



**Voluntarism in Macedonia**  
**- Issue Specific Assessment Paper -**

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## **Problem Description**

With the development of the civil society, especially of the NGO sector, efforts are made to spread and develop the principle of volunteer work, however, that is done in a disorganised manner lacking appropriate strategy to be acted upon at a national level. With certain exceptions, the NGOs in the RM do not recruit volunteers in a regular, formal and organised manner. Still, plenty of them use voluntary services in their every day work and some of them dedicate time to volunteers as a potential assistance in their work by elaborating principles and guidelines for the volunteers' work. On the other side are the state governance and the local self-governments that do not acknowledge the volunteer work as a development element of the civil society. This arises from the fact that the volunteer work has not been legally defined and regulated yet. In spite of the potential found in the volunteer work, the Republic of Macedonia does not own a mutual initiative, coordination and strategy for the development of the volunteer work.

All of the researches that YCC – Bitola made for the target group (in the frame of Local Youth Action Plan, Strategy for Youth, Volunteerism in the Public Institutions, Draft Plan for Development of the Voluntarism etc.) have shown that the young people in Macedonia are still marginalized human resource and that the State is not investing enough in this potential. A serious problem is the very low level of employment especially of the high-educated young people who, in the same time, do not feel enough skilled to follow the modern economy standards and needs.

The setting up and operation of the Volunteer Centre should fill in the gap in the planning, promotion, support and needs for volunteer work experienced by the state authorities, as well as the lack of organised services for administering domestic and international volunteer programmes. The Volunteer Centre through its database will recruit, engage, train and promote the volunteer work at a local and national level in co-ordination with the institutions and organisations having the need of volunteers. The initiative of implementing a public policy for the promotion of the values of being a volunteer and acknowledging the volunteer work, as a strategic resource of every country should change the approach towards the volunteers exercised so far. The change of the negative image of the volunteer work will contribute to the democratic processes, strengthening of the civil society and approximation to the EU.

## **Problem Analysis**

Volunteer work and volunteers are ones of the important participants in the social life and economic development because they are huge human potential and are good-willed to dedicate their spare time, knowledge and skills to a work without receiving any financial compensation and for the purpose of a social change at a micro or macro social plan. Even though the volunteer work seems to be free of charge, a lot of social institutions in West Europe exist thanks to the volunteer work. If we summed the entire volunteer work and translated it into economic value, we would obtain an enormous amount. For instance, in Great Britain the expected value of volunteer work in the gross domestic product has a share of 40 billion pounds on an annual basis, placing it in the third position according to the share in the GDP (General facts about Voluntarism, Voluntarism and Public Institutions, ADP – Zed). Apart from the value for the state, the volunteer work has an educational importance, i.e. the volunteers acquire certain experience and skills through informal education preparing them for the labour market and making them part of the so called life-long learning and fulfilment of their ideas and programmes. And the third most important "benefit obtained from the volunteers is the construction of a solid and stable civil society. The volunteer work creates trust among citizens and strengthens the solidarity - factors of essential significance for a stable society" (Justin Davis Smith, session of the UN on the occasion of the International Volunteers Year 2001).

In the RM, as well as in other post-communist countries of South East Europe, after obtaining its independence the volunteer work as well as the statute of the volunteers

continued to move within the same frames as in the previous period. The communist ideology parted from the idea that every citizen must participate in the promotion of their community and do something useful for the society. This idea seems to have been imposed on the citizens because they were not able to make their own free decisions, which is the essence of volunteer work and the basic value of the volunteer. It resulted in a lot of volunteers feeling repulsion and distrust. Therefore, as in other post-communist countries the negative image of volunteer work was kept in R. Macedonia as well.

