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VOLUNTEERING
INFRASTRUCTURE
IN EUROPE

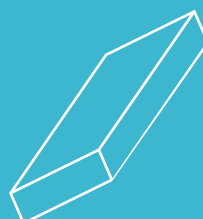
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1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

CONCEPT DEFINITION

In Macedonia, a volunteering legal framework was adopted in 2007 (Official Gazette 85/07). The law on volunteering sets out the basic framework of organised long-term volunteering, conditions for carrying out volunteer activities, rights and obligations of volunteers and organisers of volunteering, volunteering contract and keeping record of volunteer activities. The law recognises volunteering as an activity of interest in Macedonia that contributes to better quality of life and activates citizens in social life, as well as a tool for development of democratic society based on equality.

The definition of volunteering is as follows: based on free will, providing services, knowledge and skills for the benefit of other individuals or organisations without financial gain. The Law does not regulate ad hoc or incidental volunteer services and makes a clear distinction with so called volunteering practice that is regulated by Labour Law.

The Law on volunteering regulates volunteering of domestic and foreign volunteers. The age limit is set to above 18, with an exception of under-aged volunteers from 15 to 18 who require parental consent to be engaged in volunteering activities. Volunteer organisers can be organisations and institutions from the non-profit sector, including: citizen's associations and foundations, religious communities and religious groups, public institutions and state organs. With the amendments from 2008 Municipalities and City of Skopje are also included as volunteer organisers.

The Law on volunteering regulates rights and responsibilities of volunteers and organisers of volunteering, introduces the volunteering contract and volunteer book as official state documents for keeping record of volunteering experiences. Volunteers are also eligible for reimbursement of costs related to volunteering (food, transport and training) that are tax free in the maximum amount of 15 % of gross average salary in the country.

In the *Strategy for promotion and development of volunteering (2010 – 2015)*¹, adopted by the Macedonian Government on 19 October 2010, the following institutions are listed as part of volunteering infrastructure:

- *Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*
- *Ministry of Finance*
- *Ministry of Justice*
- *Ministry of Education and Science*
- *Agency of Youth and Sport*

1. Министерство за Труд и Социјална Политика - Стратегија за Промовирање и Развој на Волонтерството (2010 – 2015) Ministry of Labour and Social Policy – Strategy for promotion and development of volunteering (2010 – 2015)

- *Department for Cooperation with the NGO sector in the General Secretariat of Government of Macedonia*
- *National Council for Development of Volunteering*
- *Local government*
- *Civil society organisations*
- *Religious communities and religious groups*
- *Educational institutions on all levels, and*
- *Media*

There is no special state agency responsible for volunteering. Volunteer organisers are solely responsible for the creation of volunteer programmes as a solid base for engagement of volunteers. In this respect, there is a great potential for involvement of NGOs as service providers to organisers of volunteering to adhere to the quality volunteer management system.

From 2007, the Youth Cultural Center (YCC) Bitola had the initiative of setting up a National Volunteer Centre of Macedonia, an informal network involving a total of seven NGOs from seven cities in Macedonia which implement Local Volunteer Service (LSV) programmes. YCC-Bitola coordinates the LVS activities by working closely with organisers of volunteering in creating and administering volunteer placements in public institutions, state bodies and municipalities. The basic idea is to enable citizens to participate in organised long-term volunteering where they live. A total of 165 volunteer placements of three months have successfully been implemented in Bitola, Skopje, Prilep, Ohrid, Tetovo, Kavadarci and Sveti Nikole municipalities, between 2007 and 2011.

32.1% of Macedonia's population is engaged in volunteering, while 46% of the population is a member of at least one organisation.

Volunteering infrastructure in Macedonia also involves NGOs working with foreign volunteers. For example, currently a total of 34 organisations from Macedonia are accredited² as host organisations for the European Voluntary Service (EVS) under the Youth in Action Programme. There is no accurate data on how many volunteers are currently engaged in EVS programmes in Macedonia.

2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

In Macedonian two words, *dobrovollec* (доброволец) and *volonter* (волонтер), translate into the English concept of volunteer. *Dobrovollec* means “*person acting out of free, good will*”. Both words can be used to refer to individuals who do work or provide services for others, out of their own free will and without being paid. However, the words can have different connotations. In general, the international word *volunteer* is used most frequently by the NGO community.

According to the exact definition of volunteering within the National strategy for promotion and development of volunteers 2010-2015, published by the Ministry for Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia, volunteering is based on free will, giving services, knowledge and skills for benefit of other individuals or organisations without financial gain.

