

# Call for a long-term Croatian volunteer in Vlahi Nature School Bulgaria

## Mountain spirit – Strategic EVS for Nature Conservation

### About the project

**Mountain spirit** is a project involving several several volunteer exchanges in Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and Bulgaria. It aims at combining efforts of international volunteers and local people from mountainous/rural areas for nature conservation activities in protected areas or species.

*The idea is to uncover **invisible links** between places and their inhabitant creatures, to take our responsibilities as humans towards all forms of life without forgetting to listen and learn from nature within and around.*

*To discover the **spirits of mountains in the Balkans** with preserved nature where bears, and wolves roam through the wilderness, where there are still waters running freely, where people are resilient.*

*The **spirits** of Velebit mountain, Croatia; Sharr mountain, Kosovo; Frushka gora, Serbia and Pirin mountain, Bulgaria. The spirit of the Bears....*

*Spirits which are also exposed to **threats** of destruction, exploitation and loss of the invisible connections that link all of us into one living system.*

*We believe that with small but consistent efforts another way is possible where people are not on the top, but rather live a peaceful co-existence with nature and themselves.*

### About the volunteer exchanges

Volunteer exchanges that happened in 2018:

- Croatia – Kuterevo Bear Refuge, Velebit Mountain – [8 months long-term EVS](#) and [2 months short-term EVS](#)
- [Kosovo – National Park Sharr Mountain](#) – 1 month short-term EVS
- [Kosovo – Prishtina Bear Sanctuary](#) – 2 weeks short-term EVS
- [Serbia – National Park Frushka Gora](#) - 2 weeks short-term EVS
- [Bulgaria – Nature School Vlahi, Pirin mountain](#) – 3 weeks short-term EVS

Long-term volunteer exchanges happening in 2019:

- Croatia – Kuterevo Bear Refuge (3 volunteers for 8 months, 4 volunteers for 6 months)
- Bulgaria - Vlahi Nature School, Pirin mountain (2 volunteers for 8 months in 2019)

### About us

The project involves activities in mountains spread from West to East in the Balkans. [Velebit Association Kuterevo, Croatia](#); [GAIA Kosovo](#); [Vlahi Nature School](#) and [CVS Bulgaria](#) have been working together for some years now, aiming at making strong connections between people through learning from and acting for nature in the Balkans.

The Spirit of Kuterevo Refuge for Bears and People served as inspiration for the current project which involves new partners such as [Birds Protection and Study Society of Serbia](#) and [Four Paws, Kosovo](#). For 40 years now Kuterevo has been a place where young people can learn and volunteer by being close to nature, bears, local people and their traditions. Thus experiencing and creating the [Kuterevo Spirit](#). We believe each place has its uniqueness and its messages to be listened to and respected, therefore exploring and developing its own spirit.

*Mountain spirit – Strategic EVS in  
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Co-funded by the  
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# Vlahi Nature School for the young environmentalists of Kresna

## *Long-term EVS in Bulgaria*

*October 2019 - May 2020*



### **About Vlahi Nature School, Bulgaria**

Vlahi Nature School is a small educational project trying to follow the principles of permaculture. We are located in a remote village at the foot of Pirin Mountain. Vlahi is small and abandoned village with only 7 permanent inhabitants, but with local people taking care of their gardens and coming to spend a weekend in the nature. There are three NGOs operating there. The nearest town Kresna is 9 km far from the village.

We started the project in 2002 when we bought the old building of the school and with the help of hundreds of volunteers we restored it to become again a functioning place for learning through doing, experimenting, collecting information from the local people and implementing ideas from around the world.

To renovate the building and for constructing new elements in the garden we use combination of traditional and modern techniques, we rely on natural materials and sustainable use of resources. Through volunteer weekends, summer camps for children, workcamps and by our presence in the region we share our knowledge, skills and know-how with anyone who cares for a life in balance with nature.

*Before and after pictures:*



## About Pirin mountain, Kresna Gorge and the protected areas

Pirin is the oldest National Park in Bulgaria and it is proclaimed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As a very old mountain, formed during the ice age, nowadays in Pirin there are many glacial lakes and relict species that have survived until today. The mountain is small but diverse in landscapes, habitats, and biodiversity. It lies between the valleys of Struma and Mesta river, Rila, Rhodope and Slavyanka Mountains. In close proximity is the strict reserve "Tisata" which is famous for its forests of *Juniperus excelsa* (Greek juniper). Struma river forms the beautiful Kresna gorge, which is the richest place for biodiversity in Bulgaria.

Pirin National park is a symbol for the civil society in Bulgaria and its tireless efforts to prevent corruption to destroy it. Plans for expansion of Bansko ski resort and for allowing logging in the National park have triggered on-going national protests (more info in English [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Similarly, the Kresna gorge has been threatened for many years now by a motorway construction project (info [here](#) and [here](#), video [here](#))



## About the EVS

There will be 2 volunteers (*1 Croatian, 1 to be confirmed*). They will be based in Blagoevgrad, a small university town 40 km from the Nature School, with the opportunity to spend any amount of time in Vlahi. The volunteers will support the educational work of the school by organizing presentations on nature protection topics, helping in the campaigning work for protection of Kresna valley and Pirin mountain. Moreover, the project aims at expanding the partner network of the Nature School with local stakeholders by organizing afforestation actions, joining monitoring checks of river water levels, etc.

