

Report on the Satisfaction and Impact of SL(M) Projects

1. Introduction

Service-Learning (SL) has become established in recent years as one of the most significant methodologies in higher education, as it connects students' academic development with the response to real community needs. This analysis is framed within the European project Service-Learning Migrants/Refugees SL(M), whose aim is to promote the social inclusion of migrants and refugees through the creation of networks between universities and social organizations. This initiative is coordinated by the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) and seeks to create a space for mutual collaboration that enables both students and participants to engage in transformative learning processes while simultaneously generating a positive social impact.

The purpose of this report is to analyse and assess the impact that these SL(M) projects have on the organisations involved and on the direct beneficiaries, with a particular focus on migrants and refugees. To this end, two primary sources of information were used: a focus group composed of technical staff from social organisations, university faculty, and students (10 participants); and another focus group with refugees who have participated in SL projects (5 participants). This reflection has allowed us to analyse the satisfaction of those involved in these projects and to identify the perceived benefits and transformations, the challenges encountered, and the key obstacles and proposals for improvement aimed at consolidating the methodology within university practice.

We conducted a qualitative analysis by combining a thematic reading of the transcriptions with a lexical study of the most frequently used words. This dual approach not only allows for a deeper understanding of the testimonies, but also helps to identify the most significant dimensions for the various actors involved. In this way, the report aims to offer an integrated view of the impact of the projects, highlighting both the commonalities and divergences between the perspectives of the organisations and those of the refugee participants.

2. The Reflection of Technical Staff, University Faculty, and Students

2.1. Roles, Coordination, and Expectations

One of the most prominent topics in the focus group with technical staff and faculty was the importance of coordination. As one faculty member expressed: *“The management of time on our part at the university and the management of time on the part of the organisations... that dialogue helps us a great deal”* (I2.1). This statement reflects that continuous communication between the parties is essential for aligning objectives and resources.

The organisations agree that students' motivation cannot be taken for granted. A technician noted: *"Motivation should never be assumed. Motivation must be created and nurtured like a baby"* (I1.1). This comment highlights that young people's commitment requires ongoing support to sustain their interest beyond the initial enthusiasm.

The necessity of clearly defining the roles of each stakeholder was also emphasized. For faculty members, it is crucial that students acknowledge this as a formative experience with a social dimension, while organisations must understand that university schedules are governed by academic requirements.

2.2. Learning and transformation

The learning outcomes identified go far beyond the curricular content. As one faculty member stated, *"The true value lies in this change of attitudes... moving from pity to admiration"* (I3.1). This testimony reflects how direct contact with migrants and refugees fosters a transformation in students' perspectives, moving them away from paternalistic views and towards attitudes of respect and recognition.

In the healthcare field, a nursing professor highlighted, *"We have learned that care is not the same everywhere, and that interventions must be tailored to the individual"* (I4.1). In this regard, SL acts as a real-world laboratory for professional competencies, where intercultural communication skills and diversity management are put to the test.

From the perspective of the organisations, the value of engaging young people who bring energy and creativity is emphasised. As one representative noted, *"Students bring freshness, a different way of seeing things, and this also helps associations to question their practices"* (I5.1).

2.3. Impact on the Community and the University

The projects have had direct effects on the community. For example, a technician recounted: *"During a screening, we detected vision problems in several children, and thanks to that, they were able to receive glasses"* (I5.1). The social dimension is also emphasised: *"Engaging in service-learning helps reduce hate speech in society"* (I6.1). These findings demonstrate that SL not only adds value to students' education but also generates tangible improvements in people's quality of life.

At the university level, the importance of maintaining experiences that have become part of the identity of certain degree programmes is highlighted. As one faculty member stated, *"If we have been doing this for 12 years, there must be a reason"* (I2.1). This indicates that SL has become institutionalised in some courses, with a level of satisfaction that encourages the continuation and replication of the experience.

