



EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE

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CHAPTER

VOLUNTEERING  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
IN EUROPE

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# 1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

## CONCEPT DEFINITION

In Slovakia, there is no common concept of volunteering infrastructure, nor has any discussion been held on this topic yet. The concept is used only by a few experts from volunteer centres in Slovakia. Volunteers and professionals in non-profit organisations are not aware of the concept.

Under the term *volunteering infrastructure*, a set of tools and conditions that are enabling the development of volunteering are understood. These include:

- *Structure - the network of regional volunteer centres with quality standards*
- *Legal framework for volunteering*
- *Financial support for volunteer centres and volunteer organisations provided by national and/or local government*
- *Existence of awareness raising activities and research on volunteering*

In Slovakia, there is still an insufficient volunteering infrastructure. Some of the elements of volunteering infrastructure are developed only partially, some of them are missing. These are therefore mentioned in the recommendation section.

## 2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

Despite the fact that volunteering has a long tradition in Slovakia, both the terms volunteering and volunteer were not defined in any official document, legislation or legal act until December 2011. In reports and publications about volunteering that are available in Slovakia, the most commonly used definition of volunteering is that “*volunteering is an action undertaken out of free will, not motivated by financial gain and that it can bring benefits to a community, volunteers and the society at large*”. This definition includes both formal and informal volunteering.

The terminology for volunteering used in Slovakia by experts in volunteering is mostly based on the definition of the General Declaration on Volunteering accepted by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) in 1990. This definition determines volunteering as an activity that:

- *Is based on a personal motivation and choice, freely undertaken*
- *Takes the form of individual or group activities generally carried out within the framework of an organisation*
- *Is a way of furthering active citizenship and community involvement*
- *Contributes to the vitality of economic life, even creating jobs and new professions*
- *Enhances human potential and quality of daily life, building up human solidarity*
- *Provides answers for the great challenges of our time, striving for a better and more peaceful world.*

In Slovak studies and publications, the term of volunteer is mostly defined as a person who freely, without financial gain, provides his/her time, energy, knowledge, and skills in the favour

of other people or society<sup>1</sup>. Thanks to the Law on Volunteering, valid since 1 December 2011, Slovakia now has an official definition of a volunteer. This law states that “A volunteer is a person who from his/her free own decision without a requirement to be paid, performs a voluntary activity based on his/her knowledge, abilities and skills for another person with her/his agreement or for the public good”.

From 1993 to 2011, in Slovakia there were only a few research projects undertaken on the topic of volunteering. It is difficult to compare the results of these studies and to provide a complex description of volunteering in Slovakia based on them, because different methodologies were used. In addition, it is difficult to define the situation of volunteering in Slovakia due to the way people perceive volunteering in Slovakia. Many people do volunteer, yet they do not see themselves as volunteers. This is consequently reflected in research and surveys as these people would answer a question “Do you volunteer?” with a simple statement “No”. In addition to that, the majority of research projects are focused on formal volunteering only.

The Eurobarometer implemented at the end of 2006 stated that 79% of Slovak citizens said that volunteering and helping other people is important for them. This number is very similar to the one in the European Union (EU) Member States. This poll also stated that 33% of Slovak citizens are active within volunteer organisations<sup>2</sup>.

There was significant representative research carried out in 2011 as a part of the National Campaign for the European Year of Volunteering 2011<sup>3</sup>. The research found that 27.5% of Slovak citizens are involved in formal volunteering (carried out within or through various organisations). According to the last report on volunteering in the European Union<sup>4</sup>, this level

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**It's difficult to define the situation of volunteering in Slovakia due to the way people comprehend volunteering: many people do volunteer, yet they do not see themselves as volunteers.**

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of engagement puts Slovakia among countries with a medium-high level of people volunteering (between 20 – 29% of the adult population). This however only reflects formal volunteering. Almost half of Slovaks (47.1%) are involved in informal volunteering, which is shown especially through mutual help and support among neighbours. The research showed that a high number of volunteers active within formal volunteering also participate in informal volunteering, and vice versa.

