



# SLIPStream: Service-learning in fostering youth civic engagement, diversity, and social inclusion in the CEE region

CEE Region Advocacy Actions Report - Work Package 5

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Project Information .....  | 4  |
| Introduction.....  | 5  |
| General Contexts .....   | 6  |
| Country Level actions and contexts .....   | 6  |
| Overview of Actions: .....   | 6  |
| Romania .....  | 7  |
| Country Context .....  | 7  |
| Action 1: Community of Practice event .....  | 7  |
| Action 2: Agreement signed with Ministry of Education.....   | 8  |
| Action 3: Advocacy Meeting - Outreach to practitioners.....  | 9  |
| Slovakia .....   | 10 |
| Country Context .....  | 10 |
| Action 1: Outreach to School Principals and Institutional Representatives .....  | 11 |
| Action 2: Outreach to School Principals.....   | 11 |
| Action 3: Meeting with Policy Makers .....   | 12 |
| Croatia.....   | 13 |
| Country Context .....  | 13 |
| Action 1: Strategic dialogue on Service Learning Integration - University of Rijeka ....   | 14 |
| Action 2: Meeting with representatives from the Department for Education, Culture,<br>Sports and Youth of the City of Rijeka ..... | 14 |
| Action 3: Presentation of SL during conference of Principals .....   | 15 |
| Czech Republic.....  | 16 |
| Country Context .....  | 16 |
| Action 1: Roundtable on Service Learning for Representatives of Primary and<br>Secondary Schools.....                              | 17 |
| Action 2: National Conference - Volunteering for Children 2025.....  | 17 |
| Action 3: National Association of Volunteering Conference .....  | 18 |
| Kosovo.....  | 19 |
| Country Context .....  | 19 |
| Action 1: Campaign Video .....   | 20 |
| Action 2: Public Event - Youth Festival.....   | 20 |
| Action 3: Signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with local school.....  | 21 |
| Bosnia & Herzegovina .....   | 22 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Country Context.....                                 | 22 |
| Action 1: Stakeholder Meetings .....                 | 23 |
| Action 2: BiH Service Learning Network Meeting ..... | 24 |
| Action 3: Regional Activism conference.....          | 25 |
| EU level actions .....                               | 26 |
| EU Level Advocacy Event .....                        | 26 |
| Action 2: Advocacy Plan webinar.....                 | 27 |
| Action 3: Advocacy Plan survey .....                 | 27 |
| Common messages & approaches .....                   | 29 |
| Differences in approach .....                        | 30 |
| Recommendations .....                                | 31 |
| Recommendations for Advocacy.....                    | 31 |
| Policy Recommendations - National Level.....         | 31 |
| Policy Recommendations - European Level .....        | 32 |
| Conclusion .....                                     | 32 |

# Project Information

SLIPStream has sought to foster and enhance the quality of opportunities for youth participation in democratic life and social and civic engagement in communities through the connection of formal and non-formal learning, by creating the conditions for the development of service-learning strategy in Central and Eastern European countries (CEE region). Through SLIPStream, the partners have created tools and conditions to implement service learning and to make it more inclusive.

Through the project, tools and materials were created for the Service Learning Award, which was implemented through 2024 and in 2025. Tools and guidance were created to support Service Learning implementers, including a training and quality standards for Service Learning. To support the validation of learning and reflection on competencies gained through Service Learning, an app has been created. Supporting these outputs and reinforcing the impact, advocacy training was given to ambassadors who implemented local actions according to the needs and contexts of their countries.

The project has been led by Platforma dobrovoľníckych centier a organizácií (PDCO), with funding from the Slovakia Erasmus+ National Agency. The project has brought together partners from across Europe, including:

- TOKA (Kosovo)
- Národní asociace dobrovolnictví (Czech Republic)
- SMART (Croatia)
- MIOS (Bosnia & Herzegovina)
- New Horizons Foundation (Romania)
- Centre for European Volunteering (Belgium)

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# Introduction

This publication brings together the analysis and advocacy regarding Service Learning, implemented by the partners in their local, regional, and national communities, in 6 European countries and at the EU-wide level.

The actions began with a training session in Brussels, November 2024, bringing together people from different backgrounds who were engaged in Service Learning from each partner country. The training aimed to provide guidance and tools for future advocacy in the partner countries, as well as giving space for the exchange of ideas and discussion, empowering participants to act as Service Learning Ambassadors in their local communities, working closely with their partner organisations.

To lay the groundwork for this targeted advocacy, ambassadors and partners first performed an analysis of their specific context, highlighting some of the main issues, barriers, and avenues for advocacy for Service Learning in their communities. This was followed by the implementation of multiple advocacy actions in each partner country, generating positive interest in SL, highlighting avenues for stakeholders to engage with Service Learning, and reinforcing awareness of Service Learning and its benefits for schools, youth, and communities.

When viewed all together, the results of the various advocacy actions, and the different country-level context analyses, there are clear commonalities both in terms of opportunities and barriers for SL advocacy & implementation. This publication aims to highlight these commonalities and the key messages stemming from the advocacy actions across the region, while providing recommendations for stakeholders to strengthen SL advocacy.

## General Contexts

In general, there are unsurprisingly a lot of common challenges facing Service Learning in the region, primarily stemming from a lack of awareness and understanding of Service Learning and its benefits, and particularly among teachers & parents. Much of the efforts currently are led from the ground-up though there is a varying level of cooperation and prioritisation of the topic from governments at the national and local levels. In the most successful cases, there is the chance to embed it into a national strategy, while in others there is no legislative recognition of SL, however, in both cases it's clear that NGOs and to some extent schools are leading the efforts in terms of advocacy and implementation.

Strengthening and expanding the existing networks of implementers, and creating targeted information they in turn could provide to concerned parents/fellow teachers, may be a particularly strong avenue in cases where concrete governmental support is lacking.