When we talk about voluntarism in the period before independence, i.e., when it was part of SFRY, Macedonia had similar experiences to the other republics that made up the country. Voluntarism existed as a form of engagement of youth in the renovation of the country in the period after the war (after 1945). This kind of work was organized in order to renovate and rebuild the country (construction of railroads, roads, bridges and dwellings), and this kind of voluntarism continued to exist, albeit on a smaller scale, up to the end of the 1980s. During the communist period there were possibilities to work voluntarily in organizations such as the Red Cross. Practical work in schools, that was part of the school program, was considered as a voluntary work. In the period after independence, voluntary work in Macedonia retained the same framework and main characteristics as volunteering during the previous period. In most cases, people volunteered in organizations such as the Red Cross (humanitarian organizations) and their engagement in those organizations was entirely a result of their free will.

Today, in the Republic of Macedonia, the disappointment is evident between the average citizens towards the mutual living and trend of destroying and uncontrolled grabbing of the mutual goods. Over 300 000 citizens live on social welfare and they have no optimism in better future, mutual help or positive efforts for development. In this kind of surrounding, there is small number of NGOs who are developing the volunteers' practices, but there is no evident cooperation and partnership between them. So far initiatives in the field of voluntarism make modest contribution in popularization of voluntary work in Republic of Macedonia: Manual for developing the program for volunteers, an initiative of a group of activists in the ECMI NGO Network, trainings for volunteers management realized with the help of FOSIM NGO Support Centers, Macedonian Volunteers in Action Project implemented by the First Children Embassy Megashi etc. On the other side, the state governance and the local self-governments do not acknowledge the volunteer work as a development element of the civil society. The volunteer work has not been legally defined and regulated yet and further more the current situation evidently shows that the Republic of Macedonia does not own a mutual initiative, coordination and strategy for the development of the volunteer work.

### **Political Situation Research**

Stimulating the citizens to dedicate their free time to the community is one of the largest and most complex challenges set to the state. It is complex due to the "disappointments" brought by the transitional period to the citizens resulting in the basic existence as a problem neglecting the reforms in the political and democratic system as important segments for the functioning of the society. The labour actions from the past and the creation of the socialist system on the basis of the volunteer work principle, the disappointment from the disintegration of ex Yugoslavia contributed to identifying the term of *volunteer work* with that period.

Voluntarism, as an important segment in the functioning of every society, has its basis in different legal forms. In some cases these are special laws, but in other countries voluntarism and voluntary work are defined by legal clauses present in a number of different laws and sub-laws. For example, in Italy there is a wide legal framework that defines the legal status of voluntarism in Italy (law of voluntarism, law of social cooperation, law of mutual cooperation and development of volunteers' organizations, law of military service for conscious objectors, law of public institutions etc.). The current Law of voluntarism came into effect in 1991 and it is used as the legal basis for regional authorities to define the issue of

voluntarism in their jurisdiction. This law, like other regional laws that followed, recognized voluntary work as an integral part of civil society. By this law, main characteristics of voluntary work are defined, and it regulates mutual relationship between government and voluntary groups. The law strictly defines that volunteers are not considered as employees. Consequently, volunteers' organizations are not obliged to pay any social tax for volunteers nor taxes to the state and local authorities. In the last several years in Slovenia, voluntarism was recognized as an active tool for alleviation of poverty and social exclusion, which are residues of the ex-communist regime. Despite the high level of participation in voluntary actions, there is no specific legal regulation defining the status of volunteers in Slovenia. Only recently government has started a serious dialogue with different organizations concerning the need for legislation regulating voluntarism. The Government of Slovenia has introduced volunteering in schools through an educational reform. Secondary students are obliged to carry out some kind of voluntary work, while volunteering at primary school level is currently considered as 'good practice'. The Romanian Law on Voluntarism of 2001 defines voluntarism as "an activity of public interest undertaken by individuals called volunteers within the framework of a certain legal relationship, other than legal relationships created under the Labour and Civil Codes pertaining to the carrying out of a paid employment". However, the main focus of the law is on international volunteers, and it does not particularly aim to increase citizens' overall awareness of voluntary activity.

