



# Volunteering 4 Change

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There is increasing evidence that exposure to plants and green space, and particularly to gardening, is beneficial to mental and physical health.

**Green Go! Project**

# About Green Go! Project

The Green Go! Project was implemented by International Initiatives for Cooperation and hosted 38 volunteers from 6 countries (Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Egypt, Jordan, Spain, Turkey) for a short-term period from 3 to 6 weeks. Volunteers experienced rural life style in the area of Razlog Municipality. They managed to developed skills in leading sustainable life through eco-farming and agriculture. They managed to get to know not only Bulgarian cultural habits but also the culture of the other participants. They learned how to support each other and interact with the locals.

As a result they Increased their knowledge and skills for sustainable life-style, became more involved and responsible towards nature preservation, improved their capacity to work with different social and age groups, improved their intergenerational communication, increased their knowledge how to maintain their mental health and well-being. They became more engaged in solidarity activities and increased their opportunities for personal and professional development. The project stimulated and encouraged the intercultural dialogue between the members of the partner organisations, the volunteers and the local community and strengthened the international cooperation.





The project was initially designed to teach young people how to live sustainably and how to develop life-long skills to live in harmony with nature and as a result to respond to the environmental and climate challenges that humanity suffers all over the world. During the project activities, we managed to create awareness among young people and the local community but also taught the volunteers how to do sustainable eco-farming and eco-agriculture. We passed the message to all the involved volunteers that It is high time that we change our habits and start living in harmony with the laws of nature. We believe that they will continue encouraging members of their community to live sustainably. The activities of eco-farming and eco-agriculture were done in the villages of Razlog municipality - around the city of Razlog and in the villages of Banya and Gorno Draglishte, where we had local guides – old grandmas and grandpas who helped us reconnect with the land. In the village of Banya we rented a piece of land where we planted different plants- beans, maize, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, pumpkins, and different herbs. In the town of Razlog and the village of Gorno Dragishte we were helping different owners to grow their gardens. The volunteers were involved in all the processes – from the processing of the land to the harvest. They also visited some farms –cattle and sheep breeding farms, fish farms, small farms, mainly family ones breeding pigs and hens. Apart from the eco and agricultural activities, specific activities were organized in the villages to allow intercultural dialogue and exchange such as craft afternoons, dancing and singing evenings, karaoke evenings, and cooking activities. Training and informational activities were organised to increase the volunteers' knowledge and raise their awareness on the topics of focus for the project – green and sustainable lifestyle. Study visits to places in the Pirin and Rila National Parks and other natural locations were organised. Workshops and campaigns were organised related to developing green skills and attracting the local youth and community in general. Volunteers were able to experience the cultural diversity on one side because they were living and working together with volunteers from different countries and cultural backgrounds and second because they had to interact with the local community constantly. The knowledge of English in the villages is very poor but the communication between the volunteers and the local community was going smoothly using diverse means (hands, gestures, facial expressions, learning some words and phrases, online translator, etc.) and communicating on an emotional level. The intergenerational approach was also achieved. The volunteers managed to acquire a wide range of soft skills and develop life-important abilities. They developed communication skills and improved their knowledge of other languages, for sure English and Bulgarian, but some of them also managed to find a third common language for communication. They also improved non –verbal communication and became more sensitive to other cultures and needs.

