

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



CONTRIBUTION OF NON-PROGRAMME COUNTRIES TO EU YOUTH WIKI

SERBIA CHAPTER II: VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

Authors: Bojana Perovic, Jelena Ristic Beronja

Published: August 2017

Disclaimer: The content of this document, commissioned by the EU-CoE youth partnership, is the sole responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of either of the partner institutions (the European Union and the Council of Europe).

Contents

2.1.	General context	1
2.2.	Administration and governance of youth volunteering	3
2.3.	National strategy on youth volunteering	4
2.4.	Laws and regulations on youth volunteering	6
2.5.	Youth volunteering at national level	8
2.6.	Cross-border mobility programmes	10
2.7.	Raising awareness about youth volunteering opportunities	11
2.8.	Skills recognition	13
2.9.	Current debates and reforms	14
	GLOSSARY	14

2.1. General context

Serbia has a long tradition of voluntary activities whose social and economic value has been immense so far. The period in the aftermath of the Second World War could be taken as a starting point to reflect on the increasing role of volunteering as an organised movement. In that time, Serbia was a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Just after the war, driven by the socialist regime, the so-called Youth Labour Actions (Omladinske radne akcije, ORA) became ubiquitous, with their main goal to restore and rebuild the badly ravaged economy, infrastructure, settlements as well as sports and culture facilities. In the first post-war federal youth labour actions, millions of young people built highways, railways, factories, even entire cities using the potential of mass-mobilisation of youth through participation in politically led volunteering activities. The largest volunteering youth actions took place between 1946 and 1952, when several infrastructural milestones were accomplished, including the main national motorway, railways, bridges and urban districts.

While ORA was a national volunteering programme organised by the state, there were a few other international voluntary movements present at the time, independent or largely independent of the state: the Society for support and education of poor and abandoned children, since 1880 – now Friends of children (Društvo za potpomaganje i vaspitanje sirotne i napuštene dece), the Red Cross, the Scouts, and the international workcamps movement. These movements exist in Serbia to the present day.

The international workcamps movement and international exchange of volunteers were conducted through the Socialist Youth League of Yugoslavia (Savez socijalističke omladine Jugoslavije) after the Second World War. Just before the breakdown of Yugoslavia, since 1990 several republics continued this practice independently, but this time governed by civil society organisations instead of governments. In Serbia the organisation in charge was Young Researchers of Serbia, with a sector formed for this purpose – Voluntary Service of Serbia (VSS) – in 1990.

In more recent Serbian history, the year 2004 was important for young volunteers. Gathered around several associations from the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the [first national initiative for the legal regulation of the status of volunteers in Serbia, IZVoR](#), was launched on 5 December, symbolically on International Volunteers Day. The main purpose of the initiative was to further promote the culture of volunteering, providing better conditions for volunteering activities and a legal basis for voluntary work. As part of the final stage of the initiative, the Working Group of IZVoR organised a conference named “Status of volunteers in Serbia” in 2005 in Novi Sad, with more than 50 civil society representatives. The Working Group agreed on proposals for the definitions, rights and commitments that the future text of the Law on Volunteering should incorporate. On the one hand, it is obvious that the IZVoR initiative played an important role in pushing the issue of legal regulation of volunteering higher up the policy agenda, leading consequently to the drafting of the law, in 2008. On the other hand, one of the crucial moments for the adoption of the law was the organisation of the World Summer Universiade in Belgrade in 2009, with more than 11 000 young volunteers participating from all over the world. The Law on Volunteering was finally adopted in 2010 and it is still in force in 2017. In spite of the IZVoR initiative’s recommendations, the law was adopted without consulting them, which sparked a great dispute between the civil society organisations, who are the majority of volunteer programme organisers, and the ministry in charge of labour.

One of the major milestones in promoting the volunteering culture among young people was the establishment of the first [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) (MoYS) in 2007. Bearing in mind that the initiative for setting up the ministry came from the civil society and particularly from youth associations, the government's interest in volunteering has developed over time and youth volunteering representatives have become deeply involved in many aspects of youth policy decision making. Recognising the power and importance of volunteering engagement for young people and their active participation, especially in a local context, in 2010 the MoYS launched the national programme "[Youth Rules](#)" ([Mladi su zakon](#)), which became the synonym for youth volunteering engagement, recognisable in local communities but also nationwide (see chapter 2.5). The programme is still in force in 2017.

In Serbia, volunteering is the basis of civil society and the functioning of associations, especially youth associations. Thus, it is worth mentioning that one of the key incentives for popularisation of volunteering came with the [Law on associations](#) in 2009, which aims to create an enabling environment for increasing the number of non-profit organisations. According to the law, the main requirements for establishment of an association are the commitment of any three citizens with a common interest and a modest registration tax.

