

## VOLUNTEERING - ENGINE OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** *In the last decade of the twentieth century, the phenomenon of volunteering began to take shape in Romania. Therefore, it is necessary to study its evolution, the necessary resources, the implications and benefits it brings to society at the collective level but also at the individual level. The purpose of the paper is to determine the degree of involvement of young people in volunteer activities. About volunteering it can be said that it can contribute to the development of young people on several levels: social, psychological, human and why not even economic. In the first part of the present study are presented some theoretical aspects regarding the volunteer activity, and in the second part are presented the research methodology and the results of the data analysis obtained through the questionnaire.*

**Keywords:** *volunteering; youth; benefits; correlation ratio.*

**JEL Classification:** *J31.*

### 1. Introduction

Volunteering can be considered an important part of modern social and economic life, as it can contribute to strengthening globalization through increasingly frequent intercultural exchanges.

Volunteering integrates any type of individual, engaging him in various situations and providing a favorable framework for the accumulation of diverse experiences. Human development is materialized through education, through various contacts within society and certainly through volunteer activities.

Volunteering is also a phenomenon that can cover a wide range of people, regardless of age, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, political orientation, social class, level of education, even overcoming the language barrier.

The objectives of this research are the following:

1. Determining the degree of involvement of young people in volunteering activities, taking into account issues such as gender; the environment of origin; occupation.
2. Determining the main reasons why young people choose to get involved in volunteer activities.

This paper has the following structure: the current state of knowledge; research methodology; research results; proposals for action, conclusions and bibliography.

## 2. Literature review

The European Youth Forum considers that "volunteering activities are not based on profit and appear at the initiative of the volunteer or in an organized setting" (European Youth Forum, 2019). Attractive activities for volunteers are considered the following: sports, social activity, culture, recreation, education (formal; non-formal), vocational training, personal development.

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language defines volunteering as follows: "Activity carried out for the benefit of other people or society without pursuing a material gain" (Dex online, 2019). Volunteering is considered to be a sum of values such as: altruism, generosity, social responsibility, altruism (Jardim& Silva, 2018). At the same time, the European Youth Forum mentions that an activity can be considered voluntary only if several criteria are met, such as (Center for Research and Consultation in the Field of Cultures, 2018):

- Own initiative - a person, without the constraint of external factors, chooses to dedicate his time and energy to meet certain requirements or needs of society and the environment in general, but also in particular at the individual level;
- Remuneration- as is clear from the above definition, it is clear that the volunteer does not engage in such activities for the purpose of obtaining benefits of an economic nature, but especially of a social nature (self-esteem, prestige, generosity, appreciation of society, altruism, etc.);
- Organizational activity- voluntary activities are usually carried out under the auspices of non-profit institutions, non-governmental organizations.

In order to be able to emphasize the dimension of youth involvement in volunteering activities, it is necessary to make a conceptual delimitation regarding the youth segment. At the Romanian level, there is the Youth Law, according to which citizens are considered young when they are between 14 and 35 years old (Romanian Parliament, 2006).

Regarding the youth segment, it was found that young people seem to prefer informal or unconventional forms of civic and political participation, which best suit their interests and needs. At the same time, their participation is generally separate from any political affiliation. According to a 2015 statistic, about 1 in 4 young people across the European Union have been involved in a form of volunteering). Approached from a broader perspective, it can be mentioned that volunteering has two main components, namely: the psychological component and the sociological one. In terms of the psychological component, volunteering satisfies self-esteem, it follows the motivations of the volunteers, and through altruism one individual can differ from another individual who does not practice such activities. From the perspective of the sociological component, the social changes that occur over time are followed, which changes the structure and concerns of the volunteer but also the individual (Jardim& Silva, 2018). Any activity that an individual carries out is based on motivation. When it comes to volunteering, the spectrum of intrinsic motivation is dominant. Nowadays, motivation is supported by impulses such as: career

development, personal growth, professional experience, the development of new skills and competencies, premises to be able to get a job more easily; new friends etc.

