

NATIONAL REPORT – BULGARIA

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1 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT VOLUNTEERING IN BULGARIA

1.1 History and contextual background

The history of volunteering is based on the traditional feeling of community (19th 20th Century). After 1944 (heavy state and ideological regulation under the communist regime), volunteering was associated with physical and strenuous work and political propaganda.¹ Despite the long tradition of solidarity and help, the somewhat negative image of volunteering in Bulgaria still prevailed at the beginning of the democratic reforms in the 1990s. The state of volunteering was additionally aggravated by the sharp political changes and difficult socio-economic conditions in the country.

The transition to democracy simultaneously brought about the dynamic development of Bulgarian civil society and the third sector. Despite the existing prejudices, volunteering is a strong feature of the third sector. Volunteering has become popular among young people who are willing to contribute to the social and economic development of the country. Significant efforts by various stakeholders have been made to enhance the third sector and to promote volunteering in Bulgaria. In 2000 non-profit organisations initiated a variety of activities, particularly for children and young people, thus raising public awareness about the voluntary sector and positioning a better image of it in the minds of the Bulgarian people. The connection between democratic participation, active citizenship and volunteering is slowly strengthening.²

Nowadays, voluntary activities are growing in the fields of environment and culture. In addition, non-profit organisations have increasingly become providers of social services.

1.2 Definitions

Traditionally, the term *volunteering* in Bulgaria refers to any provision of work and services without concern of financial gain. Accordingly, a *volunteer* is any person who provides such free and gratuitous labour. In the country's legal system, however, there is no legal definition of either volunteering, or provision of work and services without concern of financial gain. Consequently, the status of volunteers as well as their rights and duties is not set in law or formally recognised.³

The existing legal framework on volunteering is only partial and far from being well-developed.⁴ In 2006 a Law on Volunteering⁵ was drafted by a number of non-profit organisations among which the Bulgarian Red Cross, the National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA), the Lale Foundation, and the Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-profit Law (BCNL). If ratified by Parliament, the definition suggested by this Law would identify volunteering as an *activity outside of an individual's legal employment relations which is done voluntarily and without remuneration at non-profit organisations, local and state institutions.*

¹ *Voluntary Activities – Bulgaria*, n.d., Youth Society for Peace and Development of the Balkans, European Youth Forum.

² National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

³ *Country report on the legal status of volunteers in Bulgaria*, 2006, Dessislava Velikova, European Volunteer Centre.

⁴ A number of laws partially define or regulate volunteering activities as elaborated in Section 2.10.1.

⁵ Project for a Law on Volunteering, 2006, http://www.bcnl.org/pndocs/doc_31.doc.

A definition of youth volunteering is provided under Article 23 of the draft Law for Youth Development introduced in 2008, where the term is coined similarly. In addition, the definition ascertains that young volunteers are usually *associated with a volunteering organisation* and that volunteering is an *activity which broadens the knowledge, skills and experience of volunteers and the people they help*.⁶

There are a number of problems in defining the terms *volunteering* and *volunteer* which stem from the difference in the perspectives of citizens, volunteers and representatives of third sector organisations. There is a perception, Bulgarian citizens perceive volunteers as people who have found a solution to their everyday problems of sustenance, i.e. who have a guaranteed standard of living and can afford to spend time and other resources to do something for others. According to volunteers, the most important factors in taking the decision to get involved is the matching of their interests with voluntary opportunities, the benefits of an interesting experience and the feeling of satisfaction. According to representatives of third-sector organisations, volunteering is a social activity where the humanistic attitudes and active social position play the leading role.⁷

1.3 Number and profile of volunteers

As the government has not commissioned any systematic research, there is an observed lack of data on volunteering in Bulgaria.

The quantitative information on the number and profile of volunteers presented in this section is based on data from two surveys among non-profit organisations across Bulgaria conducted respectively during the period 15 February – 30 April 2002⁸ and 10 November – 30 November 2005.⁹

Total number of volunteers

The *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria (2002)* reports that approximately 6% of Bulgarian citizens take part in voluntary activities.

According to the *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria (2005)*, 84% of organisations use the help of volunteers. In addition, the report outlines the percentage of non-profit organisations using volunteers in 2005:

- 27% of organisations work with more than 20 volunteers
- 17% use between 11 and 20 volunteers
- 21% use between 6 and 10 volunteers
- 19% use between 1 and 5 volunteers.

At present, some 14, 000 people and 6, 000 young people are active volunteers at the Bulgarian Red Cross and more than 750 at the National Volunteers' Centres which are members of the National Alliance for Volunteer Action.¹⁰ More than 200 young people from different Member States volunteered in Bulgaria through the European Voluntary Service

⁶ Project for a Law for Youth Development, 2008, State Agency for Youth and Sport.

⁷ National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

⁸ *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria*, Information and Society Foundation, 2002.

⁹ *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria*, 2005, Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL).

