



EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE



CHAPTER

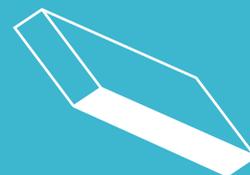
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VOLUNTEERING
INFRASTRUCTURE
IN EUROPE

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1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

CONCEPT DEFINITION

Rooted in the communist regime and continuing to today, volunteer work can be negatively perceived by Albanians, because they were initially introduced to the most negative forms of it. The communist Labour Party of Albania promoted as “volunteering” forms of work where citizens were obliged to volunteer for production of collective property both in agriculture and industry, obligatory labour during official holidays in different sectors, longer shifts at work etc. These were in fact forms of forced labour, that are stuck in the mind of Albanians and work to explain why even today, after more than 20 years have passed since the fall of communism, it is still very difficult to change the Albanians’ point of view towards volunteer work, and what it really means to volunteer on the basis of free will.

Today, no form of organised volunteering infrastructure exists at a national level. The most recognised ways of volunteering are through Civil Society Organisations, youth groups or school based projects that use volunteers in their local/national activities on a periodical basis. Volunteering programmes are run through the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme or the Red Cross in Albania and many local and national civil society organisations (CSOs) organise activities and involve volunteers. Each of the actors has internal policies on volunteer management and no common scheme of volunteering infrastructure exists.

Tirana is the only city in Albania where a Local Volunteer Service (LVS) centre exists. This service was established in early 2011 by the Beyond Barriers Association (BBA)¹ with the funding of the European Delegation to Albania in terms of Instruments for Pre-Accession (IPA) Funds², and in collaboration with the South Eastern European Youth Network (SEEYN)³ that worked closely with BBA to share the experience and knowledge needed to build the first LVS centre in Albania.

With the support of the SEEYN Secretariat in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the partner organisations of Banja Luka⁴ (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Bitola⁵ (Macedonia) and Varese⁶ (Italy), BBA established and is successfully running the first Local Volunteer Service in the country. The LVS-Tirana, officially opened in April 2011, has managed to break the stereotype of volunteer work among young people in the area. Having experience from international volunteer

More than 20 years since the fall of communism, it's still very difficult to change the Albanians' point of view towards volunteer work, and what it really means to volunteer on the basis of free will.

1. Beyond Barriers Association is a non for profit, non governmental and voluntary based that organisation that defends the rights and the interests of the young people. The mission of BBA is to promote equal opportunities for all youngsters, especially for those with social disadvantages and different abilities, by offering them support to get empowered and be active part of the community's life. www.beyondbarriers.org

2. IPA – Instruments for Pre-Accession, Civil Society Facility – Civic Initiative and Capacity Building programme of EU

3. The South East European Youth Network (SEEYN) is a network organization involving 15 member NGOs from 8 countries in an attempt of overcoming differences among societies that have recent tradition of conflicts through gathering young people from entire South East Europe region to work together on global issues. www.seeyn.org

4. Youth Communication Centre Banja Luka – Bosnia and Herzegovina <http://www.okcbl.org>

5. Youth Culture Centre of Bitola –Macedonia www.mkcbt.org.mk

6. Centro di Servizi per il Volontariato della provincia di Varese CESVOV – Italy www.cesvov.it

work and with the support of its partners, Beyond Barriers Association has become the only place where there is now a solid and well-constructed volunteer infrastructure. LVS is a bridge that connects young people who want to volunteer with organisations and institutions that need volunteers in their activities.

The aim of the centre is to promote volunteer work as an added value to society and focus on the promotion of inclusion and active participation of youngsters, with special regards to disabled people. LVS operates as a programme inside BBA and is being run by its paid and volunteer staff members. The LVS–Tirana offers the opportunity to all young people from the city and the surroundings to join by registering in their offices, thus they become part of the offline database that serves to collect information about volunteers and match them with vacancies.

LVS has 20 partner organisations/institutions that host volunteers, after they are trained by the centre on the concept of volunteering, its values and practices, the obligations and the responsibilities of volunteers and those that host them. At the same time LVS promotes capacity building of the partners by training their staff on how to manage volunteers and volunteering programmes.