In a general note, in order to be able to benefit from volunteering, the first step is obviously to practice it. Referring to the perspective of motivating human resources in an organization whose main purpose is to make a profit, we can extrapolate this relationship from the perspective of non-governmental organizations, where motivation must be generated by intrapersonal beliefs.

Therefore, it can be said that it is much more difficult to motivate individuals when the goal is not economic in nature, but based on intrapersonal beliefs. Due to the heightened heterogeneity of individuals, it is difficult for non-governmental organizations to engage, motivate individuals to serve a cause or voluntary activity. Based on the heterogeneity of individuals, it goes without saying that the benefits they obtain or perceive are different.

Young people have different reasons why they choose to volunteer, compared to the elderly, as they are mainly interested in gaining qualifications, experiences, skills that can be useful for their future job.

The basis of volunteering is to a large extent the awareness of a cause, whatever its nature (social, environmental, educational, etc.), but the benefits arise from the actions of the individual to combat or support the cause.

According to the sociological approach, volunteering can be seen as a social phenomenon involving models and social relationships, interactions between individuals, groups and organizations, which is why it can involve the following benefits: improving interpersonal relationships, stimulating compassion for others and their problems, improving personal qualities based on interaction with other individuals (Hustinx et al., 2010).

Taking into account the psychological perspective, volunteering brings benefits such as: increased self-esteem; improving personal satisfaction; increasing the appreciation of the company; increasing the feeling of productivity and utility in society etc. (Hustinx et al., 2010).

In terms of volunteer activities, the benefits are not only on the part of the individual engaged in such activities, but also on the part of society. Among the benefits that society can have through such volunteer activities we mention: new availability in terms of training or education of groups of people; improving the quality of life; increasing the degree of social cohesion, etc.

### **2.1. Volunteering in Romania**

Considering that the volunteer activities materialized in most countries after the end of the Second World War, it can be said that this did not happen in Romania, because from the end of the war until 1990 the dictatorial regime in our country it focused very much on the reconstruction of the country and implicitly on the production of goods, leaving individuals very little time to carry out other activities, such as volunteering. From this point of view, it can be considered that the incipient moment of volunteering in Romania is the year 1990.

In post-communist Romania, dictatorial doctrine persisted for a long time in collective memory and customs. Therefore, the values that volunteering implies hardly penetrated the behaviors and new habits of the Romanian society, which can be observed at the statistical level when in 2001, the percentage of volunteers from at least one association was only 8%, the percentage being largely made up of the young urban population modeled on the population of Western Europe (Corduban et al., 2014).

The first really important step in reducing the gap between Romania and Western Europe came late, only in 2014 when the Romanian Senate voted the law on regulating volunteer activities in Romania. The law regulates the framework for the participation of individuals in volunteer activities organized by other individuals or public organizations. At the same time, volunteering is considered an exponential factor for creating a competitive labor market, education, vocational training (Romanian Parliament, 2014).

In order to be able to carry out a quantitative research of the volunteer activities in Romania, the approach is a difficult one because there are no exact data on the persons who practice the volunteer activities and implicitly there are no institutions to deal with the registration of volunteers (Sana, 2016). An overview can be provided by the European Youth Report, which includes a survey on volunteer activities in European countries, including Romania.

According to the European Youth Report, in Romania (European Union, 2017):

- 17% of respondents participated in the last 12 volunteer activities organized through clubs (sports, youth, leisure).
- 85% of respondents said they did not have the opportunity to volunteer internationally.
- 74% among the respondents considers the educational dimension of volunteering to be important and that young people should be encouraged in this direction.
- Only 15% of respondents believe that the European Union could promote itself

values through volunteer activities.

According to the National Resource Center for Volunteering of the Pro Vobis association in Romania, there are several traditional events that aim to reward good practices in the field of volunteering: National Volunteer Week (held annually in the third week of May); National Volunteer Gala and other local galas; International Volunteer Day (December 5); International Day of Volunteer Coordinators - November 5 (Pintea, 2019).