¹⁰ National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

(EVS) in the period 2000-2008 but unfortunately, the number of Bulgarian youngsters who volunteered in another EU country is not known.¹¹

Trend

Classified data on the trend in the number of volunteers in Bulgaria in the past decades is largely unavailable but based on the practice of the Bulgarian Red Cross this trend is stable. However, while young EVS volunteers from across different Member States are keen to volunteer in Bulgaria, Bulgarian youngsters have proven difficult to stimulate with voluntary opportunities despite their potential benefits. Based on the *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria (2002)*, for 54% of NPOs the number of volunteers during the past years increased, for 35% it remained unchanged, and for 11% of organisations the number of volunteers decreased. The reasons for the increasing number of volunteers were the growing popularity of voluntary organisations or the causes to which they are dedicated, the improved capacities of these organisations allowing them to offer new knowledge and training to volunteers, and positive changes in the civil engagement of people. The reasons for the opposite trends were found to be the difficult economic conditions in the country, the lack of adequate stimulation of volunteering, the growing civil apathy, and the lack of adequate social appraisal of volunteering.

Gender

The *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria (2002)* reports that the majority of volunteers are female - 69 %. Male volunteers are 31 %. Women dominate across volunteers in all age groups except for people above 60 years old where the proportion of female and male volunteers is equal.

Age groups

The distribution of volunteers in Bulgaria across age groups according to the *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria (2002)* is as follows: Up to 18 years old – 7%, 18-30 years old – 25%, 31-40 years old – 21%, 41-50 years old – 19%, 51-60 years old – 14%, 60 + years old – 14%. The biggest percentage of volunteers in Bulgaria is young people belonging to the 18-30 age group. Youth participation in NGOs has been the subject of investigation of a 2005 study by the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (BGRF)¹² which discovered the following: The 26-30 age group was the most inclined to support NGOs' initiatives including volunteering. 57% of young people in this age group were willing to participate in public benefit events through volunteering as compared to 45% of 18-25-year-olds and 44% of 16-17-year olds.

- 30% of the respondents did not answer the question in what circumstances they would help an organisation by volunteering and 11% said that they would not do it under any circumstances. Only 1.7% of Bulgarian youngsters are willing to do voluntary work in any circumstances.
- Only about 4% of young people in Bulgaria aged 16-30 were engaged in NGOs at the time. The majority were engaged in tourist and sport organisations, environment organisations and organisations for leisure activities. Fewer were engaged in organisations working for the protection of human rights.

¹¹ National Centre European Youth Programmes and Initiatives

¹² *Young people and civil society in Bulgaria*, Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (BGRF), 2005.

Geographical spread of volunteering

Voluntary organisations hold opposing views on the geographical spread of volunteering in the country. For some of them the majority of volunteers are found in bigger cities with few exceptions based on the activeness of a city or region in terms of projects.¹³ For others volunteering is more attractive and widespread among smaller cities and regions because there the local community's attitude toward volunteer activities is valued at a higher level.¹⁴

Education levels

The *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria (2002)* states that the typical volunteer in Bulgaria holds a university degree - 56%. Another 12% of volunteers have a lower, associate degree or were enrolled at university at some point but did not finish their studies. 27% of volunteers have a high school diploma and 4% are with secondary school or lower education. 44% of volunteers worked as full-time employees and 19% as part-time. The rest were retired people – 17%, unemployed – 13% and school and university students – 7%.

Volunteer involvement by sectors

The *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria (2005)* reports that the biggest number of volunteers in Bulgaria is involved in non-profit organisations working in the areas of social services, community development and environment – in these three spheres the number of organisations using more than 20 volunteers is the largest. Table 1 below shows in detail the number of volunteers involved per sector, for example in the social services sector, 14% of organisations have between 1-5 volunteers.

Table 1: Number of volunteers per sector in 2005

	No volunteers	1-5	6-10	11-20	20+
Social services	10%	14%	26%	16%	35%
Education and research	20%	14%	29%	14%	23%
Community development	11%	15%	24%	20%	30%
Business/professional organisations	28%	33%	19%	9%	12%
Environment	11%	17%	19%	17%	36%
Human rights	5%	25%	10%	20%	40%
Public policies	22%	6%	11%	39%	22%
Culture	13%	13%	40%	13%	20%
Charity and volunteering	31%	23%	15%		31%
Clubs according to interests	33%	25%		25%	17%

¹³ Bulgarian Red Cross

¹⁴ National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

Healthcare	17%	17%	8%	33%	25%
Ethnic questions	9%	9%	27%	36%	18%
Legislation and advocacy	25%	13%		38%	25%
International affairs		40%	20%	20%	20%
Religion		50%			50%

Adapted from *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria*, Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law, 2005.

Profile of volunteers by employment status

According to the *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria (2002)*, 46% of employees who dedicate their free time to volunteering are specialists holding a university degree and 26% belong to the group of qualified personnel. 8% work are small or medium entrepreneurs and 7% are employed as doctors, lawyers etc.

Time dedicated to volunteering

Volunteer involvement depends on the declared engagement. This could be short-term i.e. participating once in a concrete event or long-term throughout the entire calendar year. Voluntary organisations report that volunteers who are involved on a more permanent basis spend on average 4 hours per week on volunteering.

1.4 Number and types of organisations engaging volunteers

Definition of voluntary organisations in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria there are many terms used to describe the organisations working in the third sector, for example, non-profit, non-governmental, voluntary, community etc. The **Law on Legal Entities with Non-profit Purposes (2001)**¹⁵ defines such organisations as *associations and foundations which self-determine themselves as organisations pursuing activities for public or private benefit*.

According to the law, non-profit organisations:

- shall freely determine the means for attaining their objectives
- may pursue additional business activities provided that they relate to the main subject of activities for which the organisation is registered and provided that the revenues are used for the purpose of attaining the objectives of the organisation
- are non-profit distributing.

