



May 2012

Promoting Youth Volunteerism 75388 in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Volunteerism strengthens social cohesion and contributes to inclusive national and regional growth;¹ the community, the volunteers, and wider society all reap the benefits. Through their work, volunteers develop a wide range of useful skills, and gain knowledge and access to people and situations that open doors to future opportunities.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), volunteer work is not a new concept; it has deep cultural roots. However, a strategic and structured approach to volunteerism has yet to be developed, including a national framework with robust legal and institutional guidelines. This note explores the potential to expand youth volunteerism in BH so young people can (i) improve opportunities for their social and economic development; (ii) make valuable contributions to community wellbeing; and (iii) ease their transition into productive adult employment and citizenship. The note presents an overview of the history of volunteerism in BH, and a review of the existing framework, including institutional and legal dimensions; it describes and compares volunteer sector norms in the European Union, Slovenia, and Croatia, and identifies good practices in these countries for volunteerism outreach and promotion. The note concludes with opportunities and challenges for the volunteer sector and recommendations to advance practices, in particular among youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I. The Volunteer Sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Historical context

Volunteerism has a long history in BH, linked to strong community solidarity. Family members and neighbors supported those in need (e.g., to organize big social events such as weddings or funerals). This well-rooted custom is called “*moba*” and was particularly common in rural areas.² Traditionally, religious institutions also encouraged volunteerism. The four primary religions represented in BH (Islam, Orthodox, Catholicism and Judaism) formed “the basis for certain social norms such as mutual help and voluntary work for the benefit of the wider community”,³ in particular, organized assistance to the most vulnerable. This tradition continues today, with volunteer activities organized by a wide range of civil society organizations.

After World War II, in the newly founded Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, religious groups lost their significance and volunteerism was overseen by the State. However, community volunteer opportunities continued to exist, particularly for youth, although they were unrecognized legally. State authorities organized and controlled unpaid work through several government associations, for example, the Socialist Union of

1 Eurofound, 2011.

2 CEV, 2008.

3 Kacapor, 2002.

the Working People of Yugoslavia (SSRNJ). Work was organized on multiple levels of state administration.⁴ Children participated in mainly environmental activities through obligatory school programs; members of the Union of the Socialist Youth (SSO) participated in popular Youth Working Actions (Radne Akcije), which supported large-scale community works that involved construction and reconstruction. Young citizen participation was viewed as highly positive, although most so-called “volunteer” work was organized by the central government, and lacked social or democratic involvement or community ownership.⁵

Understandably since that time, volunteerism has been viewed as reactive not proactive, which in part, explains why the BH voluntary sector is underdeveloped.⁶ After the 1990s war and during successful implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, civil society development and volunteerism focused on humanitarian aid for reconstruction and development. Since BH local and entity governments have limited resources to provide social services using existing infrastructure, non-governmental and voluntary sectors assumed a major role in social services and community development activities.⁷ More recently in BH, significant efforts have been made to build civil society and expand volunteerism; these are now bearing fruit—the number of volunteers is beginning to rise, especially among youth.⁸

Volunteers and Legal Regulations

In BH, volunteer work is subject to some legal regulations. At the national level, the Poverty Reduction Strategy for BH states that legislation should be adopted to promote volunteer work in the social protection system. Similarly, during 2004-08 in BH, NGOs sought to raise awareness of the potential benefits of legislation to formally recognize and protect volunteers and volunteerism. A working group comprising United Nations volunteers, national and international organizations, and government developed a draft National Law on Volunteering, which has yet to be endorsed by parliament at Federation of BH (FBiH) or State levels.⁹

At the entity level, the Republika Srpska (RS) adopted a Law on Volunteering in July 2008. The Law defines

rights and responsibilities for volunteers and volunteer organizations (e.g., contracts between volunteers and organizations).¹⁰ Local authorities are committed to defining recognition and reward mechanisms for volunteerism in local communities. The Law on Volunteering defines principles, such as equal treatment, protection, prevention of misuse (especially of minors); it specifies criteria for reimbursement of expenditures incurred during volunteer activities (travel costs, required work clothing and equipment, meals and accommodations, training, and medical services). The Law indicates that volunteers who travel for work are eligible for an advance on out-of-pocket expenses in amounts not to exceed 50 percent of official civil servant per diem rates; the Law also details penalties for non compliance, including fines. Early in 2009, a working group from the Federation of BH (the other entity) discussed a Law on Volunteering and consulted with civil society representatives and experts. By end-2009, they had a draft law that was presented to the Youth Commission of the Federation Parliament.¹¹ The process was advanced in 2011 and on December 5, International Volunteer Day, the Youth Commission initiated the draft Law on Volunteering at the Federation Parliament. The Commission gave its assurance that the new law will regulate volunteerism and will acknowledge long-term volunteering as work experience. The Law entered parliamentary procedures; public hearings on the draft Law are expected to follow at the first regular session of the Federation Parliament in 2012.