No matter how it is regulated, the issue of voluntarism and voluntary work is in most cases defined by the status of volunteers (social and health insurance, work experience, benefits, compensation, etc.), then by the status of international volunteers (social and health insurance, residence permit, taxation, work experience, benefits, etc.) and by types of involvement of volunteers in public institutions. Besides legislation, the common practice is a policy for voluntarism that is in use in some ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Sport and Social Policy.

In Macedonia, there is no rights regulation in the frame of the Law System connected with the issue of voluntarism and, also, there are lots of confusions with the terminology and definition of the term "volunteer". There is neither a special law regulating the organization or nature of voluntary engagement in public institutions, nor is there a place in the institutions where volunteers can go and offer volunteers' services. The status of volunteers in Macedonia is very similar to the situation in which individuals starting to work (new workers) have and both kinds of work are for a limited period of time. Macedonian legislation regarding employment neither mention, in any part of the main body or special supplement, nor regulate voluntary work. For this reason, voluntary work in public institutions in Macedonia is legally defined only in court administration by the 'Regulation of job positions' systematization', in health institutions by the Law of health care, in veterinary ambulances by the Law of health of animals. In practice, voluntary work is a precondition for professional examination and in this way acquiring the right/license for work in their profession. There have been examples and support of voluntarism lately, which are not defined by the law - that is more a result of agreement/ contract between employers and volunteer. These contracts are closely linked to clearly defined projects and activities.

YCC – Bitola in the frame of the Voluntarism in the Public Institutions Project has conducted the nation-wide research about the legislature in Macedonia that regulates different aspects of voluntarism in Republic of Macedonia. 50 public institutions in Macedonia has been surveyed on this topic and the results has shown that none of them is familiar of work with volunteers in the past. It was noticed that institutions surveyed interpret restrictively the activities that can be considered for voluntary ones, so it can be concluded that we are talking about lack of information and education in this field. Besides in Macedonia, the same research and questionnaire was conducted in Croatia, BIH and Montenegro. The results from the survey are published on the CD and a hard copy publication on English.

After this, YCC – Bitola joined the national initiative for drafting the Plan for Development of Voluntarism in Republic of Macedonia coordinated by NGO Sunrise from Sveti Nikole. The survey was conducted over a group of 368 citizens from 11 municipalities in Macedonia in order to collect information about the public opinion about the volunteer work in general. The result from the survey showed that most of the citizens mainly do not understand the

concept of voluntarism, which to the certain extent presents lack of interest, information and education. In this direction, the recommendations in the Draft version of the Plan for Development of Voluntarism are as follows:

- To raise public awareness about the needs of practicing the voluntarism
- To make conditions for legislative framing of voluntarism
- To make conditions for support of voluntarism in Republic of Macedonia from the all relevant institutions

The Draft Plan for Development of Voluntarism is now submitted to the Sector for Euro Integration in the State Government. The initial feedback for the Paper is received, just as information that there is no kind of initiative going on at the moment in regard to this issue, due to the other ongoing responsibilities in different government bodies. However, the recommendations from the Paper will be taken into consideration when it's appropriate.

Realising the general situation of voluntarism and volunteering in Macedonia, the general conclusion is that the voluntarism and volunteering are marginalized both in theoretical and practical sense. It is noticeable the lack of interest of the governments for voluntary work too, which is an important resource of the development policy in every community i.e. the lack of interest for improvement of volunteers' position as well. In the labor legislation the concept of volunteer as well on the volunteers' rights protection is completely excluded. Mentioning voluntarism and voluntary work as a kind of training period (internship) or advanced training in the profession; no deeper understanding of the concept of voluntarism itself and reducing number of activities that are still considered as voluntary ones; as

well as insufficient health and social insurance of volunteers, speak in favor of superficiality and incompleteness of the existing legislation.