## Country Level actions and contexts

### Overview of Actions:

Throughout the length of the project, partners implemented a minimum of 3 advocacy actions in their countries, and at the EU level, leading to a total of 21 total actions. Through these actions, 483 participants were engaged through workshops, meetings, events and roundtable discussions. Furthermore, through these actions, 1 national government was engaged through the signing of a collaboration agreement. National government representations and service learning experts were brought together, along with school principals, in a further workshop implemented through the project. Representatives from the local government's education department, in one major city, were further engaged through project advocacy. One partner released a campaign video to provide an easy tool for awareness raising. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with a local school to establish future collaboration and partnerships. Finally, a European level event was hosted in Brussels bringing together various stakeholders from across the region.

# Romania

## Country Context

Service Learning is developing and the principles of Service Learning are implemented within the curriculum to some extent, through subjects such as civic and social education, however they lack the practical, community focused learning component.

NGO's, such as the New Horizons Foundation, have led the effort to train teachers and give them the skills needed to implement student-led community projects - however this is largely without systemic, institutional support at the national level, thereby limiting the possible scope of such initiatives.

Some of the biggest reported barriers to implementing Service Learning in Romania have been identified as follows:

- Absence of Service Learning in National Policies
- Bureaucratic constraints
- Lack of systemic teacher training
- Limited time for extracurricular activities
- Parental resistance
- Lack of resources

Some of the main routes for advocacy are:

- Advocating for SL inclusion in the national education strategy
- Educator training programmes
- Highlighting growing repository of best practices & case studies
- Strengthening university collaboration
- Encouraging cross sector collaboration

## Action 1: Community of Practice event

The event brought together 13 key national stakeholders from NGOs, universities, and civic organizations to form and strengthen a community of practitioners around Service Learning. This network is essential for fostering long-term collaboration and mutual support in the field.

Through structured presentations and exchanges, each organization shared how it integrates SL into its programs, highlighting successes, challenges, and methodologies. This promoted a shared understanding of SL as a strategic educational and civic approach in Romania. Mind-mapping exercises and open discussions allowed participants to identify future directions for joint projects, policy dialogue, and the development of tools, standards, and advocacy resources.

By identifying connections, overlaps, and interdependencies between initiatives, the event generated a clearer picture of how SL is already contributing to community development and active citizenship – a key advocacy tool for influencing educational and youth policy frameworks.

Furthermore, the workshop was purposefully placed ahead of the National Service Learning Awards, which added visibility and strategic importance. It served as a platform to align messaging and increase support for SL at a national level.

Key Points:

- Outreach to experienced practitioners and stakeholders, supporting the exchange of best practices
- Harnessing successful, existing Service Learning programmes and initiatives to further identify and support future implementation
- Interest and engagement generated through the meeting was carried forward and brought into a future activity, the National Service Learning Awards, providing an opportunity for deepening the stakeholder engagement

## Action 2: Agreement signed with Ministry of Education

The meeting marking the signing of the collaboration protocol between the Ministry of Education and the Noi Orizonturi Foundation (NHF) formalized a strategic partnership aimed at advancing student well-being, social-emotional learning, and community engagement through education. The gathering resulted in:

- Mutual recognition of NHF's programs as aligned with national educational priorities.
- Agreement on joint implementation and institutional support for five key educational programs: IMPACT, Service Learning in the Classroom, Family Club, Open Hearts, and the Mentoring Program for Technological High Schools.
- Ministry commitment to support dissemination, visibility, and impact documentation through official communication channels and participation in events.
- Establishment of communication mechanisms, including the appointment of contact persons from both institutions, to ensure sustained collaboration.

Key points:

- Realistic and specific steps which build towards a stronger partnership
- Expanding the reach of Service Learning utilising existing connections and contacts
- Collaboration with an institution which can support in disseminating and bringing Service Learning to a new audience





### Action 3: Advocacy Meeting - Outreach to practitioners

This event encouraged participants to discuss and review the current status of SL implementation and integration, from the experience of experts, education specialists, and SL practitioners, while exploring avenues for further advocacy, development, and barriers. They concretely explored, utilising the experience of the practitioners, SL integration at each education level, from pre-school, to university, and vocational training schools. They discussed current pilots, points where SL is already well established in schooling, and where barriers exist such as national policies and changing curriculums. A further challenge highlighted was the lack of familiarity with SL among teachers, particularly at high school level in well established, formalised subjects.

Further advocacy actions were planned as a result of this meeting, including outreach to policy makers at the national level, highlighting areas for further research and strengthening the evidence base, and upcoming opportunities to bring SL to a wider audience through participation in events and programmes.

#### Key points

- Engagement with key experts and those with experience
- Exploring issues on the ground to reinforce the local needs and fine-tune approaches
- Clear links to further action thus maintaining the interest generated

# Slovakia

## Country Context

In Slovakia, Civil society is relatively young, primarily due to historical factors, and participation in public life or volunteering is not seen as a natural part of citizens' lives. This lack of civic participation, coupled with the challenges facing a slow to adapt education sector, lack of consistent leadership due to turnover of government officials, and the alarming performance of Slovak students in international rankings, all highlight the need for an innovative and impactful approach such as Service Learning.

Service Learning is not yet a deeply rooted concept within Slovakia's education system, or in broader societal awareness. While the concept appears in some educational projects, there is no systemic recognition for Service Learning in primary schools or secondary schools - in fact Slovakia lacks an official, national definition of Service Learning. As such, SL is implemented sporadically, primarily through the initiatives of individual schools, universities or NGOs.

The Strategy of Education and Training of Children and Youth for Volunteering, which was adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport in 2018, outlines the fundamental principles of education for volunteering, aligned with Service Learning principles however lacking the systemic attention required to embed Service Learning into education. However, as a first step towards integrating Service Learning into schools, the strategy provides a good foundation for future developments.

At the higher education level, some universities such as Matej Bel University and Presov University apply service learning in their teaching, which has helped to create a strong pool of experts and research on the topic.

At the lower educational levels, NGOs tend to be the primary driving force in supporting teachers & schools to implement Service Learning. Organisations such as PDCO and Roots and Shoots both have developed their own programmes to guide teachers through the preparation and implementation of Service Learning Projects.