Certainly, the devastating floods and landslides that hit the whole country 2014 posed challenges and raised questions around the status of volunteers and of organisers of volunteering activities. . Although the national and local institutions made great efforts to help vulnerable areas and people who suffered, volunteers of all ages, but especially young people, have been proclaimed the heroes of that difficult period. Their engagement not only continued through the most critical days, but also during the repair of the consequences of the floods, weeks after the water had subsided. As a result of that emergency, many questions were raised referring to the several shortcomings of the Law on Volunteering. Consequently, that led to the establishment of the Working Group for the Impact Assessment of the Law on Volunteering (see chapter 2.9).

Although in the Serbian context volunteering is usually regarded as a youth activity, the national legal framework does not recognise youth volunteering as such. The definition of volunteering, set down in the Law on Volunteering, states that volunteering is organised, voluntary provision of services or performing of activities in the public interest, for the common good, or for the benefit of another person, without monetary compensation or claim of other tangible benefits. However, bearing in mind that the majority of volunteers are young persons, the law recognises the principle of youth protection as one of the key principles of volunteering in Serbia.

The law makes a distinction between short-term and long-term volunteering, where the latter should last longer than ten hours per week, for at least three months without interruption. In practice, it the definition is not clear since it falls short on any activity that lasts longer than ten hours per week but does not last as long as three months.

In terms of the labour status of young persons who are acquiring their first practical work experience, there is usually a lack of common understanding and distinction between internships, apprenticeships and volunteering. Despite the law clearly stating what shall not be considered as volunteering, it is still often that both employers and young people interpret volunteering incorrectly, relating it to any time spent on professional training or personal development, without an employment contract.

2.2. Administration and governance of youth volunteering

The ministry in charge of the implementation of the law and other regulations on voluntary activities is the [Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs](#) (MoLEVSA). In particular, according to the Law on Volunteering, the ministry keeps records of volunteering organisers who are obliged to submit an application for volunteering organisations as well as a report on volunteering for the previous year by 31 March of the current year. Supervision of the implementation regulations on volunteering and volunteer contracts is performed by the labour or administration inspection. Within the ministry, the Sector for Labour is responsible for volunteering policy development and issues related to implementation of the law. By 2017 there was no collective report produced by MoLEVSA that shows the analysis of volunteers' engagement in Serbia.

Beside the MoLEVSA, the main institution recognised by young volunteers themselves, and by youth organisations, that supports and promotes the development of youth voluntary activities is [the MoYS](#). Within this ministry, the Sector for Youth is responsible for promoting volunteering among young people. The main policy document in the field of youth, [the National Youth Strategy 2015-2025](#) (Nacionalna strategija za mlade, NYS), clearly emphasises the significance of volunteering, both through its main principles and its specific goals. [The Action plan for the Strategy implementation \(2015-2017\)](#) provides concrete activities that should be realised in order to achieve the goals set. The researches and surveys on the position and needs of young people that the MoYS conducts on an annual basis always include a chapter relating to volunteering habits and attitudes. Those survey findings and research conclusions are two of the main starting points in evidence-based decision making in the youth field. Mainly by supporting civil society organisations and local youth offices, the MoYS has raised youth volunteering activities to a higher level by initiating and co-ordinating the national youth volunteering programme "Youth Rules".

Aside from the above-mentioned ministries, a number of public bodies and organisations are involved in the implementation and support of voluntary activities, such as the [Office for Co-operation with Civil Society](#), the [Olympic Committee of Serbia](#), the [Red Cross of Serbia](#) and many others. They mostly support volunteering among their other activities and responsibilities.

The role of municipalities in relation to volunteering is not uniform. Some of them have highly developed voluntary services and a network of local volunteers (such as the [Voluntary service of Belgrade municipality of Zvezdara](#)). Additionally, since 2015 some of the local youth offices have run numerous ad hoc activities as part of supporting refugees and migrants on their way through Serbia, such as: collecting and delivering clothes, enabling internet connections and promoting diversity of culture and traditions of migrants from war-affected countries. On a strategic level, it is important to note that most of the municipalities in Serbia have adopted Local Youth Action Plans, which usually promote youth volunteering.

The most important civil society organisations involved in the promotion of volunteering which contribute to the youth volunteering culture are certainly [Young Researchers of Serbia – Voluntary Service of Serbia](#) (Mladi istraživači Srbije – Volonterski servis Srbije), [the National Youth Council of Serbia](#) (Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije, KOMS), [the National Association of Youth Workers \(NAPOR\)](#), [Civic Initiatives](#) (Gradjanske inicijative) and [the Scout Organisation of Serbia](#) (Savez izviđača Srbije). Also, every year through "Youth Rules", the national programme of youth volunteering, between 12 and 25 volunteer resource

centres are selected from all over the country to implement the programme. They are among the main actors for the promotion, facilitation of co-operation and information exchange in the area of youth volunteering. Thus, they are recognised as reliable, representative partners of the government institutions and other stakeholders interested in creating an enabling environment for youth volunteers. Their representatives are members of different cross-sectoral working groups with a mandate to analyse the current situation and propose measures for improvement of the status of volunteers.

