

VOLUNTEERING  
INFRASTRUCTURE IN EUROPE  
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### 1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE CONCEPT DEFINITION

In 2012, in Hungary, there was no definition of the concept of volunteering infrastructure as such. For most people it might even have sounded bizarre to refer to volunteering support mechanisms as 'infrastructure'. However one might have defined it, infrastructure was nevertheless considered essential for the development of volunteering and combined efforts from different stakeholders. There were a small number of organisations at the governmental level which dealt with volunteering infrastructure development. Volunteering was more and more a horizontal issue in Hungary, it appeared as an element in different programmes, but speaking about volunteering as a professional sector was difficult. Few organisations and professionals were fully dedicated to volunteer development or volunteer management; it was rather the case that only part of their core business was connected to volunteering. This situation continues in 2020. There are still few organisations that put volunteer development into the heart of their operation but their numbers and impact are growing.

The 2005 Hungarian Act on volunteering [\[1\]](#) defined the activity, what type of voluntary action was subject to the law, and what a volunteer was. The concept of volunteering infrastructure, as understood by the Volunteering Hungary – Önkéntes Központ Alapítvány (ÖKA) to include all elements, software and hardware, that help develop volunteering in Hungary, such as legislation, the network of volunteer centres, specific programmes, publications, knowledge and everything related.

In terms of importance and relevance, ÖKA considers that some of the key elements of volunteering infrastructure are the legal and the programme framework that may foster and enable volunteering. In 2012, the most important were considered to be the volunteer centres and specialists working there. As strange as it might have sounded to include people in the definition of infrastructure, usually understood as physical structures/premises, these professionals were the ones on which the development of the organisations and structures relied, they were the engines and fuel in these efforts. A number of other organisations support volunteering in Hungary. This had become increasingly visible in 2011 (the European Year of Volunteering), when governmental organisations, public institutions and the business sector started to engage more actively. Volunteering Hungary is still playing an important role in the development and coordination of the volunteering however for various reasons volunteering infrastructure in Hungary in 2020 no longer includes an entity which can be identified as a "National Volunteer Centre".

The overall function of the volunteering infrastructure in Hungary was volunteering development. From this perspective, ÖKA played a major role in the development of this infrastructure that was in fact one of the key aims of the organisation. Fortunately ÖKA's efforts were coupled by the work of other civil society organisations and the more and more active part that the government took in the sector. This situation continues in 2020 and is reflected in the fact that volunteering is almost universally supported and seen as a non-partisan issue.

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[\[1\] Act LXXXVIII of 2005 on Voluntary Activities in the Public Interest.](#)

Proper infrastructure has been, and is, seen as necessary, as it channels information on volunteering, whether on volunteering opportunities or management, and brings together different actors, volunteers, organisations and institutions.

This linkage should not be taken for granted, and it was not easy to bring interested parties together, and from that perspective, the catalyst role of volunteering infrastructure was, and continues to be, indispensable. Big steps have been made in terms of partnership building, and organisations working increasingly together. In the years up to 2012, a practice in that sense was starting pilot projects, so that different actors, that usually did not closely cooperate, were brought together, had greater achievements and thus experienced the benefits of working in partnership. Volunteering infrastructure was the convener for cross-sector collaboration in the years around the European year of Volunteering 2011 and this continues in 2020 although Government policies and approaches have contributed to a more disconnected system.

However, the extra motivation of specialists working in volunteer centres was, and continues to be, necessary. Most of the activities carried out are not 'profitable'; it remains an area of activity without large financial support, or significant material benefits to the employees, so specialists working in the volunteering sector in Hungary truly need to be engaged in their work with their heart and mind. It is impressive how much volunteer centres have achieved over the years in terms of activities carried out, compared to the resources used. In other words, how much they managed to deliver from insignificant budgets. Their social entrepreneurship remains key, or else these innovations would not have happened, with the little funding that was made available. It was often the case that volunteer centres needed to invest a lot of effort in starting up a service, and only in the best-case scenario could this become self-sustained through income generation. An additional trend can be seen in that public authorities request and expect services from volunteer centres that are not necessarily in line with their vision, aims and objectives. In 2020, the sector is seeing development and becoming more equipped with resources but sources of funding are often more independent from State funding.

The 'New Generation' Youth and Development programme has been created by government, funded through EU grants, but tends to fund new initiatives that replicate existing ones rather than providing additional support to those already in place.

Local authorities do not see the human resource and knowledge cost behind these efforts and often take volunteering as something that happens naturally. They have even proposed initiatives, such as starting new programmes, not understanding the costs that this implied. The situation got better and better once there was more communication and collaboration between sectors which has enhanced the understanding of each others' work. A challenge that remains is the fact that volunteer development organisations were and are far away from having a business approach when it comes to activity planning and ensuring financial sustainability. For instance, a volunteer centre might assist a business with setting-up an employee volunteering scheme, but most likely would not make a demand forecast to see if this could be developed into a service that the volunteer centre could deliver, at cost, to other businesses.

### 2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

Volunteering in Hungary is defined through the Act LXXXVIII of 2005 on Voluntary Activities in the Public Interest. According to it, volunteering is defined by principles or cumulative conditions that need to be met by an activity; namely *to be based on free will, carried out outside of one's family or circle of close friends, without remuneration or financial gain and to serve the public interest, done for a community cause and not for individual interest*. The law does not specify that volunteering has to happen in a formal setting, in connection to an organisation or through programmes of an organisation.