Some of the biggest reported barriers to implementing Service Learning in Slovakia are as follows:

- Overloaded Curricula
- Lack of time & excessive workload among teachers
- Insufficient recognition and support for Service Learning implementers
- Lack of methodological resources
- Low awareness of Service Learning
- Limited funding & resources
- Lack of School-Community collaboration
- Absence of Systemic institutional support

Some of the main routes for advocacy are:

- Working with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Youth of the Slovak Republic
- Working with regional and municipal authorities
- Potential for forming networks of SL partners through volunteer centres
- Bringing together new partners and NGOs with Service Learning experience
- Disseminating role models, best practices, and outcomes from those organisations/institutions with experience in Service Learning

## Action 1: Outreach to School Principals and Institutional Representatives

This working meeting in which the SL ambassador took part, brought together 50 participants including representatives of the Department of Education of the City of Prešov and School Principals. The meeting presented a strong opportunity to advocate for Service Learning, particularly within the context of Slovakia's curriculum reforms and the present stakeholders role in how this reform's implementation will take shape in schools and the city. Concretely, Service Learning was presented with a targeted focus, emphasising the benefits of SL implementation for schools and young people, aligning well with the goals of the audience to strengthen education outcomes. Furthermore, SLIPStream was presented including the project outputs which serve as tools and resources for SL implementation. Participants agreed to take part in the upcoming reflection tool testing, thus maintaining the engagement and momentum generated by this initial action, and carrying it forward into a chance for these important stakeholders to contribute towards ensuring that the project outcomes are robust and effective.

### Key points

- Linking with wider activities and materials, maintaining the momentum generated
- Link to curriculum reforms as an opportunity for increased visibility and relevance
- Bringing together different stakeholders

## Action 2: Outreach to School Principals

This working session brought together a SL ambassador and 6 principals under the authority of Lučenec city, to discuss the benefits of a SL strategy for schools and youth, and concretely highlighted the RSLA and conditions for entry.

Through the session, participants were invited to take part in the SL training and to apply to the RSLA, with 3 accepting. From this, those 3 participated in the SL training, began implementing SL, and are expected to take part in the RSLA in 2026.

The interest generated by the successful advocacy in the initial meeting, which was facilitated by outreach to decision makers with the power to implement SL, and targeted messaging on the benefits of a SL strategy, was maintained and generated a tangible

impact. The conditions for SL were strengthened, through directing participants to the SL training, providing the guidance and resources for quality implementation, and reinforcing quality standards by highlighting the RSLA.

Key points:

- Providing clear avenues to maintain momentum
- Pointing from one activity to another
- Targeting specific decision makers with focused messages

### Action 3: Meeting with Policy Makers

The SL ambassador successfully met with the director of the Department of Youth, Health and Physical activities, responsible for non-formal education and the development of youth volunteering. Within his mandate, he is authorised to shape the implementation of the National Youth Strategy, which includes service learning as one of its components. The meeting aimed, and was successful in, laying the foundation for collaboration on advancing Service Learning in school-based extracurricular and childcare facilities.

The meeting utilised the existing connections and network of the partner organisation strongly, reaching the right decision maker with the authority to influence SL implementation within a National Strategy. The ambassador was able to draw on prior outreach to educators, those implementing SL on the ground, and carry this perspective forward to the Ministry, acting as a link and strengthening the synergy between the two.

Key points:

- Leveraging existing connections and networks
- Outreach to specific policy/decision makers
- Building on past advocacy actions
- Bridging perspective of education and municipal sectors

# Croatia

## Country Context

Croatia has undergone significant political, social, and economic transitions since the early 1990's, the legacy of which can still be felt within educational systems and community structures. Similarly to Slovakia and Romania, a complex historical context must be taken into account when considering the current status of Service Learning and Volunteering more widely within Croatia. However, volunteering is well-established and a strong part of both rural and urban life in Croatia - supported by a robust civil society sector.

It is this civil society sector which is the main driver of Service Learning in Croatia, often in cooperation with the academic sector. While these efforts from Civil Society continue to bring more people and stakeholders into Service Learning, this is still very much in the developmental stages. There exists strong initiatives to implement Service Learning, however they are not wide-spread or systemically brought into the national curriculum.

As with other countries discussed, many of the principles of Service Learning - active citizenship, social responsibility, bridging schools and communities - are implemented primarily through extra-curricular activities, such as after school clubs, fundraising, and environmental clean-ups. This addresses one of the highlighted needs among the Croatian Education sector, to bring in more non-formal or informal, novel, and participatory methods in formal schooling. There is a growing interest in non-formal approaches, which these clubs and small initiatives aim to address, and which Service Learning has a strong potential to bring a positive impact.

At the higher education level, some universities, particularly in larger cities like Zagreb, Split, and Rijeka, have started integrating Service Learning into certain academic programmes - while research has shown that this is a new experience for many students, it also highlights that those who do participate in courses with Service Learning elements, express a high degree of satisfaction with the method.

Some of the biggest reported barriers to implementing Service Learning in Croatia are as follows:

- Lack of a standardised National framework
- Lack of agreement on which terms to use
- Resistance to adopting innovative practices, particularly where traditional education methods dominate
- Lack of resources & training in integrating Service Learning among teachers
- Lack of support from the wider school institution, among implementing teachers
- Lack of financial resources among schools & community organisations to implement ambitious projects
- Particularly in rural areas, there are many logistical challenges

Some of the main routes for advocacy are:

- The current implementation of Civic Education in Croatia provides a strong basis for developing Service Learning



- There is growing recognition and interest in Service Learning, and a growing amount of resources to support teachers
- Cooperation with key ministries at the national level, with both the potential to set policies and oversee funding sources
  - Ministry of Science, Education and Youth
  - Ministry of Work, Pension system, Family and Social Policy
- Local and Regional Self-Governments, in Croatia these branches have a degree of autonomy in developing strategies which could support SL programmes
- Utilising networks and bodies which oversee the NGO sector, those institutions and organisations with experience in SL can be brought together to raise awareness and share implementation guidance with new stakeholders

### Action 1: Strategic dialogue on Service Learning Integration - University of Rijeka

The ambassadors met with academic staff at the University, with key roles relevant to the implementation of Service Learning, discussing the potential for implementing SL, institutional support and quality assurance, and utilising alumni contacts and expertise to strengthen the community-university ties.