The structure is designed as a horizontal hierarchy. The volunteers are constantly monitored by the LVS, despite the supervision and support they receive from the CSOs where they are based. Each volunteer, once registered for a long-term project (2-5 months), is given a volunteer passport from the LVS centre.

Importantly, the LVS currently promotes volunteering mainly to young people aged 16-30 years old. There is still a big gap in the understanding of volunteering from older ages, thus volunteering in Albania is still considered as a service for, with and through young people.

2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

As previously stated, as a result of the past there often derives a lack of interest and activation of people in volunteering activity. Moreover, from focus groups with young people in highschoools in Tirana, it was found that the school curriculum at a national level includes the subject of Civic Education. Here pupils have to do “community work” that is in most cases promoted as “volunteer work”, for which they are granted credits. This is actually another mandatory form of community work, which mostly confuses youngsters and gives true volunteer work less credibility. Tirana schools mostly apply the system by collaborating with the Red Cross Albania, who takes classes off school premises in organised activities, such as cleaning actions, blood donation actions, promotion campaigns, where they have to perform this so called “volunteer work”.



This phenomenon clouds understanding of what real volunteer work means and how is it performed. If you ask young people if they have ever carried out volunteer work, they will say yes. But if you then explain that volunteering is an action of free will and free of charge in the benefit of the community, they get puzzled and realise that what they do in school does not comply exactly with the concept of volunteering.

There is no specific and trustable data about how many people volunteer in Albania.

No definition of volunteering

No commonly agreed upon definition of volunteering exists in Albania. The definition most widely used and consulted is in the Draft Law of Volunteering that is described below, but which is not an official version yet, as long as the Law has not reached Parliament.

Lack of statistics about volunteering

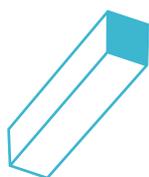
There is no specific and trustable data about how many people volunteer in Albania. Referring to a report⁷ published by the United Nations Volunteers, with the data of CIVICUS Civil Society Index of 2009 for Albania, there is no data at all about members of CSOs, people that take part in collective community action or people that volunteer. While the World Value Survey 1999-2004 shows there is no data on people volunteering, there is an estimation that 54.1% of the population in Albania volunteers with at least one organisation and 67.4% of the population of Albania are members of at least one organisation.

Last records from the Institute of Statistics of Albania

By the end of 2011, INSTAT⁸ published a study⁹ about the use of time in Albania during 2010-2011. This publication estimates in terms of average time per week: Females aged 10-14 perform 0 minutes of volunteer work and help, while males perform 3 minutes. Females aged 15-65 years old do volunteer work and help for 1 minute and males about 2 minutes. Females over 65 carry out 3 minutes of voluntary work and males of that age carry out 5 minutes. These data show that Albanians do almost no volunteer work at all during their life, but it also suggests that males dedicate a little more effort to volunteering than females. The relevance of the data is however uncertain, given the blurred perception of Albanians on volunteering.

Observations of the Local Volunteer Service (LSV) Tirana

On behalf of BBA and from experience in volunteer work, it can be stated that those who are mainly interested in volunteer work are young people aged 16-28 years old. LVS Tirana has conducted small focus group surveys on the volunteering behaviours of youngsters of 6 High schools in Tirana where 2024 pupils voluntarily filled out a questionnaire. According to the cross-analysed data so far, the main fields of interest in volunteering are: helping people in need (38% of the cases) and participation in raising awareness campaigns (41% of cases) and environmental campaigns in (41% of the cases). The results of this research will be published by BBA in 2012, both in English and Albanian. So far, girls appear more likely to volunteer and they prefer volunteering activities that include working with children, disabled young people and awareness raising campaigns. This was also visible during 2011 amongst the LVS volunteers (around 400 volunteers placed in short and long term projects).



7. UNV, 2009, Understanding Volunteerism for Development in South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Lessons for Expansion; Page 43.