An interesting aspect related to the adoption of the law was the fact that organisations could choose to officially register their volunteering programmes or carry out their work outside of the scope of the law on volunteering. Any non-governmental organisation (NGO) could register if they consider it useful to do so. Registration however means that organisations would benefit from the positive aspects of the law. For instance, one of the main advantages is that all costs incurred in relation to the volunteer activity are tax-exempt. Previously, only structures that were considered to be public benefit organisations were allowed to register, but this was changed by the amendment to the law prior to 2012. In 2020, the number of registered hosting organisation according to the law: 12279

The registration is at the Ministry of Human Capacities and did not put a huge administrative burden on organisations. The process is simple and merely supposed to fill in a form and submit it to the Ministry. As a result of registering one's organisation, there was the obligation to register information on volunteers (at the organisation), in terms of number of volunteers, what type of activity they carry out and when. There was also the obligation to sign a contract with the volunteer, if applicable, depending on the type and length of the activity. Generally for activities that occurred irregularly and did not suppose any reimbursement of expenses, a volunteer contract is not required, whereas volunteering regularly for an activity for which expenses were reimbursed made signing a contract obligatory.

In 2012 there was little consistency in terms of facts and figures on volunteering in Hungary. Data was gathered differently and that naturally led to differences in figures obtained. The highest percentage was identified in representative research carried out by ÖKA in 2005, using the broadest understanding of the concept of volunteering and including everyone who performs any voluntary activity carried out in a formal or informal setting, ranging from long term voluntary engagement to preparing food for school children's activities, and taking the last year as time reference. The result of this survey was that about 40% of the adult population in Hungary was engaged in some kind of volunteering activity. At the opposite pole was a survey carried out by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal), which each year looked at NGOs that work with volunteers. According to this survey only 5% of the adult population was engaged in volunteering. According to the European Value Study, an initiative of the University of Tilburg and the GESIS Leibniz-Institute for Social Sciences, about 10.8% of Hungarian adults volunteered, with slightly more males than females volunteering. The average volunteer was married, had children, lived in an urban area, had a medium financial income and had been volunteering for a few years. This study also looked primarily at volunteering done in connection to activities of volunteer organisations

The European Year of Volunteering 2011 (EYV 2011), coinciding with the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first part of the year, represented a breakthrough for Hungary in terms of volunteering data collection. The internationally adopted methodology for volunteering measurement, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work was rolled-out and a module on voluntary work was included in the Labour Force Survey, making Hungary one of the first European countries to implement this Manual.

The common ground of the surveys on volunteering painted the profile of the average Hungarian volunteer. The data available in 2012 suggested that people aged between 30 and 40 seemed to be the most active, and people who had already started a family and had a stable income were more prone to engage in volunteering. The evidence also indicated that young people started volunteering after the age of 14 and the percentage of people who volunteer increased along with the age up to a certain point; it then decreased drastically after the age of 60. This clearly indicated that there was a lot to be done to foster senior volunteering in Hungary. In terms of gender, engagement was balanced, with slightly more men than women volunteering. Women were more visible in day-to-day volunteering activities, but the balance is tipped by the fact that more males volunteer in areas of civil protection on boards of directors. The fields that gather the highest number of volunteers were social and health care, environmental protection, religion, sport and leisure activities and culture. The choice for these fields was in line with the findings of the Hungarian Volunteer Motivation Inventory [2], which identified values, recognition, social interaction, environment, understanding and culture as the primary motivating factors behind one's decision to volunteer.

Additional data made available in 2018 showed that 30-39 year olds were the least likely to volunteer in the past year. Only 7.5% of people who did volunteer within the past year were in this age group. The age group who made up the largest share were over 60s at 27.4%, and volunteers aged 18-29 were second largest group at 20.6%. In terms of gender, women were more likely to volunteer within the past year at 57.2%, while 42.7% of the male respondents volunteered within the past year. However, the gender ratio became more equal among those who did not volunteer at all [3]. This data continues to support some aspects of past research in which women were more likely to volunteer. However, volunteers who were young and 60+ also indicate a more demographically balanced profile of Hungarian volunteers. This proves that efforts to foster senior volunteering are successful.

The perception of volunteering has changed a lot for the better in the in the ten years up until 2012. Moreover, the EYV2011 enhanced this opinion change and overall had a tremendous impact in Hungary. For many years, volunteering carried the burden of a negative image, influenced by the determination of the concept under communism, when voluntary work was obligatory, leaving question marks after the fall of communism as to why anyone would engage if it is not required. The perception changed, not entirely, but significantly. An increasing number of people in Hungary understand what volunteering is, understand that doing voluntary work is good for them and no longer see it as a sacrifice. Moreover, even people who do not do voluntary work have increasingly seen the added value in it, and considered it useful to society. A large part of the population remains passive, neither negative about volunteering, nor getting actively involved.

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[2] Bartal, Anna Mária and Kmetty, Zoltán, 2010 – "A magyar önkéntesek motivációjának vizsgálata és a Magyar Önkéntesmotivációs Kérdőív (MÖMK) sztenderdizálásának eredményei" "The examination of the motivations of volunteers in Hungary and the Hungarian Volunteer Motivation Inventory", page12

[3] ÖNKÉNTESÉG MAGYARORSZÁGON (Volunteering in Hungary, 2018 - AZ 'ÖNKÉNTESÉGGUTATÁS 2018 ELSŐ EREDMÉNYEI' [cited 15/07/2020] Pg.8

Surveys also showed that people having undergone higher education were more likely to participate in volunteer activities. This raised another challenge for the volunteering sector, namely that of reaching out to underprivileged groups, and enhancing the opportunities to volunteer for groups at risk of social exclusion.