This action directly responds to the identified need in Croatia for stronger institutional anchoring of SL within higher education. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka already promotes pedagogical innovation, making it a natural entry point for SL integration. Engaging strategic faculty stakeholders is essential for overcoming current barriers such as lack of standardisation and limited SL recognition in academic settings. The meeting helps build ownership and bottom-up advocacy within the academic community, aligning with SLIPStream's objectives to foster youth civic engagement and inclusive learning in Central and Eastern Europe.

#### Key points

- Working directly with experienced universities
- Finding the right department staff with the expertise and mandate to act
- Responding to a need for institutional anchoring and further implementation of SL at teacher training as an avenue for building grassroots support

### Action 2: Meeting with representatives from the Department for Education, Culture, Sports and Youth of the City of Rijeka

The meeting brought together 2 representatives from the department and 3 practitioners of SL, with relevant first hand experience. The meeting aimed to present the current situation regarding SL implementation in Croatian schools, drawing upon the practitioners experience, and highlight both the benefits and challenges of SL implementation. The role of institutional support and potential next steps were also discussed, including fostering

collaboration and cooperation between the City administration and educational institutions through the presentation of SL in a conference of primary school principals in the City.

#### Key points

- Working with local municipality and targeting the right department staff
- Responding to the need for supporting partners and collaboration
- Bringing together policy makers and those stakeholders implementing SL on the ground

### Action 3: Presentation of SL during conference of Principals

This action was a follow up to the previous meeting with City officials, who prompted the ambassadors to present SL during this conference of key stakeholders. In their role as school leadership, principals can both directly support the integration and sustainability of SL practices, and act as multipliers, sharing knowledge and good practices with their teaching staff. Their feedback during the meeting helped to identify practical needs and opportunities for adapting Service Learning to the local school context. This dialogue created the foundation for further collaboration between schools, universities, and the local community.

#### Key points

- Working with school leadership, particularly those engaged in past events
- Well prepared and clearly presented ideas with the benefits of SL emphasised
- Practical entry points were provided for engaging with SL

# Czech Republic

## Country Context

Aligned with many of the countries in this report, Service Learning is not systemically implemented or legislated in the Czech Republic. However, there is some progress and development though this typically stems from innovative pedagogues and some civil society organisations. While there are many international examples of Service Learning which can be drawn from, in the Czech context much of the developments and pilot programmes are in the early stages, meaning that while there is positive movement on the topic and in establishing a strong evidence base, there is currently a lack of strong evidence specific to the Czech context to draw upon. However, it should be recognised that the Service Learning method aligns with many of the goals of national and European education strategies, which emphasise active citizenship, involving young people in tackling societal issues, and preparing young people for democratic life.

In some cases, as with other countries in the region, there is a particularly strong dominance of traditional, formal, education methods which may create some resistance to Service Learning - a challenge which should be addressed through targeted communication and messaging from Service Learning Advocates.

Some of the biggest reported barriers to implementing Service Learning in Croatia are as follows:

- Low awareness of Service Learning among educators, youth workers and the general public.
- Limited funding options for Service learning projects among schools and NGOs
- Lack of resources and supporting materials for Service Learning, adapted to the Czech context
- Limited time and capacity among educators to prepare and implement SL projects, additional to standard curricular requirements
- Resistance among the traditional education sector to implement new, non-formal methods
- Lack of capacity to build partnerships with schools among NGOs

Some of the main routes for advocacy are:

- Utilising the experience of NGOs to help schools build projects and facilitating these connections
- Harnessing a growing interest among young people in social issues, including ecology, social justice and supporting local communities
- Aligning with national legislation and strategies - the RVP ZV (Framework Educational Program for Basic Education) in Croatia emphasises the future needs of students and focuses on the acquisition of competencies needed for an active civic, professional and personal life, while reducing inequalities in access to education



- Informal education centres present throughout Croatia, such as youth centres, provide a strong avenue and safe space for community service projects
- Building the capacity of educators and youth workers, particularly with online courses to reach rural communities

## Action 1: Roundtable on Service Learning for Representatives of Primary and Secondary Schools

The ambassador brought together representatives from both formal and non-formal education in the Pilsen Region, with different levels of engagement and experience of SL, with the goal of exploring the possibilities to integrate SL into existing educational programmes.

Through the roundtable discussion, awareness of SL and best practices were raised, directly with education representatives, opportunities for future collaboration were identified, and a commitment to pilot projects was given.

This action primarily focused on establishing institutional support from the education sector, utilising targeted outreach and messaging on the pedagogical benefits to build interest in stakeholders. This support was made concrete and harnessed to generate an impact primarily through the discussion of pilots, providing stakeholders with a clear avenue to further explore and implement SL, building upon the previous discussion on opportunities to further integrate SL with education more generally. Thus, through this action the ambassadors provided both the theoretical framework and space for discussion which motivates and generates interest among participants, as well as practical next steps to ensure this interest is maintained.

This responds to the concrete identified need, common across many implementing countries, for more institutional support for SL, to ensure a strong and robust foundation for implementation. This support also strongly contributes towards the sustainability of SL, as there is the potential for further action after successful piloting, schools within the region and beyond may learn from and launch their own SL based on the pilots, therefore those directly engaged by ambassadors can further act as multipliers.

### Key points

- Focused on a key stakeholder with tailored approach (roundtable discussion)
- Both seeking insight & input from participants, and raising the potential for SL implementation
- Focus on fostering connections and a sustainable approach

## Action 2: National Conference - Volunteering for Children 2025

This event brought together over 100 participants from various sectors relevant to Service Learning, including universities, civil society organisations, and representatives from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports the Ministry of the Interior as well as the First

Deputy Governor for Education in the Ústí nad Labem Region and representatives from the Czech Council of Children and Youth. Space was given for a focussed discussion on Service Learning, presenting case studies and implementation strategies, and exploring the possibilities specifically within the region based on local infrastructure and organisations. Through this action, awareness on Service Learning, its benefits, and its potential, across the region was tangibly raised, particularly with key stakeholders and those with the decision making power to lead Service Learning implementation. A key component of the event was the networking space, which allowed participants to freely discuss and explore opportunities between themselves, allowing the ideas shared during the structured discussion to turn into real connections and real opportunities for increased Service Learning implementation across the region.