The largest group of volunteers (23.1%) is active within social services, providing help for various target groups. Almost a quarter of all formal volunteers carry out activities in this field. The second most frequent activity is carried out in environmental protection (14.6%) followed by art and culture (12.3%). More than 10% of volunteers help in the area of sport, religious activities and within children and youth organisations. These findings are quite different from those found in previous years in the field of volunteering in Slovakia. This can be interpreted through the development and quality improvements in social services in Slovakia as well as through the increasing number of campaigns and advocacy activities of environmental organisations.

1. Brozmanová Gregorová, A. – Mračková, B – Marček, E., 2009. Analýza dobrovoľníctva na Slovensku.

2. European Social Reality. Report. Special Eurobarometer 273 / Wave 66.3: 2006-2007. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_273\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf) [cited 10.2.2009]

3. Brozmanová Gregorová, A. – Matulayová, T.- Mračková, A.- Vavrínčiková, L. – Vlašičová, J. 2011: Dobrovoľníctvo – keď pomoc baví a zábava pomáha.

4. GHK, 2010. Volunteering in the European Union

The social profile of Slovak volunteers can be characterised by:

- *almost the same level of involvement of men and women within both formal and informal volunteering*
- *a similar representation of individual age groups, even though the lowest level of participation in both types of volunteering is in the 15 to 19 years age group*
- *a relationship between volunteering and level of education, with the higher the level of education, the higher the participation in volunteering*
- *a relationship between volunteering and economic position, with the highest level of participation shown by students of universities, employed and retired people. Conversely, the less involved are the unemployed and students of secondary schools*
- *a relationship between volunteering and the level of income - participation does not automatically increase with the level of income; the least active are people with the lowest income and the largest activity is shown by people with the average income in Slovakia (600 – 900 EUR)*
- *a higher level of involvement of widows and widowers in informal volunteering*
- *a connection between religion and increased informal volunteering*
- *an interconnection between participation in volunteering and membership in an organisation, where members of organisations have a tendency to be more active in both types of volunteering.*



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*Volunteer organisations often state that volunteering in Slovakia is not valued. Practically, there is a lack of information about volunteering; the general public does not understand what volunteering means, and moreover, why it is important*

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The largest space for participation of volunteers is provided by NGOs, followed by villages, towns, and organisations of state administration.

The most frequently implemented volunteering activities are the organisation and/or helping with the coordination of various activities, events or campaigns, and also the organisation and coordination of leisure-time activities. Helping with the basic functioning of an organisation and fulfilling its mission is the most prevailing activity for volunteers, followed by the provision of direct personal help to individuals and groups.

Slovaks are motivated to volunteer primarily by a strong belief that it is important to help others and by the desire to meet new people and make new friends through volunteering. Other important motivational factors are learning through a volunteering experience and gaining better self-awareness, reciprocity, improved self-esteem or self-evaluation, the desire to gain new knowledge, experience or contacts related to the profession of a volunteer and the joy of the appreciation gained through volunteering.

Many publications about volunteering in Slovakia mention that volunteering in this country does not have such a high social status and awareness about volunteering is not so developed as in other countries with more advanced democratic structures. One study stated that the problem which non-profit organisations often mention is the fact that Slovak society does not value volunteering. Public opinion polls on volunteering show other views on the perception of volunteering, stating that volunteering in Slovakia has a high social prestige<sup>5</sup>. Volunteers are perceived as people who should be recognised by society. On the other hand, in Slovak society, there prevails a very strong opinion that volunteers would not be needed if the state would perform its duties. In 1998, this opinion was expressed by 55% of respondents and in 2003 by 74%.