From taking care of the garden in the School, through dealing with small repairs in the house, through researching and implementing new ideas, to working with children, there are diverse opportunities for learning, growing up and embracing life following nature rhythm.



## Examples of Tasks/Activities during the Service

1. Development of information and educational materials;
2. Workshops at Kresna school / library club on nature protection topics;
3. Permaculture gardening / elements, workshops; study visits;
4. Direct nature conservation actions;
5. Support for the “Save the Kresna Gorge” and “Save Pirin” campaigns with the NGO coalition, Za Zemiata / Bankwatch / FoE / WWF;
6. Celebrating 10 years of Vlahi Nature School.



1. Development of information and educational materials (in English) for students 10y-18y:
  - at least 3 topics (i.e. protected areas and species, climate change, ecosystems, etc.) developed for interactive presentations for (high)school children;
  - for each topic: presentation, handouts, practical exercise, games, visuals / short documentary;
  - discussions with teachers/librarians about adjusting the topics to audience level and the class program
2. Workshops at local schools / library club on nature protection topics:
  - at least 6 visits to schools, clubs in Kresna and Blagoevgrad.
3. Permaculture gardening / elements workshops, study visits in the Nature School in Vlahi:
  - 2-4 weekends with local volunteers for preparation of the Nature school garden for winter and for spring vegetation.
  - at least 3 school study visits to Kresna gorge / Vlahi – with support of biodiversity experts.
4. Direct nature conservation actions
  - 2-4 afforestation volunteer actions in autumn and spring with educational elements for the participants
  - 2-4 actions on monitoring the water levels of small mountain rivers affected by construction of small Hydro Power plants
5. Support for campaigns on Kresna Gorge and Pirin:
  - generate up-dates for international audience, media outreach materials, blog posts, SM campaigning, organising protests, organising events (e.g. exhibition etc.), monitoring activities – in coordination with the active coalition of environmental NGOs, that the Nature School is partner with.
6. Celebrating 10 years of Vlahi Nature School
  - planing and implementing initiative to celebrate 10 years of Vlahi Nature School work – i.e. event, exhibition, gathering, interviews, movie, articles, publication



**Learning opportunities:**

- Learning about biodiversity, habitats, nature conservation
- Exploring challenges that local people and nature are facing, possible solutions
- Facilitating workshops/educational activities
- Learning about how environmental campaigns work
- Experiencing difference of urban and rural lifestyle
- Living and sharing with others
- How to deal with problems and find solutions

What to expect	What not to expect
Simple living conditions Sharing space with others No office Discovering local way of life, food, customs Time and dedication to research Self-initiative	Living in a very big city Unlimited access to resources (shopping centers, unseasonal food, internet...) Tourism Long vacation

**Practicalities:**

**Duration:** October 2019 – May 2020

**Age:** between 18 and 30 years

**Country of residency:** Croatia

**Accommodation:** The volunteers will live in the university town of Blagoevgrad in a shared rented apartment. It is 30 min away from Kresna by bus, where the project activities with students will happen.

**Food:** The volunteer will cook for him/herself in an equipped kitchen of the apartment.

**Local transport:** by bus/train and by car when going to the village of Vlahi

**Language support:** Bulgarian language through the on-line linguistic support of Erasmus+

**Equipment (phone, internet, etc.):** wi-fi in the rented apartment.

**Pocket money:** monthly, 3 Euro per day received in the beginning of the month

**Insurance:** The volunteer will be insured through the program.

**Supervision and support:** The hosting organization provides supervision from distance, since the supervisor doesn't live in Blagoevgrad, but is available on phone, skype, e-mail. The mentor is in Blagoevgrad. For more information, visit our website: [www.vlahi.org](http://www.vlahi.org) or facebook: [Vlahi Nature School](https://www.facebook.com/VlahiNatureSchool)

**Travel to the EVS venue:** up to 275 EUR; the environmental way of travelling (train, bus, etc.) is strongly encouraged. Reimbursement is done only after receiving the original tickets.



### Profile of the volunteer:

We can imagine that interested volunteers are

- mountain and nature lovers; people, who like to be outside;
- the project might be particularly engaging for students in natural sciences (biology, forestry, veterinary medicine etc.)
- previous experience with activities, related to nature protection and environmental education or desire and motivation to develop in this field
- some skills in photography and video could contribute to documenting the activities
- initiative and independent; ability to work in a team; with communication skills, open for learning new things;
- English speaking and willingness to learn local language
- Driving license if possible

### How to apply:

Fill in the google form ([link here](#)) choosing “8-month long EVS in Vlahi Nature School (Bulgaria)” and send your CV and specific motivation letter to [natureschool@vlahi.org](mailto:natureschool@vlahi.org) with subject Mountain spirit\_volunteer\_[your name]

**DEADLINE: May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019**