1. Short introduction about volunteering in Slovakia

Despite the fact that volunteering has a long tradition in Slovakia, both the terms volunteering

and volunteer were not defined in any official document, legislation or legal act until December

2011. In reports and publications about volunteering that are available in Slovakia, the most

commonly used definition of volunteering is that *“volunteering is an action undertaken out of free*

*will, not motivated by financial gain and that it can bring benefits to a community, volunteers and the society at large”*. This definition includes both formal and informal volunteering.

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

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

There was significant representative research carried out in 2011 as a part of the National Campaign for the European Year of Volunteering 2011. The research found that 27.5% of Slovak citizens are involved in formal volunteering (carried out within or through various organisations). According to the last report on volunteering in the European Union, this level of engagement puts Slovakia among countries with a medium-high level of people volunteering (between 20 – 29% of the adult population). This however only reflects formal volunteering. Almost half of Slovaks (47.1%) are involved in informal volunteering, which is shown especially through mutual help and support among neighbours. The research showed that a high number of volunteers active within formal volunteering also participate in informal volunteering, and vice versa.

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

The social profile of Slovak volunteers can be characterised by:

*• almost the same level of involvement of men and women within both formal and informal*

*volunteering*

*• a similar representation of individual age groups, even though the lowest level of participation in*

*both types of volunteering is in the 15 to 19 years age group*

*• a relationship between volunteering and level of education, with the higher the level of education,*

*the higher the participation in volunteering*

*• a relationship between volunteering and economic position, with the highest level of participation*

*shown by students of universities, employed and retired people. Conversely, the less involved are*

*the unemployed and students of secondary schools*

*• a relationship between volunteering and the level of income - participation does not*

*automatically increase with the level of income; the least active are people with the lowest income*

*and the largest activity is shown by people with the average income in Slovakia (600 – 900 EUR)*

*• a higher level of involvement of widows and widowers in informal volunteering*

*• a connection between religion and increased informal volunteering*

*• an interconnection between participation in volunteering and membership in an organisation,*

*where members of organisations have a tendency to be more active in both types of volunteering.*

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

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

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

Volunteer organisations, their members often state that volunteering in Slovakia still has a low prestige. Practically, there is a lack of information about volunteering; the general public does not understand what volunteering means, and moreover, why it is important. There are many examples of people who do not refer to themselves as being volunteers; however, after some explanation they realise they actually are volunteers.

**Structure of the non-profit sector involved in volunteering**

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

Among other activities, C.A.R.D.O. continues with the promotion of volunteering in Slovakia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The largest organisations with a volunteering background are the Slovak Red Cross and the Union of Seniors, which have a long tradition in Slovakia. Organisations working in the area of sport – sport clubs, unions, and centres – have a long tradition as well. Despite the fact that these organisations are not typical volunteer organisations, many of them work with volunteers. Another large group of volunteer organisations consists of environmental organisations.

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

**Funding opportunities**

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

The funding of many volunteer organisations is provided by the state through mechanisms implemented by the respective Ministries. The activities of most volunteer organisations fall under grants offered by the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport is an important donor for children and youth organisations which are mostly based on volunteer work. This Ministry also supports activities in the area of sport, where there are many volunteers involved. Since 2008, the Ministry has also supported work with young people. This is done through the ADAM Programme that has a part explicitly focusing on youth volunteering.

Funds from the European Union are also a very important financial source for organisations working with volunteers. These include mainly the European Social Fund and the Lifelong Learning Programme. Access to funding from these sources is possible only for organisations with a good financial and personnel capacity. Another source available for volunteering in Slovakia is the EU programme Youth in Action. Other relevant sources are grants for NGOs supporting social inclusion funded through the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the Slovak state budget. None of these grant programmes however, explicitly focus on the support of volunteering.

Indirect State support for NGOs is created by the assignation of 2% of paid taxes to a chosen non-profit organisation. Further financial sources for volunteering are provided by regional and local governments. The support of volunteering by these sources however, is still only marginal. This statement is also supported by the results of a survey on youth policy on the regional and local level carried out in 2007. It reveals that youth volunteering is the least supported area of youth policy.

In recent years, several Slovak foundations have significantly supported civil society activities and volunteering as such. These foundations include for example the Open Society Foundation, the Ekopolis Foundation, the Children of Slovakia Foundation, the Pontis Foundation, and the Intenda Foundation. Lately, an important role in the funding of volunteering is played by corporate foundations and partially also by community foundations that support local projects often based on volunteer work. Other financial sources for volunteer programmes come from individuals and self-financing activities of NGOs (training, publications, provision of services, etc.).

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

**Additional country specificities**

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

(Volunteering infrastructure in Europe – Country Report Slovakia, 2012, Published by CEV - European Volunteer Centre)

1. National overview of existing mentoring practices

Generally in Slovakia, there are a few volunteer mentoring programmes.

People in need - DOT Programme - Individual tutoring consists of working with a particular child in the area of school preparation, helping with homework and repeating and complemening the school subjects. Program individual tutoring focuses on helping socially disadvantaged, mostly Roma children, from socially disadvantaged environment. [www.peopleinneed.sk](http://www.peopleinneed.sk)

LEAF– TalentGuide - TalentGuide is a mentoring program that connects talented high school students with successful college students and young professionals. During the six months, mentee will meet regularly (online and offline) with the mentor and jointly explore areas and issues of interest. All mentors in our program are university students or young professionals with wide experience from Slovakia and from abroad, who have a positive relationship with Slovakia and a strong motivation to encourage the younger generation of students. Their expertise and interests cover a large range of areas, thanks to which they can help students with various developmental needs. [www.talentguide.sk](http://www.talentguide.sk)

Kolégium Antona Neuwrtha (Collegium of Anton Neuwirth) – educational mentoring program is part of the of the program package of College. Each student has his personal mentor, selected on the basis of mutual preferences. Mentors - members of Ladislav Hanus Community - help students with their way to find mission in their life. Mentoring topics vary depending on the needs of the student. The most common mentoring objectives include self-understanding, personal, spiritual and professional growth. <http://www.kolegium.org/old/en/>