## **2.2. Good practices in volunteering**

Due to the vast fields in which volunteering can be integrated, it is necessary to delimit it both at the legislative level but also at the level of organization and proper development of activities (bodies; programs; associations, etc.). Below will be presented some bodies that carry out various volunteer programs, based on certain target groups. At the same time, they can be considered as examples of good practice in terms of volunteering.

### Pro Vobis

Pro Vobis is the first association in Romania to introduce, in 1997 with EU support through the Phare program, the concept and practices regarding the "Volunteer Center". It is also important to mention that this association has 25 volunteer centers. A volunteer center recruits and trains volunteers, informs them of volunteering opportunities; organizes training courses for volunteers; promotes the concept of volunteering and the principles of good practice in working with volunteers (Pintea, 2019).

The association also collaborates with NGOs, practitioners, public institutions, socially responsible companies. They carry out volunteer activities in areas such as education, volunteering in protected areas, child care, etc.

One of the most well-known projects is the Initiative Shelf. This project had the mission to diversify volunteering opportunities in public libraries in Romania, regardless of age (Pintea, 2019). This program aims, among other things, to increase people's awareness of the need and usefulness of involvement in volunteer activities. The program had the following results (Pintea, 2019):

- 16 beneficiary public libraries, but also 31 librarians trained in the Management of Volunteer and Volunteer programs;
- Carrying out 16 pilot volunteer programs in libraries over a period for at least 6 months;
- Diversification of volunteer actions offered in the library, having as main purpose actions to combat hate speech;
- Creating and promoting the concept of Library V - dynamic library, open to all ages and all social groups.

Within this program, as a result of the training period, the libraries involved develop and offer various courses (computer training for the elderly, personal development courses for young people, public speaking; time management, etc.).

### Cactus Association - Academy of Economic Studies

The Academic Research Association in Tourism and Services CACTUS is a distinct structure of consultancy, studies, training, professional training, research and interdisciplinary design, organization of scientific and applied events, and the fields covered are multiple and we mention some such as: tourism, services, protection environment and nature, regional development, sustainable, etc.

Cactus Association is a non-governmental organization founded in 2008 by the Department of Tourism and Geography of the Faculty of Business and Tourism within the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. Starting with 2017, the Cactus Association has started various volunteer actions involving students and respectively seeks to bring benefits to the growing population.

These volunteer actions had as unit and target group the Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Sector 4 Bucharest, with which the Association has a concluded agreement which provides mainly for educational and recreational activities for children and which targets the Day Center "Casa Sperantei "and" HarapAlb ".

Within this center, 50 students are supported, who are in the preschool, primary or secondary school cycle and who come from families in difficulty, such as: single-parent families, families with a very low standard of living, etc.

The Cactus Association carried out a series of activities specifically oriented to the needs of the children in this unit, such as: homework help for children in middle school and high school in HarapAlbcenter, ecology workshop at the Casa Speranței Day Center, Creative Workshop floral, Game and personal development workshop. Through homework help, Cactus volunteers offered meditations for various school subjects, as well as various drawing or guitar lessons. All these actions aimed to support the integration and increase the school performance of the children involved. The ecology workshop aimed to instruct and teach children in a practical way how to protect the environment, what it means to be responsible for it, to distinguish different species of plants in protected areas. The purpose of these actions is to raise awareness of the impact of their activities on nature, the need for their active involvement in environmental protection and the opening of new perspectives on voluntary environmental activities.

The ECOTUR Tourism and Ecology Club

The ECOTUR Tourism and Ecology Club is a student association that operates within the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. As the name suggests, the association is a professional one, having two fields of activity: ecology and tourism. The association aims to engage students from the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest, but also from other universities. Also, the aim of the association is to inspire and train both volunteers and beneficiaries, a civic behavior.

The ECOTUR Tourism and Ecology Club has several projects, among which: ecoTUR for Paper, Earth Hour, Earth Day, Tourism Community, Ecological Responsibility in Prahova Schools. Next, we will detail two projects, namely Ecological Responsibility in Prahova Schools and ecoTUR for Paper.