2.3. National strategy on youth volunteering

Serbia does not have a specialised, stand-alone national strategy on youth volunteering. Volunteering is only included in the National Youth Strategy and only as youth volunteering.

The National Youth Strategy, adopted by the government in 2015 and valid until 2025, contains a chapter on youth activism and active participation where youth volunteering is specifically highlighted. Also, the Action Plan for NYS Implementation (adopted in 2015 and valid until 2017) develops all activities including time-frame, indicators, main actors and partners, as well as allocated budgets. According to the NYS and the [Law on Youth](#), youth or young people refer to persons from 15 to 30 years of age.

The current NYS was preceded by the first National Youth Strategy, adopted in 2008 and valid till the end of 2014. It should be stressed that until the first strategy was created, the Law on Volunteering was not adopted, nor was the national youth volunteering programme established. Thus, the first strategy put more focus on the necessity for the legal regulation of the status of volunteers while the second one has highlighted the shortcomings of the current Law on Volunteering and its negative effects on the promotion and stimulation of the volunteering culture. Naturally, the second strategy is more progressive in terms of defining the activities needed for achieving quality standards, volunteer management training and reporting and measuring the effects of volunteering.

Upon the expiry of the first NYS, the [report on its evaluation](#) (Evaluation of the National Youth Strategy (2008-2014) in the Republic of Serbia and Action Plan (2009-2014)) was prepared with the purpose of presenting the main findings about its implementation and impacts. The report has provided a systematic overview of the achievements and lessons learned, as well as factors supporting and hindering implementation of actions conducted under the first NYS. With regard to volunteering, the report stated that the national volunteering programme “Youth Rules” had been considered as one the most important and effective programmes undertaken under the NYS, especially at the local level and especially in regard to what it takes to support youth participation and activism effectively. According to the voice of the young people who participated in the programme, one of its main impacts was promotion and encouragement of activism among young people as well as contribution to increasing awareness of the community to specific topics, such as volunteering and charity work.¹

The National Youth Strategy defines volunteering as a non-profit activity by which individuals, independently or within a group or organisation, contribute to the welfare of their

1. See Ohana Y. and Bulat M., Evaluation of the National Youth Strategy (2008-2014) in the Republic of Serbia and Action Plan (2009-2014), commissioned by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia and the United Nations Population Fund in Serbia, January 2015, p. 49.

communities. It recognises and supports volunteer engagement of young people by developing an enabling environment for young people to contribute to the society through voluntary work. Also, NYS emphasises the importance of the promotion of volunteering through networking of volunteer organisations and strengthening of their capacity. However, practical implementation of the current Law on Volunteering (2010) has shown some negative effects on the promotion and stimulation of volunteering culture. The unfavourable conditions for volunteering affected by poor institutional framework resulted from the lower interest of young people for this kind of engagement but also from the unwillingness of potential providers to initiate volunteering activities.²

As one of its specific goals, the current NYS defines improved conditions for volunteering of young people and for young people. The main institution responsible for achieving this goal should be the MoYS. Three main results expected from its planned specific activities are foreseen:

- a. Providing a conducive environment and support for the development of volunteering activities and youth volunteering:
 - supporting volunteering activities of youth activity associations, youth offices and informal youth groups
 - supporting involvement of young volunteers in short-term and long-term volunteer programmes
 - encouraging educational, cultural and sports institutions to recognise, support and value youth volunteering
 - establishing a system for the identification and recognition of skills acquired through volunteering for the purpose of employment and monitoring its effectiveness
 - encouraging intergenerational co-operation and inclusion of vulnerable young people through volunteer programmes, projects and initiatives
 - supporting programmes for volunteering in cases of emergency.
- b. Youth volunteering is recognised and its development is supported:
 - supporting the formulation of volunteering policy at the national level, improvement of the legal framework for volunteering and development of volunteer work standards
 - including volunteering programmes into national and local development plans, and emergency response plans
 - supporting youth policy actors in gaining understanding of legal obligations and enhancing the protection of volunteers and beneficiaries of volunteering
 - supporting the networking of volunteer centres and services within youth activity associations and youth offices
 - developing gender-sensitive criteria for reporting and measuring the effects of volunteering
 - supporting the programmes that promote volunteering as a socially useful activity.
- c. Empowering youth activity associations and youth offices to implement volunteering programmes and projects:
 - ensuring the application of volunteer work standards in the activities of youth associations and youth offices
 - supporting volunteer management training for youth associations and youth offices

2. The National Youth Strategy 2015-2025, p. 23,

- supporting the development and work of voluntary services within youth associations and youth offices
- supporting the regular gender-sensitive evaluation of volunteer programmes within youth associations and youth offices.

As stated, the NYS contains specific measures which aim to support inclusive volunteering through encouraging intergenerational co-operation and inclusion of vulnerable young people through voluntary programmes, projects and initiatives. Additionally, one of the strategic goals of the youth policy is to ensure the respect for differences and give all young people an equal opportunity to participate in all spheres of social life, in accordance with the principles of the NYS and the principles of the Law on Youth.