During meetings of volunteer organisations, their members often state that volunteering in Slovakia still has a low prestige. Practically, there is a lack of information about volunteering; the general public does not understand what volunteering means, and moreover, why it

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5. Bútorová, Z. 2004. Mimosládne organizácie a dobročinnosť vo svetle verejnej mienky. In: Keď ľahostajnosť nie je odpoveď.

is important. There are many examples of people who do not refer to themselves as being volunteers; however, after some explanation they realise they actually are volunteers.

### 3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Until 2011, there was no complex legal framework for volunteering in Slovakia. Nowadays, Slovak legislation partially determines two specific volunteer services – youth volunteer services and services of unemployed people.

The Law on Employment Services (no. 5/2004) defines volunteering as a possible activity for unemployed people. According to this law, these people can be engaged in the so-called *activation work* within the civil sector. It is a way for unemployed people to receive some extra income in addition to their unemployment benefit. Therefore, the volunteering sector does not see this service as a volunteer service and perceives the term volunteering in this law to be used in a very misleading way.

Law no. 282/2008 on the Support of Work with Youth devotes one part to the volunteering of youth. This law does not define terms such as “volunteering” or “volunteer”; it just determines the age and status of a young volunteer. It sets several duties for volunteer organisations which are mainly based on the concept of the European Volunteer Service, an action within the Youth in Action programme of the EU. Therefore both laws considerably increase the misunderstanding of the concept of volunteering.

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Unemployed people can be engaged in “volunteering” or “activation work” in order to supplement their benefits. But this is not truly volunteering - the term is used in a very misleading way.

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Discussions about the need for a complex legal framework for volunteering in Slovakia started in 2002. At that time, some NGOs attempted to pass a Code of Non-Profit Law in an effort to unite all legislation related to the NGO sector. However, due to criticism within the NGO sector, this law was abandoned. In 2007, Slovak volunteer organisations again started the debate on the legal framework for volunteering. The reason why Slovak volunteer organisations focused on legal issues is that many of them (together with some public organisations) had to deal with legal problems while working with volunteers. These included problems such as:

1. *There was no concept or definition of volunteering. In the Slovak legal system the concept of “volunteer” did not exist. Therefore a volunteer could be perceived as a person working on the black market. Since the status of volunteer was missing, so was the accounting scheme for volunteer expenses. Thus in the Slovak legislation volunteer expenses were not eligible.*
2. *There was no support for volunteering from the national/local governments. There was no specific grant or strategic programme for the development of volunteer centres and organisations. Through the adoption of a Law on Volunteering, volunteer organisations wanted to start a discussion about the national strategy for financial support of the volunteer sector in Slovakia.*
3. *As regards international volunteering, there was a significant obstacle for Slovak citizens who volunteered abroad on a long term basis. They had to pay social insurance out of pocket if they wanted the social insurance company to count the time period they spent abroad volunteering as their working time. Otherwise, the state saw the time they spent abroad in the same way as if they had been unemployed and did not count this time into their pension. That is why the law was aimed to enable the sending organisations to pay social insurance for volunteers.*

4. *There was no clear framework for determining the rights and duties of all parties involved in volunteering either long-term or short-term. For instance, on the volunteer organisations' side there were no duties as to the provision of trainings, coordination, insurance, etc. In addition to that, Slovak organisations were also missing a specific form of contract that could be used for volunteering.*
5. *There was the belief that a Law on Volunteering would increase the interest of all stakeholders in volunteering and would support the prestige of volunteering, with the help of the media focusing on the adoption of the new law as well.*

In 2008, C.A.R.D.O.<sup>6</sup> and the group of lawyers from the First Slovak Non-Profit Service Centre (1st SNSC) started to work on the first draft of the Law on Volunteering. In 2009, C.A.R.D.O. requested feedback from volunteer organisations and public bodies in Slovakia (ministries, local authorities) which was positive. In 2010, shortly before the national elections, C.A.R.D.O. asked all major political parties for their support on volunteering, especially for their support for passing the Law on Volunteering. Thanks to this appeal, the new government decided to include the Law on Volunteering in its programme for this electoral term.