The visible trend since at least 2012 is that volunteers are no longer just seen as people who are naive enough to work for free, and people in Hungary were now more and more eager to do voluntary work. For some groups it still remains considered a privilege; but it has become more and more accessible for all. The actual trend in Hungary identified until 2012 was that there were more people willing to engage than well-managed volunteer programmes available. This was because alongside changing public attitudes, many NGOs did not have the necessary capacity to work with higher numbers of volunteers and very often state-financed care institutions remain closed to volunteer programs. To help good programmes emerge was one of the key challenges of volunteer development agencies in 2012 and this limited volunteering management capacity was considered likely to become an issue in the long run.

Throughout 2011, there was wide media coverage for the volunteering sector and on average, more Hungarians who had access means of mass-information heard about EYV2011 or volunteer stories. The year was a success in Hungary; there was a lot of positive reflection in the media and as a result of it many people could relate to what volunteering stands for.

Later studies throughout the last decade until 2020 reflect this trend with the increasing number of volunteers in Hungary. Other notable trends in 2020 relate to: changes of state funded social and healthcare institutions is Hungary's presenting arguably the biggest challenge to volunteering in Hungary; Increased investment in the fine arts has meant that the sector has a large capacity for volunteers and most major museums also have a volunteer program. Volunteering in the cultural sector however is not viewed as tangibly as volunteering in social care and as such is less popular. New volunteer initiatives appeared during the COVID19 pandemic. District 8 in Budapest started a volunteer program helping out the local community during this period. Many district and cities have/had their own volunteer program. but probably the one in district 8 was one of the most sophisticated. The pandemic has seen an remarkable increase in interest in volunteering from Higher Education institutions and several universities have started research projects into the topic.

No extra state funding for volunteering efforts has been made available during the pandemic with the exception of a small number of networks already supported by the Government.

In 2012 every county in Hungary had a volunteer centre but in 2020 barely half of them remain due to lack of funding and other reasons. Of the remaining ones some are no longer active and all struggle with capacity. Volunteering still continues but there are few organisations remaining that are dedicated to volunteering and development of new volunteering programmes. The local affiliates of the New Generation network have all closed, as top down driven network with a different legal status than previously it now focusses on large EU projects directly channeled into government instigated actions. The Civil Houses and the Houses of Equal Opportunities (both network funded by the Government) have been allocated duties around volunteer development but it is and was never their main focus, thus their impact remains limited. Uncertainty remains for the sector and Community centres may take on a bigger role than volunteer centres due to changes in technology. A lack of funding has resulted in a lack of growth in the sector in the decade up to 2020 but the drive to revert this trend from within the sector continues. Technological develops will also lead to new ways of volunteering and new opportunities.

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

The Hungarian Parliament adopted the Act LXXXVIII on Voluntary Activities in the Public Interest in 2005. The process of developing the law was a lengthy one, starting in 2000, under the initiative of civil society organisations and in connection to the International Year of Volunteers 2001. The Volunteering Hungary ÖKA coordinated the efforts which put together the first draft of a law on volunteering, having worked together with a group of experts. The initial approach was to identify laws that impact on volunteering and modify them to frame volunteering and to become enabling for the volunteering sector. The strategy eventually changed, in line with emerging needs from the sector, and it was decided that efforts were to be concentrated on developing a special, dedicated law, which would better recognise the importance of volunteering.

In 2002, following intense lobbying from ÖKA, the Hungarian government agreed to include volunteering in their civil society strategy, having the development of a law on volunteering as a concrete action. The government gave the green light for the preparation of the law and requested civil society to coordinate, develop and submit a draft law in 2004. There was even a small budget allocated to ensure that the consultation for a law on volunteering reached out to different regions. As such, consultation meetings and debates on various aspects were held country-wide and the conclusions were fed into what became a final draft law. Civil society valued the result of this process, considered the draft to be very good, and presented it to the Government.

To the surprise of civil society organisations, the Ministry of Social Affairs had, in parallel, instructed their legal department to develop a law on volunteering. Given the in-house development process, the draft prepared by the department was less in line with the needs of the volunteering sector and negatively perceived. A debate on the changes to be made to the draft law then followed, with the legal department of the then Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment as actors. Negotiations that continued with political parties in Parliament resulted in a final draft law which was satisfactory for all parties. Civil society felt ownership over the law and was proud of the achievement, having been one of the few laws initiated by NGOs in Hungary.

The impact of the law was tremendous. It was the moment when the government started to take volunteering seriously. Volunteering essentially passed from being a nice idea to being a topic on the Hungarian policy agenda only after this law was adopted. Following the development of the law on volunteering, the contact between governmental and nongovernmental counterparts has continued to be fluent up until 2012, when, in Hungary there were two ministries that dealt with volunteering, namely within the Ministry of National Resources, the State Secretariat for Social Affairs, Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, which had a few personnel dealing directly with volunteering, and indirectly within the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration, State Secretariat for the Church, Minorities, Non-Governmental Relations and Civil Society. The coordination of activities during EYV2011 was the task of the Civil Society Department. However, after the conclusion of the European Year, it no longer dealt with volunteering.

