

Bridging the gap: European Solidarity Corps helps Sonia build her confidence

Like many of us, Sonia did not know what her future would look like. After growing up in Logroño, Spain, at 28 years old she is studying for an exam to become a junior civil servant for the regional office of La Rioja. But her journey was not always smooth. Nine years ago, in 2015, Sonia found out she had a 33% intellectual disability, but she did not let it hold her back.

In July 2023, Sonia decided to apply for a volunteering experience abroad with the European Solidarity Corps. She had been watching talks by a local association on Instagram when she came across the initiative. Just two months later, she was packing her bags and heading to Austria for her three-week project – an exceptional duration, as most volunteering experiences last between 2 and 12 months.

“I felt a bit nervous because it was the first time, I was going to a new country with people I didn't know,” Sonia told us.

For the first two weeks of her placement, Sonia worked with a group of people on gardening tasks such as weeding and raking. In her final week, the group she was there with were split into smaller teams. While the other team carried on gardening, her team was tasked with painting a wall outside the park.

“The first few days were a bit challenging due to the language barrier, not knowing anyone or the country, but as the days went by, I started feeling better,” Sonia recalled.

“They treated me as if I didn't have any disability, and I liked that a lot.”

These activities helped Sonia to become a stronger team player and to appreciate the power of collaborative work. When Sonia returned home, she felt more independent and less afraid to do things by herself. She told us she has been eager to do another volunteering experience and would highly recommend it to anyone thinking about participating.

“You can benefit from getting to know new places, new people and other cultures. And I would encourage everyone to apply because it's a very fun and interesting experience, and because it takes you out of your comfort zone and makes you more independent.”

As she prepares to start her new job as a junior civil servant in just a few weeks, Sonia said working in a new place with new people during her European Solidarity Corps experience in Austria has given her more determination, independence and responsibility that will help her succeed not just in her next role, but throughout her life.

If you are interested in taking part in a life-changing experience like Sonia, take a look at the opportunities available with the [European Solidarity Corps](#). You can search for volunteering opportunities and solidarity projects across Europe, lasting anywhere from just a few weeks to 12 months.