

## **VOLUNTEERING AMONG STUDENTS IN ROMANIA AND HUNGARY CROSS-BORDER AREA**

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**Abstract:** *Considering the multiple benefits of volunteering, this paper analyses both the forms and the sources of volunteering among students. Community participation in all its formal or informal types, by producing collective goods is proven to be beneficial for the society. Nevertheless it has positive outcomes for the individuals involved in such activities by strengthening their social capital, empowering them and providing social skills needed for a better social integration. These effects are even more important for youth which are still in their formation stage. Consequently, by getting involved, volunteering in different activities, youngsters develop both values and competencies which promote awareness of social problems and future involvement in solving such issues. More, some of these values and skills may also facilitate their integration in the field work. As we consider that volunteering is particularly important for youth, in this paper we investigate the forms of participation among students in Romania and Hungary cross border area. The research objectives set in this analysis were to: (1) analyse the dimensions and structure of volunteering among students in this area, (2) investigate volunteering covariates, and (3) to elaborate a profile of students involved in such activities. The investigated covariates of volunteering were structured on: socio-demographical characteristics, educational participation, previous academic path, current academic integration, and employment. Although volunteering and associative participation are intertwined, in this investigation on students we consider the second as a particular form of volunteering. Analyses are presented separately where appropriate, yet the focus of this paper relies on volunteering. Our main findings reveal a significant difference between volunteering among students in Romanian and Hungarian universities. Among socio-demographical characteristics solely household endowment proved to influence volunteering. Academically engaged students, with good school achievement are the ones that volunteer. The profile of students that volunteer supports the common sense idea of “good students” involved in all areas of their life. The data analysed in this paper is derived from an international research conducted in Romania and Hungary cross border area, in which 2619 students from seven higher education institutions were questioned.*

**Keywords:** *volunteering, associative participation, non-profit organizations, higher education, academic integration, working students*

**JEL classification:** *D64, D71, H40, I21, L31, Z13*

## **1. Introductory discussion**

### **1.1. Conceptual framework: youth volunteering**

Starting especially with Putnam (1993) there was a special emphasis on the role of associations and volunteering for the development of communities. The positive outcomes of such involvement in the life of the community can be found at different levels. Nevertheless, we must note that different forms of participation contribute to a higher or lesser degree to such positive effects (Edwards, 2004).

At societal level, sometimes mediated through social capital, volunteering both enhances economic development by producing public goods (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 1993; Ostrom and Ahn, 2001; Portes and Mooney, 2002), and promotes democracy by enhancing of civil society (Tocqueville, 1969; Edwards, 2004; Almond and Verba, 1989). Secondly, at individual level, people satisfy different personal needs through such involvement, on the other hand acquire different competencies and develop an active identity which promotes future involvement (Dodescu et. al., 2004; Hatos, 2005). These effects are particularly relevant for youth, seen as the future citizens of a society (Badescu et. al., 2010). Through participation young people have the opportunity to learn more, develop so called transversal competencies, and acquire social capital (trust and network belonging). This may facilitate finding a better job, thus social integration and also their choice for continuing social participation (McAdam, 1986).

Even if, at a first glance, volunteering seems easy to grasp, the theoretical framework highlights the need for distinctions driven either from the domain of involvement, its form, the causes or its effects. The multitudes of approaches, both theoretical and empirical, sustain the fact that, while there are common traits for different forms of involvement, these should be studied also separately. One may distinguish between: (a) volunteering (measured mostly as unpaid work within a non-governmental organization, often considered a particular form of NGO membership) (b) associative or civic participation (membership, paid or volunteer, in an NGO), (c) community participation (community or neighbourhood level collective actions), and (d) informal volunteering (direct help provided to individuals, unmediated by a NGO). From the political perspective one may also delineate public, political and protest participation. In this paper we focus on formal volunteering, and highlight responses for associative membership where relevant. Both volunteering and membership in associations have a much smaller incidence in Romania and Hungary than the European means (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2004). Volunteering registers 1.88% in Romania compared with 2.67% at European level. Associative membership is higher: 2.9% in Romania, yet still smaller than the 5.38% European mean. In both cases, in Romania the most attractive domains of action are the religious, philanthropic ones, while in other countries the leisure related domains have the highest volunteer support (European Values Survey, 2008, <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>).