In addition, non-profit legal entities defined as pursuing activities for public benefit (which work with volunteers more than those acting in private benefit¹⁶):

- use their property for achieving any of the following goals:

¹⁵ Law on Legal Entities with Non-Profit Purposes, 2000, http://www.bcnl.org/doc_en.php?DID=325.

¹⁶ *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria*, 2005, Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL).

- development and strengthening of spiritual values, the civil society, health care, education, science, culture, engineering, technology or physical culture
- assistance to the socially disadvantaged, the disabled or the persons in need of care
- support of social integration and personal realisation
- protection of human rights or the environment
- have a collective supreme body and managing body.

Number of voluntary organisations and distribution per sector

As reported by the *Study on the practices in the governance of NGOs in Bulgaria (2005)*¹⁷, the official figure of registered non-profit organisations in Bulgaria is 22,366. The majority of these organisations, 18,305, are associations and 4,010 are foundations. The number of registered non-profit organisations acting in public benefit is 4,191 which comprises 18,7% of the total number of registered legal entities with non-profit purposes.

The third sector in Bulgaria covers a wide range of areas and some of them are characterised by a particularly high concentration of NPO involvement. According to the *Study on the practices in the governance of NGOs in Bulgaria (2005)*, the work of 67% of non-profit organisations is focused on the following areas:

- Social services – 21%, Education and research - 14%, Community development – 12%, Business/professional organisations – 11%, Environment – 9%, Human rights – 5%, Public policies – 4.5%, Culture – 3.8%, Charity and volunteering – 3.3%, Clubs according to interests – 3%, Healthcare – 3%, Ethnic questions – 2.8%, Legislation and advocacy – 2%, International affairs – 1.2%, Religion – 0.5%

Trend

The results from the *Study on the practices in the governance of NGOs in Bulgaria (2005)* show that the number of non-profit organisations in 2005 increased with 27% (17,495) in comparison to 2003. This increase was more dynamic among associations – 29% (14,154) than among foundations – 21% (3,308). The main reason for this trend is the dynamic of the socio-economic and political situation in Bulgaria over the past two decades. The leadership position (according to the number of organisations) of social services in the third sector is a clear indication that Bulgaria has not overcome the many social and economic problems originating from this period of transformation.¹⁸

Types of organisations engaging volunteers

The majority of organisations hosting volunteers in Bulgaria, about 95 %, are non-profit and acting in public benefit (e.g. NGOs, associations, foundations etc.). Only about 5% are public sector organisations (e.g. community centres, municipal structures such as youth centres etc.).

¹⁷ *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria, 2005*, Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL).

¹⁸ *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria, 2005*, Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL).

1.5 Main voluntary activities

There is no official research but organisations typically cite being involved in the following voluntary activities: Campaigning/ lobbying, coaching, counselling/ mediation/ advocacy, arts/ craft/ performing.

2 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Main public bodies and other organisations involved in volunteering

Main public body responsible for volunteering

In Bulgaria there is no public body responsible for volunteering from a regulatory or institutional perspective. Directorate Youth Policy and in particular, Unit International Youth Programmes at the State Agency for Youth and Sports used to deal with volunteering among young people until July 2009 when the Agency was transformed into a Ministry of Physical Education and Sports. The work of Directorate Youth Policy and its constituents is now transferred to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. The **National Centre European Youth Programmes and Initiatives**, which is the main Bulgarian authority managing the Youth in Action programme, is now also part of the same Ministry and will be responsible for youth volunteering. The Centre provides funding for youth exchanges and volunteering projects, publishes EVS promotional materials and provides information on youth activities through the EURODESK¹⁹ network. Over the years, however, voluntary organisations have become used to working with volunteers without a legal framework and public body responsible for volunteering.

Other public bodies involved in volunteering

Youth Centres in Bulgaria are municipal structures whose work broadly aims at the civil society education of young people in the country. Youth centres offer many volunteering opportunities for young people's community involvement and often have an especially established Volunteering Centre within its structure (e.g. Youth Centre Haskovo). Such **Regional and Local Volunteer Centres** are responsible for placing volunteers, training, vetting and capacity building.

The network of 35 **Youth Information and Consultation Centres** across the country offers various services for young people or organisations which work for and with young people, including information on volunteering opportunities and obtaining funding for youth activities and initiatives both through state funding and other donor organisations in the country and in Europe.

Organisations that promote volunteering, facilitate cooperation and exchange of information

National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA) is a non-profit organisation working to benefit the Bulgarian public and local communities through the provision of social services. The organisation was established in May 2000 with headquarters in Plovdiv and five other

¹⁹ EURODESK is available at <http://www.eurodesk.org/edesk/Welcome.do>. It is a free information service which provides young people and those who work with them with information on EU funding and opportunities to work, study, volunteer and travel in Europe.

Regional Volunteer Centres in Varna, Gabrovo, Haskovo, Targovishte and Lovech. Its membership consists of 8 Regional and 17 Local Volunteer Centres as well as 6 Centres for Social Support. NAVA's main purpose is to serve as a mediator between voluntary organisations and people willing to volunteer. Offering brokerage services to its regional members, NAVA is one of the only networks coordinating activities of voluntary organisations in Bulgaria, including recruitment of volunteers, training of volunteers and voluntary organisations, research-related activities etc. However, the organisation lacks real national representation capacity partly because its headquarters is not in the capital.