Youth Volunteerism

In 2005, an NGO established the first local volunteer service (LVS) in BH in Banja Luka the Youth Communication Center (YCC). The LVS provides a basic structure to encourage citizens to volunteer, to help organize and coordinate local volunteer work, and to gain public recognition for volunteer contributions to local development. In partnership with NGOs, YCC established seven more local volunteer services in BH.¹² In 2009, the ninth was established in Brcko within the Red Cross. The LVSs help create volunteer programs that match community needs.¹³ Today, all nine LVSs operate within the informal network of LVS “Volontiram!”, which exists to develop and promote volunteerism. The

4 YCC Banja Luka, 2005.
5 Milosevic, 2005.
6 Kacapor, 2002.
7 Kacapor, 2002.
8 UNDP, 2009.
9 UNV, 2011.

10 YCC Banja Luka, 2011b.
11 LVS BH, 2011.
12 These were in Sarajevo, Doboj (RS), Mrkonjic Grad (RS), Srebrenica (RS), Trebinje (RS), Bugojno (Federation of BH), and Tuzla (Federation of BH).
13 YCC Banja Luka, 2011a.

“Volontiram!” is administered by YCC Banja Luka, which is the informal national volunteer center in BH.

At the national level in BH, the Commission for Coordination of Youth issues within the Ministry of Civil Affairs, is responsible for youth and youth policy. Although BH has not harmonized the legal definition of youth, at the entity level some legislation on youth exists; in the RS, a Law on Youth Organizations was adopted in 2004, but the FBiH lacks a similar law or policy and neither FBiH nor RS has youth action programs.

Strengthening NGOs in BH led to expanded initiatives for youth volunteers at all levels, including national and international exchanges and local programs. However, the national rate of formal volunteering remains low; in 2009, it was only 4.5 percent of the population.¹⁴ In 2002, people under 34 years old comprised 70 percent of all volunteers in BH, according to UNV.¹⁵ In 2009, UNDP research participants found “the majority of volunteers are young people, i.e., university and high school students.”¹⁶

Most young volunteers lack other employment and therefore are not earning income. However, a 2007 survey revealed that many volunteers have had at least some paid work in the past whereas people who have never had paid employment are less likely to volunteer.¹⁷ The survey revealed that 86 percent of people between the ages of 24 and 30 years had never volunteered because they lacked the time, or had no access to information about volunteer opportunities, or because opportunities did not exist. However, according to LVS experience in Banja Luka, youth would like to volunteer, especially at the local level and in long-term placements of two to six months but there are still too few placements available to meet demand. Since the LVSs were established, local structures have become more effective and improved the balance between demand and supply of volunteer placements. Estimates suggest that 10-30 percent of young people can be considered potential volunteers but many still lack information about volunteer opportunities and benefits.¹⁸ Youth volunteers represent enormous potential for BH, but creating an organized cadre of volunteers requires investments in promotion, infrastructure, and legislation on volunteering. The next section highlights international experiences that could be adopted in BH to make this happen.

II. Volunteering in the EU and Selected Neighboring Countries

Volunteers are Shaping European Society

A 2010 study by the European Commission estimated that 100 million Europeans volunteer.¹⁹ The most active volunteers are adults between 30 and 50 years of age. However, the numbers of younger and older volunteers are increasing across the European Union. Among the most important reasons cited for volunteering was pursuing a career path, which demonstrates widespread recognition that volunteering has always been a successful and low-cost strategy for gaining skills and contacts needed for future employment.