The fact that there was no single entry point for volunteering policy in the Hungarian government at times posed difficulties. However the Volunteering Hungary was in contact with both government representative bodies. At the time, a new legislative provision was adopted, having the aim of regulating the strategic cooperation between NGOs and ministries. According to this law, governments could propose and sign a cooperation contract/agreement with the NGOs concerned, in the policy area of interest. These contracts define operating procedures for how to keep in touch, how quickly to answer each others' queries, and when to keep each other informed (e.g. the ministry is obliged to inform the NGO on legislative initiatives that influence the NGO's area of work). As previously explained, organisations that wished to be considered under the law and benefit from its stipulations, had to officially register their volunteering programmes. Registration was therefore not mandatory if the organisation decides that working under the law does not add value to their activity, but becomes obligatory if the organisation wished to be exempt from taxes for reimbursements of the costs incurred by the volunteers.

According to the law in Hungary, a volunteer may be a person with legal capacity, a person with restricted legal capacity or a minor older than 10 years of age (and therefore without legal capacity), with a note that the latter, may not carry out volunteer activities between 8 pm and 6 am. Unlike in other European countries, refugees or persons in a refugee-like situation could carry out volunteer activities in an organised framework if a number of conditions were met by the host organisation, such as liability and health insurance coverage. The law had specific provisions to ensure that there are no restrictions in terms of engaging in volunteer activities for people receiving social benefits, in the sense that carrying out volunteer activities did not lead to the loss of social service benefits, such as unemployment, disability allowance or pensions.

The law also described what secure relationships between a volunteer and a host organisation should look like and gave basic guidance to organisations on how to run their volunteer programmes well. Being far from sufficient volunteer management, the guidance given is useful and encourages organisations to respect principles that ultimately contribute to the quality of their volunteer programmes.

The Act LXXXVIII of 2005 on Public Interest Volunteer Activities did not concern volunteer blood donations, volunteering in fire brigades, in civil or wildlife protection. These activities were subject to other, specific legislation.

When creating the law there had been big debates concerning the Public benefit/non public benefit scope of the law. The review of the law concluded that it was focused on initiatives of public benefit only, but it couldn't exclude others and the regulation is now open for any NGO and anyone can host volunteers. In 2020 it is reported that 12279 organisations want to work under this law even hospitals and government institutions and 70,000 NGOs are registered in Hungary. There are ongoing discussions if the law should change. The National council on volunteering is normally in place to consult and propose different topics to the ministry or state secretary and regulations are crucial to frameworks and areas that are not regulated are a grey area. Before this law, and a less crucial interest in the Hungarian Public and the law meant that they took this issue much more seriously.



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

Volunteering Hungary, Önkéntes Központ Alapítvány (ÖKA) was set up in 2002 in the capital city of Budapest, as an independent, non-governmental organisation.

In 2012, ÖKA was managing a growing, country-wide network of regional volunteer centres. Hungary has 19 counties and regional volunteer centres had been set up in all of them. It is noted in Hungary that regulation is very important for the running of volunteer operations in Hungary. When grey areas do pop up, it was harder to operate volunteering organisations and initiatives. The exception of one, where there was no volunteer centre per se, but an organisation that fulfils the function of a volunteer centre. The network coordinated by ÖKA expressed the long term commitment of working together. In 2012 it only included 10 of the regional volunteer centres, but good cooperation characterised the relationship between all of them.

Before 2012, ÖKA started to provide capacity building programmes for organisations in cities outside the capital. Centres on the other hand had a more complex activity, fulfilling additional functions. They were veritable regional hubs for volunteering, having as functions: providing information on volunteering, consultancy, matching volunteer supply and demand, training and capacity building, advocacy and lobbying with authorities, promotion and recognition of volunteering.

The collaboration between volunteer centres in Hungary was further reinforced through the framework given by the Önindító (Self Starter) Programme. This two year programme, running between 2009 and 2011, funded by the European Union [4], provided great support to set-up and strengthen volunteer centres with the coordination of ÖKA. A new phase of this grant was published at the beginning of 2012 with particular attention given to the development of volunteer points and volunteer centres in the smaller cities, towns and rural areas. The role of volunteer points was to organise volunteer activities and manage the supply of and demand of volunteers.

In 2012, the fact that the Önindító Programme funding stream had ended [5] raised concerns in the volunteering sector. However the second phase of the programme was aimed to support volunteer points, and had as an overall outcome, the strengthening of volunteer infrastructure in Hungary. Its framework raised a big debate because organisations previously funded (Volunteer Centres) were not eligible to apply for a grant in the second phase of the programme. Newcomer organisations could apply, so many new volunteer programmes could start up, but Volunteer Centres probably did not have the necessary capacity to deal with them. In 2020 there are only a few VC organisations that purely work on volunteer development but in the same time many organisations promote and organise programs around volunteering.

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[4] The European Social Fund.

[5] There were six projects still running under this programme in 2012, because there were administrative delays in initiating them

In 2012, ÖKA acted as countrywide coordinator, the organisation that gathers people, organisations and institutions with interest in volunteering, and that together with its network and collaborators carried out consultations, surveys and research, provides the platform for experience sharing, is the volunteering knowledge catalyst and works directly on strengthening volunteer infrastructure in Hungary.

In addition to the network of volunteer centres, there were national, sector specific networks that promote volunteering. An example was a national network of youth service, coordinated by the Foundation for Democratic Youth, Demokratikus Ifjúságért Alapítvány (DIA). There was also the intention of developing a national network of volunteering in hospitals and health care programmes.