Since the MoYS is in charge of co-ordination, development and improvement of the youth policy, it is also responsible for the implementation of the NYS and its Action Plan. The MoYS directly oversees the activities conducted at the national level, while it monitors the activities implemented at the local level and those directly implemented by other line ministries, institutions and organisations, indirectly, through the reports. The government has formed a cross-sectoral working group to monitor the implementation of the NYS, where a member of the ministry in charge of labour and volunteering policy is represented as well.

2.4. Laws and regulations on youth volunteering

Serbia does not have a stand-alone law on youth volunteering. Although the term “volunteer” can be found in more than 20 current legal acts, this area is regulated in detail by the special [Law on Volunteering](#) (Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/10, Zakon o volontiranju) adopted in 2010 in the National Parliament. The law covers the basic concepts related to volunteering, the principles of volunteering, volunteer contracts, the rights and obligations of volunteers and organisers of volunteering and supervision over the implementation of this law. The law has not yet been amended, in spite of numerous efforts by the civil society organisations to mobilise the ministry in charge of labour to do so.

In the Serbian legal and institutional framework, the term “volunteer” usually has different meanings, making no distinction between voluntary provision of services in the public interest and professional development and training. According to the respective law, volunteering refers to an organised, voluntary provision of services or performing activities in the public interest, for the common good, or for the benefit of another person, without monetary compensation or claim of other tangible benefits. In order to define more precisely what volunteering is, the law also states what volunteering is not:

- time spent on professional training and development, or in practical work without a work contract;
- work outside employment;
- performance of services or activities that a person is obliged to provide to another person;
- execution of court decisions and other decisions of the competent authorities;
- performance of services or activities common in familial, friendly and neighbourly relations;
- performance of tasks in the Red Cross of Serbia relating to the achievement of objectives and tasks;

- performing tasks and activities in political parties, trade unions and other associations, which are related to achieving goals and objectives of organisations or associations by their members;
- performing specific (“ad hoc”) activities in the public interest, for the common good or for the benefit of a third person that do not last longer than 10 hours per week, no more than 30 days without a break or with breaks during the calendar year.

The law does not refer to any specific population group. However, it recognises the importance and vulnerability of young volunteers, introducing thus principle of youth protection.

The legislator’s main idea was to define volunteering as activities in the interest and for the common benefit of the Republic of Serbia, contributing to active involvement of citizens in building a more humane and equal democratic society based on solidarity. Thus, volunteering is based on the principle of non-remuneration and a volunteer is not entitled to financial compensation or other material benefit. Only in case of long-term volunteering, a volunteer is entitled to pocket money, the amount not exceeding 30% of the net amount of the minimum monthly full-time salary in the Republic of Serbia. Apart from the principles of youth protection and of non-remuneration for volunteering, the law is based on:

- the principle of solidarity and promotion of volunteering
- the principle of prohibition of discrimination
- the principle of protection of the beneficiary of volunteering
- the principle of prohibition of the abuse of volunteering.

A volunteer can be a domestic or a foreign individual, not younger than 15 years of age. Young persons aged between 15 and 18 can volunteer as long as they have written permission from their parents or guardians. The organiser of volunteering may be a legal entity whose primary objective, in accordance with its foundation charter, shall not be for profit. As an exception, the organiser of volunteering may be a company and a public enterprise. In that case, the consent of the ministry in charge of labour for the programme of volunteering must be obtained first.

According to the law, before running a voluntary activity, the organisers of volunteering must submit an application to the ministry in charge of labour. Upon completion of a voluntary programme, they must report annually, by the end of March, on every voluntary activity conducted in the previous year. The law prescribes that volunteering shall be performed on the basis of a volunteering contract defining the situations when a written contract form shall be necessary. In addition, the law stipulates the content of the volunteering contract.

Since it came into force, there has been a great dispute over the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Law on Volunteering by the majority of the volunteering organisers. Among the main reasons for this dispute are: not having an appropriate strategy for the implementation of the law and an allocated budget; not foreseeing any support measures for the volunteering organisers but foreseeing punishment measures and overbearing administrative work for the organisers; not carrying an anti-discrimination principle in its entirety; not including all volunteering providers and so not having a realistic overview of volunteers’ engagement on the national level; and not offering a national framework for recognition of volunteer hours and gained competences.

Apart from the Law on Volunteering, it is worth mentioning that the Law on Youth (2011) and the [Law on Higher Education](#) (2017) recognise and promote youth volunteering.

The Law on Youth defines a principle of youth responsibility and solidarity which supports the active contribution of young people to social values and development of their communities, especially through various forms of volunteering. Since the Law on Youth defines social empowerment of young people as a public interest in the youth sector, the budget funds for supporting programmes and projects shall be allocated for encouraging volunteerism, youth work and capacity building of youth associations.