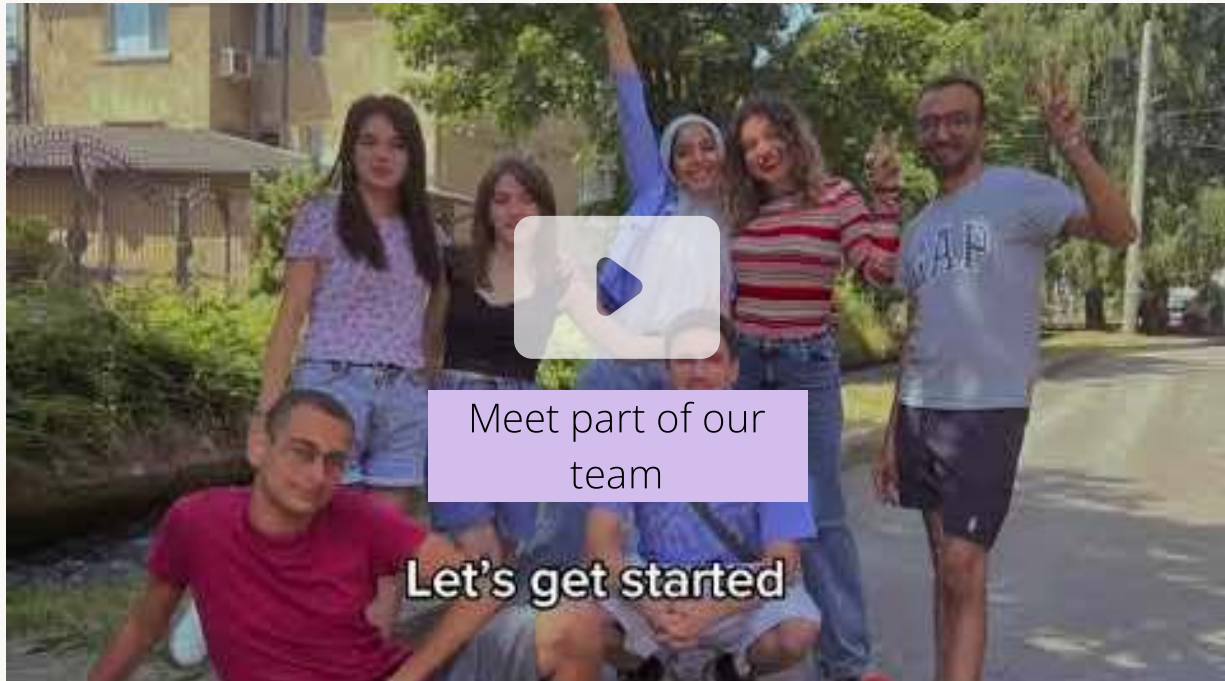




They were able to break the language, cultural, and social barriers that divided them from the beginning. They will become more tolerant, respectful towards each other, and able to accept others' values. The project created opportunities for the volunteers involved to become more active, engaged, and concerned citizens while having fun. It also had a strong positive impact on the local communities who co-existed for the first time with so many people coming from diverse cultures. The project strengthened the cooperation between IIC, our local partners, and the international partners from the neighboring countries.

## Meet part of our team

A video made by part of the volunteers sharing their experience



This video will inspire you with stories from our volunteers to contribute your time and efforts to do voluntary activities in your community or abroad. That experience is beneficial both for the members of the local communities and the volunteers themselves by increasing their knowledges and competencies, as well skills to adapt to new environment, to be culturally open and to accept diversity. The project is a powerful experience for all people involved to understand how fragile is our planet and to learn how to protect its ecosystems while at the same time to encourage others to be environmentally conscious in their our communities.





# Razlog Green Challenge



## Razlog Green Challenge | 1st Edition

The city of Razlog hosted the first edition of Green and Clean competition, uniting participants from various age groups and countries to...

Calling all young eco-warriors! 🌟 Are you ready to make a BIILIIIG difference in Razlog? Gather your friends, rally your classmates, and...

The city of Razlog hosted the first edition of Green and Clean competition, uniting participants from various age groups and countries to clean up plastic bottle litter and raise awareness about nature preservation.

Organised as part of the Green Go Project, the event brought together teams of young individuals aged 7 to 20, representing Bulgaria, Turkey, and Egypt. The competition emphasised collective action in addressing environmental challenges and showcased the universal nature of these concerns.

For me, it was a great experience managing the graphic design tasks and event planning from A to Z. Participants engaged in not only cleaning but also discussions on environmental conservation, fostering awareness about plastic pollution's impact and the need for sustainable practices.

Prizes like textile bags, pens, mugs, and T-shirts celebrated eco-friendliness, while bananas and juice offered sustainable refreshments.

By day's end, the event had collected and removed over 300 plastic bottles, 200 aluminium cans, and 10 kg of paper and plastic bags from the city.

The Green and Clean competition illustrated that impactful change starts with small, purposeful actions. It highlighted individuals' potential to effect positive change regardless of age or nationality, leaving the city cleaner and its residents more committed to safeguarding nature. This competition was a testament to the enduring power of collaboration for a sustainable world.



Before the green challenge the volunteers organised a series of training events that helped the local youngsters and the community to understand the complexity of the environmental problems we are facing daily. The volunteers managed to provoke the critical thinking and make the participants understand which part of our behaviour and daily activities harm nature. Participant had very fruitful discussions, solved case studies, produced their own "warning" videos and presentations and got inspired to adopt more environmentally friendly habits and to motivate others to do so.

## Cleaning the garden of the public school in Dolno Dragilshte



The first group of volunteers under the project "Green Go!" we were accommodated in the village of Gorno Draglishte, a small, cozy and very beautiful village, part of Razlog municipality. We had the opportunity every day to communicate with local people of all ages, they welcomed us very warmly and made us feel at home. We really wanted to do something positive for our friends in the village that would leave lasting memories for us. In order to return the kind gestures we received daily, we decided to clean and improve a space in the school yard that was intended for the students, but was currently unusable because it was overgrown with weeds. We got permission from the school principal, rolled up our sleeves and did a great job. In addition to getting the place ready for a fall makeover, we had a lot of fun and were proud of the final result.








# Intercultural Night



As an volunteer in another country, one of the most exciting and enriching events during my time abroad was the eagerly awaited "Intercultural Night." It was an evening where all the diverse and vibrant cultures of our international community came alive in a spectacular showcase of traditions, performances, and mouth-watering cuisine. I want to share my experiences.

