

The NGO Vols is a volunteering association for cooperation and solidarity with children and youth in developing countries. Their working scope is mainly education.

Xavier Costa is the project and communication officer of [Vols Voluntariat Solidari](#), an NGO with the objective of helping in the field of **education for sustainable development**. Vols count on a vast volunteering network that works on several projects with children and youth in developing countries.

The NGO has already more than 450 volunteers and works in various cities with **Salesian presence** in Catalonia. Its volunteering program focuses on development of individuals, teamwork, inclusion, democracy, and popular participation. In this interview, Costa explains his real-life everyday work for the Vols NGO.

What is the mission of Vols?

Our mission is to make people more and more aware towards social justice and North-South equality, especially among youth. We also want to provide material and human support to educational projects in poor villages. Our ONG belongs to the Salesian family. In this sense, the Salesian community helps us in this mission.

To what countries do you send volunteers and what kind of projects do they develop?

We can count on different options of [International Volunteering](#). The contact with the South of the world is essential to understand other social contexts that are completely different from ours. It is a journey one must start with an open mind, without prejudices, and with the will to experience and learn from other people and other projects. But what is more important, it must be an experience aimed to later create a North-South co-operation, to fight for a fairer world, and to foster the right to education. This year, volunteers are traveling to Mexico, Cuba, Ivory Coast, Peru, Morocco, and Ecuador, all of them to help in educational projects.

How did this non-profit organisation start?

We started back in 1991 as a result of the promotion of social and Christian volunteering and the collaboration of Salesian youth from Catalonia in several projects within southern territories. We had one single objective ever since: to improve life conditions of disadvantaged people, starting from education.

On how many volunteers can you count?

Nowadays, we have more than 450 volunteers and 300 members. We work also in various cities with Salesian presence. Our headquarters are located in Barcelona, but we also have delegations in Mataró, Sabadell, Terrassa, Lleida, Huesca, Ciutadella de Menorca, Sant Boi de Llobregat, and Barcelona-Navas.

You have a project in Syria too. What kind of jobs do volunteers do there and what kind of information do you get back from the country?

With the project [“Suma’t X els drets de la Infància”](#) we have helped Salesians and their projects in this complicated war period. This support for the project [“Ajuda a la població siriana - Acollida en els centres salesians d’Aleppo, Damasc i Kafroun, Síria”](#) (Help the Syrian population- homeless shelter in the Salesian centres of Aleppo, Damascus, and Al-Kafrun), which helped 200 Syrian families who were trapped because of war. This help came from the Salesian houses of Aleppo, Al-Kafrun, and Damascus. It also allowed the transportation of medicines, drinking water, food, warm clothing, cooking fuel, and school material. One part of the project was focused on supporting the educational actions of the **Centre Salesià Don Bosco d’Istanbul** (Salesian Centre Don Bosco in Istanbul) in Turkey, which helped around 300 child refugees. We do not have many people working in Syria right now, but what they tell us about it does not give us much hope for improvement.

Why are International volunteering and education for sustainable development so necessary for a fairer society?

Volunteering is the raison d’être and driving force of this organisation; we cannot conceive our NGO in a different way. This means we involve people who freely give their time, knowledge, and hope to create a fairer and more

sustainable world both in the North and in the South of the world. This is our identity: "The right of education". We will defend it wherever it is necessary, because we think that it constitutes the basis to get people to be more critical, to make them more aware and willing to fight for a better society. This kind of education is the tool that allows us to work with responsible, sustainable, and agreed principles on every possible level.

37% of your NGO exists because of public funding. What funding model would you like to have in the next 10 years?

We would simply like not to exist as a non-profit. The existence of so many NGOs means that there are too many things that are not working properly, that injustice is present in many places in the world, also within our country. We are a small organisation supported by a large social movement that trusts and funds our projects, this means, they allow us to keep on working with children and youth from poor countries. Despite this, we are still critical towards some public entities, and therefore towards the founding choices they make, since, in many cases, they just depend on economic interests when talking about what country will be helped. Sometimes there is a lack of real will.

What is "Espiral Solidària"?

[Espiral Solidària](#) is a project aimed at creating spaces for debate and real action, where people discuss about social justice, global economy, and environmental issues that affect people's lives. We want to create a network filled with people experienced in the field and who have the necessary tools to create the social change we are aiming at. It is all about an educational process in which we all are essential. A process in which actions always derive from teamwork and a preparatory work to each project.

What is the future of Vols up until 2020?

What is clear to us is that we will keep working to change the world. We are about to do it as the sole Salesian ONG in Spain, merging our efforts with [Solidaridad Don Bosco](#) and [Jóvenes y Desarrollo](#).