Article 39, which defines the scope of studies within the Law on Higher Education, foresees that the overall activities of a student, apart from exams, colloquia, writings, final papers, etc. shall include also voluntary work in a local community. In terms of this law, voluntary work by students shall mean work without remuneration, organised by the higher education institution in respect of the projects of importance to the local community and evaluated within the system of higher education.

Within the Serbian regulatory framework, there are no laws or other acts providing quality standards to be applied to the organisations and projects in which young volunteers participate, or relevant criteria for their evaluation. Youth volunteering is the only volunteering aspect systematically supported by the MoYS, through the National Youth Strategy. No other strategy, or action plan foresees volunteerism support in different fields and through different age groups.

The effects of the Law on Volunteering are currently being analysed by the cross-sectoral working group, co-ordinated by the ministry in charge of labour. However, since its formation in 2015, the working group has neither met nor produced any conclusions. A separate analysis of the law has been produced by the civil society organisations, who are among the main organisers of voluntary work in Serbia. These recommendations are yet to be considered by the Ministry of Labour.

2.5. Youth volunteering at national level

Since 2010 Serbia has had a national programme for youth volunteering called “Youth Rules” (Mladi su zakon). It is a nationwide programme funded and co-ordinated by the MoYS. It is run through partner civil society organisations tasked with re-granting funds under the special funding line. The programme supports, on the one hand, one-off small-scale interventions called [youth voluntary projects](#) (omladinski volonterski projekti) and on the other, [international voluntary workcamps](#). The final implementing actors of youth volunteering projects are both formally registered associations of young people and so-called “non-formal” groups, comprised of at least five young persons from 15 to 30 years of age. The main objectives of the programme are stimulating self-organisation, volunteering, activism, youth participation, leisure-time activities and the development of peer initiatives.

There are two main types of activity being supported and implemented within the “Youth Rules” programme: youth voluntary projects and international voluntary workcamps.

- Youth voluntary projects are “ad hoc” local voluntary activities of non-formal youth groups and youth associations, which often provide a one-time response to a recognised problem or need in their local communities. Volunteering activities are supported with a maximum of 100 000 Serbian dinars (RSD) (approximately €820). For their implementation, in every Serbian district, professional assistance, guidance and mentorship are provided by the network of associations, so-called resource centres, and their partners. In 2017, 124 such youth voluntary projects have been implemented throughout Serbia, compared to 188 in 2016 and 165 in 2015. The main reason for the reduced number of projects supported is budget cuts, since in 2017 a total of RSD 7.1 million was allocated for this purpose, compared to RSD 10.67 million in 2016 and RSD 11 million in 2015.
During the eight years of implementation of the “Youth Rules” programme (2010-2017), more than 1 420 ad hoc youth voluntary projects have been supported and realised by the youth associations and non-formal groups, engaging more than 7 000 young volunteers. As a result, many playgrounds, classrooms and parks have been reconstructed, environmental and human rights campaigns conducted, cultural heritage sites renovated and promoted, educational workshops realised, amateur theatres and other cultural events have been organised as well as different activities aiming to promote intergenerational solidarity.
- International voluntary workcamps gather youth associations, local actors and young volunteers from Serbia and abroad. Usually, they offer a sustainable and long-term response to a problem or a specific need of a local community. Workcamps also represent a kind of a mechanism for encouraging international and national mobility of young people, empowering them to contribute to the local communities different from their place of residence. Promoting values of intercultural understanding, diversity and solidarity plays an important role in a workcamp. The networking of voluntary organisations and recruitment of volunteers is co-ordinated by Young Researchers of Serbia – Voluntary Service of Serbia and partner civil society organisations (CSOs). According to the MoYS’ data and statistics of the funded and implemented projects, in 2017 there were 34 workcamps which included 532 volunteers, donating Serbia 23 500 hours of volunteering, supported by the MoYS with RSD 3 million. In 2016, the scope of activities was on a much higher level: 47 camps included 731 volunteers, donating Serbia 33 000 hours of volunteering, supported by the MoYS with RSD 4.4 million. When it comes to 2015, 35 camps were organised, involving 533 volunteers, donating Serbia 23 000 hours of volunteering, supported by the MoYS with RSD 3 million. The work camps were held on a variety of topics: environment, social inclusion, renovation, agriculture, art and culture and many others. Workcamps have been organised in Serbia since after the Second World War and they have been included in the national youth volunteering programme since 2014.

Having in mind the aforementioned recent financial data, it can be easily concluded that the total value of the “Youth Rules” programme has decreased significantly in 2017 (RSD 21.3 million), comparing with 2016 and 2015 when it reached RSD 32 million and RSD 31.8 million respectively (a reduction of approximately 33%). The main reasons were government austerity measures and restrictive budgetary allocations for the Sector for Youth, which consequently influenced the “Youth Rules” programme as well.