#### Key points

- Space for bringing together different stakeholders and building collaboration
- Concrete focus on the specific region, with regional stakeholders
- Providing the space for both formal and informal discussions and network building

### Action 3: National Association of Volunteering Conference

This workshop was part of the National Association of Volunteering Conference and gave space for a structured discussion and interactive activities on Service Learning with 20 participants including former policy makers, representatives from volunteer centres and organisations within the National Association of Volunteering.

The Service Learning Ambassador presented the activities and focused on education about Service Learning across the Czech Republic. Through the workshop, a network of Service Learning enthusiasts, committed to bringing Service Learning into their organisations and regions, was expanded, thereby both directly increasing awareness of Service Learning, while preparing participants to act as multipliers within their own communities.

#### Key points

- NFE method of content deliver, through the participatory workshop
- Bringing together different stakeholders
- Linking with wider events to increase awareness and opportunities

## Kosovo

### Country Context

While volunteering is relatively well known and understood within Kosovo, there is often a lack of engagement, particularly among young people, with research highlighting that 70% of Kosovar youth have never engaged in volunteering activities. Similarly, Service Learning itself is not a widely known or understood concept in Kosovo - while the aspect of volunteering may be better established, the linking of volunteering and formal education is a missing step towards the integration of Service Learning. Particularly given Kosovo's historical context, being a post-conflict society, Service Learning presents a strong opportunity and potential positive impact in reinforcing democratic norms and values, fostering an active citizenship, and tackling societal challenges.

Currently, Service Learning is predominantly driven by Civil Society Organisations such as TOKA, who engage young people to implement community projects. There remains an underutilisation of Service Learning among formal education, and a lack of broader institutional integration of SL policies, however current pilot programmes and partnerships particularly at the municipal level, and with the Ministry of Education, present a good starting point for the development of SL in Kosovo.

In Kosovo particularly, there is a strong engagement between Civil Society Organisations such as TOKA, and policy makers at the national and local level, and strong engagement between CSOs and schools & young people. Through these connections, CSOs such as TOKA are particularly well placed to bridge the gap between policy makers and the education sector, being the facilitator of this collaboration.

Some of the biggest reported barriers to implementing Service Learning in Croatia are as follows:

- Lack of Institutional Frameworks
- Limited awareness among key stakeholders and target groups
- Resource constraints, in terms of financial, training, and infrastructure
- Cultural Perceptions, particularly how volunteering is valued when compared to formal education
- Inequality in access, particularly for rural and marginalised communities

Some of the main routes for advocacy are:

- Existing pilots and smaller scale implementations of SL, can be replicated and scaled
- The engagement between the Ministry of Education, local municipalities, and NGOs is generally positive, with established connections which can be drawn upon
- International examples and best practices, from countries with more established SL practices, and be drawn upon and adapted to the local needs

## Action 1: Campaign Video

The Service Learning Ambassador led the creation, with the support of the partner organisation TOKA and local organisations, of a campaign video publicised with 5 main aims:

- Promote Service-Learning
- Advocate for more support and recognition of Service-Learning
- Raise awareness about Service-Learning
- Invite teachers to join the Service-Learning Programme
- Advocate for more institutional support.

The video featured the ambassador, giving the video added visibility and energy as a young influencer, a professor with first hand experience of Service Learning who shared the benefits it can bring to both students and teachers, adding weight and credibility to the message, and a professor and researcher, who shared her early findings from a study on youth mental health and how Service Learning can play a positive role in well-being, grounding the discussion on Service Learning to the wider impacts it can have on the community, young people, and providing a strong foundation for showcasing why teachers should engage with Service Learning.

The ambassador built upon this in the video by presenting a concrete opportunity for teachers, the video's audience, to engage with Service Learning through the SLIPStream project - ensuring that any interest and momentum gained from this video is directed towards further opportunities to gain more knowledge and resources on Service Learning, enhancing the impact of both this action and future activities within the project.

Key points - Novel concept, engagement of a few key stakeholders with a positive story to share, linking research and new knowledge with the the more direct experience of implementers, starting point for engagement and solid direction towards further opportunities

## Action 2: Public Event - Youth Festival

This event focused on introducing Service Learning to over 50 community members and young people, directly through a participatory session where children and youth explored issues in their local community and took part in games and activities to foster collaboration and active participation. The session concretely discussed with young people their role in shaping their communities, and how Service Learning can be an avenue for this, speaking to and empowering them as active leaders and citizens in their communities. Through combining non-formal methods such as team-building and collaborative games, with the practical and theoretical aspects of Service Learning implementation, the event was well tailored to the target audience - building engagement, providing ideas and guidance, and giving participants the chance to get a taste of Service Learning activities through the workshop.

#### Key points

- NFE methods integrated within the advocacy, with theoretical and practical backing
- Reaching directly to the target audience, with tailored content
- Collaborating with youth organisations who can help connect and facilitate sessions such as this

### Action 3: Signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with local school

Working with the partner organisation, an MoU was established between TOKA and a local school, ensuring a long-term partnership, with a clear commitment from school staff to support Service-Learning projects and the establishment of a foundation for student-led initiatives that address local community needs.

Through the meeting in which the MoU was signed, the Service Learning ambassador further discussed the potential for integrating Service Learning into the curriculum, the wider role of youth in building inclusive communities, and further opportunities for collaboration between education institutions and NGOs.

The MoU signing represents a strategic step toward embedding Service-Learning in formal education structures. It guarantees institutional backing for youth-focused initiatives and creates sustainability for project outcomes. By partnering with schools, the project ensures a larger number of students are engaged, fostering a culture of civic engagement and social responsibility from an early age.