Non-profit sector research [6] published shortly after the fall of communism in Hungary reflected the fact that 'early examples of non-profit organisations in Hungary employed very few staff and were mostly run by volunteers'. Most of the NGOs in Hungary still relied greatly on volunteers. A different study [7] showed that the proportion of volunteers in the total human resources in the non-profit sector was 81% in the case of advocacy organisations and of 92% in classic civil organisations, associations and foundations.

The biggest volunteer involving organisations in the country were most likely relief organisations; Hungarian branches of well reputed international organisations such as the Red Cross or Maltesers International, which were present nation-wide. For instance, Magyar Vöröskereszt, the Hungarian Red Cross [8] in 2012 counted 30,000 local volunteers; another big volunteer-involving organisation was the Hungarian Malteser Charity Service (Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat), as of 2014, engaged 5000 regular volunteers and 15000 who volunteer on a casual basis.

In 2020 the non-profit sector in Hungary is less unified that can at least partly be attributed to uneven funding in different areas. Another visible trend during the last 2 decades is a general lack of capacity in a sector that is dominated by small organisations even though "big players" work professionally with volunteers with their own systems. Funding ear-marked for the non-profit sector has been invested into a variety of projects but not all were volunteer-based or volunteer-involving. In some cases, the government also took these initiatives concerning new funding streams without sector consultation and independently from ÖKA which meant that there were two separate dialogues regarding the development of volunteering in Hungary. It can also be noted that in the past two decades, many volunteering organisations were small and lacked the capacity to include lots of volunteers and large scale projects. Nevertheless, it can be clearly seen that the sector grew within this structure. A renewed interest in this sector would help to push it to even greater growth in the years and decades to come. Fortunately there are more and more organisations and institutions that run professionally coordinated volunteer programs that is the essential element of the future growth.

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[6] Kuti, Éva, 1993 - "Defining the Nonprofit Sector: Hungary", page 2

[7] Nagy, Renáta and Sebestény, István, 2009 - "Methodological Practice and Practical Methodology: Fifteen Years in Nonprofit Statistics." Hungarian Statistical Review, Special Number 12, page 130

[8] <http://www.redcross-eu.net/en/Red-Cross-EU-Office/EU-NATIONAL-RED-CROSS-SOCIETIES/Hungarian-Red-Cross/>

### 5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Cross-sector cooperation is an increasingly prominent feature of the Hungarian volunteering landscape. The lead in developing programmes and policy still remained within civil society; however the government took an active part in supporting and developing volunteer programmes.

Between 2005 and 2010 there was a state-financed programme for long term unemployed youth, developed in coordination of the Volunteering Hungary, called ÖTLET Programme. Within the framework of this programme, young people who had been unemployed for extended periods of time, had the opportunity to do up to 10 months of voluntary service with a NGO, local authority or institution. Despite the criticism against the scheme, seen as a kind of alternative to employment, ÖTLET provided young people with an excellent opportunity to gain experience. The evaluation of this programme showed that it contributed to the employability of the young people who participated in it, as most of them eventually got employed. As part of this programme, ÖKA provided training to both the young volunteers and to the volunteer involving organisations.

An organisation previously mentioned, DIA, set up a National Youth Service Network Programme called KöZöD!<sup>[9]</sup>, an initiative aimed at providing young people aged 14 to 25 the opportunity to organise community based volunteer activities, offering them a small grant scheme and technical support to develop the activity.

Since at least 2012, and until 2020, it can be seen that companies become increasingly interested in collaborating with the voluntary sector and in engaging their employees in volunteer activities. In fact, it was usually companies that initiated contact with volunteer centres. This trend has continued and in 2020 8% of companies in Hungary had volunteering programs, especially concentrated in the multi-national companies located in the Capital region. However, their approach and motivation was different to the volunteer organisations', being very interested in promoting their brands, enhancing their visibility and keeping their employees happy and loyal to the company. There were therefore grounds for cooperation both for the development of employee volunteering programmes and for specific volunteer projects, as part of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of companies. The increased volunteering awareness, brought about by the EYV2011, led certain companies and banks to make calls for small grants for community volunteer programmes. Although these grants were used by businesses primarily for promotion purposes, tapping into the popularity of volunteering, they were of value added as unlike large European grant schemes, they reached small, community-based initiatives. There had been a steady growth in the sector before the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 and interested has expanded beyond CSR concerns and now also encompasses a Human Resources (HR) development remit.

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[9] <http://english-dia.blogspot.com/p/dias-programmes.html>

Political parties in Hungary did not have volunteering as such on their agenda; they placed voluntary activity under larger frameworks such as community participation, engagement or democracy.

For some political parties volunteers were a possible resource. In fact some political parties were launching calls for volunteers to support their activities, being a matter of choice and a reflection of their political positioning whether they call for 'volunteers' or for 'activists'.

According to a National Public Education regulation from 2012, each and every secondary school student would have to do at least 50 hours of community service before concluding secondary school. No secondary school graduation certificate would be issued without proof that the community service was carried out [10]. Given its obligatory character, despite being done for public benefit, this service was not called volunteering. However, the voluntary sector was asked to step in and assist with the management of the community service and with identifying activities that can be done by the students. The extent of volunteer centre involvement would be determined by the closeness of the collaboration thus far between schools and the volunteer centre in respective communities. Generally there was still resistance from formal education structures to approaching volunteer centres for extra-curricular activities and there were usually NGOs that tried to break the barriers and propose models of cooperation.