Not surprisingly, volunteering is an important component of the Europe 2020 growth strategy, which aims to improve the EU employment rate by helping people learn new skills and adapt to a changing labor market. The broader social impacts of volunteering contribute directly to key EU policy objectives, such as social inclusion, employment, education, and skills development.²⁰ The EU recognizes volunteering as a valid form of learning by providing funding for volunteer activities such as the Youth in Action Program (European Voluntary Service), the Europe for Citizens Program, and the Lifelong Learning Program.

The European Skills Passport (ESP) is slated to become the recognized pan-European equivalent of the volunteer passport tools now used by some national- or regional-level volunteer centers.²¹ Consequently, volunteer centers will be jointly responsible for promoting the ESP among employers throughout Europe. The ESP concept is a formal process of third-party validation of skills acquisition that makes it possible for passport holders to use their acquired knowledge and skills to seek employment or volunteer opportunities throughout Europe. Eligible third parties can include training centres, enterprises, schools, or volunteer organizations. The ESP confirms the skills and competencies of passport holders and records are stored securely in a central database, ensuring accuracy.²²

The European Year of Voluntary Activities in 2011 promoted active citizenship. In the EU, political

14 UNDP, 2009.

15 Kacapor, 2002.

16 UNDP, 2009.

17 Powell et al, 2007.

18 Powell et al, 2007.

19 UNV, 2009.

20 EC, 2011.

21 CEV, 2011.

22 DTI, 2011.

Good Practice Example EU I Developing a European Skills Passport

(European Infonet, 2011)

The EC plans to launch the new ESP by November 2012. This ESP will record skills acquired during traineeships or volunteering (at home and abroad). The ESP will present job seekers' abilities and experiences through a medium that is accurate, transparent and comparable; the ESP will validate skills and competencies acquired during studies, volunteering and employment.

developments have affected volunteering and multiple efforts have been undertaken to promote voluntary activities. In 1997, the intergovernmental conference adopted Declaration 38 on Volunteering; following this, other EU-level documents have emphasized the role of volunteerism and declared support for volunteers across Europe. Recently, the social and economic value of volunteerism was highlighted in EU documents, which called for quantifying its economic value. In 2011, the EC launched the Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship, which encouraged: (i) dialogue on volunteering; (ii) exchanging good practices; (iii) raising public awareness; (iv) networking among sectors.²³

Few EU countries have national legal frameworks to regulate volunteerism.

No uniform regulations exist in the EU, due to the diversity and complexity of the volunteer sector across Member States. A few countries have a national strategy for volunteerism but most existing legislative frameworks were adopted after 2001, the UN International Year of Volunteers. Little information/data are available on volunteering; what data exist are often unstructured or not standardized. Countries with a legal framework for volunteerism have scant information on its impact. Even fewer countries have identified targets, or formal reporting and monitoring arrangements for the volunteer sector. The International Labor Organization is developing the first set of international guidelines for generating regular statistics on volunteerism, which will enable cross-country comparisons.²⁴

23 Eurofound, 2011.
24 GHK, 2010.
25 EC, 2011.

Good Practice Examples Czech Republic

(AVSO & CEV, 2003)

Accreditation of Volunteer-sending Organization

In the Czech Republic the State channels funding to state-approved volunteer-sending organizations. The support received may cover up to 70 percent of volunteer's costs. People who volunteer for a minimum of 20 hours per week are entitled to State healthcare insurance and social welfare protection.

Unemployed Volunteers

From 2000, the Czech Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs supported unemployed workers, who were allowed to perform voluntary activities without losing entitlements to their social welfare payments. This national program involves young unemployed people as volunteers. One day per week, the young volunteers receive training. After the first year, the program was opened to other unemployed groups, such as workers on maternity leave. Several Employment Centers also started to cooperate with the program. However, although volunteering for the unemployed has proven beneficial, it should never replace social measures designed to assist unemployed workers.