It was a very interesting experience for me to taste the food of the participants from Spain, Bulgaria, Egypt, learn interesting facts about their country, and at the same time, as an Azerbaijani, to introduce our country, our cuisine, and our culture. Everyone was hungry and waiting impatiently to eat, the facial expressions while tasting the food of different countries, everyone putting each food on their plate and tasting it, the dances and music making some of us laugh, making new acquaintances was one of the most sincere moments for me.

What struck me the most during Intercultural Night was the overwhelming sense of unity and friendship that transcended cultural barriers. As we mingled with people from different parts of the world, we discovered that while we were diverse in language, customs, and love for celebration and connection brought us together as one global family.



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Intercultural Night wasn't just a one-time event; it became the catalyst for lasting friendships and cultural exchange. We continued to organize smaller gatherings to share our traditions, stories, and recipes, creating a sense of belonging that extended far beyond our time as European Solidarity Corps volunteers.

Intercultural Night taught me that the world is a treasure trove of cultures, waiting to be explored and appreciated. It's a celebration of what makes us unique and what unites us. As an volunteer, I discovered that it's through these cultural bridges that we build a world that is colorful, compassionate, and truly connected.



## Street Debates in Razlog

On 21st July 2023, the team of International Initiatives for cooperation, Bulgaria and the volunteers of "Green Go" project were organising a street debate in the town of Razlog in the central park, where a lot of people were passing. During the event we were looking for answer of the following question: "As a citizen how can I change Europe?". The street debate was conducted among European citizens, aimed at exploring their perspectives on how they can actively participate in bringing about positive change in their societies and influencing the future of Europe. More than 30 citizens took part in the street debate in the centre of Razlog, shared their opinions and at the same time exchanged opinions. For us was so great experience to have opportunity to meet local people, to speak with them and share our thoughts about Europe.



The street debates were organised under the NOTE project "Network of Organisations and Towns for the European Elections" (NOTE), approved by the European Commission under the "CERV" Programme – Network of Towns. Association "International Initiatives for Cooperation", Bulgaria our host organisation is a partner organisation in this project.



This QR code contains a **short video** of the participation of our volunteers in the Street debate organized by IIC through the NOTE project.



REEL SHARED ON OCT 4, 2023  
BY @IICBULGARIA





# "The Harmony between nature and architecture in Razlog"

I'm Ziad Ameen from Egypt. I'm working as interior designer and visual artist. And at this moment i'm a volunteer in International Initiatives for Cooperation, Bulgaria within Green Go project. From my perspective, when you want to know about the history or nature of any city, you should communicate with the local people and explore the streets and its architectural style. From this point on, I got to know more about Razlog, which I fell in love with at first sight, and I felt familiar and peaceful, as if I literally belonged to this place since I arrived in Bulgaria.

The houses are standing one after another in harmony between their colors and forms. In addition to the green mountains in the background, as well as the sound of water flowing small rivers- as if it were a painting that could be heard from all corners of the streets of Razlog. So I say it strongly, yes, I loved Razlog very much, and I hope to come again and again after the end of my volunteer period, which I consider really an important step in my professional and personal experience.







## Weeding the field

After we have planted different crops on the fields, it is normal that we also have to take care of them. The rainy weather has resulted in the sprouting of quite a few weeds which are suffocating the planted crops. The next step was to weed the weeds so the crops could grow. On 12 July together with Kostadinka we went to the field and we weeded crops. This activity helped us to become more familiar with the occupation of the local population of Razlog Municipality, to show the importance of protecting and cultivating nature.