The Ecological Responsibility Project in Prahova Schools, involves the club's volunteers to go to schools in rural and urban areas in Prahova County and to teach middle school and primary school students how to adopt an eco-civic behavior. This involves volunteers providing students with information about ecology, cooking healthy food with them, planting trees and flowers, and greening various green spaces. The purpose of this project is to raise awareness of the positive impact that people have on the environment, but especially to raise awareness of the negative impact and correct it through the practices involved in the project.

The ecoTUR paper project has the same goal, which is to raise awareness of the negative impact that cutting down trees has on the environment. This time, the target group is students, who are encouraged to recycle the paper they no longer need. The volunteers of the association go to the student dormitories of the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest and collect the paper that the students no longer use, then send it to the companies that deal with recycling.

### 3. Research methodology

The purpose of this paper is to determine the degree of involvement of young people but also the reasons that determine them to get involved in volunteer activities, taking into account the main causes for which they choose to fight but also the subsequent benefits they obtain. For data collection through the questionnaire, the target group is young people aged between 18 and 35 years. This is a pilot study. 76 respondents participated, and the research hypotheses are the following:

1. Less than 50% of respondents do not volunteer;
2. Over 60% of women in urban areas practice activities of volunteering;
3. Less than 60% of urban males are volunteer;
4. Less than 30% of all respondents from rural areas stated that they volunteered;
5. At least 50% of all respondents consider that the main reason why they chose to volunteer is to help their peers;
6. More than 80% of all respondents consider that they do not want to volunteer because they do not have enough free time;
7. Over 60% of undergraduate respondents are involved in activities volunteering.

We also tested the influence of social variables (background, gender and occupation) on the causes served by volunteer activities and on the reasons behind the practice of volunteer activities. For this we used the correlation ratio.

### 4. Results

The majority of respondents (71%) practiced volunteer activities, and 29% of respondents did not practice volunteer activities, so hypothesis 1 is refused. In the contemporary era, taking into account the fact that the Romanian economy is still in transition and that the era of speed also has negative consequences on people (stress), it is found that people still have a certain dose of interest in volunteering.

The structure of respondents by gender is as follows: 58 of the respondents are female and 18 are male. Also, 42 of the respondents are from urban areas. In order for hypothesis 2 to be validated, 25 of the 42 respondents must have volunteered. The hypothesis is valid, because 29 of the 42 respondents practiced volunteer activities, this means 69%. Also, 13 of the 18 male respondents are from urban areas. In order for hypothesis 3 to be validated, less than 8 respondents must have volunteered. The hypothesis is refuted, as 9 of the 13 respondents practiced volunteer activities, which means 69%.

The structure of the respondents according to the environment of origin is the following: 21 are from rural areas, and 55 are from urban areas. Hypothesis 4 is refuted, as 16 of the 21 rural respondents volunteered, which means 76%.

In order for hypothesis 5 to be validated, at least 38 of the 76 respondents must have chosen to help their peers as the main reason for practicing volunteer activities. The

hypothesis is refuted, as 30 respondents chose among their motives the help of their peers, which means 39.47%.

In order to validate hypothesis 6, more than 18 of the 22 respondents who did not volunteer should invoke their free time as a reason that prevented them from carrying out such activities. The hypothesis is refuted, as only 7 of the 22 respondents chose free time as a reason that prevented them from volunteering, which means 32%.

In the structure of respondents by occupation, 32 of the 76 respondents are undergraduate students. In order for hypothesis 7 to be validated, more than 19 of the 32 respondents must have stated that they had volunteered. This hypothesis is validated, as 25 of the 32 undergraduate students stated that they practiced volunteer activities, which means 78%.

From a social point of view, the majority of respondents live in urban areas (72.4%), most respondents are between 18 and 25 years old (93.4%), most respondents are female (76.3%) and most of the respondents are undergraduate students (40.8%). Starting from the premise that involvement in volunteer activities is not determined by economic factors, social factors were taken into account. In order to find out if the social factors influence the involvement of young people in volunteering activities, it was determined what is the connection between the reasons why the respondents practice volunteering activities and three social variables, namely the environment of origin, gender and occupation. It was also determined what is the connection between the causes that the respondents serve through volunteer activity and the same social variables. To determine the link between the variables mentioned above, the following references have been established:

- Independent variables: environment of origin, gender, occupation;
- Dependent variables: the reasons why the respondents practice volunteering activities, the causes that the respondents serve through the volunteering activities
- Calculation method: calculation of the correlation ratio (Multiple R) using the Regression function in EXCEL and testing its statistical significance using the FISHER test.