Despite the data vacuum, volunteerism is becoming more important to national agendas and many countries plan to adopt related laws, strategies or policies. Some countries also use laws on volunteering to channel funding by offering accreditation for volunteer activities that support government policy goals and objectives for public services.²⁵ Most EU Member States support volunteerism through their tax regimes, typically through reimbursing expenses for volunteers and exempting non-profit activities from taxation.²⁶ For example, under Romania's Law on Volunteering (2001), expense reimbursement to volunteers is tax-exempt.²⁷ In Germany, volunteers can receive small tax-exempt stipends of up to 500 euro per year. Other tax benefits include a higher tax allowance for income from training activities and tax-deductible membership fees for associations, which qualify as special expenses.²⁸

26 EC, 2011.
27 AVSO & CEV, 2005a.
28 GHK, 2010.

Youth volunteerism is a key European Union policy area

Volunteerism is a key concept in EU youth policy, which recognizes that young people might seek volunteer opportunities and continue to do so throughout their lives, assuming they have access to good information about volunteer positions and have positive experiences. In 2001, the White Paper, “A new impetus for European youth,” was adopted; it highlighted the value of volunteer activities to individual professional development. In particular, when opportunities are limited for higher education or finding paid employment, volunteer positions are useful to develop marketable skills and a track record of achievements that can be recorded in the ESP or equivalent documents.

Promoting the benefits of volunteer work and integrating volunteerism with the education system as a regular component of a professional career path could encourage young people to consider volunteering as integral to their education.²⁹ In many Member States, volunteer skills and competencies acquired during informal learning are now formally recognized. Some examples include the Austrian Volunteer Passport, the Finnish Recreational Study Book, the Estonian Volunteer Passport, and the Bulgarian Volunteer Record Book. These documents, similar to the ESP, primarily target young people, recognize their volunteer efforts, and reinforce the benefits of volunteer work. These passport/books document the type and duration of volunteer work and skills acquired, and can be used to convey this information to prospective employers, ideally to encourage employers to hire those who have been volunteers. For example, the Austrian Economic Chambers and the Employment Service recognize the Volunteer Passport.

Volunteering in Slovenia

In Slovenia, volunteerism has a long tradition; volunteers are an integral part of civil society, and can address multiple social needs and challenges. Since Slovenia’s independence in 1991, many civil society volunteer programs have been developed, including the NGO “Slovenian Philanthropy (Slovenska Filantropija): Association for the Promotion and Development of Volunteering” and the “Society for Development of Preventive and Voluntary Work”. In 2003, these two associations initiated a joint program, “Activities to Promote Volunteering in Slovenia.” This resulted in

Good Practice Example Slovenia I Nonformal Learning Record Book and Portfolio - NEFIKS

(GHK, 2009)

NEFIKS is a record book and an online portfolio of nonformal learning achievements of bearers, mainly school and university students and unemployed. NEFIKS records knowledge acquired through engagement as active citizens through work, organized education, work in camps, and volunteer activities. NEFIKS is a uniform system to validate knowledge and experience acquired in a nonformal manner. Personal achievement is observed ‘post hoc’ by program leaders and assessed by internal and external assessors from youth centers nationwide. This nationally recognized validation aims to convince employers to consider nonformal education as an employment reference. It has been recommended that universities use NEFIKS as a tool to record the results from the practica/practical components of their formal examinations.

developing the Slovenian Network of Volunteering Organizations, which expands access to volunteer placements in organizations, represents volunteer organizations, and provides volunteering information.³⁰ In addition, an informal framework included a network of volunteer organizations, a biannual volunteer congress and a professional code of conduct for volunteer work.³¹

The Code of Ethics for Organized Volunteering includes basic recommendations and minimum quality standards for volunteer work; all volunteer organizations are expected to comply.³² In February 2011, during the European Year of Volunteering, Slovenia adopted a new Law on Volunteering, led by the Ministry of Public Administration and in consensus with Slovenian NGOs. The Law defines volunteer rights, obligations, principles and mechanisms; it introduced systematic monitoring of voluntary work hours; it requires volunteer organizations to issue certificates specifying skills gained by volunteers during their assignments, which can be used as references when seeking employment.³³

Under the Law, organizations must maintain records of volunteers and their work assignments; they must provide training and mentors, and cover any costs

29 EC, 2011.

30 Value, 2009.

31 Rakar et al, 2011.

32 Prostovoljstvo, 2006.

33 UKOM, 2011.

incurred by volunteers in carrying out their work. Unemployed workers who volunteer do not lose their unemployment status and are able to maintain their benefits. The Law introduced a State prize and an Award for the Volunteer of the Year, issued by the National Youth Council; a National Association of Volunteers will be created, which will offer insurance coverage for volunteers.³⁴ Organizations that are managed and run mostly by volunteers are VAT exempt.³⁵ Since the Law on Volunteering was just enacted, no data are available on practical implications.