According to the official statistics in 2009, 32.1% of Macedonia's population was engaged in

2. http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_en.cfm

volunteering. Additionally, 28.5 % of the population participated in community meetings related to a relevant community action. Furthermore, 46% of the population is a member of at least one organisation.

The percentage of volunteering in the cultural, educational and welfare organisations is between 15 and 20%, in youth and women organisations about 10%, while in sport, humanitarian, peace and professional organisations it is between 5 and 10%, and it is less than 5% in the labour movements.

The highest number of volunteers falls into the age group of 15 to 29, namely about 45%, followed by the group of 30 to 49, about 41%, whereas only about 4% of Macedonians aged 50 years or older volunteer. According to the same statistics, in terms of gender division, slightly less women volunteer than men; about 56% of Macedonia's volunteers are estimated to be male. Finally, regarding the level of education of volunteers, about 29% of the volunteers have primary education, about 26% have secondary education and 45% obtained higher education.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The Law on volunteering in Macedonia was adopted in 2007. Three months after the adoption of the law, rules on volunteer books, documents aimed at keeping record of volunteers, and the procedure for engagement of foreign volunteers were adopted. In 2008, amendments were made on the Law on volunteering, which also involved municipalities and City of Skopje as organisers of volunteering.

Concerning the implementation of the Law, there is no up-to-date data about the total number of persons involved in volunteering. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is the responsible body for monitoring the implementation of the Law on volunteering in Macedonia.

In October 2010, the government adopted a strategy for promotion and development of volunteering in the period 2010-2015, including an action plan for its implementation. An important part of this strategy is the establishment of the National Council for Development of Volunteering (NCDV), an inter-sector body that includes five members from governmental departments and four members from civil society organisations (CSOs). The open call for members from CSOs was announced in February 2011. Following a highly delayed and non-transparent procedure, the members of the NCDV were appointed through the government's decision on 6 February 2012, almost one year after the open call.

The strategy is accompanied by an action plan for implementation, with deadlines and responsible bodies for implementation of the activities. There are four main strategic fields and sub-actions related to the respective fields:

1. Promotion of volunteering to the wider public

- Increased interest for volunteering in different target groups (retired, persons with special needs, employed in economic sector, children and youth)
- Increased presence in the media with articles about volunteering
- Promoted and recognised volunteering on local and national level
- Increased visibility and public appreciation of volunteers and volunteer work

About 56% of Macedonia's volunteers are estimated to be male, 45% have obtained a higher education degree and only 4% are above 50 years.

2. Increased culture of volunteering in the educational system

- Involvement of children and youth in volunteering
- Involvement of university students in volunteering programmes
- Involvement of youth in volunteering

3. Increased level of volunteering in the civic sector

- Increased information for volunteer opportunities in the CSOs
- Increased capacities of CSOs to stimulate volunteer activities
- Established and developed volunteer centres
- Conducted research and analysis about state of volunteering in Macedonia
- Creation of databases related to volunteering

4. Established system of institutional support for volunteering

- Established and functional National Council for Development of Volunteering (NCDV)
- Report on implementation of the law on volunteering
- Established system for financial support of projects and programmes for development of volunteering
- Increased capacity of governmental bodies in volunteer management
- Opening of support offices with participation of young volunteers

The goals outlined are commendable. However, there are two main issues that are hampering the implementation of this strategy; firstly, the implementation of the activities was started with a delay, and secondly, the activities are not accompanied by budget allocations. In addition, there is no system for the monitoring and evaluation of the performance and for the reporting on the strategy implementation's progress.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING

In Macedonia there is no officially registered National Volunteer Centre as a separate organisation. However, the *Youth Cultural Center - Bitola* coordinates the activities of an informal network of NGOs that form the National Volunteer Center of Macedonia and include seven Volunteer Info Points, namely the *Youth Cultural Center Bitola*, the *Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Kavadarci*, the *Youth Educational Forum Skopje*, the *Youth Council Ohrid*, *Agtis in Prilep*, the *Organisation of Women in the Municipality of Sveti Nikole* and the *Institute for Community Development Tetovo*.

These organisations implement the *Local Volunteer Service Programme* that encourages youth civic involvement and fosters cooperation and collaboration between young people and the local government in Macedonia. Working in seven municipalities, YCC-Bitola has trained, placed and assisted 165 young people in three-month volunteer placements, working with local government offices, state bodies and NGOs.