The Ministry of the Interior was chosen to become the body responsible for the preparation and implementation of the Law on Volunteering in Slovakia. This ministry established a committee consisting of various experts from the NGO sector responsible for setting up the law. The leader from the non-profit sector was the civic association C.A.R.D.O. The underlying goal of all the work done to support the passing of the Law on Volunteering was to achieve support for volunteering, and not to bring limits or bureaucracy. Thus, spontaneous and short term volunteering should not be affected by the law.

The Law on Volunteering was passed on 21 October 2011 and has been valid since 1 December 2011. The law brought a new technical term into Slovak legislation, “volunteer activity”. It defines sending and hosting organisations, and regulates a contract between these parties and volunteers. The law introduces rights and responsibilities as well as recommendations for organisations which want to work with volunteers, such as the reimbursement of certain volunteer costs. In the case of long term volunteering, the law enables volunteers to count their volunteer time into their working time in order to include this time in their pension. The law brings only a small financial contribution from the state to the volunteer sector. It provides volunteers with the opportunity to increase their income tax assignment to a chosen volunteer organisation from 2% to 3%. Based on this law, a local government can decrease or forgive certain taxes on volunteers. However, the law does not bring any direct financial support from the state to volunteer centres and/or volunteer organisations.

The main idea of the law was to cover all fields of volunteer activity but not to regulate those volunteer activities which should stay spontaneous. Since the law does not bring any direct financial resources to volunteer organisations, it does not involve any sanctions or limitations for those organisations. In this light, the law does not regulate, but gives guidance, especially for those organisations that need to work with contracted volunteers.

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6. C.A.R.D.O. is a non-profit and independent organisation, which was founded in May 2004 as a Slovak umbrella body with focus on gathering and spreading the information and know-how of various European states in the fields of volunteerism, education, management and financing of public and non-profit organisations in Slovakia.



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

Since 2007, the role of a national volunteer centre in Slovakia has been fulfilled by the civic association C.A.R.D.O. In 2007, C.A.R.D.O, with the support of the Ministry of Education, launched a project for a virtual national volunteer centre. The web portal [www.dobrovolnictvo.sk](http://www.dobrovolnictvo.sk) provides service and information to volunteers and voluntary organisations at local, national as well as the international level. It is an important source of contacts, volunteer opportunities, information about volunteering and is a tool allowing the search for partners for cooperation in the field of volunteering.

Among other activities, C.A.R.D.O. continues with the promotion of volunteering in Slovakia. In cooperation with regional volunteer centres, it organised Volunteer Days events, every year, since 2009. It has also developed international projects on volunteering, implemented volunteer programmes in social services, has started a process of building a network of volunteer centres in Slovakia, provided training and consultations to volunteer organisations in the area of volunteer management and worked on preparation of the legal framework for volunteering in Slovakia.

Currently, there are six regional volunteer centres that implement various programmes; however, these are dependent on their own funding sources. The main role of these centres is to match volunteer organisations with volunteers, to promote volunteering, to undertake/participate in research, and to provide training and consultancy for organisations involving volunteers. Since 2009, there has been closer cooperation among volunteer centres. They meet regularly three or four times a year and discuss the main issues and steps in the development of volunteering in Slovakia. Volunteer centres cooperate closely with volunteer organisations in their region on common projects and/or volunteer programmes.

Until 2011, there was no national umbrella organisation for organisations involved in volunteering. There are various Slovak platforms and umbrella organisations, such as the Socioforum for NGOs working in the area of social services, Ekoforum for those working in the area of environmental protection and MVRO for organisations active in the area of development aid.

In 2011, there was a significant change in the infrastructure of volunteering in Slovakia. The *Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations* was established on 3 August 2011. At the beginning, the platform was associated with five volunteer centres: C.A.R.D.O. (Bratislava), Centre of Volunteering in Banska Bystrica, Volunteer Centre of Kosice Region, Nitra Volunteer Centre and Presov Volunteer Centre and Volunteer Group Willow that focuses on volunteering in hospitals and hospices in Slovakia. The Platform was a result of several activities and processes that took place over recent years. The non-formal network of volunteer centres that had already existed since 2009 was officially formalised as the Law on Volunteering was approved. It was clear that the law would not support the funding of volunteer centres and volunteer organisations. Volunteer centres needed to set up the Platform in order to continue with cooperation with the government once the law was approved.