In most countries youth volunteers more than adults, both because their extrinsic motivations derived from the need for personal achievement are stronger, and they have more time (Hatos, 2005 and 2009). One may argue also that they have more opportunities (Lambri et. al., 2010). As stated above, this topic is particularly important for youth as they shape development in still developing country as Romania. In this paper we investigate the profile of students who volunteer in order to find mechanisms to promote such activities.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1. Research objectives

Our approach aims the following research objectives: (1) The analysis of the dimensions and structure of volunteering and membership among students from universities in Hungary-Romania cross-border area; (2) The investigation of volunteering covariates; (3) The elaboration of a profile of students as volunteers.

Our analysis is based on data obtained in a survey conducted within the project *HERD: Higher Education for Social Cohesion Cooperative Research and Development in a Cross-border Area* (HURO/0901/253/2.2.2.), research project supported by the European Union European Regional Development Fund. Questionnaires were addressed to students from the universities in the Romania-Hungary cross-border, data collection was organized between March - June 2012.

### 2.2. Data and methods

The sample based on which we conducted our study consists of 2619 cases, 1296 from Hungary and 1323 from Romania. The sample is representative for students from all educational levels and all study programs. The questionnaire was applied to students enrolled in BA and MA studies (84.1% - BA, 15.9% - MA). 71.3% of them pay tuition. 70.6% come from urban areas. The mean value of students' age is 22.4, with standard deviation of 3.01. 63.9% are females and 36.1 % males

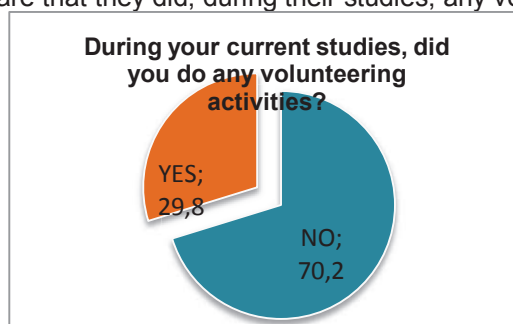
Our analyses focused on students' volunteering. We guided the analysis in a comparative manner, in order to capture the differences and similarities characteristic in this cross-border area.

According to our research objectives, we followed socio-economic indicators and students' academic situation indicators. In order to develop students' volunteer profile we used measures regarding students' academic careers.

### 2.3. Results and Discussions

#### 2.3.1. Dimensions and structure of volunteering among students in HU-RO cross-border area

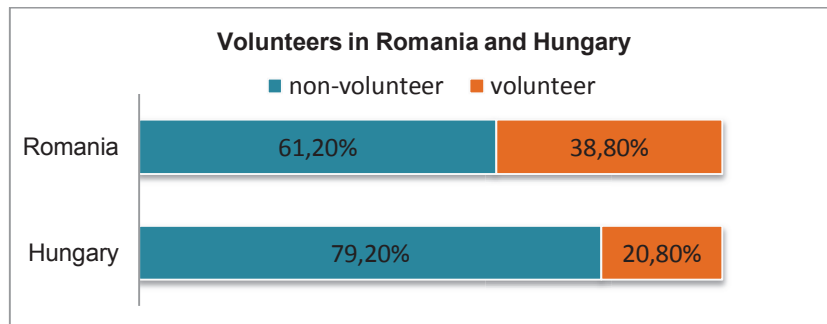
The figure below indicates the degree of voluntary work of students. From 2490 students, 741 declare that they did, during their studies, any voluntary work.



**Figure 1:** Students involvement in voluntary work  
Source: authors' own calculations

The comparative analysis for Hungary and Romania, presented in Figure no. 2, shows significant difference regarding students' volunteering in the two countries

(Pearson Chi-Square = 96.56, p=.000). It is interesting that Romanian students are more engaged in volunteering than those in Hungary. However, it would be interesting to further investigate if students from Romania are more involved in all kinds of voluntary work or just in some areas. Looking to the next indicator, motivation for volunteering is found in the sphere of charity actions.



**Figure 2:** Students involvement in voluntary work, data recorded for Hungary and Romania

Source: authors' own calculations

Most of students are guided in voluntary activities in order to support others in need. Furthermore, students consider that this kind of activities can improve their professional skills and knowledge, and therefore facilitate the transition to active life. Our results are important from the perspective of proposals from local businesses for voluntary involvement of young people. Such partnerships are a win for both sides. On the one hand volunteer students gain experience in accordance with the requirements found on the labour market, on the other hand, firms take advantage of the support from additional human resources in carrying out the company's current activities.



