



EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE

CHAPTER

20

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VOLUNTEERING
INFRASTRUCTURE
IN EUROPE



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1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

CONCEPT DEFINITION



Volunteering infrastructure, for the purposes of this chapter, will be considered to be those institutions which are in place in order to support volunteering in society. A sufficient volunteering infrastructure would therefore involve support for volunteering from below, in terms of adequate local and regional voluntary services as an integral part of civil society. These should be constantly open and growing to accommodate more and more volunteers. They could either be independent organisations with a focus on recruiting volunteers, or be organisations with a volunteering element. At the moment, this is something missing in Montenegro.

Alongside this, an important part of a volunteering infrastructure would be effective communication between these ground-level civil society organisations and local authorities and government. There must be strategic and legal support of volunteering at a national level in order to develop volunteering in a society. A consultative independent body at a national level would also be important to help remove any prejudice and misunderstanding of volunteering, which exists still in Montenegro at a government level.

A volunteering infrastructure should support and develop volunteering and not restrict it or over-regulate it.

2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

“Voluntary work” has been defined in the Law on Volunteers, which came into practice on 22 April 2010.

Voluntary work is a willing and free of charge investment of time, knowledge and skills that provides services or activities on behalf of another person, or for the general welfare of society.

However, this is an unsatisfactory and unclear definition, which is a starting point of the misunderstanding between civil society and government. This is the definition created by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, as the department that deals with labour legislation. While civil society represents volunteering as the core of democracy and citizens’ participation in the socio-economic development of society, the ministry sees volunteering only as unpaid work, or work for which we do not receive (financial) compensation.

Officially, there is no research on the number and profile of volunteers in Montenegro. The search for this data is currently not a priority in the country as the current concern is the development of services, activities and programmes that involve volunteers. It is the absence of these that is more concerning for the development of volunteering at the moment. The development of a ground level infrastructure is the present focus.

However, the Statistical Office of Montenegro – MONSTAT is discussing with civil society organisations possibilities for the implementation of the International Labour Organisation

(ILO) Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work, to get comparable and reliable data on volunteering.

People have varying perceptions of volunteering. In some government ministries there seems to be doubt that volunteers even exist in Montenegro. This is something that is being challenged by civil society. Within the general community, the purpose and role of volunteering is generally understood, but contact with the volunteering community is limited. At the moment, civil society is not necessarily rated very highly by the general public. Indeed there is not necessarily instant trust of civil society, which can limit the number of volunteers and taint the perception of volunteering.

Volunteering is associated with young people in Montenegro. Of course, without reliable data, this cannot be verified, but is nonetheless a common perception of volunteering. At the moment, the infrastructure and volunteering “climate” does not so readily allow for the contribution of elderly people to volunteer work.

The media are interested in volunteering when major events occur, such as the Annual Volunteer Awards, described later in this chapter. Otherwise, it is not given priority; it is not as high up the agenda as other “hot” topics. There is also a reluctance to report on things such as corporate volunteering, as the media may not want to be seen to be advertising any given company.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The Law on Volunteers was adopted in the Parliament of Montenegro on 22 April 2010. Explaining the adoption of this legislation, a proponent from the government of Montenegro said: *“Following the examples of developed countries, the government has recently adopted a strategy on the development of volunteering in Montenegro (2010-2015), which determines the strategic directions for the development of volunteering, in order to improve the current situation and provide legal proposals on voluntary work within the institutions of the system”*.

The government of Montenegro decided that these strategic directions (contained in the adopted strategy) were to be the starting premise for the development of legislation. However, according to the Association for Democratic Prosperity – Zid (ADP-Zid), the prepared draft law was not actually a response to these. After exhausting all possibilities of adjustment, ADP-Zid, supported by 68 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), requested that the draft law be withdrawn. To show the groundlessness of the government and the non-functionality of the proposed draft legislative act, members of parliament (MPs) proposed amendments to the draft law. There were 36 articles contained in the draft law. Seven MPs submitted 30 amendments to these, of which two were accepted.

Because of the initiatives of ADP-Zid, civil society and these MPs during that period, the European Economic and Social Committee sent a recommendation to the Parliament of Montenegro that stated *“The Law on Volunteers, which is still to be passed, should incorporate NGO*

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*standpoints*¹. However, despite this point of view, the Parliament has remained persistent in supporting the government's proposal, which has been voted on.

One year and 7 months after the adoption of the Law, ADP-Zid conducted a survey among 54 NGOs, and exactly half of those surveyed stated that they were not familiar with the contents of the law.

The Law on Volunteers of 2010 is being revised by the government in 2012. On 29 December 2011 the government adopted a draft, which involved introducing 4 new articles to the law.