The **Bulgarian Red Cross** has a network of 28 municipal branches across the country. The organisation holds a General Assembly every year. The forum, attended by network representatives from across the country, discusses the work and achievements of the organisation and adopts the annual action plan and budget.

There is, however, no umbrella organisation representing the voluntary sector in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, voluntary organisations often cooperate with one another forming working groups in pursuance of legislative or other initiatives affecting the development of the voluntary sector.

Affiliation with European umbrella organisations/networks

At present, 65 voluntary organisations in Bulgaria are EVS accredited sending, hosting or coordinating organisations.²⁰ NAVA is in the process of evaluating its capacity to become an EVC/CEV member.

Although there are no Bulgarian members in the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO), nor in the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations (ALLIANCE) yet, voluntary organisations use them as valuable sources of information.

2.2 Policies

National strategy/framework for volunteering

Volunteering is not yet a priority on the political agenda in Bulgaria, hence there is no national strategy or framework for developing volunteering. Stakeholders, however, are optimistic that the lack of policy and legislation will be reversed under the rule of the new government elected in July 2009.

The role of youth volunteering is recognised in the **National Strategy for Youth Development 2009-2018**.²¹ The document identifies three strategic priorities regarding youth volunteering, namely:

- creating more voluntary opportunities for young people, in particular with regard to transnational mobility
- guaranteeing the rights of young volunteers, especially those under 18 years old
- recognising volunteering as an important form of non-formal education.

The following strategic tasks are envisioned:

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_list_from_query.cfm

²¹ Project for a National Strategy for Youth Development 2009-2018, <http://www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=789>.

- Task 1: Creation of a legal guarantee about the status of young volunteers and protection of those who are under age from activities which could be potentially harmful to their physiological or psychological health.
- Task 2: Provision of appropriate training and qualification for young volunteers with regard to the volunteering activities in which they are involved.
- Task 3: Certification and recognition of the training, experience and skills young volunteers have received during the volunteer activities.
- Task 4: Introduction and maintenance of good practices for managing, recruiting, training, stimulating young volunteers and recognizing their achievements as well as monitoring and evaluation.
- Task 5: Introduction of a “volunteer booklet” as an official certified document for the circumstances connected with the volunteer activity of volunteers.
- Task 6: Creation of a legal status of volunteering organisations.
- Task 7: Establishment of standards for youth volunteering and of public control working towards protection of young volunteers.
- Task 8: Public support for youth volunteering from the state and municipal authorities.
- Task 9: Joining and ensuring the application of the European convention for encouraging the long-term transnational youth volunteer service.
- Task 10: Encouragement and support for the participation of the Bulgarian youth in the international youth volunteering.

National targets and reporting arrangements for volunteering

There are no national targets or reporting arrangements for volunteering.

International policies

The UN International Day of Volunteering which takes place on December 5 every year since 1985 is considered as good practice and has been adapted in the Bulgarian context. It is celebrated annually by government actors dealing with youth policy and voluntary organisations across the country.

The Bulgarian Red Cross, through its rich history and tradition and membership in the international Red Crescent and Red Cross Movement, participates extensively in international cooperation (e.g. international relief programmes though delegations may involve paid staff rather than volunteers).

2.3 Programmes

Key national programmes that stimulate volunteering at national level

There is no concrete state programme stimulating volunteering at national level in Bulgaria.

Programmes promoting/supporting volunteering at regional and local level

Although there is no concrete state programme promoting or supporting volunteering at regional and local level in Bulgaria, NAVA and its local branches around the country have been delivering volunteer services for both disadvantaged and disabled children in orphanages, day-care centres, schools for children with learning disabilities, shelters, etc.

since 1999. The basic focus of the programme is to organise group activities for children and volunteers. The programme reports that it engages a large number of volunteers across the country each year.

Locally, in Plovdiv, the association Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bulgaria, an official member of Big Brothers Big Sisters International since 2006, delivers a mentoring programme to children between 7 and 12 years of age. These are often children who feel isolated by their family environment, have communication deficits or experience educational problems. So far the target groups of this programme have been children at risk, children with disabilities, minority children, and street children. The essence of the programme is that a child is paired with a motivated volunteer who share their interests or experiences in a one-on-one mentoring relationship. The Big Brothers Big Sisters programme has reported that it has engaged about 180 volunteers in Plovdiv.

Programmes promoting/supporting volunteering at transnational level

No data available.

3 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

3.1 General legal framework

There is no law exclusively dedicated to regulating volunteering in Bulgaria. As mentioned above, in 2006 a **Law on Volunteering** aligned with European legislation in this area was drafted by the Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law and a number of voluntary organisations but it has not been passed by Parliament to date.

The *draft Law on Volunteering (2006)* and *draft Law for Youth Development (2008)*²² provide a stepping stone for developing a legal base for volunteering. The former sets out such essential aspects as definitions of the terms *volunteer* and *volunteering*, the principles on which volunteering is based and the relation of the state towards this type of activity, as well as the legal status, rights and duties of volunteers. The latter provides a definition of youth volunteering and information on the obligations of voluntary youth organisations towards their volunteers in terms of matters such as insurance, training, registration etc.