Additionally, this informal volunteer network promotes volunteering in local communities, organises volunteer actions and work camps, as well as international exchange of volunteers through European Voluntary Service (EVS) or other programmes.



There are a variety of organisations that work with volunteers. Many of the NGOs in Macedonia are volunteer-based, mainly because of not being able to afford paid staff, given the long-term financial instability in the sector. There are also organisations focused only on international volunteering programmes (EVS for example) and at times managing the hosting of these volunteers becomes challenging. In this respect, the level of impact and success of these placements can be low.

Apart from the informal network National Volunteer Center of Macedonia, there is no national umbrella volunteer organisation. Most of the activities of the NGOs are separated and independent, without coordination of activities.

5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS



The campaign “Tree Day” aims to engage Macedonians for the planting of more than 2 million tree seedlings, corresponding to the population of the Republic of Macedonia, in a single day.

The annual tree-planting campaign “Tree Day” in the Republic of Macedonia gathers large numbers of people in a massive one-day action. The purpose of this initiative is to get all citizens engaged by planting more than 2 million tree seedlings, corresponding to the population of the Republic of Macedonia, in a single day. This campaign was first organised on 12 March 2008 and is a civic initiative of several famous actors, musicians and singers. It is completely supported by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, the European Union representative office in Macedonia, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia and the Association of Local Self-Government Units. Volunteers are provided with organised transportation to previously selected places where they plant their tree. The action day is an official holiday, and all tree seedlings are provided by the government.

Volunteering in rural Macedonian communities is centred on special events or periods of the year, such as the preparation of carnivals, grape harvesting or celebrating big religious holidays. In villages, just about everybody volunteers, from schoolchildren to retired and elderly. Families get involved in voluntary actions, whether for a common goal or for the benefit of other families, according to the motto, “I’ll help you today and you’ll help me tomorrow”. This voluntary work reinforces trust and reciprocity in communities and is of great value particularly because many families live on low budgets.



6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In Macedonia, there are no specific funding mechanisms directly aiming at promoting and supporting volunteer initiatives and sustainable volunteer structures. National funds targeting volunteering are missing and funding opportunities for volunteer programmes are limited. Most of the initiatives are funded by international donors or private foundations with offices in Macedonia, or European funding programmes open to Macedonia.

Governmental support is distributed through an annual open call for supporting NGOs, but this is not specifically for volunteer programmes. The

total budget is around 250,000 EUR per year, but funds are distributed to a small number of NGOs, in the form of small grants of up to 5,000 EUR per project. It is therefore not possible to finance large scale or multi-year programmes through this kind of support.

Additionally, there are no budget allocations that will support and follow-up the implementation of the *Strategy for promotion and development of volunteering*. For example, the strategy notes that local volunteering centres will be supported but there is no clear definition by whom and what kind of financial support they will receive .

Local governments or municipalities also have budgets to support NGOs but these funds are even more limited and the procedure for granting them is non-transparent and often bound by political influences.

Mobilising resources from the local community is also under-developed in Macedonia and most of the NGOs are struggling to secure funding for their activities including volunteer initiatives.

7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

In Macedonia, regular and systematic research on volunteering is lacking, although volunteering is mentioned in some research about the non-governmental sector, civic activism or philanthropy. Due to the lack of other, reliable sources of information, some of the findings of these researches are used as basis for volunteering policy development.

In 2006, the research about “*Philanthropy in Macedonia*” done by the Center for Institutional Development (CIR-a Skopje) showed that only 10 % of the population volunteer, mostly in civil society organisations. However, around one third of the population expressed the will to volunteer, if volunteer opportunities were provided.

Research reveals that ad-hoc and incidental volunteering prevails and the level of awareness for community engagement is at a very low level

The research “*Social responsibility of citizens*” by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation from 2009 depicts a low interest in volunteering in local communities. According to this study, 27.4 % of the respondents stated that they had volunteered in their local community, but most of them for a mere 10 hours per year. This confirms that ad-hoc and incidental volunteering prevails and that the level of awareness for community engagement is at a very low level. There are also other researches offering some insight into volunteering in Macedonia but these are partial and lack a representative sample, thus cannot be treated as relevant sources of information or basis for policy intervention (example: “Civic practices” No.12 issue MCIC 2010 where only eight international volunteers were interviewed, which is not a representative sample).

According to the available official data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, until December 2009 a total of 370 volunteer books were issued for domestic volunteers and 158 consents were issued for foreign volunteers in Macedonia.

