of skills but also build stronger relationships within the team. It also allowed the organization to see my potential beyond my volunteer role, which eventually led to a formal job offer.

Now, I officially work in the organization. I currently divide my responsibilities between two projects: I continue my work on the „Shine” project, supporting women as they navigate life in Germany, and I also manage financial administration for another project aimed at helping women integrate into the German job market. It’s rewarding to know the organization recognized my potential and that I can continue to contribute in ways that matter.

Of course, I still face language challenges—especially in more complex topics like finances or official procedures. But I’ve learned that it’s completely normal to make mistakes and not get everything right the first time. What matters is staying curious, asking questions, and being willing to learn. I try to see every misunderstanding or hesitation as part of the learning journey, and I continue to study on my own to keep growing.

REFLECTIONS AND ADVICE

Looking back, I realize how important it was to take things step by step. I didn’t come to Germany with a clear plan to build a career—I simply wanted to learn, connect, and grow. But being open to new experiences, actively asking for help, and seeking out spaces where I could truly contribute made all the difference.

Finding a job in Germany can be quite difficult, especially for people with a migration background. Often, the process involves translating documents into German, having degrees officially recognized, navigating complex bureaucracy, and demonstrating a high level of German. In many cases, employers also expect previous experience working in a German context, which can make entering the labor market even more challenging.



That's why I strongly recommend starting with a volunteering opportunity or a practical internship—if your financial situation allows it. These experiences can help you build language skills, understand the work culture, gain hands-on experience, and prove your potential. For me, it was the bridge between arriving in Germany and becoming professionally integrated.

Everyone's path is different, but I believe that with patience, persistence, and the right support, integration into the German job market is achievable. And while the road can be tough, it can also be full of meaningful learning and personal transformation.

One last thing I'd highlight is this: it's worth searching for an environment that matches your values. When your work feels meaningful and the team around you is supportive, integration becomes much more than a professional goal—it becomes a personal journey you actually enjoy walking.



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