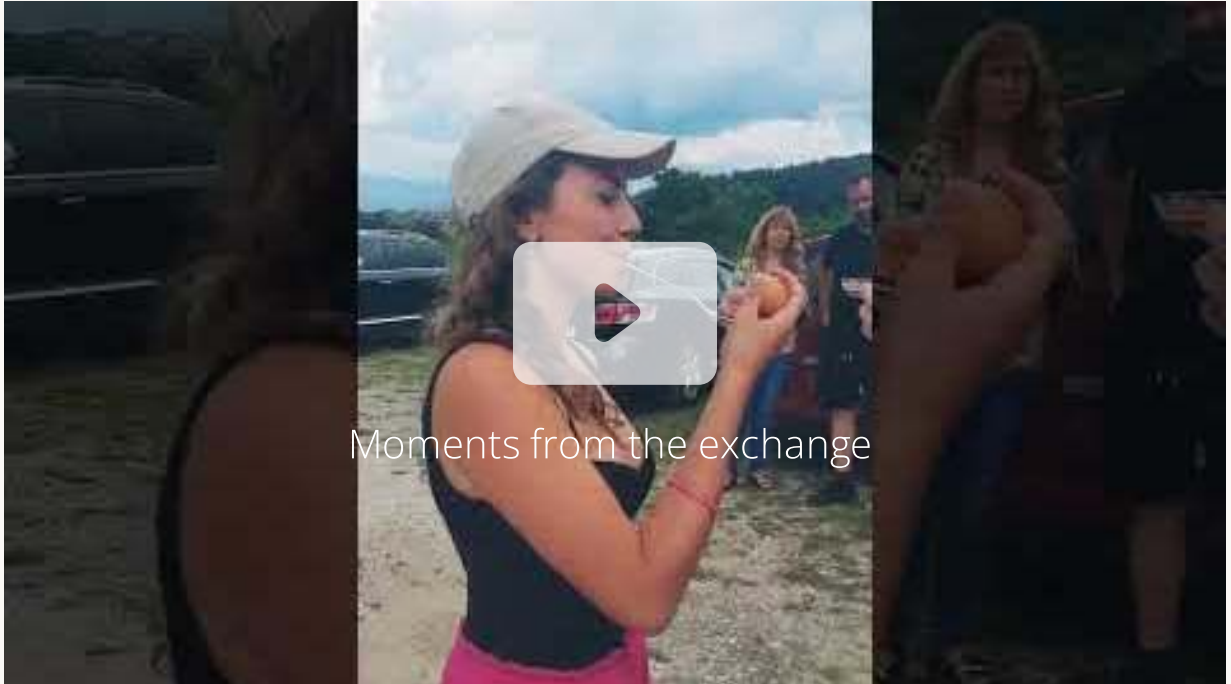
# The international youth exchange day

As a volunteers of "Green Go!" project, coordinated by International Initiatives for Cooperation which is our host organization we have opportunity to took part in one international youth exchange called "SPOPRIFY - Sport as an Investment in the Future of Youth".

The international youth Exchange was very fruitful as it combined acquiring healthy lifestyle, cultural exchange between 7 different nationalities North Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Egypt and Bulgaria. We started our program by doing different sports and ice breaking activities, then held networking circles talking about different topics about sports and healthy lifestyle like physical conditioning exercises, injury prevention, nutrition, psychological support and building the strength and endurance to keep our fitness and our mental health. The most crucial handout we received is how to find motives to keep pushing ourselves for accomplishing our life goals. Then, we were divided into many groups, each one of them was responsible for making a plan for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This plan included the food, the activities and the ways that drive us to accomplish our goals. After that we presented what we had prepared. The second part of the program we played some games including very challenging and funny games with balls and balloons. We took part in all these activities for the sake of maintaining a proper physique and a positive mentality.







Moments from the exchange




Our volunteer Dr. Sarah Khaled introduced to the participants of the youth exchange "Sportify" the basics principals of healthy habits, nutrition, how to practice sport safely and injure prevention.










You can't come to Bansko and not going for a hike. That's our host organization "International initiatives for cooperation" (IIC) organized for us on July 5 of 2023. It was an absolute unique and a beautiful hike up for a group of youth participants from different countries like Italy, Greece, North Macedonia, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria and Egypt. It was a bit more challenging than any other sport activities because this physical activity depends on external factors not only your own body like difficult terrain or horrible weather, or something internal like having a bad day or bad interaction with another hiker. Our hiking day was a rainy day. It was raining cats and dogs, but if you're ready for it, take as many breaks as you need, you'll be up top in no time (okay, in maybe 3-4 hours). One of the remarkable things about the whole day was the Baykusheva mura, it is the oldest coniferous tree in Bulgaria. Its age is more than 1300 years. The tree is located in Pirin National Park, in the eastern foot of the Vihren summit, south-west of town of Bansko. The tree was named after the famous Bulgarian scientist Kostadin Baykushev, who discovered and described this specimen. I took a lot of photos and spent a very good time with the other participants. At the end, Hiking offers all the cardiovascular benefits of walking but the uneven terrain does more to strengthen the leg and core muscles, which in turn boosts balance and stability, It also generally burns a lot of calories than walking. From our great experience with IIC I recognize that spending time in nature and having experiences that inspire awe also lower stress and anxiety.



## A Hike in Pirin

One of the major things that should be done when in Razlog, is visiting the mountains. I've had the chance to visit Pirin with some of my local friends here.

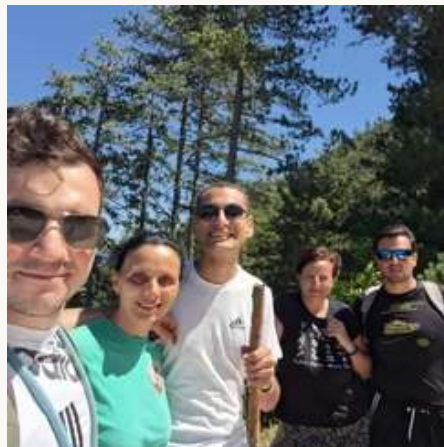
During our trip we went out me, them, their mother's and their dog. It was refreshing how while I see something they see something else. How our perspective of things is different. What they see as a normal hike in the weekend. I see as a experience of a lifetime being embraced in the forest and the beauty of the nature of this mountain area.