One of the Platform's goals is to influence the policy towards volunteer centres, to advocate the interests of volunteer centres and organisations and to increase the number and the quality

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*The newly established Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations creates a positive environment where volunteer centres and organisations can share and exchange their ideas, cooperate on common projects and lobby for common interests.*

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of volunteer centres in Slovakia. In order to do so, the Platform was successful in its efforts to become a member of the Government Council for NGOs; thus the voices of volunteer centres gathered under the Platform will be heard at the government level. The Platform creates the environment where volunteer centres and organisations can share and exchange their ideas, cooperate on common projects and lobby for common interests – to create a positive environment for volunteering development.

Children and youth volunteer organisations belong to the biggest volunteer involving organisations in Slovakia. For example, there are large organisations such as Slovak Scouting, organisations with a Christian background like DOMKA, ERko or smaller organisations on a local level providing leisure time activities for children and youth. In children and youth organisations, there is a long tradition of education on volunteering. They are usually supported by former recipients of the services, who started to volunteer once they were old enough, to bring up the next generation of children.

Another large group of volunteer organisations is formed by traditional self-help clubs, unions, and organisations, such as clubs of seniors, hunting unions, associations of people with different disabilities, and organisations which have the role of civic protection such as voluntary fire brigades. The largest organisations with a volunteering background are the Slovak Red Cross and the Union of Seniors, which have a long tradition in Slovakia. Organisations working in the area of sport – sport clubs, unions, and centres – have a long tradition as well. Despite the fact that these organisations are not typical volunteer organisations, many of them work with volunteers. Another large group of volunteer organisations consists of environmental organisations.

During recent years, the development of volunteer programmes can be seen in social and health care facilities such as in hospitals, senior houses, organisations providing services to homeless people or to people with disabilities, and also in harm reduction services. International volunteering and volunteering by senior professionals also plays an important role in Slovakia. There are new trends in volunteering, such as virtual and corporate volunteering initiatives where NGOs are also actively involved.



## 5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The involvement of a variety of stakeholders in volunteering in Slovakia is an ongoing effort. There are public service providers starting to involve volunteers in their activities. This is often a positive side effect of awareness raising campaigns such as National Volunteer Day and of the training in volunteer management provided by volunteer centres in Slovakia. During National Volunteer Day, many organisations, including public organisations providing social or health care, especially senior houses or nursing homes which are established by local governments, call for volunteers who can help on that day and possibly stay longer if these organisations are able to manage long-term volunteers.

Public organisations also have an interest in attending the training on volunteer management. Some of them are starting to see volunteering as a way to improve the quality of the services they provide. However, there is no follow-up or evaluation of the real impact of such training on the day-to-day life of these institutions.



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*There is a boom in employee volunteering; the companies see the effects and impact of employee volunteering; they see improvement of their public image and their brand awareness, in the relationships among their employees.*

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In Slovakia, there is a boom of employee volunteering which was initiated by several large international corporations and the Pontis Foundation, founder of the Business Leaders Forum and the community partner of the ENGAGE initiative. Nowadays, medium sized enterprises in Slovakia are also starting to look for volunteer opportunities. The companies see the effects and impact of employee volunteering; they see improvement of their public image and their brand awareness, in the relationships among their employees and the teambuilding effects of volunteering etc. There are several major events organised by the Pontis Foundation in Slovakia such as corporate volunteering days carried out in different towns (Bratislava, Žilina, and Košice) under the name “Our Town”, organised once a year. During these events, employees from various companies can choose for which NGOs to volunteer. National Volunteer Day is also an event which can be joined by employees of companies throughout Slovakia. Despite these activities, there is still a lack of long-term partnerships between companies and volunteer organisations and/or volunteer centres.