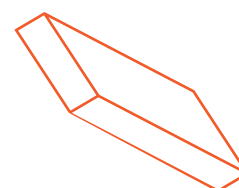
With these changes, an employer will have the opportunity to make a "special contract on voluntary work" with a person who wants to gain special knowledge and skills to work in a profession. A volunteer working under the conditions of this contract will have their voluntary work recognised as work experience and this will be a precondition for passing their professional exams. With such amendments, it is expected that volunteering will equate to vocational training without employment. The contract on voluntary work will replace the traineeships of all young people who are not paid as part of their working arrangement. This introduces a new form of traineeship that is recognised as work experience, but through a contract which is not an employment.

This engagement anticipates full-time work for volunteers, of 40 hours per week. This solution by the Government is supported with the explanation from the Bureau for the unemployed, as it is a more flexible legislative solution that allows professional development and the engagement of young people.

However, this law is more restrictive than it is supportive. It limits possibilities for volunteering by over-regulating, and fosters misinterpretation of volunteering by calling pro bono traineeships "volunteering". For example, it prohibits anyone under the age of 15 from volunteering. Likewise, Labour Law inspectors can forbid voluntary activity if volunteers are found without a contract during spot checks. A volunteer therefore needs a formal contract, even if the voluntary activity is for a very short period of time. This costs the organisation insurance money, and at the moment, this insurance can only be obtained annually, i.e. an organisation cannot obtain volunteer insurance for just a one-off event.

Another way in which the law is overly restrictive is in relation to corporate volunteering. Technically, the law forbids voluntary activity during company working hours.

Suffice to say, it is unrealistic for all articles of this law to be consistently respected by volunteer, involving organisations and volunteers in Montenegro.



1. European Economic and Social Committee, 2010. OPINION of the European Economic and Social Committee on: The role of civil society in EU-Montenegro relations [REX/298]. Available at: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/rex298_en.pdf

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

Within the NGO sector in Montenegro, there are both associations and foundations. There are approximately 500 registered NGOs in the country. However, the problem is that these organisations often have very few volunteers involved and these volunteers are involved in short-term projects.

Mapping of voluntary work² among 312 NGOs and sports and cultural organisations showed that volunteers exist in 70% of the organisations; up to 5 volunteers are involved in 20% of organisations, from 6 to 10 in 15% of organisations, from 11 to 20 in 13% and more than 20 in 14% of organisations. However, these numbers represent short-term volunteer engagement. This is a consequence of the nature of work in civil society organisations (CSOs), an absence of clear profiling of CSOs, but also poor knowledge and practice of volunteer management. It is also important to note that these figures are only approximations. The number of volunteers that an organisation involves is not something that is asked formally, it is not part of regular data collection.

There is no official national volunteer centre. The organisation representing a National Volunteer Service is ADP-Zid. This offers services to other volunteer-involving organisations and provides voluntary services at a local level, in Podgorica and the surrounding area. ADP-Zid has a database of approximately 500 volunteers at the moment, and recruits volunteers for other organisations, although again, often on a short-term basis, most frequently one-off events. Along with approximately 20 other NGOs, ADP-Zid has created an informal coalition of volunteering organisations, who have all signed a Memorandum of Understanding, committing to building cooperation and understanding in order to develop volunteering in Montenegro. This coalition aspires to build a concrete community of volunteering services.

The Red Cross in Montenegro is the organisations involving the highest number of volunteers. The Scouts also involve many volunteers, although less than before, as they exist in only a few cities.

5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

There is a national strategy on volunteering, adopted by the government on 8 October 2009, which illustrates the government perspective on volunteering. It contains aims for volunteering generally, which span the following five years. This strategy was prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, largely in partnership with ADP-Zid. It offers a framework of guidelines and potential regulation which could develop volunteering in the country. This strategy has been adopted, but with quite low visibility and publicity (for example it does not appear on the government website), and sadly many of its elements remain unimplemented. At the government level, it is the Ministry of Labour Law and Social Affairs that is in charge of anything related to volunteering. Government ministries have only been known to strongly promote volunteering during the case of a natural disaster. There is no continued, dedicated support for volunteering from the Government, and Montenegro is a highly politically driven country.

There is no official national volunteer centre. The organisation representing a National Volunteer Service is ADP-Zid, which together with other 20 NGOs has created an informal coalition of volunteering organisations committed to developing volunteering in Montenegro

2. S Mihajlović, and I. Milošević, 2009. "Mapping the programs and activities intended for young people in Montenegro"

However, the results of research show that there is a willingness of local governments to support the establishment of voluntary community-based services³. Among the interviewed institutions, 40% think that their greatest contribution could be where they feel a lack of resources, i.e. for increasing the quality of services and relationships with citizens, and launching new services or programs. A slightly smaller proportion, 35%, believes that the effect would be greater in the realisation of extraordinary activities, such as conferences or festivals.