In the middle of the mountain there is a hut called Yavorov where we enjoyed a warm meal and desserts after hours of hiking up.

Seeing how people here live and how joyful they are is a heartwarming experience. Something that makes me sure that I will definitely come here again.

Visiting the mountains in Razlog, particularly Pirin, has been an eye-opening and heartwarming experience for me. Exploring the wilderness with my local friends and their family, and witnessing how they perceive the beauty of nature compared to my own perspective, has been refreshing. The hike to the mountain hut, followed by a warm meal and desserts, added to the memorable experience. Observing the joy and contentment of the pe

People living here has left a lasting impression, making me certain that I will return to this picturesque mountain area again. The connection forged with nature and the locals has made this journey feel like more than just a weekend getaway; it has become an unforgettable adventure of a lifetime.





## The People of Razlog

You might know Razlog as the beautiful small town that is among the mountains but I'm not here today to talk about its buildings or nature. I'm here today to talk about its people. I'm an Egyptian guy that has been staying in Razlog for 1 month now and this is my experience so far.

People in Razlog are warm and welcoming. Throughout my stay here I've been greeted and welcomed by people and had the opportunity to have plenty of conversation with them. Though some of them don't speak other languages other than Bulgarian and I can't speak Bulgarian we still found away to communicate with each other and spread the joy and happiness. I've been invited by several people into their houses for food and drinks out of their affection and their generosity showing how the people of Razlog are kind and sweet.

Everyone in this town knows everyone. It's connected and you can see it through their eyes and smiles how they share their love for each other. In some coffee shops, supermarkets and restaurants here I became a regular. Being treated like I'm one of the locals and sharing their life and living the life they live.

In Egypt, we constantly greet each other in the street. I took this part of my culture here and kept greeting people in the street in Bulgarian. Though the stereotype is that people wouldn't greet you back. People in this town when I greet them reply to me with a kind smile and a handwave.

In conclusion, my experience in Razlog has been nothing short of heartwarming and enriching. The people of this small town have demonstrated an exceptional level of warmth, kindness, and openness towards a foreigner like me. Despite the language barrier, their genuine hospitality and willingness to communicate have made me feel welcomed and cherished as if I were one of their own.

The strong sense of community and interconnectedness among the residents is truly remarkable. It is evident in their smiles, friendly gestures, and the way they readily embrace newcomers into their lives. Becoming a regular at local establishments and being treated as a part of their close-knit community has been a delightful and humbling experience.



I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience the culture and generosity of the people of Razlog. This journey has reinforced my belief in the beauty of human connections and the universality of kindness. As I prepare to leave this charming town, I will carry with me the cherished memories of the people and their heartfelt gestures, leaving behind a piece of my heart with the people of Razlog, forever grateful for their genuine warmth and friendship.

Ahmed Elzomor







## The Youth of Razlog

Razlog is a home for many young people. During my stay here I had the chance to be a friend to many of them. To see how they live in their day to day live. See what they love, enjoy and their hopes and dreams.

One interesting couple I met 17 years old of age one of them wants to be politician. He wants to be the change that Bulgaria needs. He wants the country to be a better place for his family, friends and everyone that shares the land with him. His girlfriend loves him and adores him and supports him and wants to walk that path with him. She wants to work in social work helping people in need and giving less privileged people a better chance in life. Seeing young people like them is admirable and shows just how the future of each country is dependent on its youth.

Another group that I met are a little different. They are focusing on art and culture. They want to be a rock band that brings the Bulgarian culture through their music and let their voice be heard. I was invited and had the privilege to attend couple of their reversals and I have to say the power and passion that they have for what to do is just breathtaking. I hope one day they breakthrough and be something big in this industry because they deserve it.

In conclusion, my time spent in Razlog has afforded me the privilege of connecting with a diverse group of young individuals, each driven by their unique aspirations and passions. The aspiring politician and his supportive girlfriend exemplify the determination of youth to shape a brighter future for their country. Similarly, the aspiring rock band members showcase the immense artistic potential that resides within this vibrant community. These encounters serve as a reminder that the destiny of a nation rests upon the shoulders of its youth, who hold the power to instigate positive change, whether through politics, social work, or cultural expression. As I reflect on these remarkable experiences, I am filled with hope and optimism for the incredible contributions these young people will undoubtedly make to Razlog and beyond.



# My experience as a volunteer.

Hi, I'm Rafa, I'm 21 years old, and I'm currently in Razlog, Bulgaria. I want to share with you the reason why I'm here.

It all began in June when I received a notification about an open volunteering project called Green Go. As I checked the location of the project, the first thought that came to my mind was, "Here in Spain, we're experiencing 40-degree weather. Let's see what the temperature is like in Razlog." After checking, I started to research the



objectives of the project and found them quite interesting.