8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING



Volunteering is not systematically present in the media: the lack of sensationalism, the fact that volunteering depicts an average, positive story usually makes it a less marketable theme.

There are no special codes or provisions in Macedonia to ensure ethics and quality standards for volunteering.

Some provisions in the Law on volunteering regulate matters regarding the health insurance for volunteers and emergency insurance as an optional provision in the volunteer contract. There are also provisions on personal data protection of volunteers, keeping the organisers' confidential data and the responsibilities of parties in case of damage being caused. However, the law does not look at quality standards for the process of volunteering itself. There are positive examples of NGOs which adhere to quality standards of internal volunteer management. In case of the National Volunteer Centre of Macedonia, coordinated by the Youth Cultural Center Bitola, there are procedures and quality standards set for the Local Volunteer Service programme. This system is applicable to all stages of volunteer management system, especially concerning the recruitment and selection of volunteers, training and preparation as well as monitoring and evaluation of Local Volunteer Service programmes. YCC Bitola together with the other six partner NGOs functioning as Volunteer Info Points have successfully implemented these standards for the last years in 165 placements of volunteers for three-month services in institutions.

9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

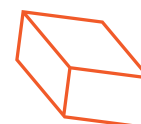
There is no on-line database for volunteers or volunteer opportunities in Macedonia. However, YCC Bitola manages and maintains an internal database of volunteers through the Local Volunteer Service Programme, where over 800 volunteers have registered. In the database there are also over 100 organisers of volunteering who have registered their needs in terms of volunteer positions and profiles.

Volunteering is promoted in the media and generally media is receptive and willing to report on volunteer events and to cover volunteer stories. However, the topic of volunteering is not systematically present in the media, but coverage depends on the occasion and nature of the event. The lack of sensationalism, the fact that volunteering depicts an average, positive story usually makes it a less marketable theme, especially for the national media.

From 2006, YCC Bitola established a National Volunteer Awards scheme. These Awards are given to individuals who had significant contributions as volunteers during the year. There is national event held every year on 5 December, on International Volunteer Day, in Bitola, Macedonia where gold, silver and bronze certificates for volunteer achievements are granted to volunteers from all over the country.

10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

Another set of laws and regulations which substantially affect volunteering are those concerning education. Therefore, volunteer-like activities form some part of the educational programme in certain disciplines. Work experience is required or encouraged in some higher education courses and the nature of this work can vary from volunteering, well-supervised and officially recognised, to more or less obligatory labour. For example, in certain professional fields, such as law and medicine, in order to graduate, students are required to work as 'apprentices' or 'trainees' for vocational training and independent work in their chosen profession prior to taking their professional exam. These different kinds of formalised apprenticeships can play an important role in ensuring that graduates have practical skills, which they may otherwise lack, as well as academic knowledge.



11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the recommendations that should be considered for development of volunteering in Macedonia are:

- Establishing a system for the monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the Law on volunteering and the Strategy for promotion and development of volunteering 2010- 2015,
- Monitoring of the implementation of the action plan for implementation of the strategy with concrete budget allocation from the Budget of Central Government (relevant Ministries) and the Municipalities,
- Providing real mechanisms for the support and sustainability of Local Volunteer Centres,
- Establishing funding mechanisms for the support of volunteer programmes and projects of NGOs at the national and local level,
- Promoting volunteer values in the educational system in Macedonia,
- Establishing close cooperation with the media for promotion of volunteer activities to the wider community and among citizens,
- Supporting research on volunteering and systematic data collection about volunteering in Macedonia in cooperation with the State Statistical Office,
- Revising and amending the legislation that creates barriers and administrative obstacles in the engagement of foreign volunteers in Macedonia,
- Setting-up a 'one-stop-shop' where potential volunteers can find out about volunteering opportunities, centres that advocate for volunteering,
- Ensuring the financial sustainability of existing volunteer centres, developing adequate strategies for future management of such centres, perhaps at the national level,
- Capitalising on the existing knowledge and capacities of the organisations that are promoting volunteering, when developing models for the management of volunteer centres, currently still a matter under discussion,
- Providing training for volunteer management training courses,
- Establishing exchange programmes for staff, that would enable people working or volunteering in civic organisations to visit other organisations and therefore to learn about good practices, which can then be adapted and implemented in their own organisations.

Resources

Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia, 2007, No.85/07 and 161/08 “Law on volunteering”

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