Apart from supporting youth volunteering, the “Youth Rules” programme responds to a spectrum of NYS objectives including active youth participation, youth information, quality

leisure time, non-formal education, employability and employment opportunities, healthy lifestyles and non-violence.

As stated in the report on Evaluation of the National Youth Strategy (2008-2014) in the Republic of Serbia and the Action Plan (2009-2014),³ “Youth Rules” is considered to be one of the most important and effective programmes undertaken under the NYS, especially at the local level. A survey conducted in 2012 among youth who took part in the programme showed that it has a significant impact in terms of encouraging and promoting activism (98%), fostering civil sector development (98%) and the formation of informal groups (91.5%) as well as in terms of contributing to increased sensitivity of communities to specific topics, such as volunteering, charity work, etc. (93.2%).

One of the major particularities of this programme is its focus on small-scale, creative and punctual initiatives of young people who are allowed to implement all kinds of activities addressing issues relevant to young people in their local communities. Outside the context of this programme, such initiatives never happen because little or no funding is available to young people who are not organised in formally registered associations.

When it comes to assessment of the programme’s impact, no comprehensive monitoring or evaluation of the quantity and quality of the “Youth Rules” programme and their impact across NYS objectives has been conducted so far.

2.6. Cross-border mobility programmes

Besides various international projects supporting volunteering, there are two existing international voluntary programmes active in Serbia, with a long-lasting impact:

- the international voluntary workcamps movement, since the Second World War
- European Voluntary Service, within the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, since 2001 (previously the Youth Programme and the Youth in Action Programme)

The international voluntary workcamps movement

The international voluntary workcamps movement has been carried under the co-ordination of Young Researchers of Serbia – Voluntary Service of Serbia since 1990, when it took it over from the Socialist Youth League of Yugoslavia just before the country collapsed. From 1990 until 2014, workcamps in Serbia were organised as local community initiatives, with funding provided by local donors, municipalities, private citizens and foundations. Since 2014 the majority of workcamps are a part of the national youth volunteering programme “Youth Rules” and funded through the action plan of the National Youth Strategy.

Workcamps are 10- to 14-day activities, gathering 10-15 international volunteers from different countries who work for the benefit of local communities, while at the same time providing space for intercultural understanding in informal and non-formal learning settings.

3. Evaluation of the National Youth Strategy (2008-2014) in the Republic of Serbia and Action Plan (2009-2014), p. 49.

In the most recent period, 2014-2017, there have been 127 workcamps organised in Serbia, with more than 900 international volunteers and around 1 000 volunteers from Serbia, who together delivered more than 88 000 voluntary working hours to local communities. At the same time, every year since 1990 between 400 and 500 volunteers from Serbia have volunteered abroad under the same principle.

The exchange is possible within the international networks of voluntary organisations: [Alliance of European Voluntary Organisations](#), [Service Civil International](#) and [Coordinating Committee of International Voluntary Services](#). In Serbia there are more than 40 organisations each year that, through Young Researchers of Serbia – Voluntary Service of Serbia, send and receive volunteers. Volunteers from Serbia can participate in approximately 2 500 workcamps abroad, in more than 30 countries. Reporting is done by Young Researchers of Serbia – Voluntary Service of Serbia through the national youth volunteering programme “Youth Rules” and through annual reports on voluntary activities to the Ministry of Labour, both on incoming and outgoing volunteers.

European Voluntary Service

Being a Partner Country defined by the programme guide of the youth programme of the European Union, called simply “Youth” (2000-2006), then “Youth in Action” (2007-2013), then “Erasmus+” (2014-2020), Serbia was able to participate in one of the activities of the programme, called European Voluntary Service.

This programme allows long-term volunteers’ exchange between Serbia and the countries of the European Union, so-called Programme Countries. In order to participate, the organisations need to be accredited. Accreditation is obtained through SALTO South-East European Resource Centre. In 2017 there are 39 accredited organisations for sending, hosting and/or co-ordinating roles. SALTO SEE is the co-ordinating body for the European Voluntary Service programme for the Serbian organisations. Since 2016, the Tempus office in Serbia is the co-ordinator of the youth component of the Erasmus+ programme, but not yet the accreditation, funding, monitoring and training as part of it. At the moment there is no comprehensive analysis of youth participation in this programme, showing incoming and outgoing volunteers.

The Law on Volunteering recognises long-term volunteering, as well as volunteering provided by foreign nationals, and describes that as being the basis for obtaining a residence permit. On the other hand, it does not recognise the specific financial and insurance framework of the programme, nor the Youth Pass certificate.

2.7. Raising awareness about youth volunteering opportunities

The MoYS is the main public authority conducting the wide range of activities, especially within the scope of the national programme “Youth Rules”, thus drawing public attention to volunteering as well as encouraging more young people to become volunteers. The promotion of voluntary workcamps and local youth voluntary projects as well as dissemination of information about volunteering opportunities are most intensive from May to December, ending up with the main national event – the celebration of International Volunteer Day on 5 December. Traditionally on that day, since 2010, the MoYS has organised the closing ceremony of the national programme “Youth Rules”. This event gathers numerous youth

sector representatives: civil society organisations, local and national authorities, media as well as international partners and donors.