Based on previous references, the following results were obtained:

**Table 1:** Correlation ratio

<i>Indicators</i>	<b>The environment of origin</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Multiple R</b>
<b>Reasons for volunteering</b>	0.64	0.62	0.53	
<b>Causes served through volunteer activities</b>	0.73	0.74	0.62	

Source: made by the authors



*Observation:* in the analysis was used only the main reason why the respondents carry out volunteer activities (personal development).

Multiple R = 0.64 is statistically significant because  $F_{\text{calculated}} (11.11) > F_{\text{critical}} (1.46)$

Multiple R = 0.62 is statistically significant because  $F_{\text{calculated}} (12.28) > F_{\text{critical}} (1.46)$

Multiple R = 0.53 is statistically significant because  $F_{\text{calculated}} (0.98) > F_{\text{critical}} (0.68)$

Multiple R = 0.73 is statistically significant because  $F_{\text{calculated}} (10.05) > F_{\text{critical}} (1.46)$

Multiple R = 0.74 is statistically significant because  $F_{\text{calculated}} (11.11) > F_{\text{critical}} (1.46)$

Multiple R = 0.62 is statistically significant because  $F_{\text{calculated}} (0.89) > F_{\text{critical}} (0.68)$

All correlation ratios are in the range [0.5; 0.75], which means that there is a medium intensity link between the independent variables and the dependent variables. Thus, it is found that social indicators are not the main indicators that create the impetus for volunteer activities among young people.

## 5. Proposals

1. The implementation in the school curriculum by the Ministry of Education of a discipline or the integration of some sub-themes of volunteering within an already existing discipline.
2. Starting with the high school cycle and ending with the higher one, volunteering should be included in the compulsory internships, offering students other reliable alternatives that can contribute to their human and social development.
3. Involvement of public institutions in actions to promote volunteering and the realization of public-private partnerships in order to carry out extensive volunteering campaigns in the fields of education and environment.

## 6. Conclusions

It is found that young people are not very well informed about what volunteering generally means, and especially about the benefits that come from volunteering. It is also found that young people put personal interests (personal development) first and not the causes for which the volunteer activity is carried out. This contradicts the definition of volunteering to some extent, but reinforces the premise that volunteering contributes to the development of young people. Volunteering is a way for young people to learn to communicate better with each other and with society as a whole, as the main competence acquired through volunteering is the ability to communicate. The online environment is the best way to promote volunteering, whereas most young people have heard of such activities through the online environment. It is also noted that student associations are a cornerstone in terms of volunteering, as most young people have volunteered in these associations. A particularly important aspect

is that young people are aware of the problems of society, as most young people have said that the feeling that appears when they practice volunteering is the awareness of a problem. It also seems that one of the most important causes for young people to volunteer is the environment, and many young people believe that volunteering should be better promoted. It is found that most young people do not volunteer because they do not have free time, and if they had time to practice volunteer activities, they would be in the field of environment (ecology), and the main beneficiaries would be children. It is also found that over 50% of young people volunteer. Another important aspect is that the percentage of young people in urban areas who practice volunteering is equal (69%). Young people in rural areas are very interested in volunteering, as 76% of them have volunteered.

Also, in order to create and stimulate an ecological behavior, it is necessary to invest in ecological education from an early age, and this process should be continuous.

In other words, volunteering can close the gap on equal opportunities for one another, providing support and solutions for everyone and responding to increasingly diverse needs.

In conclusion, volunteering has many benefits, implications and involves various resources. It can be seen and understood as an engine with alternative fuels that can help society solve various problems, which politics and education can no longer cope with.

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