8. Institute of Statistics www.instat.gov.al

9. Instituti i Statistikes, Dhjetor 2010; Shqipëria-Perdorimi i Kohes se lire 2010-2011; page 39

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Volunteering in the Existing Legislation

During the post-communism period and continuing to today, there is no legal framework for volunteering in Albania. With the emerging democracy, and desire to become closer to European Union regulations, the first 10 years after communism brought meaningful changes in the legal framework of Albania, though almost completely leaving out volunteer work, as seen as separate.

Only after the communist collapse did CSOs start to emerge in Albania, and take action in playing an important role in community life. As a result numerous CSOs registered and the number continually increased. Their main fields of work were democracy, human rights work, participation etc. Nowadays many CSOs still exist, but others ceased functioning because of lack of funding, not forgetting that they mainly run on foreign donations.

If we consider the whole legal infrastructure developed significantly after 1990 and with the new Albanian Constitution of 1998, volunteering was only indirectly mentioned in the Law on Non-Profit Organisations¹⁰. Volunteering is seen and considered inside any activity that supports and develops individual and the societal spiritual values and other human values, protects the life of people and health, secures and realises public and social services, helps and supports in case of disasters, protects the environment, develops culture and education, supports and develops values and cultural/historical traditions, as well as supports in the development of science, education etc. This Law never explicitly mentions the word volunteering.

The other Law that treats the issue of volunteerism is the Law on Civil Emergencies¹¹ where in Article 24 of this Law, headlined as Volunteer Service, it is stated:

Volunteering services are organised for supporting civil emergencies

1. A volunteer can be any Albanian Citizen over 18 years old, who has undertaken education and has been basically trained to respond to situations of emergency, or that accepts to participate voluntarily in order to support civil emergency situations.
2. Foreign citizens are accepted as volunteers in order to support civil emergencies.
3. The individuals that voluntarily accept to take part in the rescue operations have these rights:
 - Their working place must be maintained
 - Get the full salary from the employer, even if in the private sector.
 - In case of accidents or loss of life during the activity of civil emergency, they benefit from a pension of invalidity, according to the dispositions in force.

The new Draft Law on Volunteering

For the last 10 year there have been attempts to draft a law on volunteering in Albania, but for different reasons they have never emerged. The last initiative was taken at the end of 2010 by a group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) under the umbrella name of the Albanian

10. Article 2 of the Law nr.8788, date 7/5/2002 "Law on Not -Profit Organisations" where its stated "Activities for the benefit and interest of the public".

11. http://www.minfin.gov.al/minfin/pub/1_i_g_j_nr_8756_date_26_03_2001_per_emergjencat_civile_84_1.pdf (cited 20 February 2012)

Youth Council¹². Beyond Barriers Association got involved in the process and during the whole of 2011 played a crucial role in drafting the Law. Several round tables were held and facilitated with the participation of different stakeholders. The consultation process on the Law has been transparent and opened to all CSOs and young people and/or other parties interested to follow and contribute. Experts in volunteering issues and laws from Bosnia Herzegovina and Macedonia were consulted during the process as well.

The final Draft Law on Volunteering was proposed to the state authorities on 5 December 2011 on *International Volunteer Day*. The Law was welcomed by the authorities such as: Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports; Ministry of Labour and Social Issues; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Education and Science, and Ministry of Justice. However, there has been no official announcement given by the authorities about the Law or about if and when it will be brought to Parliament.

This is the first step for Albania towards having legal recognition of volunteer work and the CSOs involved think that this Law could help a great deal in changing the mentality of people about volunteering values and volunteer work, and moreover create a valid infrastructure that would hopefully be supported from the state and other stakeholder in the future as well.

Under this Draft Law, volunteering is defined as in Article 3/c: *Volunteering is considered the investment of personal time, effort, abilities and knowledge of one individual in activities or services from which the community or other individuals will benefit.* Volunteering should be performed according to this Law and it cannot include any kind of payment or reward, besides when the Law defines differently.

The other Articles of the Law define the obligations and responsibilities of the parties involved, the volunteer and volunteer organisations, contractual obligations and all the other regulations in order to protect the status of volunteers and regulate the process in a fair way for all parties involved. The Draft Law was adapted to country specificities in order to make it more realisable, but the Croatian Law on Volunteering was referred to as the best example in the Balkans.