2.4. Limitations and Areas for Improvement

The most frequently mentioned limitations relate to time management: *"Coordinating the schedules of families, students, and organisations is far from easy"* (I7.1). Attention must also be paid to the impact of the academic calendar: *"When exam periods approach, it becomes more difficult for students to engage"* (I3.1).

Additionally, language barriers were noted, although they tend to be resolved: *"Sometimes it is difficult to understand each other, but we always find a way to overcome it"* (I6.1). These challenges highlight the need for better planning and additional support, such as interpreters or multilingual materials.

3. Reflection among Migrants and Refugees

3.1. Activities and Expectations

Migrants and refugees valued the activities carried out very positively. One participant remarked, *“It was quite informative, quite understandable”* (I1.2). The relationship and dialogue were emphasised: *“It was like an exchange, between the important things here and those from our countries”* (I2.2). These comments reflect that SL is not perceived as a one-sided action, but rather as a shared learning process.

3.2. Relationship with University Students and Relational Climate

The quality of the relationship with university students was one of the most highlighted aspects, contributing to a positive atmosphere of interaction: *“It was great to be able to talk calmly as if we already knew each other”* (I3.2); *“We felt united... like a family”* (I4.2). These testimonies reinforce the idea that SL fosters bonds of trust that overcome institutional barriers.

Furthermore, the international dimension of the experience was emphasised: *“It’s like a network among several countries that connects us”* (I2.2). These perceptions support the hypothesis that SL helps create a sense of belonging and a global community.

3.3. Challenges and suggestions

The main challenges are once again related to time management. One mother commented, *“The schedule was complicated because of the child”* (I5.2). However, on other occasions, there were calls for more time for the activities: *“It could have been longer, extending the hour”* (I1.2).

Regarding the university, clear demands for accessibility were expressed: *“It would be beneficial to have a program facilitating migrants’ access to the university”* (I4.2); *“There should be greater accessibility in studies”* (I2.2). These statements demonstrate that the service within the framework of the SL(M) project is not perceived as an isolated action but rather as a space that could support the development of other programmes aimed at strengthening the inclusion process.

4. Lexical Analysis

The lexical analysis consisted of extracting only the nouns and adjectives from both transcripts, unifying their singular and plural forms. Subsequently, the frequency of each term's occurrence was counted, allowing the identification of the ten most recurrent words. This procedure provides an objective insight into the central themes and concepts within the participants' discourse.

1. Projects – 57
2. Organisations – 43
3. People – 43
4. Students – 31
5. Learning – 27
6. Service – 23
7. Time – 23
8. Associations – 23
9. Student body – 21
10. Migrants – 21

The lexical analysis reveals the centrality of terms related both to institutional organisation (“projects,” “organisations,” “associations”) and to the actors involved (“people,” “students,” “student body,” “migrants”). It also highlights the repeated use of the word “time,” confirming that time management is one of the most recurrent challenges in the experience of all parties involved.

5. Common Themes in the Analysis of the Impact of SL(M) Projects

The comparison between the two groups reveals a series of convergences that are particularly significant.

Firstly, the creation of an atmosphere of trust and horizontality is emphasised. Refugees highlight that *“we felt like a family”* (I4.2), while organisations acknowledge that *“students stop seeing people with pity and begin to admire them”* (I3.1). Both testimonies reflect a change in relational dynamics that breaks stereotypes and situates the experience within parameters of equality.

Secondly, they highlight the transformation of the students. SL brings about a shift in attitudes, summed up in this statement: *“The true value lies in this change of attitudes”* (I3.1). This process is perceived both by those participating and by those receiving the service. It is not merely a change in thinking but also in the way diversity is approached and in the ability to recognize the value of individuals beyond previous stereotypes. For the organisations, this change constitutes clear evidence of meaningful learning, while for migrants and refugees, it means becoming visible, feeling seen, and being treated with admiration and respect.