#### Key points

- Targeting a local centre of decision making with power to implement SL
- Reaching out through established connections and networks
- Difference of what can be done at local level vs with national institutions.

# Bosnia & Herzegovina

## Country Context

Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), due to complex cultural, historical and educational factors, presents both unique opportunities and significant challenges for the implementation of Service Learning. As we have seen with other countries in the region, the particular position as a post-conflict, multiethnic society brings additional challenges and sensitivities which must be considered. Linked to this, however, SL has a significant potential to promote interethnic, intercommunity, and intercultural understanding and social cohesion. Through engaging students in meaningful collaborative projects, aimed specifically at addressing shared community challenges, SL can foster relationships between diverse citizens and contribute towards peacebuilding.

A further key contextual factor in BiH is a skepticism towards political and public institutions, with the education sector being one of the few exceptions which still holds a measure of public trust and authority. Often education is viewed as one of the few avenues towards upward mobility and development, which presents an opportunity for introducing SL through schools, benefiting from existing public trust in the sector, and ensuring SL is viewed as an educational tool rather than a political or ideological approach.

Linked to this, the structure of the education sector in BiH further adds complexity to SL implementation and advocacy - as the sector is highly decentralised there is often a fragmented approach to education innovation. While this limits the potential for far reaching, national level, uniform reforms across BiH, it provides additional space for local level actions and bottom-up approaches. Some schools and NGOs have already begun demonstrating the feasibility of SL projects through pilots with specific municipalities, highlighting that a nuanced and targeted approach is needed, but that innovation is possible.

Thus, all together the context of BiH presents strong opportunities for SL implementation, and SL has an immense potential to contribute towards tackling complex divisions present in the country. As with many of the contexts in this region, we see SL in a stage of early development, primarily driven by NGOs and specific schools or municipalities, but lacking an overarching national framework or strategy on SL and a similar lack of public awareness of the topic. SL implementation and advocacy must be approached with sensitivity, taking into account the complex contextual factors and political divisions, focusing on transparency, inclusivity and community practices.

Some of the biggest reported barriers to implementing Service Learning in Bosnia & Herzegovina are as follows:

- Decentralised and fragmented education system
- Lack of institutional support or systemic recognition for Service Learning

- Limited understanding and awareness of Service Learning, particularly among educators, policymakers and the general public
- Resource constraints
- Political sensitivities and social fragmentation
- Lack of data or evaluation to support SL advocacy

Some of the main routes for advocacy are:

- Development of localised SL practices and pilots
- A strong pool of active educators and school development teams, who have been involved in SL projects in their institutions
- Cooperation with Regional and International Service Learning networks
- Gradually growing interest in SL at the higher educational level
- Alignment with national educational priorities
- Strong existing culture of solidarity and mutual aid, creating a cultural compatibility with SL practices

### Action 1: Stakeholder Meetings

This series of meetings, implemented on a continuous basis throughout October and November 2024, with additional follow-up in March 2025, addressed the lack of awareness and understanding of Service Learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region. Across 10 meetings with various stakeholders, with a particular focus on meetings with local municipalities, 18 participants were reached and informed on Service Learning and its relevance to youth civic engagement. These stakeholders were identified following the country context in BiH whereby the decentralised education system provides space for innovation at the local level, and because of their key roles in youth development and education policy.

As a first engagement, and with the aim of awareness raising, the meeting focused on introducing Service Learning as a methodology, highlighting its potential positive impact on education outcomes. It further explored opportunities for dissemination and where institutions can support the development of SL, with initial discussions on potential formal cooperation being a key priority of the meetings.

The meetings saw a strong interest from the stakeholders present in promoting Service Learning in their respective areas, with several of those met with initialing internal discussions on formalising cooperation. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Education and Science acknowledged the potential for integrating Service Learning into educational policy, as well as promoting the Regional Service Learning award in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key Points:

- Focus on awareness raising with new stakeholders, with introductory presentations and discussions

- Responding to the decentralised nature of the educator sector, a focus was given to engaging local stakeholders
- The potential for formalising interest and cooperation on the topic of Service Learning was emphasised, helping to maintain the momentum generated by this meeting

## Action 2: BiH Service Learning Network Meeting

This meeting was hosted in November 2024, bringing together 11 representatives from schools across nearly all regions of the country. As a pre-existing network of stakeholders, they already have a strong role in the promotion and dissemination of Service Learning methodologies at the national level, as well as being implementers of Service Learning themselves. As such, the meeting was able to focus more deeply and concretely on a strategic plan for Service Learning development, harnessing the expertise of the network to explore on steps towards engaging public institutions responsible for youth and the education sector.

Specifically, the meeting discussed three key goals linked to the development of Service Learning. Firstly, with regards to enhancing the capacity for Service Learning implementation among schools and universities, integrating the methodology into teacher training programmes in universities was highlighted as a key avenue for strengthening this capacity. Linked to this, and as part of establishing a supportive framework, the importance of SL resource hubs was emphasised.

The second goal, fostering policy level support and recognition for Service Learning, particularly within the decentralised education sector, the potential of policy roundtables and cross-sector working groups was discussed as a key way to engage both policy makers and SL practitioners, sharing key expertise and knowledge to develop policy recommendations and action.

Thirdly, expanding multi-sector partnerships to support and co-implement Service Learning initiatives at the local level is a key step in the development of Service Learning. On this point, establishing specific partnerships between schools, municipalities, and NGOs was discussed as one avenue, particularly at the local level where real community needs can be identified, with the stakeholders able to co-design and implement at that level.

### Key Points:

- Engaging those already interested in or committed to Service Learning ensures that more detailed and specific discussions can take place, particularly regarding avenues for future development
- The meeting had clearly defined goals and objectives, providing a strong structure and helping to keep the discussion focused on concrete actions and outcomes
- Through connecting the approach of SLIPStream with that of the existing SL network, the meeting facilitated a more cohesive advocacy and development field, avoiding potential overlap or fragmented information



### Action 3: Regional Activism conference

This large-scale event, hosted in December 2024, brought together 83 participants from various sectors and levels, including representatives from the local administrations, the regional Ministry of Culture, Sport and youth, and representatives from both schools and youth organisations across the country.