Universities were also, slowly but surely, opening up to collaborating with volunteer centres. University students were not among the most active population group, most likely due to the absence of a suitable framework; however changes were starting to happen. Budapest based students, such as those attending the University of Technology and Economics were becoming more engaged and some university departments were starting to recognise volunteer activity as eligible for receiving credits [11]. It was noted in 2012 that voluntary activity was starting to be mentioned in curricula vitae, being considered as a sign of social commitment and additional skills. In 2020 there is a continued and visible trend among university students to undertake some volunteering activities. The project "Amigos" is a well known example of this and is a Graduate-founded organisation that spends time with sick children in Hospitals. The popularity of this organisation among students is high and it is very well known in Hungary.

## 6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2012, Government and European Union programmes were the larger sources of funding for volunteering in Hungary. One of the positives of these funding frameworks was that their programmatic, conceptual design was done in full awareness of the concept of volunteering. Moreover, not only did funding for volunteering get directed through dedicated streams,

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[10] [https://ofi.oh.gov.hu/sites/default/files/attachments/school\\_community\\_service\\_in\\_hungary\\_28.07.2016hs.pptx](https://ofi.oh.gov.hu/sites/default/files/attachments/school_community_service_in_hungary_28.07.2016hs.pptx)

[11] Under the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

but it is also the case that a volunteering element was included in other, more generic programmes aimed at strengthening civil society or developing different social services. Volunteering development was a cross-cutting element of different programmes, not as prominent as environmental impact or equal opportunities, but as a clearly defined horizontal necessity. In some programmes for instance, volunteering promotion and engaging volunteers are not required, but constituted advantages in the evaluation of project grant proposals.

In 2012, funding opportunities presented themselves mainly through calls for proposals on concrete projects. There was the opportunity for organisations to request operational support grants through the National Civil Fund, established through Law No. 50 on the National Civil Fund of 2003 [12], with the aim of strengthening the operation of civil society organisations and the development of the third sector through grant supports. The voluntary sector was not specifically singled out, but volunteer organisations were eligible to apply and there was also provision for covering direct costs incurred by volunteers on activities, such as travel expenses.

The negative aspect in the nature of the source of funding was the fact that, particularly in the context of the budgetary cuts, these sources were not stable. An enhanced partnership with the business sector could be one of the pathways to financial stability. However outside of the capital city of Budapest, businesses were often not community oriented enough to engage easily with voluntary sector projects. Reaching out to the business sector was not easy. Nor was it easy for companies to pick and choose organisations to partner. From this point of view, the Volunteering Hungary was privileged; because of its visibility companies did approach it. Partnership with the business sector were however a continuous investment of energy. There was the pressure of needing to identify new types of innovative cooperation. It is a very positive trend that more and more organisations create partnerships with businesses. In 2020 such cooperation have many forms and often there is a volunteering or pro bono element in these partnerships and the new National Volunteering Strategy who's preparation is coordinated by ÖKA

Volunteer organisations tried to maintain their funding sources by writing project grant applications and lobbying for volunteering to be mainstreamed and included in other programmes. The set-up of the Önindító Volunteer Centre Development Programme was a concrete example of these lobbying efforts leading to a successful programme. However, a lack of investment discontinued the project. Despite this, public support remains high to propose projects like this in future. It is hoped that the National Year of Volunteering in 2021 will serve as a catalyst for new innovation in this field.

The National Civil Fund has been changed to be the National Cooperation Fund, which roughly gives 3000 Euros to small NGOs. These funds often go into the running costs and organisations tend to rely on this grant in 2020. However, organisations with a budget of over 2000 Euros may not apply. In 2018, the government announced it would give out 1.5 billion Hungarian Forint or roughly 4.25 million Euros to NGOs [13]. However, international funds for volunteering are more limited and rely heavily on private donors. Nevertheless, while there is not a lot of funding, it is not a severely underfunded sector.

[12] [http://www.nca.hu/?page=webtext/show&wte\\_code=english](http://www.nca.hu/?page=webtext/show&wte_code=english) From 2012 on it functions as National Cooperation Fund.

[13] <https://dailynewshungary.com/national-cooperation-fund-disburse-huf-1-5-bn-among-civil-organisations-2018/>

In 2020, many of the EU funds run directly into projects which are managed by the government and are more focused on aiming to generate direct economic development rather than initiatives with a more community development focus. Therefore the ÖKA has taken a more independent role in fostering projects, rather than being a National Centre of Volunteering.

### 7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

As mentioned above in the 'Volunteering landscape' section, in Hungary there were different surveys using different methodologies and reflecting different realities. Volunteering and non-profit sector research was carried out by the Volunteering Hungary, by other civil society organisations, as well as by the Central Statistical Office.

The most promising aspect was the implementation of the ILO Manual for the Measurement of Volunteer Work during EYV2011. Following the methodology of this Manual, a volunteer work module was added to the labour force survey in the third quarter of 2011. The aim of the survey was to capture the frequency, rate and characteristics of volunteer work in Hungary. Its target population was aged 15 to 74 and the reference period was the previous 12 months. The results of the survey were released by the Central Statistical Office in the course of 2012 and showed that 30-39 year olds were the most likely to volunteer. The breakthrough with this survey was that it would likely mean that volunteering in Hungary would be surveyed regularly. There was a proposal to implement a volunteering survey every second year, and the data obtained in Hungary, by having followed internationally agreed methodology, will be comparable with statistics on volunteering in other countries. Data on volunteering would be an efficient way to both design programmes that better address the reality in the sector, and to raise policy makers' awareness and public opinion on the value that volunteering brings to our societies and economies.