Youth Volunteering is Promoted and Encouraged

Most Slovenian volunteers are young people—either secondary school students 15-18 years, or youth, 19-30 years of age according to the Ministry of Education and Sport. Adults older than 30 years of age, and particularly those over 64, are significantly less likely than youth to volunteer.³⁶ Only 10 to 19 percent of adults were volunteers.³⁷

Government encourages volunteering by co-financing voluntary work programs and introducing volunteering into school curricula through educational reforms.³⁸ Each year the Government Office of Youth launches a public campaign highlighting youth voluntary activities. In a successful system for youth volunteering in primary and secondary schools, students are offered a specified number of hours of volunteering in their communities as an annual extra-curricular activity for which they receive a certificate of participation.³⁹ Early positive experiences with volunteering can lay the foundation for students to continue volunteer activities throughout their lives for the benefit of communities and society as a whole.

Good Practice Example Slovenia II Study Credits for Volunteering

(Trasner, 2010)

The University of Ljubljana introduced a system of accreditation that formally recognizes skills gained by young people through volunteer work; each student receives two credits for 60 hours of volunteering per year.

Several Slovenian universities have established student volunteer programs that provide mentors to supervise and assist volunteers, and counselors for oversight. So far, the programs are not accredited within the academic system.⁴⁰

Volunteerism in Croatia

Volunteering is based on a long tradition of community solidarity and support. In 2001, the National Committee for the Development of Volunteering was established, and consultations were held with stakeholders. In 2007, the Croatian Parliament adopted a Law on Volunteering, the first of its kind in the country and the region; the Law complements other national laws and defines relations among volunteers, organizers and beneficiaries.

The Law promotes a supportive social environment for volunteer work, but also seeks to prevent misuses.⁴¹ It regulates terminology, principles and conditions; it prevents discrimination or exploitation; it protects beneficiaries and minors; and it regulates contracts, international volunteer positions, the code of ethics, and volunteering certificates. The Law anticipates government funding of the National Board for the Development of Volunteering, and the National Volunteer of the Year Award.

So far, National Labor Law has not been amended to align with the Law on Volunteering resulting in some conflicts. For example, Labor Law does not recognize volunteer status among registered unemployed persons; therefore the State is required to withhold support payments while they are volunteering. It is anticipated that the two Laws will eventually be aligned.

Regional Volunteer Centers Support Youth Volunteering

Croatia has four regional volunteer centers: the Volunteer Center Osijek, the Volunteer Center within the Association for Civil Society Development SMART in Rijeka, the Volunteer Center within the Association MI in Split, and the Volunteer Center Zagreb. These centers promote and develop volunteerism on the local, regional, and national levels; they offer training in volunteer management and public education on volunteerism; they conduct research.⁴² Potential volunteers are introduced

34 GHK, 2009.

35 EC, 2011.

36 GHK, 2009.

37 UKOM, 2011.

38 GHK, 2009.

39 CEV, 2007.

40 AVSO & CEV, 2005b.

41 Horvat, 2007.

42 CEV, 2008.

to volunteer opportunities, and interested organizations are linked with volunteers. All four regional volunteer centers in Croatia primarily target youth.

The Croatian Volunteer Centers Network is a joint project of the four volunteer centers. The Network influences public policies and legislation and promotes and establishes educational standards in volunteerism and volunteer management; it disseminates public information about volunteerism, ensures quality standards for volunteer services, and develops good practices.⁴³

The National Youth Program in Croatia emphasizes student learning through community volunteerism (Education, Measure 12). The program aims to expand youth volunteer opportunities (Participation, Measure 7) and to promote youth volunteers to institutions and companies with the help of volunteer centers.⁴⁴

III. Volunteering in BH: Challenges, Opportunities, Recommendations

Over the last decade, stakeholders have made a significant effort to strengthen civil society and promote the concept of volunteerism. Numerous volunteer activities and policy changes are ongoing in BH, but many challenges remain. This section discusses these challenges, as well as opportunities and recommendations for stakeholders seeking to promote volunteerism and support an enabling environment for youth volunteers in BH.

Challenges & Opportunities

1. Clarify the legal framework for volunteering

The UN 2001 International Year of Volunteers emphasized that an enabling national framework for volunteerism is an important precondition for a volunteer movement to flourish. A clear national legal framework would distinguish and clarify the roles of paid and volunteer staff, and ensure legal recognition of civil society volunteer activities.