The objective of the International Volunteer Day national event is to make visible and further promote the achievements and commitments of young volunteers. By organising a high-level event, for example, in the National Assembly in 2016, the government confirms its willingness to work towards improving the position of young volunteers, create a facilitating environment for volunteering in Serbia, to reward and recognise volunteering activities and raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering. Up to 2015 the ceremony included the announcement of the best volunteer projects under “Youth Rules” for that year, the awarding of prizes to selected volunteer groups and the promotion of extra opportunities and programmes that involve volunteering at international, European and national level. One of the main supporters of this event used to be the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia which additionally, up to 2015, used to reward those volunteer initiatives that specifically promote the value of the EU. Since 2015 the national event still gathers all the relevant stakeholders, donors, civil society organisations, local and national authorities. However, it proceeds without the awards, but with statements and recommendations of all actors involved in the programme “Youth Rules”, for being taken into consideration by MoYS for the planning of the 2018 open call for the programme.

Likewise, the celebration of International Youth Day on 12 August is recognised as an opportunity to promote the values of youth activism and youth participation. On that day, all actors in the youth field, at both local and national level, have the special attention of the media who usually report on the current position and needs of young people in Serbia. That provides a unique opportunity to widely disseminate messages of youth voluntary engagement and best practice examples that have changed local environments. In co-operation with the leading associations in the youth field, non-formal youth organisations and local youth offices, MoYS co-ordinates a broad spectre of thematic public events, such as conferences, competitions, awards ceremonies, local volunteering activities etc. Those events are directly organised by resource centres which are associations for youth, who are local co-ordinators for the “Youth Rules” programme. The events are performed in every Serbian district, with the topics and contents proposed and designed by young people themselves in accordance with their local needs and priorities.

Having in mind a systemic and programmatic support by the Serbian government, after a few years of successful implementation, the programme “Youth Rules” has become a recognisable brand of the MoYS and young people themselves when it comes to youth activism and voluntary engagement. Since the local/regional media in all Serbian districts are fully acquainted with this programme, it has had great support, promotion and visibility. In part, one of the reasons is the fact that the representative of local media in each district participates in the selection of the best youth voluntary projects.

Apart from the national programme “Youth Rules”, the MoYS is responsible for editing a web portal, [Mladi su zakon](#), where updated information and open calls for joining voluntary workcamps or local youth initiatives can be found.

2.8. Skills recognition

Recognising a set of knowledge, skills and competencies gained through non-formal settings (volunteering included) implies that those processes are to be compared to processes of obtaining certain professional qualifications as described in the National Qualifications Framework (which is drafted and in the process of adoption). A certificate after a non-formal educational activity proves the participation of a person in a certain course/seminar/exchange/volunteer activity, and the recognition of competences gained is verified by the validity of the certification (if the educational activity is accredited by a representative body, e.g. European Voluntary Service by the National Agencies; specific training courses by the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Affairs; validating competencies of youth workers and youth CSOs in delivering youth services following the “Standards for assuring quality of programmes of youth work” by NAPOR – the National Association of Youth Workers).

Competences acquired by young people through volunteering and in non-formal education in youth work are very important for the employability of young people, since these competences (personal, interpersonal and work-related) are those that employers look for when hiring. In 2014 NAPOR conducted a [“Study of the impact of non-formal education in youth work on acquiring competences for better employability of young people”](#), where, among others, they identify the competences acquired through non-formal education programmes in youth work (including youth volunteering) and contributing to the greater employability of young people. The study results show that it is possible to identify key qualitative aspects and characteristics of non-formal educational activities that contribute to the development of competences of youth. The insight that the combination of qualitative aspects depends on the type of non-formal educational activities that are carried out is also interesting. The survey has highlighted the key aspects of the three most common types of activity: training courses, workshops, and long-term youth work (including youth volunteering). The results showed that all three types of activity have “active participation in the learning process” by the participants as the key aspect, and that there are significant differences in terms of educational approach that contribute to the development of competences within training courses, workshops and long-term youth work.

Even though there is no co-ordinated national initiative or framework for recognising competences gained through volunteering, there are some independent initiatives:

- the Youth Pass gained after participation in a European Voluntary Service project, centrally organised through the Erasmus+ programme; all the accredited hosting organisations are required to issue a Youth Pass to an EVS volunteer;
- several faculties of the state universities have, since 2010, been establishing a framework for recognising formally, though ECTS points, hours spent in extracurricular activities, which include voluntary activities as well. However, it is not clear what qualifies an activity to be recognised through this framework;
- NAPOR has been developing a framework for recognition of competences gained through non-formal settings since 2015. It is still in its pilot phase;
- Young Researchers of Serbia – Voluntary Service of Serbia, together with 13 partners from the EU, in 2016 developed a mechanism for assisted or self-oriented evaluation and recognition of competences gained through international volunteering – IVE methodology (ive-experienced.eu). This methodology is being used in 2017 within the national programme of youth volunteering “Youth Rules”, for workcamp experiences.