The business sector has a casual engagement with volunteering. Very few companies have a formalised action plan in terms of corporate volunteering. Quite often, any voluntary contribution is a symbolic, one-off activity, with minimal impact. It is an area of volunteering that is just starting in Montenegro. For example, the Fund for Active Citizenship (fAKT) a local non-governmental and non-profit grant making foundation, have held Corporate Social Responsibility award ceremonies for the last three years, with one award dedicated to volunteer effort.

6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

According to legislation relating to NGOs, the government must make a fund available to calls on an annual basis. This amounts to 2.7 million Euros (in 2011) covering NGOs in six sectors: social, assistance for the disabled, sport, culture, non-formal education and the fight against drugs and other anti-social behaviours. Under these six sections, NGOs can apply for a programme under section a) under 15,000 Euros or under section b) over 15,000 Euros. There is no funding dedicated to volunteering.

Civil Society funding is further complicated by the fact that the majority of private foundations have less interest in this area, and with the fact that the so-called “Crisis Funds”, which financed the work of these foundations, have been redirected to different locations. In addition to these sources, funding also comes from embassies, although this is relatively rare and usually for pilot projects. However, the American embassy does offer funding each year for certain projects. Currently, the business sector is much closed to civil society in terms of access to funding.

There is also access to some European Union funding, especially the Instrument for Pre-accession (IPA) and the Youth in Action programme. It is noteworthy that other European Commission funding programmes such as PROGRESS and the Europe for Citizens Programme are not yet available in Montenegro.

Essentially there is no infrastructural financial support for volunteering and it is very difficult for volunteer-involving organisations to cover costs.



3. The Association for Democratic Prosperity -Zid, 2008. “Voluntarism and Public Institutions”

7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

As stated above, there is no regular or systematic research conducted in Montenegro with regards volunteering. This will perhaps develop in parallel with the development of a basic and more supportive volunteering infrastructure. There are though plans to implement in Montenegro the ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work, a methodology that allows reliable and comparable data on volunteering to be collected.

8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

In the 2010 Law on Volunteers, there is a paragraph on the rights and responsibilities of volunteers. Likewise, ethics are mentioned in the national strategy on volunteering, but as previously stated, this strategy has not really been translated into action. There is no formal ethical code for volunteering adopted at a national level. However, this is an issue being addressed at the moment and there is hope for the implementation of one in the future. It is hoped that this will be an element incorporated into legislation. Currently, individual NGOs have their own internal codes of ethics and procedures.

A priority in Montenegro is the disseminating of examples of good practice at the local and national level. There also needs to be greater recognition of the value of volunteering by the government. An ethical code and the consistent adoption of quality standards in volunteering can only really be realised if developed in parallel with a stronger and more supportive volunteering infrastructure.

9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Awareness about volunteering opportunities is created via social media, websites and campaigns involving leaflets, billboards and media publicity.

ADP-Zid, having its office in Podgorica, has a database of approximately 500 volunteers; local organisations can engage volunteers from this database. There is no equivalent at the national level. Awareness of volunteering opportunities is also created via Facebook, websites and campaigns involving leaflets, billboards and media publicity.

For the last five years, there has been a national Volunteer Award ceremony in Montenegro, organised by the ADP-Zid. This is a high-profile event, attracting over 150 people from all groups of society, including the media and representatives of the Government. It is held each year on 5 December, International Volunteer Day. There are categories for awards including the award for best contribution to corporate volunteering, best overall volunteer, best volunteer service or programme and best senior volunteer. This event helps to promote volunteering and to raise awareness on its contribution to society.

10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

Montenegro is at the early stages of the development of its volunteering infrastructure. However, there have been great improvements in recent years.



11. RECOMMENDATIONS

At the national level:

- The legislation on volunteering should be supportive, and not restrictive.
- An institutional mechanism is required to support the organised involvement of citizens, to support volunteer services and to fund a network of volunteer centres at the national and regional level.
- There should be capacity building of civil society.
- Citizens should be engaged more with their local communities and the relationship between citizens and civil society should be strengthened, which would serve to empower citizens.

At the European level:

- There should be more cooperation between countries, and a greater development of partnership working.
- With European Union (EU) institutions made more aware of volunteering, there needs to be a development of a stronger European strategy related to volunteering, which should reach all European countries, beyond the boundaries of the EU.

Resources

Association for Democratic Prosperity-Zid www.zid.org.me

European Economic and Social Committee, 2010. *OPINION of the European Economic and Social Committee on: The role of civil society in EU-Montenegro relations [REX/298]*. Available at: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/rex298_en.pdf

Mihajlović, S. and Milošević, I., 2009. *“Mapping the programs and activities intended for young people in Montenegro”*

The Association for Democratic Prosperity -Zid, 2008. *“Voluntarism and Public Institutions”*