At the FBiH level, another challenge is that volunteerism is now regulated only through the Labor Law, which does not adequately reflect the concept of volunteer

work.⁴⁵ Two articles in the Law refer to trainees (Article 26) and volunteer work (Article 28).⁴⁶ Article 26 sets out that an employer can train individuals who have not worked before and who seek professional work experience in their field of studies. The trainees receive a training contract and unpaid on-the-job training for a maximum of one year. Article 28 regulates cases in which professional work experience or passing professional exams are obligatory for employment. The Law regards this not as employment but as volunteer work; however, the volunteer must receive a contract and accident and medical insurance. Therefore, it might be more accurate to refer to this arrangement as an internship.⁴⁷ By contrast, volunteer work is undertaken in any field of choice, is not an obligation, and does not seek work experience specifically to pass examinations or to achieve professional credentials or qualifications.

2. Improve monitoring of the implementation of existing legal regulations on volunteerism

Despite the successful adoption of a Law on Volunteering in RS, challenges remain for implementation. So far, no established methodology for monitoring and implementation of this Law exists and according to the YCC in Banja Luka, the Law is not always respected in RS municipalities.⁴⁸ To facilitate implementation of the Law, the YCC in Banja Luka initiated and created volunteerism policies for seven municipalities in RS: Mrkonjic Grad, Laktasi, Trebinje, Doboje, Derventa, Srebrenica, and Banja Luka. The policies cover local guidelines for expanding volunteerism, establishing priorities, developing recognition systems, and implementing the policies locally. These local policies should be monitored to evaluate their impacts. If successful, local volunteerism policies could be drafted for municipal-level volunteering in FBiH, until an entity Law on Volunteering is enacted.

3. Record volunteer work in official labor cards

An additional challenge to expanding volunteerism in BH is that volunteer work is ineligible for official labor card records (Radna Knjizica). Under FBiH Labor Law,⁴⁹ the labor card is an official document issued by municipal governments upon request for every person over the age of 15 years and includes an entire employment

43 UNV, 2009.

44 MoF, 2009.

45 LVS BH, 2011.

46 Sluzbene Novine FBiH, 1999.

47 LVS BH, 2011.

48 YCC Banja Luka, 2011a.

49 The card records education, qualifications, work experience, long-term absences from work, unemployment, working days and hours in odd jobs, social insurance, and pension services. (Sluzbene Novine FBiH, 1999).

history.⁵⁰ However, eligible forms of employment include only officially registered full-time work experience. Volunteer work, even full-time, is now not eligible for the official labor card because it is unpaid work undertaken without an employment contract. This is a disincentive for potential volunteers because it disqualifies valuable volunteer work experience, which cannot be recorded for use in a job search. Alternative means of recording volunteer contributions, such as a volunteer passport, could also be considered if the labor card system is abolished.

4. Improve information and awareness of opportunities to volunteer

Considerable scope exists to develop strategies for attracting youth volunteers and clarifying regulations for their participation in NGO work. Many people, and particularly youth, have expressed interest in volunteering with NGOs and contributing to the community. However, to move people in BH from interest to action will require more information on volunteer opportunities and benefits both individual and social such as acquiring work experience, job skills, building individual career paths, and contributions to the larger community.

Recommendations to Improve the Legal Framework for Youth Volunteerism

1. Develop national legislation on volunteerism

A national law on volunteerism would establish understanding and recognition of volunteer work across the whole territory of BH. A law would increase legal recognition and raise awareness of the benefits of volunteer work for individuals and communities. Harmonizing legislation on youth in the two entities in BH and establishing volunteerism as a key component of BH youth policy would focus attention on the volunteer sector as a reliable route to professional and individual development for young people.

2. Revise the Law on Labor

The Law must recognize the status and treatment of volunteers. The Law could also adapt the labor card regulations to recognize the validity of volunteer and part-time work so that it becomes eligible for labor card

records. This would remove a current disincentive to volunteer, and enhance the ability of young volunteers to use volunteer work experience to seek employment or job promotions.

3. Monitor the implementation of existing legal regulations

The Law on Volunteering in RS has been enacted but implementation is lagging; therefore it needs to be monitored. Seven RS municipalities provide good examples to use in facilitating implementation of the Law in other municipalities. Local volunteerism policies should define local guidelines, establish priorities, develop recognition methods, and monitor policy impacts.