There were some partial initiatives from different NGOs, but still in Macedonia there is no established volunteers' centers that should play the role of mediator between potential volunteers and interested institutions. Even though we assume that the interest in volunteering will increase the question is where the selection and training of volunteers for certain activities will be carried out. Current non-existing of volunteer's centers and lack of broader network of local centers present a big obstacle. Additionally, the government does not respect and follow UN declarations and recommendations and standards of the EU as well as the experiences of the countries that already passed transition period toward European integration.

The general conclusion is that in Republic of Macedonia there is a strong need of conducting the new law for volunteerism or new changes in the already existing amendments in different laws that are regulating the issue of volunteer work.

### **Stakeholder analysis**

The Youth Cultural Center – Bitola is a nongovernmental organization that works with young people over the last 8 years. Most of its activities refer to the young people from the town of Bitola, but in the same time, YCC – Bitola conduct national initiatives connected with the youth policy and youth strategy topics in Republic of Macedonia.

In the area of volunteer initiatives and development of the volunteering, the YCC - Bitola put more systematic emphasis at the beginning of 2002 through the campaign for promoting the volunteering named *Dzabe Raboti, Dzabe ne Sedi* (Work in vain, do not sit in vain). It was the local campaign, directed towards the activation of young people from Bitola to become our members and to get involved in our programmes. The project was an excellent start of the recruitment method of new members - activity carriers. The YCC – Bitola team was doing an informal meetings with young people from the city, usually in the coffee bars and schools just to interview them about their thoughts, concerns and priorities in regards to join YCC – Bitola and to make different kind of contribution. Most of them expressed their willingness to work on cultural activities, to practice music and art and to be included in informal educational activities in the frame of YCC – Bitola programs such as: computer and language studio, ethno workshops etc. They strongly express their willingness to develop and deepen their personal skills, but there was misunderstanding when we are talking about their motivation to be useful for the local community and the possibility to be

involved in decision-making processes. The feeling of mistrust and lack of possibility to use their power to change something in the community was evident. In that time YCC – Bitola start its involvement in citizens campaigns (Enough is enough, Mosaic, Don't you FYROM me etc.) in order to change the existing situation and help in national efforts to raise peoples' awareness of using the power for making changes. At the same time, the volunteering was included in the organisation activities as a special programme. We started to form focus groups of young people and communicate with them every time when we wanted to start some initiative in order to meet their needs and to improve our ideas and future steps.

All of the researches that YCC – Bitola made for the target group (in the frame of Local Youth Action Plan, Strategy for Youth, Volunteerism in the Public Institutions, Draft Plan for Development of the Voluntarism etc.) have shown that the young people in Macedonia are still marginalized human resource and that the State is not investing enough in this potential. A serious problem is the very low level of employment especially of the high-educated young people who, in the same time, do not feel enough skilled to follow the modern economy standards and needs. YCC – Bitola experience in working with the volunteers is that the young people aged 17 – 35 are the most interested to practice voluntarism and to take part in different volunteer actions. There is strong motivation for them to feel useful in the society, to deepen their knowledge and skills outside from the formal education system, creative expression etc. Also, they are open for new experiences and new methods of work in order for better adaptation of the global market changes.

***Target group benefit:***

1. Young people aged 17 - 35:
  - Encouraging the young people for mobility and education
  - Knowledge and experience transfer
  - Motivation of the utilisation of the entrepreneurship abilities
  - Motivation in self-organisation
  - Team work
  - Managerial and organisation skills
  - Communication and partnership relations development
  - Destroying barriers and prejudices
  - Solidarity
  - Spending their free time
  - Creative expression
  - Meeting other cultures
2. The institutions competent for the adoption of the legal regulation from the area of volunteer work (assembly members, the governmental sector, citizen contact offices of the assembly members, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Finance) to which the campaign on raising the initiative for legal regulation of the volunteer work will be intended
3. The local communities benefit from the results of the local actions
4. NGO sector in the R. Macedonia through the training of the volunteer info points
5. Improved image of the local business sector through the support of the local actions
6. Educational Institutions will benefit with the adopting the new law (or change the existing amendments) of voluntarism
7. General Public benefit from the campaigns for raising the awareness about the positive values of voluntarism

For the Society, there are two main benefits from volunteers. **Firstly**, it is an economic benefit: volunteers provide strong economic support to society because they do jobs that would be done otherwise by paid staff.