These stakeholders were identified as key actors in youth development and education policy, at the local and federal level, making them essential partners for integrating Service Learning into institutional frameworks. The aim was to not only promote the SLIPStream project and wider Service Learning initiatives, but also to stress the importance of a Regional Service Learning Strategy for youth work, and focus the minds of all stakeholders on how a joint intervention through Service Learning can support youth, youth organisations, and education outcomes.

This event further builds upon the previous advocacy actions, highlighting a continuous process of outreach, informing stakeholders, deepening the engagement of those already interested in the topic, and as a collective defining the next steps and additional avenues to develop Service Learning in the region.

Stemming from the event, a pledge of support for youth work and capacity building through Service Learning was signed, representing a concrete step and commitment from key stakeholders to continue emphasising the role of SL in education.

#### Key points:

- As a large scale event, the conference was able to reach many stakeholders at once, while providing a strong space for connections and collaborations to be formed
- This point of collaboration, and how the sectors can work together towards a common goal, through Service Learning, was particularly emphasised, encouraging a more even and sustainable approach to SL implementation
- The concrete pledge of support resulting from the conference further provides strong avenues for future actions, while encouraging a cohesive approach towards Service Learning

## EU level actions

### EU Level Advocacy Event

The European Level Advocacy Event took place between 14-16 November 2025. This event brought together 97 stakeholders from across Europe, including CEV members, NGOs and CSOs, and Policy makers at various levels - from municipalities to EU policy makers.

The event began with an initial evening session, during which project partners together with

SLipstream ambassadors engaged with participants, sharing insights on Service Learning and gaining more experience on how this is viewed or implemented in other countries across Europe, as well as the common challenges.

On the 15th, the session began with a presentation of the methods and outcomes of partners Service Learning advocacy in their local communities. Participants were then split between 5 groups, reflecting on the situation of Service Learning in their countries and assessing opportunities as well as barriers. These groups were defined by key target groups and stakeholders in Service Learning, including: Civil Society, Parents, Teachers, Students at the primary school level, and Students at the secondary school level. Following these discussions, participants in these groups created a novel and creative presentation advocating for Service Learning.

On the 16th, participant groups were invited to share their presentations during a session in the European Parliament - which again brought together key stakeholders and organisations. Each group created their own, innovative way of presenting the perspective of their target group - including a short video, a roleplay scenario and storytelling.

Through this event and the different components across each day, the aim was to gradually increase participants' involvement, and therefore knowledge of Service Learning, leaning on the experience of those who have been directly involved through the project to help guide those who may have less knowledge with Service Learning. The presentation of the SLIPStream Advocacy Plan aimed to inform, and increase awareness of Service Learning and importantly, advocacy methods - providing best practices which participants could draw from for their own advocacy. The discussions focused on specific target groups encouraged participants to reflect on what challenges different groups may face when approaching Service Learning, but also how to best tackle and overcome these challenges - and facilitated the exchange of knowledge as each group was made up of various stakeholders, at various levels, from various countries across Europe. The final presentations in the European Parliament, aside from giving participants the experience of being inside one of the key European Institutions, encouraged participants to think about advocacy beyond what the key messages are and more into how these messages are presented. Avoiding a standard power point presentation, through creating novel presentations, aimed to emphasise the importance of catching the audience's attention and genuine engagement, and encouraged participants to think how they could best reach people and communicate their perspectives.

## Action 2: Advocacy Plan webinar

An EU level webinar was hosted in November, bringing together teachers and educators. During the webinar, the SLIPStream SL Advocacy plan was presented, including the results of the local advocacy actions implemented by national partners through the project, and the advocacy & policy recommendations. The aim of the meeting was to bring together key stakeholders to present the document, facilitate discussion on the key points and relevant take-aways, and gain some feedback on the usefulness and applicability of the plan.

Through the webinar and discussion, it was clear that the plan presents a strong resource which stakeholders engaged on Service Learning could draw from, and use to inspire their own advocacy. However, it was also evident that the advocacy plan is more useful for those already, to some extent, engaged in Service Learning and looking to further develop their knowledge and skills, and to further advocate for SL in their community, while being less applicable for those with little or no experience in Service Learning. As such, feedback highlighted that this advocacy plan, while containing many useful highlights, is less appropriate as an introduction to the topic for newcomers, but is a useful resource for those already engaged. Further, participants highlighted a motivation to continue learning more about Service Learning and further develop their knowledge on the topic, which presented an opportunity to point them towards the other, more introductory, project outputs and resources.

### Key points

- Targeting key stakeholders who are, or could be, engaged in Service Learning
- Gaining the input and perspective of relevant stakeholders
- Pointing towards further points of engagement with the project and wider topic

## Action 3: Advocacy Plan survey

A further survey was shared with participants during the EU Level Advocacy Event, collecting input on wider experiences of Service Learning and advocacy across Europe. Sharing the survey during the in-person meeting provided the chance to reach a variety of stakeholders who were engaged in the event, at the same time, and from a variety of different European contexts. The aim was to gain insight into the broader status of Service

Learning across Europe, not only in project partner countries, to better understand the context and points of success or challenges facing Service Learning implementation.

The number of responses was limited, partly due to being shared in-person, however it provided some relevant and useful information.

We can see a very limited knowledge and awareness of Service Learning in the countries of those who responded, with all saying there is little or no awareness, and all saying there are only small-scale pilots or no Service Learning implementation in their country.



In line with the research from national project partners, the survey further highlights that simple, clear, and positive messaging is key towards Service Learning Advocacy. Particularly emphasising the point of inclusion, and how this manifests in Service Learning, was a key message mentioned in the survey and utilised by project partners. In terms of barriers highlighted in the survey, again we see much the same highlighted by project partners. There is a clear need to open up public institutions to more collaboration, and to provide them with the concrete evidence to advocate for a new approach including Service Learning. Similarly, the long bureaucratic processes which schools and institutions have to adhere to, can sometimes slow down implementation or create barriers.