At present, the existing legal framework with regard to volunteering is far from being well-developed – the main laws which partially define or regulate voluntary activities are summarised as follows:

- Under the **Crisis Management Law (2005)**²³ voluntary organisations can be set up in cases of crises, volunteers being persons above the age of 18. The law also regulates the legal status of volunteers - for example, if volunteers are employed while taking part in voluntary activities, they are considered to be in unpaid leave from their occupation.
- The **Law for the Bulgarian Red Cross (1995)**²⁴ introduces some specific legal provisions relating to volunteering and volunteers.
- Article 22 of the **Law for Physical Education and Sport (1996)**²⁵ requires that schools provide necessary conditions for extracurricular sports activities. Such

²² Project for a Law for Youth Development, 2008, <http://www.youthdep.bg/base/zrm.pdf>.

²³ Crisis Management Law, 2005, <http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135499555>.

²⁴ Law for the Bulgarian Red Cross, 1995, <http://www.redcross.bg/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0019&n=000003&g=>.

activities are voluntary for students and take place through the school's sport section or club authorised by the school's headmaster.

Self-regulation in relation to volunteering

Individual voluntary organisations usually have codes of conduct – for example, the Ethical Code of the Bulgarian Red Cross or the EVS Charter guiding the work of the National Centre European Youth Programmes and Initiatives. Such documents are valid for the organisations' staff and volunteers alike, lay down core values or quality standards, or forbid any kind of abuse in relation to the name, activities, finances or confidentiality of data of the organisations and its members.

3.2 Legal framework for individual volunteers

Provisions for specific categories

A specific legal status of volunteers does not exist in practice due to the lack of legislation in the area but the draft Law on Volunteering does take into account the non-economic nature of volunteering which implies that volunteers should not be classified as employees.

Support schemes and incentives

Due to the lack of a legal framework, no support schemes for volunteers in Bulgaria have been established.

Taxation rules on reimbursement of expenses for individual volunteers

Under the Law for the Bulgarian Red Cross (1995), the Crisis Management Law (2005) and the draft Law on Volunteering (2006) volunteers are reimbursed for the expenses they incur in the course of their voluntary service and also have a right to compensation in cases of injury. With regard to social protection, only under the Crisis Management Law volunteers are insured against all secured social risks - if a volunteer dies while performing voluntary service, his spouse, children or parents are entitled to compensation.²⁶

There are no taxation rules on reimbursement of expenses for individual volunteers, however. Therefore, voluntary organisations choose whether and how to compensate volunteers' contributions, which usually includes basic expenses such as transport, daily allowance, office supplies etc.

Taxation rules on rewards or remuneration for individual volunteers

In Bulgaria there are no taxation rules on rewards or remuneration for individual volunteers.

3.3 Legal framework for organisations engaging volunteers

The **Law for Legal Entities with Non-profit Purposes (2001)** regulates the registration and operation of non-profit organisations in Bulgaria and was later followed by amendments to the **Law on Corporate Income Tax (2006)**²⁷ and the **Tax Law for Physical Persons (2007)**²⁸ introducing tax exemptions for non-profit organisations and donations made to

²⁵ Law for Physical Education and Sport, 1996, <http://www.youthdep.bg/base/zfvs.pdf>.

²⁶ *Country Report on the Legal Status of Volunteers in Bulgaria*, 2006, Dessislava Vekilova, European Volunteer Centre.

²⁷ Law on Corporate Income Tax, 2006, <http://www.bcnl.org/doc.php?DID=241>.

²⁸ Tax Law for Physical Persons, 2007, http://www.nap.bg/files/file_download.document?p_doc_id=147.

such organisations. The legal framework of NPOs was particularly improved through the introduction of the notion of public benefit organisations (PBOs) which must be registered at a special central registry within the Ministry of Justice. Individual taxpayers may deduct up to 5% and companies up to 10% of their taxable income for donations made to registered PBOs; in addition, donations of imported goods to PBO recipients are now exempt from VAT.

According to the existing legislation, there is a 10% tax on the profit from economic activities in Bulgaria and NPOs are not exempt from it regardless whether these activities are related to their non-profit occupation. Any other income, including income derived from non-economic activities, is tax-exempt. NPOs registered under the Family and Persons Law (which generally regulates them) are not subject to taxation, but under the tax law, if these organisations engage in economic activities, they are liable to taxes.

The problem with the current legislation is that there is no clear definition what constitutes *economic* and *non-economic* activities. Furthermore, there is no clear definition of economic activities which are related to the organisation's *regular* non-profit occupation. There is a danger that if the authorities decide that an NPO is engaged mainly in regular economic activities or derives most of its income from such activities, the organisation could lose its non-profit status and will be forced to re-register as a business entity.²⁹

3.4 Legal framework for profit-making organisations

There are no legal provisions concerning the involvement of private organisations in volunteering in Bulgaria.

3.5 Insurance and protection of volunteers

Individual voluntary organisations are responsible for the insurance and protection of volunteers. It is up to them to define the amount of compensation which may also depend on the relationship between volunteers and the organisation.

²⁹ National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

4 ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF VOLUNTEERING

4.1 Funding arrangements for volunteering

National budget allocated to volunteering

Generally, there are no administrative grants allocated to volunteering or supporting voluntary organisations in Bulgaria. The central state budget provides subsidies to a small number of non-profit legal entities including the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Bulgarian Olympic Committee. The *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria (2005)* coins the percentage of non-profit organisations receiving state support at 17% and the financial contribution of this source at 8%.