**Figure 3:** Students' motivation for voluntary work

Source: authors' own calculations

Data obtained for the two countries in our sample show differences in terms of students' motivation for voluntary work. Values presented in the table below suggest that students from Romania are oriented toward charitable activities in a greater

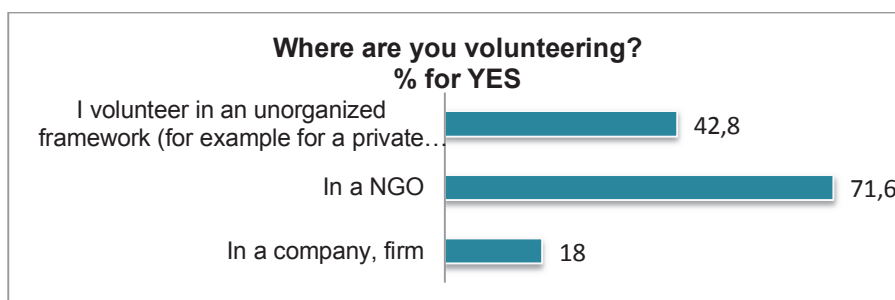
extent than those from Hungary.

**Table 1:** Students' motivation for volunteering, data for Hungary and Romania

<b>Volunteering motives - % for YES</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Romania</b>
To have what to write in my CV	20.8	36.6
To gain professional experience	48.5	74.1
To improve or maintain my relationships	50.8	67.6
To help people	56.6	81.2
To spend my free time in a useful way	37.0	61.5
To enrich my foreign language knowledge	35.4	46.5

Source: authors own calculations

Regarding students spheres of volunteering, data show that they are involved mostly in formal voluntary activities, within nongovernmental organizations. Nevertheless, the 18 percentage of those working in a company is noteworthy. Although it is not a higher value, in accordance with our above mentioned statement, these students are those who have an advantage in the transition to professional life. They are beneficiaries of direct contact with the socio-economic environment in which they will develop their future professional career.



**Figure 4:** Places for voluntary work

Source: authors' own calculations

The comparative analysis done for the two countries reveals interesting differences. Student from Romania are volunteers in NGO sector, while students from Hungary are volunteers in a non-organized field. A comparative analysis of the associative sector in the two countries might provide explanations of this fact.

**Table 2:** Places for voluntary work, data recorded for Hungary and Romania

<b>Volunteering places - % for YES</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Romania</b>
In a company, firm	11.9	21.1
In a NGO	42.5	59.1
I volunteer in an unorganized framework	57.5	39.9

Source: authors own calculations

As volunteering takes place mainly in NGOs we explored also the types of associative participation in both countries. The answers to the question *Are you a member in a civic group, association, organization, club?*, reveal that students are

oriented mostly toward activities organized within church or religious groups in a much higher percentage than all other types of NGOs. The second field of involvement is represented by leisure groups (sports or cultural). The lowest support from students is for political groups or movements, followed by professional associations. We obtained similar results in the comparative analysis for Hungary and Romania, such as those found in the case of voluntary work: in the case of all kind of organizations, students from Romania report higher values. The values are especially higher in the case of confessional and religious organizations. As our data suggested, students are mainly volunteering in organizations, so the two issues, volunteering and associative membership, are strongly correlated. In our further analysis we will focus on describing characteristics of volunteer students. In order to investigate the structure of participative behaviours of students in cross-border area, we focused first on students' socio-economic characteristics and also on their academic situation.

There are no significant gender and age differences in the case of students' voluntary work. Even though previous studies (Hatos, 2009) indicate a higher involvement in voluntary activities among females mainly in charity, in the case of students from HU-RO cross border area this statement is not confirmed.