## Common messages & approaches

Throughout the countries included in this report, we can see various commonalities both in terms of the specific messages being communicated, and in the approach on how to communicate this. In many of the countries, the complex culture, history, and political landscapes present a series of challenges. Particularly in those post-conflict societies, where many societal divisions still echo into the modern day, and in countries with a less robust or well-established civil society sector, Service Learning must be approached with sensitivity, transparency, and a strong communication of the benefits. However, in each case, it is also evident that Service Learning represents a key tool to contribute towards tackling these same challenges in wider society. Through the civic engagement, community actions, and personal growth offered by Service Learning participation, there is the potential to foster more cohesive, open and diverse societies, while strengthening education outcomes.

A further common approach is to highlight the success of early pilots, international efforts on Service Learning, and small scale projects already implemented. In the vast majority of cases, these early pilots and projects have been implemented from the ground-up, primarily by NGOs or Civil Society Organisations working directly with local schools or municipalities. While there is a lack of national level efforts or pilots with leadership from national level policy makers, seen in many of the countries across the region, the smaller scale projects and pilots already implemented do provide a strong evidence base which can be emphasised in Service Learning advocacy.

In summary, some of the key commonalities in the messaging and approaches of the Service Learning advocates, are as follows:

- Service Learning brings key benefits to both students and teachers when implemented well, including learning outcomes and increased civic engagement
- Service Learning requires an upfront investment, in terms of teacher training and institutional support, to bring these benefits
- Cross-sector collaboration is key to Service Learning, bringing together education, public policy, and civil society, as such advocacy has focused on these key target groups
- Service Learning principles are already key to many curriculums, however formal integration would be a next step, strengthening the impact and limiting the amount of extracurricular investment required by teachers
- Communicating with and involving parents in the process can help alleviate the apprehension some may have, while strengthening community cohesion
- Service Learning is a key tool for building inclusive and resilient communities, able to address and co-design solutions for local challenges



## Differences in approach

In spite of the commonalities in the challenges faced, cultural contexts, and approaches to Service Learning advocacy, it is also evident that these same factors have led to some differences in the approach and methodology of each partner. In summary, the key differences can be categorised as follows:

- Advocating at different levels- based on the realities on the ground, some partners were able to work at the national level with key departments in the national government, while others worked at the regional or city level with the relevant decision makers.
  - The scope of what can be achieved is limited by bureaucracy in many cases, and which level advocacy is being done at has a big impact on this
- Engaging a variety of stakeholders - In some cases, there exists enough institutional knowledge for Service Learning experts to support advocacy, while some focused on engaging local schools and introducing the concept to them. Some partners worked directly with local students and parents, reaching the public and aiming to build bottom-up support
- A variety of methods - Workshops, including taster sessions with Service Learning components, large scale events offering wide awareness raising opportunities, direct meetings on a smaller scale, typically with policy makers

# Recommendations

As a result of the analysis performed by each partner in their country, defining the key challenges and opportunities for Service Learning, as well as the outreach, discussions, and stakeholder engagement held as part of the advocacy actions, it is possible to draw together recommendations both in terms of how to perform advocacy, and policy recommendations. These recommendations, drawing on the lessons learnt through the SLIPStream project, aim to highlight key areas for attention, development, and debate, highlighting avenues for strengthening the presence of Service Learning in the CEE region and thus bringing the benefits of an inclusive, participatory and community centric methodology to the education sector.

## Recommendations for Advocacy

Following the successful implementation of the advocacy actions across Europe, a few key recommendations for further Service Learning Advocacy can be identified:

- Work with the partners available, and seek to create new connections/networks where possible
- Maintain momentum from one action to the next, so you can build upon interest and turn it into concrete outcomes
- Be realistic about what can be achieved, at the level you are working at, with the partners you are working with
- Define your aims for each action
- Tailor your argument for your audience, anticipate what issues are most relevant based on your experience and past conversations

## Policy Recommendations - National Level

While, as highlighted, the specific national context of each country presents additional challenges, complexities and complications to the development of Service Learning. However, given the many commonalities, some recommendations can be highly relevant across the region but targeted at national level policy makers. These recommendations are as follows:

- Service Learning should be formally recognised for its positive impact on student outcomes, community cohesion, inclusivity, and social and civic engagement, as well as its alignment with national education priorities
- Service Learning should be institutionally supported, integrated into national curriculums, and collaboration between schools & civil society organisations fostered
- The competencies gained through Service Learning should be validated, recognised, and celebrated at all levels

## Policy Recommendations - European Level

While education is not a core competency of the EU, it is an area where the EU cooperates and supports the actions of Member States, particularly through specific programmes and initiatives such as Erasmus+ and the European Education Area. As such, there remains a significant space for the European level to support and supplement national level Service Learning policies. As such, the following recommendations have been identified:

- European Level strategies should recognise Service Learning for its potential role in achieving not only national, but also common European, education goals, as well as building active citizenship and resilient communities
- European level resources should support the implementation of Service Learning, particularly in regions with lower educational outcomes and less well-established Civil Society Sectors
- Guidance, training and materials which support the implementation of Service Learning, including from CSOs and networks engaged on SL, should be given visibility, with the space for knowledge sharing and exchange
- The competencies gained through Service Learning should be validated, recognised, and celebrated at all levels

## Conclusion

This report has aimed to provide an outline for both the current status of Service Learning across the Central and Eastern European Region, and the challenges & opportunities towards further developing Service Learning. Through focused research, partners and Service Learning ambassadors have identified key factors and considerations specific to their country contexts, which has in turn helped to design an impactful advocacy plan. Through the implementation of these advocacy plans, partners have engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, at regional, national, and European levels, from key target groups such as policy makers, education professionals, and civil society organisations. As a result of these actions, awareness of Service Learning has been reinforced, collaborations between sectors have been fostered, and space given for the spread of knowledge regarding best practices, knowledge, strategies and materials to support Service Learning implementation. This report, while being less appropriate as an introduction to Service Learning, could serve as a valuable resource for inspiration, information, and implementation of Service Learning Advocacy for those already engaged in the topic.