In 2009 the state contributed almost 3 million leva (1.5 million euro) to support the Bulgarian Red Cross. This was part of nearly 9 million leva (4.5 million euro) given mainly to representative organisations of socially disadvantaged people. A little over 1 million leva was distributed in the same year to projects of public benefit NGOs working in all the areas that the NGO law defines as public benefit.³⁰

Some state funding is also allocated to community centres.³¹

Sources of funding for voluntary organisations

53% of organisations interviewed in the *Study on the practices in the governance of non-profit organisations in Bulgaria (2005)* cite international donors as their primary source of funding. Almost half of these organisations (46%) obtain funding through membership fees and almost one third (35%) gain income through pursuing economic activities. Donations by physical persons and companies are the next most common sources of funding for 26% and 23% of organisations respectively. Common practice is also the redistribution of funds between non-profit organisations in Bulgaria (19%).

Table 2 below illustrates in detail the type and importance of the sources of funding for Bulgarian non-profit organisations:

Table 2: Type and importance of the source of funding for non-profit organisations in Bulgaria (2005).

Type and importance of the source of funding for non-profit organisations in Bulgaria (2005)		
	Sources of funding	Allocation of funds according to the source
	% of organisations	% of funds
International donors	53%	40%
Economic activities	35%	17%
Membership fees	46%	11%
State budget subsidies	17%	8%

³⁰ Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL)

³¹ Community centres are typical for Bulgaria civil voluntary unions which perform a collective cultural function serving as a library, theatre, foreign language school, dance and music hall etc. The number of community halls registered with the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture to date is 3437.

Corporate donors	23%	8%
Bulgarian non-profit organisations	19%	6%
Donations from physical persons	26%	6%
Charity activities	11%	3%
Local budget subsidies	7%	2%

Adapted from *Study on the practices in the governance of NPOs in Bulgaria*, Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL), 2005.

As seen from the table, 40% of financial support for Bulgarian NGO and other charitable and development activities comes from foreign donors. The second most important source of funding is funding obtained through the organisations' economic activities – 17%. Donations from private persons and corporate entities and membership fees account for 14% and 11% respectively.

Social Services of General Interest (SSGI)

Recent amendments to the **Public Procurement Law (1999)**³² allow non-profit organisations to compete for government contracts at the local and central levels. Though not an official figure, the number of competing organisations rose from 120 in 2001 to 373 by the end of October 2002.³³

In addition to public procurement where NGOs are treated equally to business enterprises, there is a special procedure under the amended in 2003 **Social Assistance Act** for organising competitions for outsourcing of social services. NPOs wishing to deliver social services must register at the Agency for Social Assistance. A number of NGOs across the country have participated in such and won contracts to provide social services. The process is called social contracting. It creates new opportunities for active participation of non-profit organisations in the development of social assistance policy and opportunities for state funding of social service providers. Such providers may apply for funding from the Social Assistance Fund which will collect funds from the state budget, endowments and donations, licensing fees, taxes, and state lottery revenues.³⁴

4.2 Economic value of volunteering

Income generated through volunteering

No data available.

³² Public Procurement Law, 1999, http://www.bcnl.org/doc_en.php?DID=316

³³ National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

³⁴ International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), <http://www.icnl.org/KNOWLEDGE/news/2003/03-05.htm>

Value of volunteering work as a share of GDP³⁵

In the period 1991-1998 the contribution of the third sector to the GDP of Bulgaria was about 0.15 %. During the following years more favourable macroeconomic and institutional conditions for the functioning of the third sector were created and in 2001 the added value of this sector was 62.8 million lev (approximately 30 million euro) which formed 0.21 % of the country's GDP.

Added value of non-profit organisations

In 2000 the added value of the activity of non-profit organisations in Bulgaria was 31.8 million lev (approximately 15 million euro) which made up 0.12 % of the country's GDP. However, if community centres and sports organisations are excluded from the group of NPOs, the added value is 23.1 million lev (approximately 11 million euro) and the share of NPOs in the country's GDP decreases to 0.087 %.

Despite its small contribution to the economic development of Bulgaria at the end of the 20th and beginning of the new century, during the period of economic and financial crisis in 1996-1997, the third sector in Bulgaria increased its net financial assets thanks to the received transfers. This implies that this sector could become an important factor for long-term growth in the economy of Bulgaria given that an appropriate economic policy fosters its development.

Employment in non-profit organisations

The number of employed people in non-profit organisations gradually decreased from 16,771 people in 1996 to 11,502 people in 2001. More than half of these employees worked in community centres. During this period the number of people employed in the third sector decreased in parallel to the increase in the level of unemployment. But in 2001, together with the rise in the added value of the third sector mentioned previously, the number of employed people increased again.

In 2000 the average annual salary is 2,433 lev (approximately 1,200 euro) which is 11% lower than the country average.

Income of the non-profit organisations in 1998-2000

The nominal income of non-profit organisations from profit and non-profit activities was 238,426 lev (approximately 115,000 euro) in 2000 and their share in the GDP of the country was 0.89%. As the existing legal framework does not encourage economic activities of non-profit organisations, the income from non-profit activities form about 85% from their income.

The main sources of income for non-profit organisations are donations, followed by income from legally regulated non-profit activities. In the period 1998-2000 the share of donations increased from 34.2% to 37.4%, mainly at the expense of the relative decrease in membership fees from 14.1% to 6.2%.