4. Exempt volunteers and volunteer organizations from taxation

Tax exemptions help ensure the sustainability of volunteer organizations. Following the example of other European countries, volunteer stipends should be tax-exempt, and organizations' reimbursements to volunteers should be tax-exempt. In Slovenia, for example, organizations that are managed and run mostly by volunteers are exempt from VAT.

5. Distinguish trainee and volunteer contracts

In close cooperation with government, companies could distinguish volunteer work from trainees or internships, which would help reduce existing legal contradictions under laws governing the labor force and laws governing volunteerism.

Recommendations to Strategically Expand and Promote Youth Volunteerism

1. Include volunteerism in the education curriculum in BH and recognize volunteer skills

Volunteerism could be introduced into schools and universities as an accepted curriculum component. Recent research has shown that secondary school students are most interested in volunteer work, especially in their own communities.⁵¹ Universities could offer formal credit to students who volunteer, as is the practice in neighboring countries. Acknowledging the learning value of volunteer activities and recognizing experiences and skills

50 Sluzbene Novine FBiH, 2000.

51 Powell et al, 2007.

gained would increase interest in volunteer positions in BH. A national skills or volunteer passport would provide a formal, transparent, and comparable record of skills acquired in volunteer work and validate abilities and work experiences. The passport concept could also help young people, the unemployed, and those with low educational attainment to transition into the labor market.

2. Develop a national communications strategy to promote volunteering

A national communications strategy should be ongoing and integral to any programs to promote volunteerism. The strategy could include national and local public information and awareness campaigns, seminars, events and awards by public and civil society sectors. The objective would be to promote active citizenship and volunteer work among youth and promulgate good practices from other countries or communities in BH. Unlike sporadic “campaigns”, ongoing communications activities would raise and maintain public awareness about the benefits of volunteerism and could stimulate new volunteer initiatives. Annual events could be organized around the International Volunteer Day on December 5 or around the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers in 2011. Best practice youth volunteer work could be publicly recognized through awards, scholarships, or other benefits to motivate and stimulate interest in volunteer opportunities among youth in BH.

3. Support young unemployed people to volunteer

Public institutions and civil society could invest in volunteer projects involving young unemployed people. Promoting youth volunteer opportunities at job centers, work clubs and resource centers could offer opportunities for unemployed people to participate in on-the-job training that could help them get back to work, facilitate greater social integration and contribute to overall personal development.⁵² Institutional arrangements should be implemented to ensure that the unemployed are not penalized for undertaking volunteer work through a loss of social welfare benefits.

4. Tap into the potential for corporate social responsibility in BH

Encouraging employees to participate in volunteer activities would support local communities while enhancing the corporate reputation and public image. Corporate volunteerism and corporate social responsibility are relatively new concepts in many EU countries but these practices are widespread in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, among others. Corporate volunteerism has considerable potential in BH and could be particularly effective to expose young people to a range of career choices they may not have considered. Corporations benefit by raising their public profile, creating good will, and getting a preview of potential talent for future staff recruitment.

5. Foster networking to promote volunteer opportunities

Maintaining close networks among the public, private and civil society sectors can strengthen inter-sectoral cooperation to promote volunteerism. Networking events could be organized among NGOs, private sector, academia, and media to exchange volunteerism knowledge and experiences between BH and other countries. Private sector companies may be interested in sponsoring events and activities to foster exchanges and explore the potential supply of volunteers with needed competencies; volunteers would learn about available positions.

Conclusion

While BH and its neighboring countries are undergoing transition in their socio-economic development, the nature of volunteerism, its image and organization, the development of volunteer activities, and the appreciation for volunteer work are undergoing continuous improvements. As noted earlier, 10 to 30 percent of young people in BH can be considered potential volunteers, which represents a substantial but still largely untapped social and economic resource. Expanding the cadre of volunteers will require an improved national legal framework, an overall strategy for promoting volunteerism and networking, and continuous efforts to professionalize the volunteer workforce.

52 Eurofound, 2011.

This note was prepared by Sandra Schlossar of the Europe and Central Asia Social Development Unit. It was generously funded through a grant from the Italian Government under the Social Development Initiative for South-East Europe II, administered by the World Bank.

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