Regarding students socio-economic status we used two indicators: educational capital of parents (fathers' years of schooling) and household endowment. For this second indicator we summed positive responses for items found in students' parents household and his/hers personal household (LCD, computer, laptop, dishwasher, air conditioning etc.). Reliability is proved for both scores (Cronbach alpha above .700). Results show that there are no significant relationships between educational capital of parents and students' voluntary involvement. There are no significant relationships between students' socio-economic status and volunteering. Only in the case of students' household endowment we identified significant differences, indicating higher levels for those who are involved in voluntary activities (mean value for household endowment of volunteer students is 0.91, compared to 0.71 for non-volunteers, significant for  $t=-2.82$ ,  $p<.000$ ).

To describe the academic situation of students we analysed data recorded for each university or college, field of study, academic cycle and tuition payment. Results show significant differences between universities and colleges included in our sample (Pearson Chi-Square = 232.4,  $p=.000$ ). The largest differences are found in the case of University of Debrecen, where most students do not volunteer, and Emanuel University from Oradea, where students are better involved in voluntary activities. In the case of this last institution, we have to stress out the fact that it is a confessional university, and consistent with our previous results, students from Romania are rather involved in voluntary activities for helping other people and this kind of activities are developed in an organized framework, within religious groups. To express these significant differences we computed dummy variables for each university where results are relevant. Data is presented in the table no. 3 below.

**Table 3:** Percentage of volunteers and no-volunteers in universities and colleges

University/college	Non-volunteer	Volunteer	Total	Adjusted residual	Person Chi-Square; p
University of Debrecen (HU)	78.5%	21.5%	100%	-7.8	60.70, p=.000
Nyiregyhaza College (HU)	89.9%	12.1%	100%	-4.9	23.69, p=.000
University of Oradea (RO)	67.4%	32.6%	100%	2.0	3.83, p<.005
Partium Christian University (RO)	62.7%	37.3%	100%	3.3	11.2, p<.005
Emanuel University (RO)	17.4%	82.6%	100%	13.0	170.17, p=.000

Source: authors own calculations

Students from social-sciences field are better involved in voluntary activities. Analysis revealed significant differences in the case of field of study, (Pearson Chi-Square = 172.4, p=.000), so there are domains which favours such behaviours, and other ones where students are not volunteering. We found no significant differences among BA and MA students regarding their voluntary work.

In the case of tuition payment, students who are enrolled in tax-free places are less involved in voluntary activities. Differences are significant for Pearson Chi-Square = 15.3, p=.000. Volunteers in 65.9% do not pay tuition, while 73.8% of non-volunteers occupy tax-free places within universities suggesting that students with good grades are the ones that volunteer.

### **2.3.2. Previous academic paths and students' volunteering**

In this section we aim to investigate the relationship between students' academic path and involvement in voluntary activities. A rich academic career is found in the case of top-students. Are these students also more active, voluntarily getting involved in activities that address community issues?

Indeed, higher involvement in voluntary activities is found in the case of students with higher academic capital in terms of their awards gained during high school. We used an indicator by summing positive responses to the following items: awards for school achievements, awards for Olympics, and awards for artistic and sport achievements, all gained during high-school. The mean value for awards gained by students who are doing voluntary work is 2.06, significantly higher than the value of 1.55 recorded for those who are not volunteering (for t=6.3; p=.000).

However, results obtained in the case of our second indicator for students' academic paths show no significant difference between students who already gained some higher education diplomas and those who are the beginning of their academic career. Therefore a successful academic career is better than a longer academic career in terms of getting involved in voluntary activities.

### **2.3.3. Academic integration and voluntary work of students**

In our study we focused also on students' current academic integration. We used three indicators for this approach, referring to students' academic engagement and academic performances.

For the measurement of academic engagement we used a summative scale. The scale had 4 answer items, from *Never* (1) to *Very often* (4). We conducted factor analysis using Principal component extraction method and the Varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation method. Analysis revealed four dimensions. The first dimension refers to the counselling direction of the academic activities (*I discussed about my grades and homework with a teacher, I discussed my career plans with a teacher or counsellor, I discussed ideas about readings or classes with teachers outside class, I received a written or verbal feedback*) and the second one refers to active class participation (*I raised questions or participated to discussions in courses and seminars, I did a presentation in class, We prepared two or more drafts of a paper before I finished it, I worked for a project or a paper that required integrating ideas and information from various sources*). The last two components refer to the collaboration with minority students and to the cohesion of students group. In the present study we used the score on active class participation, which has a normal distribution, with a mean value of 12.1, standard deviation 3.28, and a score on mentoring (mean value 7.19, standard deviation 2.53). Both scores have good reliability (Cronbach alpha above .700).