The sources of donations to non-profit organisations are the external sector, the non-financial sector and households. Donations are usually given to the areas of education and training. State subsidies are usually allocated to community centres. In other words, the income structure of non-profit organisations varies – depending on the type of activities they are involved in, some of them rely solely on donations and membership fees while others manage to secure state subsidies. Non-profit organisations have a redistributive function but except for the state budget, the flow of funds to these organisations has an optional rather than a mandatory character.

³⁵ Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the section is based on the *Economic impact of the activity of non-profit organisations in Bulgaria in 1991-2001, 2002*, Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL).

Issues of service substitution and job substitution

Voluntary organisations agree that there is no risk that certain voluntary activities replace services to be provided by the state. As a matter of fact, there is a growing tendency for NGOs to provide community services as municipal structures do not have the necessary capacity. Most of the organisations also agree that there is no risk that the inputs of volunteering replace employment - volunteers and employees have very different duties and job descriptions, people are generally not very motivated to volunteer etc. Still, such a risk exists in some public institutions such as youth centres where people who work there do so on a voluntarily basis most of the time.

5 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION OF VOLUNTEERING

5.1 Key benefits for volunteers, the community and direct beneficiaries

The key benefits of volunteering are multifarious but fundamentally, volunteering is perceived to contribute to the social and cultural integration of the Bulgarian nation.

From volunteers' perspectives cited in the *Study on the Voluntary Sector in Bulgaria* (2002)³⁶, the most widely cited pragmatic benefit of volunteering was the learning and development of new skills, in particular:

- Communication skills
- New personal skills/characteristics
- Concrete practical skills
- Organisational skills
- The ability to manage projects
- Computer literacy etc.

The most commonly cited emotional benefits of volunteering were:

- Moral satisfaction
- New contacts, friends, social environment
- Psychological equilibrium, optimism
- Higher self-confidence
- Personal realisation
- More freedom and confidence in themselves (volunteers), the social surrounding, and society.

Especially for youth volunteers, volunteering is an opportunity to make use of their spare time in a meaningful way and undergo self-orientation and self-discovery, as well as further develop their personality traits and outlook on the world. Volunteering gives them a sense of achievement, raises their career and employment options, encourages further training and education, and offers them the opportunity to gain new experiences and meet a wide variety of people among target groups and through EVS exchanges.

³⁶ *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria*, 2002, Information and Society Foundation.

From the community perspective, the perceived added value of volunteering consists of building or contributing to the following:

- Stronger and more active communities
- Social integration and common societal value
- Intergenerational solidarity, and an
- Improved environment.

For direct beneficiaries volunteering contributes to the following:

- Local / regional development
- Inter-generational dialogue
- Sustainable development
- Environmental protection
- Intercultural dialogue
- Common societal values
- Benefits to the local community
- Increased social cohesion and inclusion
- Inter-generational dialogue
- Intercultural dialogue
- New job creation – some volunteers change professions afterwards

It is important to note that the benefits of volunteering to direct beneficiaries mostly depend on the type of volunteering activity affecting them. For example, children participating in Big Brothers/Big Sisters become more open and confident, make new friends, feel happier, better understood and more loved, improve their motivation for studying and perform better at school, and strengthen their relationship in the family.³⁷

5.2 Factors that motivate individuals to volunteer

The factors which motivate individuals to volunteer are the following:³⁸

- Desire to be useful, to help concrete vulnerable groups – 56%
- Noble causes – 17%
- Desire to change the social surrounding and make new friends, contacts – 16%
- Opportunity to access new knowledge, skills (including training) – 12%
- Opportunity to use knowledge and skills which are not realised through volunteers' employment occupation – 1%

In addition, youth volunteers see in volunteering the opportunity to increase their vocational qualification and civil competence as a way to invest in their future and professional realisation.

³⁷ Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bulgaria

³⁸ *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria*, 2002, Science and Information Foundation.

Finally, a very important factor motivating volunteers is personal experience – for example, Big Brothers/Big Sisters who have had difficult childhood experiences are thus uniquely driven to help out children who experience a similar misfortune.³⁹

6 VOLUNTEERING IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

6.1 Recognition of volunteers' skills and competences within the national educational and training system

Volunteers' skills and competences acquired during the course of their voluntary work are not yet recognised by the national educational and training system. The certificate Youthpass, for example, which the National Centre European Youth Programmes and Initiatives issues to EVS volunteers is not recognised by Bulgarian universities or employers which are often not familiar with it.

The existing conflict between the formal and non-formal education in Bulgaria does not give any opportunities for encouraging young people to become volunteers. Volunteering is not sufficiently stimulated at the different levels of education in Bulgaria (exceptions: EVS, ERASMUS) - schools or universities do not provide any volunteering programmes. Still, some voluntary organisations report that volunteers' practical experience is recognised by certain universities and the hours spent on voluntary work are accredited towards their course load.

Voluntary organisations have developed different initiatives for recognising the efforts of volunteers and motivating more young people to take part in voluntary activities (e.g. First Volunteer Record Book, nomination process for Volunteers of the Year, an Awarding Ceremony at regional level as well as a special award for the organisation which best coordinated volunteers during the year etc.).