In this respect further surveys were carried out and in 2018 that showed that 30-39 year olds were the least likely to volunteer in the past year indicating a change on the data gathered in 2011. This research is continuously being carried out to obtain a profile of Hungary's volunteers. Data has been collected consistently for the past decade by CSOs being guided by the ILO Manual on the Measurement of the Economic Value of Volunteering. Such data illustrates who in Hungary volunteers and where they live. The four regions the report analyses are Budapest, Megyeszékhely, Egyéb város and Község, tanya (**Pg.10**). This gives a nationwide report on volunteers not just in the County Capital region but also in other cities and villages in the rest of the country. Statistically, respondents from Budapest were the least likely to volunteer at 11.3%. Egyéb város on the other hand has the highest percentage of respondents at 34.4%. Every third year, individual research on volunteering is included in labour statistics and increased research on volunteering has been a concrete outcome of the national volunteering strategy.

[9] <http://english-dia.blogspot.com/p/dias-programmes.html>

[32] European Volunteer Centre (2009), *European Elections Manifesto Do you engage for those who engage?* Brussels: CEV.

### 8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

In 2012 there was no specific volunteering quality framework in Hungary. This however did not prevent organisations that involved volunteers to seek to always improve their programmes. Volunteer management training and capacity building remains one of the core functions of volunteer centres.

The Government took the initiative to work on developing an ethical code for volunteering and through pilot projects, to initiate the development of quality standards for volunteering. The result of these efforts might prove useful in the future. Yet it has to be stressed that the absence of these instruments did not significantly hamper the development of volunteering in Hungary. The absence of such standards did not mean that quality was not a feature of many volunteer programmes.

In fact by the assessment of ÖKA, through training the quality of programmes has been constantly increasing; continuous work has led to even further improvement and having formalised standards could, in principle, not add value but instead suppose a significant time, financial and human resources cost. The need for such standards was more likely to come up in specific activity sectors. For instance, organisations that managed hospital medical care volunteer programmes, by the nature of their work, were keener to have volunteering quality standards put in place. The Volunteer Centre Network developed an internal quality standard system for volunteer centres, invested a lot of resources in it and faced challenges in meeting the needed capacity to run this system.

The main focus of the Hungarian Year Volunteering in 2021 is on the quality of volunteer programs. Organisers want to achieve a significant change in the number but mainly the quality performance of volunteer programs.

### 9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2012, awareness was created through a nation-wide database of volunteers and volunteer opportunities. This database was hosted on a Web Portal on volunteering ([www.onkentes.hu](http://www.onkentes.hu)) administered by Volunteering Hungary, with administration shared with the regional volunteer centres. Each regional volunteer centre had administrator rights for data in its area of responsibility, in order to properly manage and keep up to date the information on organisations and volunteer opportunities in the county. Volunteers could search for opportunities, create a profile and develop a filter for notifications on volunteer opportunities to be emailed to them based on availability and interest criteria selected. A smart search engine was used to support the portal, to which thousands of people and organisations signed up.

Information on volunteer opportunities was also and continues to be disseminated by volunteer centres and volunteer points through information campaigns or individual consultations. Practice showed that the decision to volunteer for an organisation in particular was also made based on recommendations and information passed by word of mouth.

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[9] <http://english-dia.blogspot.com/p/dias-programmes.html>

[32] European Volunteer Centre (2009). *European Elections Manifesto Do you engage for those who engage?* Brussels: CEV.

Volunteering is also promoted through high visibility events, usually organised to mark the Hungarian Volunteer Day, celebrated on the 1st Saturday of June or International Volunteer Day on the 5th December. On the occasion of the former, Volunteer Awards are given in a ceremony that aimed at publicly recognising the contributions of volunteers in Hungary. Most NGO websites have a section on volunteers and their social media channels are well used and people share this information around. Volunteering, in general, in 2020 is visible in the media in Hungary and is well promoted on radio, TV etc. For example, a popular Magazine for Women, each week always features a volunteer or community initiative and Forbes also includes a Volunteering aspect each month.

Media coverage during the EYV2011 featured volunteer stories and related information throughout the year. The wide coverage was not easy to maintain, for the media is always interested in sensational stories, in reports that represented news or that have a unique element. In 2012 there was a saturation of public information on the theme; however, the connection with the media continued to be good.

Additional channels of volunteer promotion and information dissemination were schools, organisations and companies, either through specific campaigns or through targeted, tailored information, upon request.

Volunteering promotion had results. As previously mentioned more and more people were interested in volunteering. The challenge came from the limited capacity to place volunteers expressing interest in volunteering, and to effectively manage volunteers.

OKA has been investing a lot of time in developing a volunteering matching database but on very limited resources and maybe the ambition is out of scope for a small country such as Hungary. Ultimately, taking into account that it requires lots of resources and not in the Hungarian interest, OKA has discontinued this area or activities. New Generation also has been developing a database but it is not well used and this could be due to that fact that social media channels and accounts already advertise many volunteer opportunities and people looking to volunteer see them there and don't need to go elsewhere.

### 10.ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

One of the strengths in the Hungarian law on volunteering was in its provisions that specifically look at ensuring that volunteering was compatible with the receipt of social benefits such as unemployment. Other laws took this aspect further however, into a greyer area. If a person was unemployed for a long time, the state considered that they must return something to the community and show their readiness to contribute to the community and prove their readiness to work. As such, long term unemployed people need to serve for 30 days a year in the community, and failing to do so would have as a consequence the loss of their social benefit entitlements. Whereas the state expectation for community work from people under its social benefit scheme was not unnatural, the fact that this mandatory service in particular was wrongly referred to as volunteering ran the risk of causing confusion on the concept in the public opinion. This concern was raised by the volunteering sector. However the government continued to call it volunteering in the absence of another term.