In Slovakia, a strategic action from government or public bodies in promoting volunteering is missing. However, there are some initiatives in the government coalition. Some government and parliament members are actively involved in National Volunteer Day. Several members of the Christian Democratic Party and one member of the Parliament helped C.A.R.D.O. to bring the Law on Volunteering into the government programme. Volunteering in Slovakia is supported by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) too. There are especially four Slovak MEPs who support C.A.R.D.O. volunteering initiatives such as National Volunteer Days or the Volunteer Award Ceremonies.

There is no strategy to involve schools and lifelong learning institutions in promoting volunteering. However, C.A.R.D.O. and regional volunteer centres contact schools in order to invite their students to participate as volunteers during various volunteering programmes they organise. Volunteering is present as one of the subjects at universities – especially at social work faculties. At some of them, students can also do a volunteer activity as an internship and thus gain credits for volunteering. At the University of Matej Bel in Banska Bystrica, there is also a service learning approach present. Some lifelong learning institutions, especially Universities of the Third Age (educational institutions for senior citizens) are starting to ask senior students to volunteer and think about the strategy for involving other students in volunteering. On the other hand, in this case it is also partially a consequence of the activities and international projects of C.A.R.D.O. aimed at recognising volunteering as a form of non-formal learning.

In secondary schools in Slovakia, there is no specific subject on volunteering. It is more or less on the individual approach of teachers who decide to, for example, react to a call to join some events organised by volunteer centres or to invite an organisation working in the field of volunteering to come and have a short presentation about volunteering. There are some international schools that involve pupils in volunteer activities and prepare workshops on this topic.

## 6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In Slovakia, there is no system of financial support targeted specifically at volunteering, volunteer organisations and volunteer centres. Volunteer organisations have to find funding opportunities for their activities and react to calls for applications or the offers of different donors. Many volunteer programmes are funded by different sources; therefore there is no relevant information about the annual budget for volunteering in Slovakia.

The funding of many volunteer organisations is provided by the state through mechanisms implemented by the respective Ministries. The activities of most volunteer organisations fall under grants offered by the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport is an important donor for children and youth organisations which are mostly based on volunteer work. This Ministry also supports activities in the area of sport, where there are many volunteers involved. Since 2008, the Ministry has also supported work with young people. This is done through the ADAM Programme that has a part explicitly focusing on youth volunteering. Funds from the European Union are also a very important financial source for organisations working with volunteers. These include mainly the European Social Fund and the Lifelong Learning Programme. Access to funding from these sources is possible only for organisations with a good financial and personnel capacity. Another source available for volunteering in Slovakia is the EU programme Youth in Action. Other relevant sources are grants for NGOs supporting social inclusion funded through the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the Slovak state budget. None of these grant programmes however, explicitly focus on the support of volunteering.

Indirect State support for NGOs is created by the assignation of 2% of paid taxes to a chosen non-profit organisation.

Further financial sources for volunteering are provided by regional and local governments. The support of volunteering by these sources however, is still only marginal. This statement is also supported by the results of a survey on youth policy on the regional and local level carried out in 2007. It reveals that youth volunteering is the least supported area of youth policy<sup>7</sup>.

In recent years, several Slovak foundations have significantly supported civil society activities and volunteering as such. These foundations include for example the Open Society Foundation, the Ekopolis Foundation, the Children of Slovakia Foundation, the Pontis Foundation, and

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**Indirect state support for NGOs comes from the possibility to redirect 2% of income tax to the non-profit organisation of the tax payer's choice.**

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the Intenda Foundation. Lately, an important role in the funding of volunteering is played by corporate foundations and partially also by community foundations that support local projects often based on volunteer work. Other financial sources for volunteer programmes come from individuals and self-financing activities of NGOs (training, publications, provision of services, etc.).