6.2 Education and training opportunities for volunteers

Training for volunteers is provided by the respective voluntary organisations/institutions, EVS organisations, National agencies, Volunteer Centres, European training centres etc. Trainings of EVS volunteers are provided by the National Centre European Youth Programmes and Initiatives. 42 % of voluntary organisations in Bulgaria have a programme or a plan for training volunteers which include training on:⁴⁰

- Teamwork – 47% of organisations
- Relations with the public, media and other institutions – 41%
- Project work – 39%
- Local fundraising – 37%
- Campaigning – 31%
- Research on the needs of vulnerable groups – 31%

³⁹ Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bulgaria

⁴⁰ *Study on the voluntary sector in Bulgaria*, 2002, Information and Society Foundation.

The training provided not only varies from organisation to organisation but it also depends on the nature of the organisation and type of voluntary activities it undertakes. Essentially, organisations provide a number of stages or modes of training including:

- introductory training to volunteers informing them about their rights and responsibilities, what kind of volunteer activities and support the Volunteer Centre offers, what difficulties and challenges volunteers could experience etc.
- ongoing and advanced trainings usually customised in line with the type of activities voluntary organisations undertake (e.g. training on how to organise activities for children)
- peer volunteer support
- mentoring/'buddying' schemes
- special training models for volunteers from marginalised groups such as Roma and training for trainers.

Trainings offered by NAVA are particularly noteworthy in that they focus not only on enhancing the skills of volunteers but also on strengthening organisations' management capacity as well as their relationship and communication with volunteers. In the past year NAVA has implemented more than 35 certified training sessions for volunteers and organisations with more than 700 participants in the past year.

7 EU POLICIES AND VOLUNTEERING

The European Voluntary Service in Bulgaria has created new opportunities for volunteering in terms of mobility of young people.

8 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERING

8.1 Challenges for volunteering

Some of the greatest challenges encountered in the development of volunteering in Bulgaria are found at national level:

- Lack of a legal framework and government policy regulating, stimulating and supporting volunteering and voluntary organisations – this is the most significant challenge according to voluntary organisations
- Lack of state financial support and sustainable external donorship
- Lack of political will and understanding necessary to promote the benefit of volunteering for individuals and society as a whole and to encourage volunteering among individuals and organisations alike
- Lack of understanding from the Bulgarian population – as confirmed by the *Study on the Voluntary Sector in Bulgaria* (2002), volunteers experience a feeling of dissatisfaction which is generated by the lack of societal understanding of volunteers' motivation, the lack of interest in developing volunteering of the state

and administration, and the many constraints (material, organisational, normative) which do not permit the fulfilment of volunteers' impulse.

- Lack of recognition and adequate support for volunteers

Most of the issues at national level are also valid at regional/local level, especially the challenge to obtain adequate project financing due to limited municipal funds.

At individual level, the main challenge is the lack of motivation of Bulgarian citizens to join the voluntary work activities, also given their difficult economic daily reality. The weak motivation of the Bulgarian citizens to work voluntarily in authorised civil forms is easily explained when looking at the day-to-day priorities and values under the current conditions in Bulgarian society are explored.

At organisational level, since there is no administrative grant or funding mechanism supporting them, organisations have difficulties setting up proper offices and disposing of adequate human resources. It was reported that organisations often have a vision and plan how to develop but lack the financial stability to achieve it. Other challenges include the absence of common attitude related to the criteria and the standards of volunteering, the fact that volunteers are not sufficiently encouraged to volunteer, the need for improved communication between different organisations and the need for a working database for example.

Furthermore, in Bulgaria it is difficult to find examples of neutral or positive presentations of NGO activities. In the beginning of the transition the media concentrated on the fraudulent activities of a few NGOs. Since then the Bulgarian media tends to concentrate on sensations and conflicts in the NGO sector rather than on the socially important but not-so-newsworthy activities of the civic sector. The situation has been slowly improving, with growing media attention on NGO provision of social services and delivery of humanitarian aid. Media coverage tends to focus on events involving vulnerable groups such as disadvantaged children.⁴¹

A factor which additionally prevents the development of volunteering in Bulgaria is the lack of practice of educating children at school about the importance of active citizenship.

8.2 Opportunities for volunteering

Stakeholders identify the legal and regulatory framework as the most favourable opportunity for developing volunteering in Bulgaria, but also:

- Information and data
- Infrastructure
- Sustainable funding
- Recognition/awareness
- Insurance and protection for volunteers.

The European level action lines encourage a better coordination of trans-national civic service cooperation, an enhanced exchange of young volunteers and of information on national voluntary programmes as well as the development and promotion of the EVS and possible extension to worldwide actions of solidarity.

In addressing the main challenges in volunteering, voluntary organisations cooperate with one another in drafting legislative and policy documents and lobbying government

⁴¹ National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

institutions in order to achieve not only concrete laws and policies on volunteering but also concrete mechanisms for enforcing them. The Law on Legal Entities with Non-profit Purposes governing the legal status and operation of NPOs enacted by the National Assembly in 2001 represents such a culmination of considerable efforts of various Bulgarian NPOs, lawyers and parliamentarians. The *draft* Law on Volunteering is at an advanced stage of discussion with a number of parliamentary commissions and organisations are hopeful that it will follow suit.

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Interviewed organisations:

Association Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bulgaria

Bulgarian Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL)

Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (BGRF)

Bulgarian Red Cross

International Youth Volunteering Centre, Haskovo

National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)

National Centre European Youth Programmes and Initiatives