Regarding academic performance, we analysed the results for a Yes-No scale. Questions referred to students' research interests, their academic awards, scholarship, language certificate etc. We used factor analysis, selecting the Principal Component extraction method and the Varimax rotation method. Results showed three dimensions - in our analysis we used the first one that explains 19.73 % of the total variance. The score refers to student's research performance (*I have my own research theme that interests me, I attended a student/general scientific conference with a paper or a poster, I have published at least one scientific article*). Cronbach alpha of this scale is above .700.

Analyses reveal significant differences in the case of all three scores referring to students' academic integration, as shown in table no 4. Data suggests that top-students, those positively oriented toward learning, are also more interested in voluntary work. If we look at volunteering as a time consuming activity, than the results are interesting: these students have to be also present, active during courses and prepare more. This finding suggests a profile of volunteers as active persons. Those who are actively involved in current activities according to their status (studying) in their free time are devoted to other constructive activities, both for their personal development and the entire community.



**Table 4:** Significance test results for the relationship between volunteering and the indicators used for student's academic integration

	Mean values for each score		Significance test	
	Non-volunteer	Volunteer	t	p
Participative academic engagement	11.63	13.18	-10.3	.000
Mentoring academic engagement	6.86	7.86	-8.2	.000
Research academic performance	0.49	0.95	-9.7	.000

Source: authors own calculations

#### **2.3.4. Employment, employability and voluntary work of students**

We identified in our analysis those students who gained some work experience before their university studies. These are non-traditional students who were employed after their high school studies. Even though differences are not statistically significant, results suggest that students with previous work experience are more involved in voluntary activities.

Regarding those students who are currently employed, results reveal significant differences. From all students who volunteer, 46.7% are employed, while non-volunteers, only 38% are employed (for Pearson Chi-Square = 15.5, p=.000). If we take into consideration the time management, we can assume that students currently employed are less dedicated to voluntary activities, yet our result contradicts this assumption. As an indicator of students' employability we explored their working abroad experience (dummy variable). Significance test results show that those who worked in other country are more oriented toward voluntary work (Pearson Chi-Square = 25.4, p=.000). Entrepreneur students are also more involved in voluntary work (Pearson Chi-Square = 13.9, p=.000).

This finding is particularly important as, added up to the previous results; it indicates volunteering among students is part of an "active profile of student". In this matter suggesting causality is risky. Nevertheless, the fact that students involved in volunteering are the ones academically engaged with longer academic paths, working, driven by intrinsic motivations, point out to a pro-active student. These are the "good" students, with good grades, participates actively to classes, interested in helping others, and also working (employed or entrepreneur) or previously worked abroad. These are also the students who volunteer. Consequently we consider the concept of active citizenship (Dodescu et. al., 2004), in which engagement is manifested in several areas of life, suitable in the describing the student's profile.

### **3. Conclusion**

Previous studies show that civic participation is positively linked with the level of socio-economic development of communities, regions or countries (Woolcock, 1998). But these studies focus almost exclusively to adults' participation. If communities and its members have nothing but to gain from membership in associations and voluntary work, than this kind of activities should be encouraged from an early age. Students, as young adults, represent in this case perfect candidates, because they have already designed their directions followed in their future professional careers, and therefore will get involved and will be motivated to

get involved in those activities that help their professional integration. From this perspective, our approach turns to students from Hungary-Romania cross-border area in order to investigate main differences and similarities regarding voluntary work of students and to outline a general profile of volunteer. Our main conclusion is that participation in volunteer activities follows different patterns in the border area, but the differences are found not so much between the two countries, but rather between different types of educational institutions included in the study. A particularity of voluntary participation is found in charitable behaviours carried out under the auspices of religious groups. Therefore we believe that one of the directions to be followed in the investigation of volunteering should be focused on explaining religious attitudes and practices and investigating their relationship with voluntary involvement in charitable activities. A successful career path proves to be an important ingredient for volunteering, but longer academic careers do not significantly improve volunteer involvement. Regarding working students and students with previous working experience, our study shows rather interesting results: students who work also volunteer more. Summing up, we consider that the profile of volunteering students overlaps on the profile of generally active students (educational, work). Active citizenship provides a suitable frame for the profile of volunteering students.

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