A third common point is the tangible community impact. Organisations mention that *“thanks to the project, many were able to access medical check-ups”* (I5.1), while the group of migrants and refugees highlights the value of health and cultural workshops: *“It was quite informative, quite understandable”* (I1.2). These testimonies demonstrate that SL is not limited to academic benefits for students but generates concrete improvements in the everyday lives of the community. Furthermore, these interventions contribute to expanding basic rights, strengthening trust in public services, and creating sustainable intercultural meeting spaces.

Another shared element is the challenges related to time and organisation. Families express that *“the schedule was complicated because of the child”* (I5.2), and the technicians confirm that *“coordinating schedules is very complex”* (I7.1). This aspect emerges as one of the main structural challenges, as it affects sustained participation and limits the scope of the projects if not properly planned.

Finally, both groups emphasize the need for continuity in these projects that link the university with the community and, more specifically, with the needs of individuals. For the organisations, *“the projects need continuity to truly be effective”* (I1.1), while refugees call for longer and more regular sessions: *“It could have been longer, extending the hour”* (I1.2). The notion of permanence emerges as an essential condition to consolidate learning and to prevent the actions from being perceived as one-off interventions without follow-up. Furthermore, continuity allows for the generation of trust among stakeholders and the construction of strong networks that transcend the duration of an academic semester.

In terms of impact, it can be affirmed that SL strengthens organisations by providing them with human resources, reinforcing their projects, and making their work more visible; it

transforms students by developing intercultural competencies and fostering social commitment; it empowers migrants and refugees by offering them a space for recognition, learning, and active participation; and it redefines the educational and social mission of universities. Among the main aspects are improvements in access to basic services, the reduction of prejudices, and the creation of cooperative networks. However, significant challenges persist, such as time management, the need for continuity in actions, and the implementation of linguistic and pedagogical supports to ensure full participation of all groups involved.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the collected testimonies allows us to conclude that the SL(M) projects had a positive, satisfactory, and multifaceted impact within both the university and community spheres. On one hand, social organisations find in this methodology a reinforcement for their daily work, thanks to the involvement of students and the support of faculty. Collaboration with the university broadens their capacity for intervention and facilitates the identification of social needs.

On the other hand, students undergo a personal and professional transformation that would be difficult to achieve through a traditional learning experience. Contact with the reality of migratory flows enables them to develop a critical, sensitive, and empathetic perspective, which translates into greater social responsibility and an active commitment to diversity.

Migrants and refugees, for their part, value the SL(M) projects as spaces of mutual learning, trust, and recognition. Their words reflect that they feel heard, supported, and, above all, integrated into dynamics that go beyond mere assistance, moving into the realm of reciprocity. SL(M) projects thus become a bridge between cultures, facilitating inclusion and strengthening the sense of belonging.

However, the experiences also reveal significant limitations. Time management emerges as the primary obstacle, both in terms of coordination and the duration of activities. Additionally, language barriers and the need to design specific programs that facilitate access for migrants and refugees to the university are highlighted. These challenges call for a reconsideration of planning and the strengthening of institutional support mechanisms.

Overall, SL is confirmed as an effective methodology to strengthen the university-community relationship and promote social inclusion. Its impact multiplies when projects are sustained, well-coordinated, and developed within a framework of genuine collaboration among all stakeholders involved. The evidence collected in this report supports the need to continue investing in service-learning as a tool for educational and social transformation within European universities. Beyond immediate benefits, SL opens the possibility of redefining the role of higher education in contemporary society, positioning it as an active agent of social cohesion and innovation. Its potential lies in generating applied knowledge that transcends the classroom and takes root in people's everyday lives, thereby strengthening the social fabric. These projects make visible issues that would otherwise remain outside the academic and political agenda, thus contributing to a university that is more permeable and responsive to its environment. In this regard, the continuation of the SL(M) project and its transfer to other contexts represent a strategic opportunity to consolidate a university model committed to social justice and the construction of more inclusive and resilient communities.