I confirmed my participation in the project and began looking for flights to Sofia at the project's agreed-upon price. One week later, on July 4th, I took my flight, and by the night of July 5th, I had arrived. I took a taxi to the hostel in Sofia and the next morning, I explored the streets of Sofia. Later, I hopped on a bus to reach Razlog. Upon arrival, my first priority was to have a meal. After that, David showed me around the city, including the office locations and where I would be staying during my time here.

The initial days were challenging due to the language barrier and communication differences. Not many people spoke English, so adapting to the local communication style took some time. However, with patience, I started to adjust and learn more about the way people interact here.

Now, I feel much more at ease with the communication in this country and among the volunteers. We have been engaging in different activities with the other volunteers for the past few weeks.

Overall, my experience in Razlog has been rewarding, and I'm looking forward to making the most of my time here as a volunteer with Green Go.

## Visit to the farm in Banya

We had a super fun day at a farm in Banya Town, Bulgaria. The farm was like a rainbow with flowers of white, red, and purple. Each colour had its special beans but they were still not ripe yet to notice the differences.

There were peppers there too, some were like sweet hugs and some were like spicy surprises. Tomatoes were like squishy red and green jewels.

The farmers showed us their cool tricks to grow food. They didn't use any bad stuff, only good things from nature. They even had worms and bugs helping them!

Guess what? We got to taste the yummy treats from the farm. The little tomatoes were as sweet as candy, and the cucumbers were very delicious. It felt like it's nature's snack time!

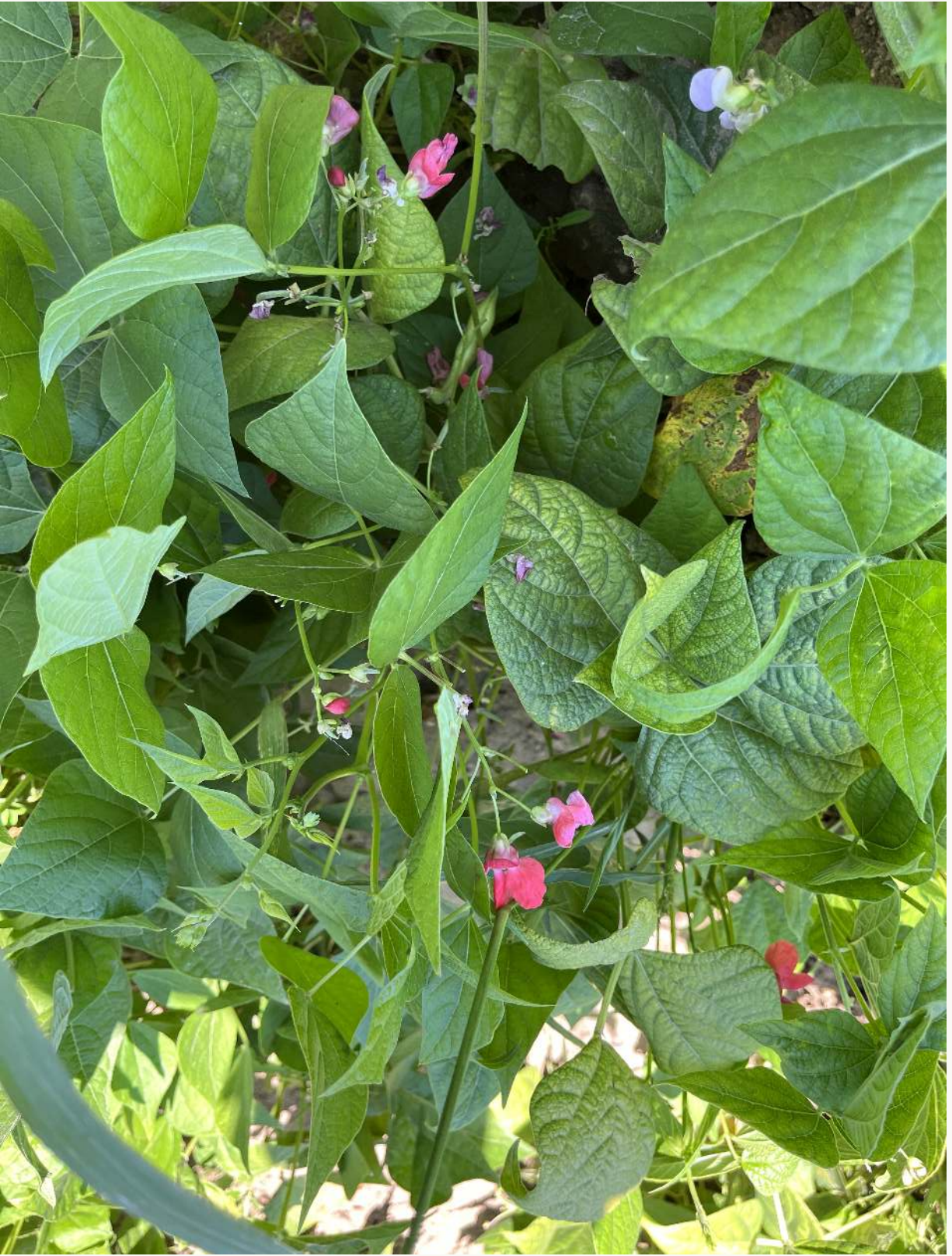
Today, we learned that farms are like nature's art with colours and flavours. We should be kind to the Earth, so it keeps giving us tasty treasures.