An aspect that for employers would be a guarantee of objectivity of skills recognition mechanism is the institution that will be responsible for validation and recognition of skills. Currently, in Serbia, there is no such authority. There is a common view that there should actually be more institutions in charge, including government institutions, CSOs and businesses.

There are no comprehensive quality assessment mechanisms on the national level to monitor the functioning of the system of skills recognition, nor are they foreseen by the Law on Volunteering or the above-mentioned strategies.

2.9. Current debates and reforms

The main actors in the field of volunteering agree that it is necessary to improve existing regulations and adopt new ones, which should enable social recognition and promotion of volunteer work, respecting the interests of volunteers and organisers of volunteering as well. Since the adoption of the Law on Volunteering, the public debate on how future law provisions should be defined in order to promote the culture of volunteering has been very intense, especially within the youth sector and among youth associations. In 2015, the ministry responsible for labour and social policy established the cross-sectoral Working Group for the Impact Assessment of the Law on Volunteering in order to recommend whether amendments to the law are needed and, if so, to draft them. Until now, there have been no available results, law impact assessment or other reports that would indicate the level of progress made towards new law provisions.

Crucial shortcomings of the current law are seen in demanding bureaucratic procedures and obligations for organisers of volunteering, keeping records of the volunteering, the content of the volunteering contract, insufficient protection of the volunteers' rights and many others. Additionally, the youth associations stress that new regulations should deal with issues of standardisation and validation of volunteer engagement.

GLOSSARY

IZVoR is the first national initiative for the legal regulation of the status of volunteers in Serbia, launched in 2004 by the civil society organisations from the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The main purposes of the initiative were to further promote the culture of volunteering, provide better conditions for volunteering activities and provide a legal basis for voluntary work.

Local youth office (lokalna kancelarija za mlade) is a part of the municipal administration in charge of co-ordinating local youth policy in line with the specific needs of its local community. The person responsible for managing and co-ordinating the office is the local youth officer.

Long-term volunteering (dugoročno volontiranje) is volunteering that lasts longer than 10 hours per week, at least three months without interruption (Law on Volunteering).

Resource centres (resursni centri) are youth associations or their federations that have the capacity to provide support to youth associations or informal youth groups within the "Youth

Rules” programme. Support can be provided through, for example, capacity building, training, information, provision of resources (space, technology, etc.), technical-administrative support or assistance in drafting projects and searching for partners in order to better implement projects, programmes or activities. They are selected annually by the Ministry of Youth and Sports for each district in Serbia.

Volunteering (volontiranje) is a non-profit activity by which individuals, independently or within a group or organisation, contribute to the welfare of their communities (National Youth Strategy).

Volunteer index (volonterska knjižica) is a form of volunteer confirmation letter, which includes every piece of voluntary work performed by a volunteer. A volunteer index can be issued by associations or institutions that conduct voluntary programmes. The index contains the name of the programme where the volunteer participated, the time and number of hours spent and a brief description of the volunteer’s activities. In addition, the volunteer index can also contain a section on training and competences acquired through volunteering. According to the Law on Volunteering of the Republic of Serbia, the organiser of volunteering is obliged to issue a volunteer certificate at his or her request, which can also be in the form of an index. However, the law does not define the form and content of the volunteer index, so the organiser of volunteering creates them in accordance with their own needs and those of their volunteers.

Voluntary workcamp (volonterski kamp) is a unique form of (international) volunteer work gathering together people between 18 and 65 years. It usually last two to three weeks. Each workcamp is different because of the number of participants, their origin and, of course, the thematic programme. Programmes are very different: ecological, archaeological, social, artistic, various reconstructions and construction, agricultural, those who deal with cultural heritage, history, language, work with children and people with disabilities. The working part of the workcamp is extremely important, but equally important is the process of education of volunteers and all other involved parties, first of all the local community.

Youth labour actions (Omladinske radne akcije – ORA) are the largest youth volunteering actions that took place in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after the Second World War, when several infrastructural milestones were accomplished including the main national motorway, railways, bridges and urban districts. The Youth Labour Actions as organised voluntary work were very popular. It is estimated that between 1946 and 1952 more than 1 million young people took part in actions through over 70 major projects.

Youth Rules (Mladi su zakon) is the national programme of youth volunteering established in 2010 and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The main objective of the programme is stimulating self-organisation, volunteering, activism, youth participation, leisure-time activities and the development of peer initiatives. The programme involves two main types of activity: local youth voluntary projects and international voluntary workcamps.

Youth voluntary projects (omladinski volonterski projekti) are “ad hoc” local volunteer activities implemented within the “Youth Rules” programme. They are run by the non-formal youth groups and youth associations, providing a one-time response to a recognised problem or a need in their local communities.