

**Volunteer report by Gabriel Nolla Lemes**  
**European solidarity corps volunteer at Kindergruppe Farbklecks**  
**from October 2023 to July 2024**



Hello! My name is Gabriel, I'm 19 and I come from Spain. I got the luck to be able to volunteer in Wien for the past months. The lovely people at my Kindergruppe selected me after the person they had in mind rejected at the last minute, that's why I started a bit later than the rest. The fact I was able to spend this year here thanks to a stroke of luck is something that I'm still amazed by, and I'm a thousand times grateful about.

When I first came to Wien my flatmate Jente picked me up and did a basic explanation of the things I should know to get by in the first months, it was a great help as I didn't know any German at all. It was also oktoberfest or kaiser wiesn as they call it here, so I was able to socialize with some volunteers before I even got the chance to settle properly. My other flatmate Umut introduced me to a couple of volunteers that I really didn't expect would be so close to me in the future, and together we met another two that as well, would become some of the closest people I had in here.

If I remember correctly I started working in the kinder the 9 of October, I was super nervous that I wouldn't be up to the task, but to my surprise it was really easy for me to do everything except speaking with the children, because as I said before, I didn't know how. I had one of the heaviest headaches in my life, as I never experienced anything similar to being surrounded by so many people speaking German, but after the second day I was fine, and in no more than a month I started understanding some basic words.

My tasks at the start were just the basic manual tasks like cleaning and heating up food or making basic things like pasta or rice. The teachers in the kinder left it super clear to me that I didn't have to push myself to do anything, that if I wanted to do nothing for the beginning so could I, but with how easy it was for me to do the cleaning and how scared I was that they wouldn't see me as a good volunteer I just kept doing as much as I could that didn't require any German use.

My mentor was super supportive from the start as well, helping me with the basic stuff and staying with me the first day. We had meetings regularly for the first months and they were helpful for a lot of reasons. It just helped me clarify my head.

I remember Grenzenlos organized the first Jour Fixe I was able to assist, and there my mind got blown with the variety of people I met. I remember so clearly wanting so badly to make friends with everyone. It was there where the first non-official volunteer friend

group got created and from there till now we have made so many connections thanks to it. For example we organized a go out to some random club, going was the best decision I took in my first months. I met two of the volunteers that would become imprescindible to me the first months of winter and whom I would travel and do activities with all the time.



Not too long after the start I did my on arrival training, I was skeptical of what it would bring to me at the start, but yet again my mouth got shut. It was literally one of the best and yet intense moments of my volunteering. Before it even started I got so nervous, I couldn't speak with anyone because of it. I thought of myself as extroverted and social so I didn't get my reaction at all. I decided to act silent and just sit and wait, but to my surprise another volunteer from Spain came and talked to me, from there I got

to open up with a lot of other people, and by the first day I had made friends which I still have close to me now. We partied, we thinked and overall we took the most of the time we had together.

As I mentioned winter I would like to clarify it was not easy. Everyone kept complaining and feeling sad, on the other hand I was pretty okay. Obviously I didn't like that many people didn't really feel like going out and stuff, but besides feeling a bit cold I dealt with it. Also seeing snow in Wien and doing some crazy things like going to Kalenberg in the middle of the snowiest day was literally a magical thing. And those magical moments were the things that kept me going so well for all of the winter.



People I met outside of the volunteer group were also amazing. Like my COALA Jua, I'm so happy I got lucky and got him as one of the first locals I met. We connected fast and I don't know how my volunteer experience would have been without him. Or Annie, a girl I met in a flat that was having a party, which I got invited to because I was a friend of another volunteer. Overall coincidences and new relationships covered me through the hard patches.

I went back to Spain for a bit to spend Christmas with my family, but I decided to spend new years in Wien with my flatmates. We ended up going to another girl and had the best new years I ever had. And I have lots of examples of these amazing moments, which I can only thank my friends and my luck for.

Time flew so fast and it was time to go to Salzburg for my midterm, the process of getting tickets and stuff was awful but I got over it in the end. As I wanted to take the chance to travel I decided to ask my friend and COALA Jua if he had any plans, I don't quite remember how it went but we ended up deciding to go skiing after the midterm. To go to Salzburg my closest friends from the on arrival training and I decided to take the same day for the mid term training, as we really wanted to see each other again after quite some months. And it went as expected because of it. Met lots of new people while having a lot of good people around already which made it an amazing time for all of us I would say. We partied every single day but still made it to breakfast every morning, that requires quite the willpower but we made it because we were having our best time.

At this point I realized I had already changed quite a bit in only 4 to 5 months, which made me quite proud for a little bit. I had learnt some German and made lots of connections, and overall I felt really good with myself and how I became even more social than I ever was.



After finishing the mid term training my friend decided to meet again in the future, we promised to at the very least go to Munich for the Oktoberfest which everyone agreed to at least try to go. This made me truly happy to have met these people.

I had to stay one more day in Salzburg to wait for my friend to pick me up so I took the cheapest hostel close to the train station and had a strange night. Some random people came and went from the room and I spoke about aliens with some person I had to sleep with, just a normal hostel night.



Then the real travel began and me and Jua traveled all the way to Bad Ischl seeing one of the most beautiful lakes I have ever seen. There I met some of his friends that were truly amazing. I didn't get much time to get close with them but I'm happy I met them. Skiing was amazing yet hard, the mountains here are way harder than the ones I had been to in Andorra and Catalonia, but I managed to not fall even once. Even in a couple I had to put strength on every inch of my body to get around with the skis.

Then I left early in the night with a train going to Wien. I pushed my time to the limit so I didn't even sleep much and just went to work like nothing after getting back home.



Then some weeks went by like nothing, and something awful happened to me and my family, I would rather not write it down. I had to go to Spain on the first flight I was able to take and I didn't know if I would be back. I spent two months there, but I decided to come back. With all the support of my friends here and in Spain, Grenzenlos and my project, It was not easy but I pushed through. To all the people who helped in this time I will be forever in debt with them in my heart.

After slowly getting back on my feet I saw how many people started leaving because their project ended or they had to end it earlier. It made me sad but I had to keep doing as much as I could, that was my way to cope with all that was going on with me.

Not many significant things happened after but personally this time is when I matured the most and everyone told me I had truly changed a lot from the start of my experience, which I can now see. As I only have no more than a couple of weeks here I can't say for certain how I will handle this end of an era for me, but I will manage. My phone broke not too long ago which caused me to lose most of my photos of the first months here, I still have some luckily.

I decided to stay in Wien next year with my flatmate Jente. We already signed a contract with a flat and I plan on working here next year, probably to do university after. So I can't really say much else than this is probably only starting, maybe not as a volunteer but as "local".

If I had to give advice to new volunteers it would be to be open to try new things and not be scared of anything, there will be people supporting you. The language might seem hard but it's doable. And lastly, don't get influenced by stereotypes, just flow with the people and it's costumes as open as you can, don't take things personally when they are not aimed at you and just try to have the best time with yourself and the people you care about.