*The second*, more important, benefit that communities receive from volunteers is the development of strong and stable society. They build trust among citizens and enhance solidarity by their work - things that are essential for stable societies.

### **Potential Solutions and Advocacy Strategy**

Several important steps should be undertaken in this direction:

**1. To change existing and adopt new law** that should be in accordance to the European legislation.

- Legislation reforms would imply adoption of the new, basic law and it would also regulate general rights and responsibilities of the volunteers, their protection and activities that are considered as the voluntary work.
- The internal and special regulations should be adopted in the institutions (public institutions, schools, hospitals, humanitarian institutions, etc.) defining neither fewer rights nor more responsibilities for volunteers than those defined by the basic law.
- Change of legislation should be focused on improvement of conditions and position of volunteers in the sense of their better health and social welfare, defining job descriptions, the Contract on voluntary work, recruitment and compensation procedures for the voluntary work etc.
- Status, rights and responsibilities of foreign volunteer involved in the activities and projects of the Macedonian organizations and institutions should be defined in the frame of above-mentioned legislation as well.
- Volunteering and training period (internship) should be defined in the law separately.
- Government departments should ensure adequate support (financial, health insurance for volunteers, education...) for the activities of individuals, organizations and institutions hosting the volunteers

**2. To work on developing of the public awareness** relating importance of the voluntarism for the country and its socio-economic system as well as for institutions and future volunteers. Improvement of public informing and education of citizens and public institutions is an important step that has to be made. Government, media, school institutions and especially volunteers' centers should play crucial role in this activity organizing different seminars, round table discussions and lecture. In this way, they will be affirming voluntary work, its importance and benefits for the public good. Emphasis on cooperation with other countries and taking part in the international volunteers' exchange programmes will also contribute to better understanding of voluntarism and its importance. At the end, exchange of experiences with organizations and institutions in other countries and accessibility of that information to wider public will contribute to better education and development of programmes. In this direction, the recommendations could be systematized as follows:

- To initiate systematic education of public institutions and government representatives (local and national) about voluntarism, benefits of voluntary work and needs for this kind of work in Macedonia
- To recommend to local and national governments establishing special funds for support of the voluntary activities emphasizing positive values of the voluntary
- Work and volunteers as the useful and active members of the society; and supporting voluntary activism among children.
- Public institutions and government should be better informed about importance and benefits of the volunteering;
- General public should be better informed about values, importance and benefits of voluntarism and in that way motivate people to take active part in the institutions that requires volunteers

**3. To insist on legislation that would enable development of volunteers' centers** and define mechanism for their financial support. This legislation should support establishing the network of national volunteers' centers that would significantly improve current situation and

cooperation of public institutions with those centers, development of volunteers' management and better and faster contact with volunteers. The law would induce better cooperation of public institutions and volunteers' centers, bigger confidence of volunteers themselves, which would influence better response to voluntary work. The centers should be responsible for recruitment, training and promotion of volunteering and be in the regular contact with institutions that require volunteers.

Other recommendations:

- To regulate relationship between the volunteer and the hosting organization by the Volunteer's contract which will include both rights and responsibility of the organization (juristic person) and the individual volunteer;
- In the future initiatives for development of voluntarism in Macedonia, cooperation among central and local authorities, public institutions and non-governmental institutions should be enhanced;
- Know-how transfer should be ensured from non-governmental organizations and institutions with relevant experience in the field of voluntarism towards those organizations, institutions and government departments lacking this experience. An important role in this process can and should have international institutions, foundations, international networks and volunteers' centers supporting this development directly or through transfer of know-how. This would make preconditions for creation of the national and regional policies for development of voluntarism, citizens' participation and help in public institutions and education of youth supporting their mobility.