Even though it might seem that there are many resources available for volunteering, the number of NGOs competing for these funds needs to be taken into account, as there are more than 23,000 civic associations active in Slovakia. Volunteer organisations may apply many fundraising strategies, but it is a big problem to find money to support the quality of volunteering programmes. In Slovakia, there is still the need to convince Slovak donors how important it is to have a paid volunteer coordinator and other staff involved, such as supervisors, trainers, psychologists for the selection of candidates in certain volunteer programmes.



7. Brozmanová Gregorová, A. et al., 2008. *Mládež - mesto - región. (Aká je mládežnícka politika miest a samosprávnych krajov na Slovensku).*

## 7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

In Slovakia, no research about volunteering and its contribution is done on a systematic basis. There has been some research, undertaken after 1989, focusing on the magnitude of participation of people in volunteering activities and a few specific fields relevant to volunteering. Since 2004, there has been a lack of basic research in the field of volunteering in Slovakia (see section 2 of this chapter). Any research was conducted by different organisations, with the use of different methodologies. The impact of volunteering has not been measured. The lack of data on volunteering and its impact until 2011 was connected to difficulties in the development and the recognition of volunteering which are mentioned in other parts of this report, for example:

- *No specific legislation on volunteering*
- *No system of financial support for volunteering*
- *Low prestige of volunteering*
- *Difficulties in the recognition of volunteer experience by employers*
- *No volunteer centres in some regions.*

In 2011, important research was carried out as part of the National Campaign for the European Year of Volunteering 2011, supported by the European Commission. The first part of the research was based on quantitative methodology and focused on formal and also informal volunteering. It gathered information on the extent and intensity of formal and informal volunteering, the social profile of volunteers, volunteer activities and organisations involving volunteers. It also presented a specific picture of motivation, benefits and barriers to formal volunteering. Additionally, the research focused on the experiences of volunteers with volunteer management. The second part was based on qualitative methodology and presents volunteer centres in Slovakia as an important part of the volunteering infrastructure. It also presents a prognosis for volunteering development in Slovakia for the future – this part is based on the ideas of various experts.

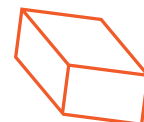
During the European Year of Volunteering, several articles on volunteering in different fields were published. Also there were many conferences and seminars carried out on different topics and issues relevant to volunteering.

As the most important event relevant to the field of research, a scientific conference focused on Volunteering as a Research Topic for the Field of Sociology and Social Work took place during 2011. At this conference, specialists defined forthcoming research topics for the field of volunteering.

## 8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

There are no general tools to assure ethics and/or quality standards for volunteering.

Some volunteer organisations have their own codes of ethics and quality standards for volunteering. These are typically connected to the area in which that specific volunteer organisation works. Some organisations have their own code of ethics for volunteers which are



mostly created and implemented by the management of organisations. In some cases, the codes of ethics are the same for employees and for volunteers, in some they are different. The process of the evaluation of ethics or quality standards in volunteering is mostly an internal issue of volunteer organisations.

## 9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

There are several ways of gaining information on volunteering opportunities in Slovakia:

1. **Website [www.dobrovolnictvo.sk](http://www.dobrovolnictvo.sk)** – This is a matching and service portal for (potential) volunteers and volunteer organisations, where the public can get basic information on volunteering and can search offers from approximately 230 organisations. There are still not enough volunteer opportunities in several regions and rural areas in Slovakia.
2. **Volunteer centres' databases and interviews** – There are six volunteer centres in Slovakia, in Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Košice, Nitra, Trnava and Prešov. Two volunteer centres have their own volunteer database of opportunities they can offer to potential volunteers when they visit the centres.
3. **Volunteer organisations and centres** work on their own public relations strategies and look for volunteers through various tools, campaigns in schools, libraries, internet, media, when organising events and disseminating information about their work.
4. **National Volunteer Day** – Annually, C.A.R.D.O. and volunteer centres in Slovakia organise a campaign to promote volunteering. They invite people to volunteer on specific days (in 2011, it was held on September 23rd – 24th) in various organisations throughout Slovakia. On these days, anyone can volunteer in an organisation according to his/her choice. Organisers implement a media campaign and use various tools to attract the attention of the wider public.
5. **International Volunteer Day** – Every year around the 5th of December, all volunteer centres in Slovakia organise a Volunteer Award Ceremony to raise the prestige of volunteers in Slovakia. They invite all national and regional media to broadcast this celebration.