Moreover, because of the nature of the service (community work for public benefit) volunteer centres were expected to work with local governments and employment agencies on this programme and identify placements for the 30 days of community work. At the same time it was a great opportunity for the Centres to build connections locally and for the unemployed to gain work experience, the feeling of teamwork, belonging and responsibility next to many indirect advantages.

In 2012, there was also a plan to change the Criminal Act to give the possibility to offer community work as an alternative to time spent in prison, in the case of minor offences, with the aim of building stronger communities through service and contributing to the integration of people in conflict with the law. This community work would not be called volunteering, and rightfully so. However the conceptual and practical set-up of this scheme was of interest to the voluntary sector.

Hungary was one of the countries in Europe where a Volunteer Passport system was developed and implemented. The Volunteer Passport is an instrument that allows people to keep a record of their volunteer experience, as well as document the skills they gained through volunteer work, as a pathway to the recognition of these skills. The volunteer passports are not yet widely used and as of 2020, this initiative has been discontinued in Hungary. Moreover, a handbook on skills recognition was developed in 2005. However, importantly volunteer work and qualifications or skills gained through volunteering were more and more frequently reflected by people in their CV, and highly regarded by employers.

In 2012, a National Strategy for Volunteering was underway in Hungary, and this was a policy milestone for the voluntary sector, as it reflected the commitment of the government to work together with stakeholders on volunteering development. Civil society representatives, including for instance ÖKA and Talentum Foundation, businesses, religious groups and the government, have developed the draft National Strategy for Volunteering jointly. On the 5th of December 2011, the International Day of Volunteering, the final draft of the strategy was sent for public debate, to give all interested parties the opportunity to comment on it or propose amendments. The strategy was in the phase of reviewing and its adoption set for 2012. The National Strategy for Volunteering covers the period of time from its adoption to 2020 and volunteering infrastructure was part of this strategy. In 2020, a new national strategy must be adopted for the volunteering sector. A system which is more dispersed and where funding is less stable requires reforms. The Covid-19 Pandemic has also provided challenges for volunteers in health and community services for which the outcome remains uncertain. The Hungarian Government has made continued efforts to create a framework for volunteering but the opinion from the sector is that they should limit the Governmental role to that of an enabler and leave independent NGOs to do the implementation.

The preparations of the New National Volunteer Strategy started at the end of 2020. ÖKA is in charge of the preparation that shows that there is a new cooperation thus a new area of volunteer development might be on the horizon. The strategy will be introduced by end of May 2021. The question is how much the Government will implement the actions of this document are prepared by NGO practitioners and volunteering experts from the field.

### 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2012 it was stressed that an enabling volunteering infrastructure in Hungary was impossible to achieve without an appropriate policy framework and funding support. Programmes designed by policy makers would need to concentrate on volunteering development, training, knowledge and capacity building, with particular attention given to host organisations, to enable them to manage good quality volunteering programmes was also highlighted. These programmatic priorities needed to also be translated into an increase in the financial involvement of the government in the support of volunteer development organisations. More was still to be done also in the partnership between volunteer organisations and businesses, for quality employee volunteering and projects funded under the corporate social responsibility policy of companies. In 2020 all of this is still relevant and necessary but should also be extended to gaining recognition from the government of the stakeholders involved in volunteering.

Identifying recommendations relevant for the European level was a challenging endeavour when working at the local, regional and national level. Except for the involvement in the work of the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), Hungarian volunteer organisations were, and are, situated outside of the European policy discussion. Recommendations should come as a result of a structured framework, evenly involving stakeholders at different levels and in all countries. In that sense, we recommended in 2011 that the European Commission should develop a White Paper on Volunteering in Europe.

The European Solidarity Corps and previously the European Voluntary Service (EVS), fosters and promotes volunteering and solidarity; they are invaluable and should be maintained and if possible reinforced. European programmes should regard more quality guidance, volunteering programmes and partnerships. A similar programme to the European Solidarity Corps should be developed for Adult and Senior Volunteers, beyond what the Grundtvig programme provided in the past.

Monitoring quality volunteering developments in different member states should also be a concern at the European level. Such an assessment would help EU member states to understand the needs and particularities of the sector at different levels and foster the exchange of good practices. In that sense, CEV can provide the space for knowledge sharing.

Research in the field of volunteering should be carried out at the European level. Thematic analysis and specific studies on different policy developments should be done in all EU countries and at the European level. At the moment there is hardly any reliable, comparable data on volunteering at the European level. Internationally approved methodology<sup>[1]</sup> for volunteering data collection exists, there is interest from the voluntary sector to support the process, and Eurostat should call on all EU member states to produce statistics on volunteering. Research on volunteering will bridge the gap between the voluntary sector needs and policy design. It will give clear information on the contribution of volunteering to society and the economy and overall recognise the value of volunteering.

Volunteering should also more clearly form part of the European Union policy agenda, rather than be merely integrated as a feature in different policy areas. Through this common agenda, Hungarian volunteering organisations can strengthen their network to strive for greater recognition. The Covid-19 pandemic has also posed challenges for the sector. Therefore, decisive leadership and fostering public interest in the sector must be required. [1] Given that there is clear interest from citizens in volunteering, the focus needs to be on capacity building for increased resources and improved quality.

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[1] International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2011. Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work



### Resources

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