# Intercultural Evenings



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It's a celebration of what makes us unique and what unites us. As an volunteer, I discovered that it's through these cultural bridges that we build a world that is colorful, compassionate, and truly connected.

A short reel of one of our intercultural evening can be seen at <https://www.instagram.com/p/CvXo5ZRMIJG/>



A short reel of one of our intercultural evening can be seen at IIC Instagram or by scanning the QR code.



# Milking cows



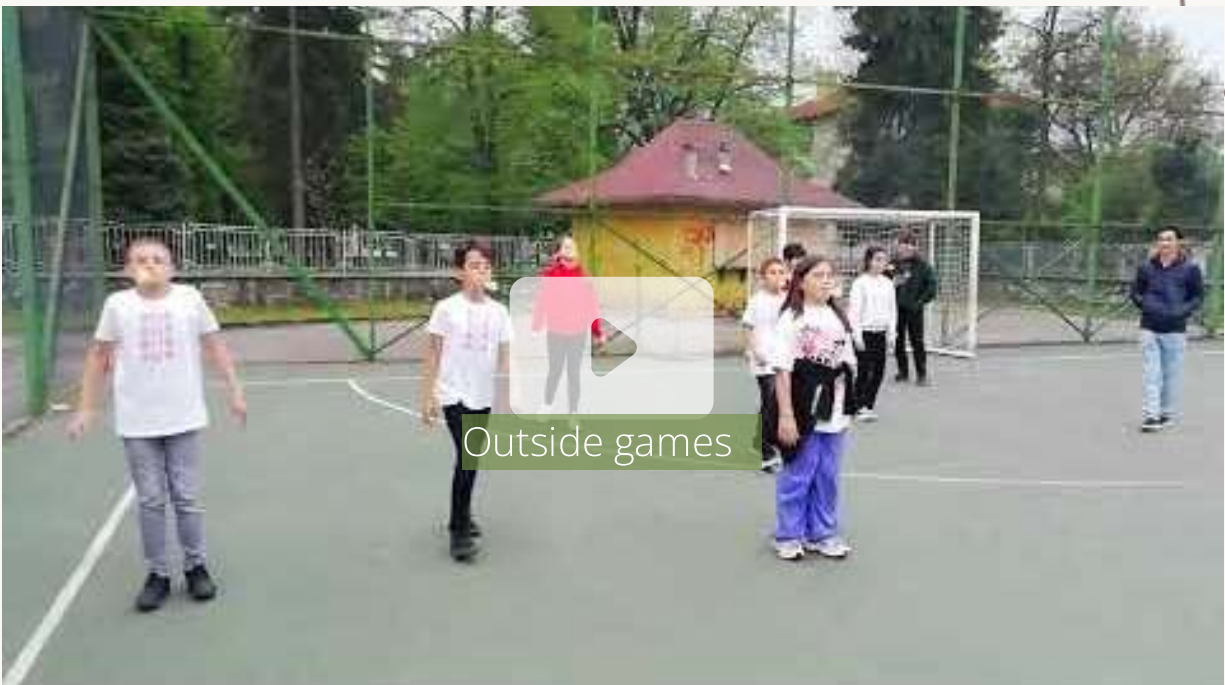
## ***This was an experience! :)***

Milking cows, feeding animals, being so close to animals in their habitat was a remarkable experience for all of us. It was the first time that we tried to milk cows in a traditional way. We learned a lot about the way cows and sheep are bred in rural Bulgaria. We drank fresh, still unprocessed, milk. The owners were so friendly taking us around and helping us making the first steps in stockbreeding. We were treated with homemade cheese and other dairy homemade products. At the end, we received as a present 2 litres of fresh milk each one. This was the beginning of of our friendship with them and the first of a series of regular visits to the farm.

# Cooperation with St. St. Cyril and Methodius School



The volunteers organised fun and learning activities using non-formal educational methods. School kids appreciated a lot their learning games which built up their ability to work in team, to communicate better and to understand different cultures. Special attention was placed on sustainability and preserving nature.