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

Most CSOs in Albania include volunteers in their work. They are included either as volunteer staff working in associations or as volunteers in local/national activities, campaigns, actions etc. Several organisations also work in promoting volunteering, though there are no visible or collaborative actions to be mentioned.

In general, there is no meaningful cooperation amongst the civil society sector and one of the significant reasons is the lack of funds in the country and the competition this generates.

Volunteering is considered the investment of personal time, effort, abilities and knowledge of one individual in activities or services from which the community or other individuals will benefit.

12. The Albanian Youth Council is a non profit youth organization, an umbrella NGO and its activity extends across all the Albanian territory. This national organization was created in 1994 to serve at local and national youth organizations, namely youth, and to mediate the relationship between youth and the state. On November 9, 2010, after two years of not being active 34 youth NGOs gathered in a meeting and organized the General Assembly, to reactivate the Albanian Youth Council. Now there are 38 Youth NGOs member and 2 Youth NGOs observer. <http://www.keshillirinor.al>

5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

In terms of the administration, the entities that involve volunteers are municipalities of some of the cities in Albania. The municipality of Tirana has a body called The network of volunteers of the municipality of Tirana that usually gets involved in different activities organised by the municipality. However, among the citizens of the city they are not very well known, and this group does not interact very much with the other networks of volunteers of the civil society organisations.

As for the business sector, we can say with certainty that they do not involve or promote volunteering yet. Occasionally, some organisations, such as banks and mobile phone companies, organise daily actions in terms of corporate responsibility. However, the general public still perceives their actions as a means of self-promotion, rather than as volunteering actions.

On the other hand, political parties promote the involvement of young people in their public campaigns. Most of the time these youngsters, the so-called volunteers of the political parties, are the “decoration” of their political movements or campaigns in order to ensure massive actions or media scoops.

6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Civil society organisations, as the main actor of promoting volunteer work and involving volunteers, are mostly funded by international donor organisations.

No special national funding of volunteering exists, but projects that include volunteering are sometimes funded by several grants at the state level.

7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

There is no concrete and systematic research as yet in Albania.

8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

There are no ethical and quality standards on volunteering at the national level in Albania. Organisation that involve volunteers have their own code of conduct and they also follow different ethics or quality standards.

Ethics and quality standards provisions have been included in the proposal for a Draft Law on Volunteering, which have to be assured after the approval and implementation of the Law.



9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

As mentioned previously, awareness of volunteering in Albania is not sufficient. Strengthening volunteering infrastructure in the country is necessary, in order to further articulate its function of volunteering promotion and awareness raise.

10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

All country specificities have been outlined above.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

A clear definition of volunteering needs to be unanimously decided upon and promoted in Albania, to reduce confusion amongst young people, and work towards changing the negative perceptions that older generations have of volunteering.

Volunteering infrastructure in Albania needs more consistent and reliable support at all levels, from legislation to local volunteer centres, in order to create an enabling environment for volunteering in the country.

Resources

Albanian Youth Council www.keshillirinor.al

Albert Einstein Project 2003 - 2005, SEE volunteers in SEE. Available at: <http://www.hrotuzla.org.ba/publikacije/Albert%20Einsteins%20research%20document.pdf>

Information about LVS and International volunteer projects www.beyondbarriers.org

Instituti i Statistikes, Dhjetor 2010. *Shqipëri, Studim për Perdorimi i Kohës 2010-2011*. Available at: http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/tabelat/TUS_2012/Studimi%20%20.pdf

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Law nr.8788, of 7/5/2002, Law on Not -Profit Organizations. Available at: http://www.shgjsh.com/doc/baza%20ligjore/Ligj_8788_07.05.2001.pdf

Local Volunteer Service of Tirana, managed from Beyond Barriers Association www.vullnetarizmi.org

South East European Youth Network www.seeyn.org

United Nations Volunteers, 2009. *Understanding Volunteerism for Development in South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Lessons for Expansion*. Available at: <http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2010/publications/UnderstandingVolunteerism-Eastern%20Europe+CIS.pdf>

World Values Survey Association, *World Values Surveys, 1999-2004*. www.worldvaluessurvey.org