Slovakia still lacks a national campaign on volunteering. There is a lack of funding in the volunteering sector and, until now, no strategy to influence the government or political parties to be active in this field. Volunteer centres and volunteer organisations have to find their own way to approach the media. It is difficult to state whether media have interest or not in publicising volunteering – there is not sufficient data on the issue. Once again, it is a question of capacity as well as funding. Those volunteer centres and organisations that have operated longer in Slovakia have their own media contacts; they can involve celebrities in their campaigns and activities; they use the internet or social networks to promote their activities and organise regular press conferences. The success of involving the media in promoted topics is largely about taking an innovative approach, having “hot” topics, valuable data, and, as mentioned before, time and capacity to establish and maintain good partnerships with the media.

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*Comparing the situation in Slovakia with other European countries, the main difference is that volunteer centres receive no regular financial support from the government or other sources - thus are not financially sustainable.*

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## 10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES



Comparing the situation in Slovakia with Western European countries, the main difference is that existing volunteer centres receive no regular financial support from the government or other sources. Thus Slovak volunteer centres, funded mainly from grants provided by Slovak foundations and the European Union, are not sustainable. What is more surprising is that until 2011, these centres did not advocate for better conditions which would have enabled the development of volunteering in Slovakia. On one hand, there has been scepticism about cooperation with the state/government. On the other hand, the government does not have a strategy and does not call for strategic partnerships with the non-profit sector. However, this could also be a consequence of lack of will, enthusiasm, capacity, and sometimes even the skills necessary for negotiations with state representatives.

## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are certain actions needed in the near future to develop a stable volunteering infrastructure in Slovakia:

### **National Strategy for the support of volunteering (recommendations for the government)**

Volunteer centres and volunteer organisations should work on cooperation with the government and declare their interest in specific support from government, in order to create an enabling environment for the development and fulfilment of their roles.

### **Continuous and systematic research on volunteering**

The European Year of Volunteering was a good start for continuous research on volunteering. It provided a good basis and resource for information on volunteering. However, it is necessary to develop and explore this phenomenon more deeply in cooperation with academic institutions and experts with practical experience in the field.

### **Increased status and quality of volunteer centres**

Volunteer centres should develop quality standards, specify their roles and functions. More volunteer centres should be established in Slovakia so that the services they provide will be available in all Slovak regions.

### **Quality in volunteer management**

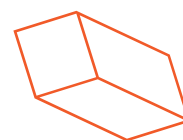
Volunteer centres should devise a strategy for involving more people of various age groups, ethnicity, social background, and make volunteering open to all. On the other hand, there are still limited volunteering opportunities available within volunteer organisations. Therefore, the role of volunteer centres is to train volunteer organisations in involving volunteers and managing volunteers and to bring volunteering to those organisations where volunteering is still missing, like for instance in social care institutions, cultural institutions.

### **Volunteering in elementary and secondary schools**

Volunteer centres should prepare a strategy for the Ministry of Education in order to create a subject focusing on volunteering in community or at least to involve the topic of volunteering into the subject of civic education, which is already part of the Slovak curriculum for elementary and secondary schools.

## Volunteering as a way to foster employability

Volunteering should be recognised by employers and formal educational institutions as a tool for gaining competences for the professional as well as personal lives of volunteers. Different stakeholders such as volunteer centres, Lifelong Learning institutions, employers and job offices should cooperate in order to see volunteering as relevant for employment.



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## Resources

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