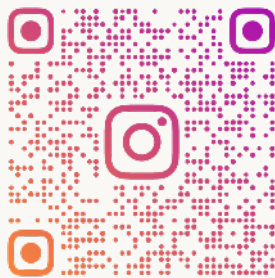
Volunteers were special guests to some school celebrations. 11 May is the day of St. St. Cyril and Methodius and the official holiday of the school. Here is a short video to some of the programme performances.





# Pirin National Park

Razlog is situated on the territory of two national parks in Bulgaria - Pirin and Rila National Parks. International Initiatives for Cooperation works in close cooperation with the Directorate of Pirin National Park. Inspired by the park staff and IIC members, the volunteers of Green Go project developed a campaign to preserve nature and protect its species. Creative messages were collected and then artistically painted on wooden boards. Together with representatives of the park we managed to place more than 20 boards on most visited places along some of the trans and around mountain huts.

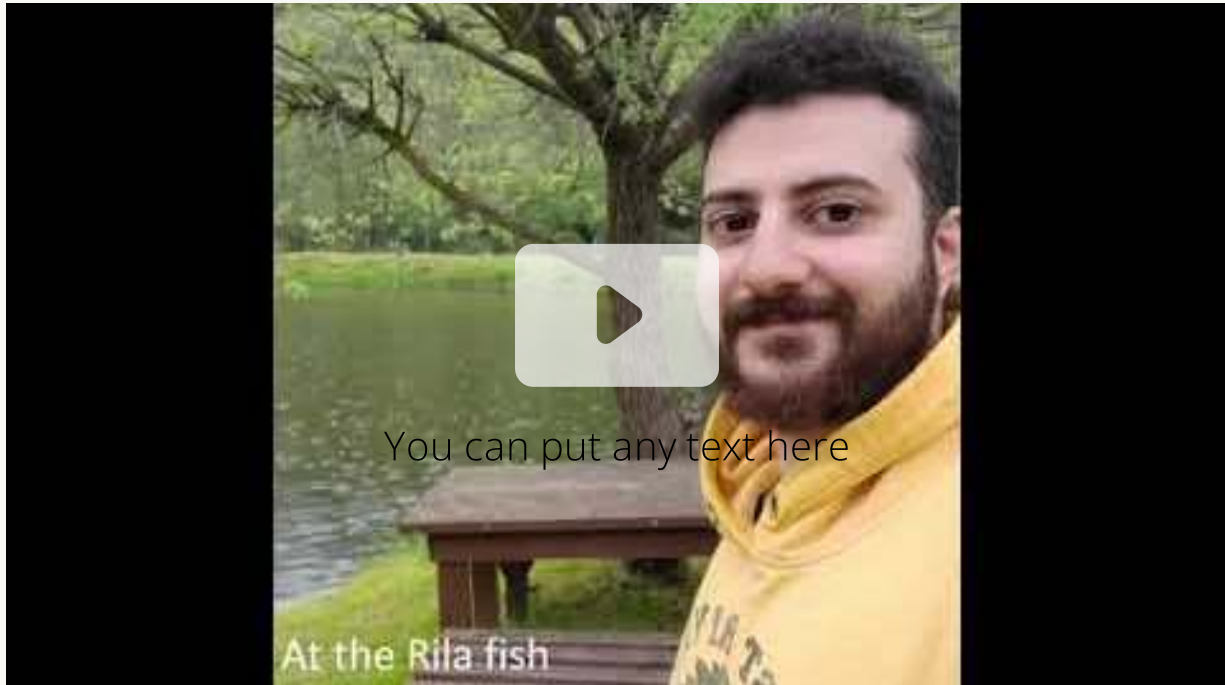


REEL SHARED ON MAY 4, 2023  
BY @IICBULGARIA

You can enjoy the preparatory phase [here](#) or scan the QR code.

## Maen's Experience in Photos

Maen is from Jordan and he loves to explore new cultures and lifestyle. He comes from a family of farmers from the rural areas in Jordan. But what he experienced here was different from his homeland. e was all the time eager to explore, learn, try it out. His curiosity for the new things helped him connect with many people, learn a lot and enjoy his stay benefitting from the time spend here to the maximum.



## Some remarks

These are just some of the remarkable experiences, stories, thoughts and insights of the volunteers that took part in the Green Go! project. All the videos are produced by the volunteers and the team of International initiatives for Cooperation as a coordinator of the project has preserved the original texts written by the volunteers with the intention to

## Social media channels

More information about the project can be found at our social media channels. Here is a full list of media containing more information, inspiring stories, interesting reels, short publications and happy pictures.

- [IIC website](#)
- [IIC YouTube channel](#)
- [Green Go! Project blog](#)
- [IIC Instagram](#)
- [IIC FB page](#)
- [IIC Flickr account](#)





**GREEN GO!**  
PROJECT

**implemented by:**



**with the financial support of  
the European Union:**



Co-funded by the  
European Solidarity Corps  
of the European Union

## **Green Go! Project**

The project is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) (International Initiatives for Cooperation) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

