

Youth Partnership

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CONTRIBUTION OF NON-PROGRAMME COUNTRIES TO EU YOUTH WIKI

BELARUS CHAPTER I I: VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

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Contents

2.1 General context.....	3
2.2 Administration and governance of youth volunteering	4
2.3 National strategy on youth volunteering	5
2.4 Youth volunteering at national level.....	6
2.5 Cross-border mobility programmes	7
2.6 Raising awareness about youth volunteering opportunities	8
2.7 Skills recognition	9
2.8 Current debates and reforms	10

2.1 General context

Participation of young people in the volunteering activities, both in their own country and in abroad, surely contributes to developing their skills and key competences in voluntary activities, greatly contributes to a young person's human capital and personal development. The history of youth volunteering can be dated back to the times of the beginning of the XX century when the World War I was at its final stage and the national independence movement had been developing its involvement. That time youth volunteering was not only aimed at the emergency help (such as Red Cross, International Guide and Scout Movement) but also at cultural and historical creation and preservation uniting cultural and artistic activists of mainly young generation that fought for the new and independent idea. Number of the youth initiatives and movements was wide but none of them was of a leading role. Though starting with the foundation of the Soviet Union in 1922 the pluralism in youth initiatives and movements was defeated and the only one ideologically appropriate youth organisation was introduced – the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol). During its existence up to 1991 in the geographical area of Soviet Union and in Belarus particularly brought the idea of voluntary organised activities among youth in the areas of infrastructure building, agricultural and industrial development. Since 1991, Belarusian youth organisations and movements in their statutes and declarations always refer to the youth volunteering as one of the key element for the social and civil development identifying it mainly within their overall aim, e.g. culture and heritage preservation and development, non-formal education, youth health, youth employment and entrepreneurship.

It is necessary to understand the Belarus concept of youth volunteering at a very wide range since the two main tendencies have influenced it: (i) rooting back to the national traditions and traditions of independence with a wide range of the culture preservation and history research, (ii) post-soviet model of youth volunteering with a strongly developed task-giving hierarchy of project implementation. As a result, one of the effective measure in implementing youth volunteering activities in Belarus is combining the methods and approaches defining the aims and objectives for youth volunteering within the present political context in the region of the Eastern Partnership and Russia as well as responding current demands in economic and social needs of the Republic of Belarus.

Nowadays Belarus is in its developing path of the volunteering strategy and involving youth volunteering particularly. It is important to identify the notion of the “youth volunteering” that also shows the general and specific aspects of its implementation in Belarus.

As for the notion of youth it is stated under the law in accordance with Article 1 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 65-Z as of 7 December 2009 [“On the Foundations of State Youth Policy”](#). There it is mentioned that youth is the citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens or stateless persons permanently residing in the Republic of Belarus aged between 14 and 31. At the same time, the [Constitution of the Republic of Belarus](#) defines as a young person the one who has reached the age of 18 and is eligible to use their right to vote. Therefore, the main criterion applicable for acquiring the description “youth” is the one defined by the age limit.

In accordance to the information from the [National Statistic Committee of the Republic of Belarus](#) as of 01 January 2018 the number of young people living in the country is 1 921 100 people what makes 985 200 are male and 935 900 are female. The major group of young people is the age group of 25-30 y.o. what makes 45.2% from the total number of young people population in Belarus.

As for the notion volunteering, there it is defined particularly in the [Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus](#) approved by the Ministry of Education as of 16.11.2015 under the No 128 that “youth volunteering activities” is “a wide range of the activities including the traditional forms of mutual support, self-support, formal providing of service and other forms of civil participation to the good of the wide society with no account to financial compensation. At the same time in that very document “youth volunteering” is identified as “socially oriented activities implemented by youth themselves or through their participation in youth organisations or youth unions oriented at the impersonal solution of socially important objectives”.

2.2 Administration and governance of youth volunteering

As it was mentioned in the Youth Wiki Chapter 1 on Belarus Youth Policy Governance, the strategic priorities of the youth policy in the Republic of Belarus are the integral part of the [National Strategy for the Sustainable Social and Economic Development of Belarus](#) for the period till 2030 (NSEDП, for short).

There it appears for the first time the relevance of “development of the youth potential and active involvement of youth in contributing to the economy of knowledge”. “Economy of knowledge” is interpreted as direction for state economy to be evolved for supporting young generation and creating conditions for acquiring the knowledge relevant to social needs as well as for youth involvement into social activities and personal development.

Moreover, the National Strategy for the Sustainable Social and Economic Development of Belarus itself as the key National Programme Document identifies the gaps and challenges that the Belarusian society may face during the following five-year term with regard to their social and economic needs. Therefore, the Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering (free will) Movement in the Republic of Belarus that was adopted on 16 November 2015 is called upon to react and meet the challenges that may be met by the young people as its target group. According to the NSEDП, youth is acknowledged as one of the most proactive actors of civil society, and one of the objectives keeps the phrase “to expand opportunities for volunteering” with no clear identification of the target group there.

As for the chronology, the Concept was approved earlier than the NSEDП, in November 2015 and December 2015 respectively.

The Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus in a quite definitive way mentions the bodies responsible for the youth volunteering activities. The authorised bodies for accounting number of young people willing to participate in volunteering activities are the main departments for ideological work, culture and youth affairs of the district executive committees (Облiсполком – Областной исполнительный комитет, Oblispolkom) and Minsk city executive committee (Мингорисполком – Минский городской исполнительный комитет, Mingorispolkom). Any of those main departments for ideological work, culture and youth affairs is entitled as the Regional Coordinator having possessed in its main responsibilities such functions as working out the information, scientific and methodological legal basis for youth volunteering as well as contributing to personnel preparation and training for working with youth volunteering, involvement, support and motivation of all the youth representatives to participate in socially useful activities. The Regional Coordinator is also responsible for elaborating mechanisms and tools for support of youth volunteering infrastructure as well as information and promotion support for it and, at the same time, analysing and sending the reports on youth volunteering to the Ministry of Education.

The Concept also has included the Republican Volunteering Centre as one of the main actors along with the main departments for ideological work, culture and youth affairs of the district executive committees and Minsk city executive committee. The role of the Republican Volunteering Centre is implemented by the National Centre for Children and Youth Art. The functions of the Republican Volunteering Centre are defined as the following:

- Ensuring the work in motivating, supporting and developing youth volunteering, particularly in informing youth at the age of 14-31 y.o. about the opportunities of youth volunteering;
- Organising constantly the informational-educational activities on youth volunteering and volunteering practices, organising seminars, training courses;
- Filling the information database on the current, open and relevant types of youth volunteering as well as on the organisations that are in search of volunteers;
- Providing volunteers with placement in social projects, actions and activities within the framework of the National Centre for Children and Youth Art plan.

One of the key elements in the Concept is identifying cross-sectorial cooperation as the main opportunity for collaboration of the local authorities in addressing the issues of social development,

youth policy, education, culture, science, physical culture and sport, public health and protection of environment. The possible stakeholders for cross-sectorial cooperation of local authorities within youth volunteering are not well defined.

2.3 National strategy on youth volunteering

Definition: a 'strategy on youth volunteering' is an overarching public document, an action plan, or a set of official documents integrating the major directions to be followed in the organisation of and policy making on youth volunteering at national level.

The Republic of Belarus has been operating with the [Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus \(Концепция организации молодежного волонтерского \(добровольческого\) движения в Республике Беларусь\)](#) approved by the Ministry of Education as of 16.11.2015 under the No 128 . The Concept has in its content five chapters under the following titles:

- Chapter 1 General Statements
- Chapter 2 Aims, objectives and principles of developing youth volunteering (free will) movement in the Republic of Belarus.
- Chapter 3 Main directions of youth volunteering (free will) movement in the Republic of Belarus
- Chapter 4 Mechanisms and conditions of the Concept Implementation.
- Chapter 5 Final Statements

The main authority responsible for the implementation of the Concept is the Ministry of Education. The concept was for the first time proposed and approved in November 2016 and has not yet been revised or updated. It is worth mentioning, that the Concept was composed in collaboration with several youth organisations and the necessity for a separate document was rooted from several cross-sectorial cooperation activities, e.g. round table sessions, organisations consultancy, between youth organisations and governmental authorities.

The Concept is rather presenting the main directions for the implementation of the annual action plans, methodological approaches, programmes and other implementation and planning strategies at the national and local levels by the government and educational institutions authorities.

The main aim of developing youth volunteering (free will) movement in Belarus is defined as “creation of the conditions for realisation of the youth rights for free will, gratuitous and direct participation in solving socially important problems of the population of Belarus with the means of self-fulfilment, acquiring new knowledge and skills, raising professional and organisational capacity, ensuring public security”.

Within the overall mentioned aim, the Concept also addresses:

- improving legal system regulating youth volunteering;
- contributing to partnership-building between various stakeholders for contributing to the economic and social problems solution;
- developing infrastructural support of youth volunteering at the national and local levels;
- improving relations between different sectors in the field of youth volunteering;
- creating system of motivation, support, development and encouragement of youth volunteering activities;
- creating support and development particularly with the help of additional financing from the budget sources (not necessarily) as well as from other sources that are not opposing the law of the Republic of Belarus;
- information support and mass media coverage of the youth volunteering for the aim of positive image creation of volunteers.

For gaining its aims the Concept may be operated as the basis for developing and elaborating the specific programmes, plans and other documents for methodological development and tools implementation for building youth volunteering activities.

The Concept was approved by the Ministry of Education, that is actually its main implementer, on 16 November 2015 and became the result of consultations of the Ministry with some invited organisations that have youth and volunteering as the main dimension factors in their activities and mission. There is defined the system, logic and hierarchy of implementation of the youth volunteering activities taking into account the possibility for improving and expanding the types of activities outlined in the Concept.

Three key notions of “volunteering”, “youth volunteering activities” and “youth volunteering” appear under the following explanations:

- “volunteering” is defined as “free will (voluntary action), non-paid work, respect, equality, self-improvement, high morality, responsibility, cooperation”;
- “youth volunteering activities” means “a wide range of the activities including the traditional forms of mutual support, self-support, formal providing of service and other forms of civil participation to the good of the wide society with no account to financial compensation”;
- “youth volunteering” is identified as “socially oriented activities implemented by youth themselves or through their participation in youth organisations or youth unions oriented at the impersonal solution of socially important objectives”.

2.4 Youth volunteering at national level

After adopting the Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus youth volunteering has acquired more or less but formally coordinated activities. It is worth mentioning that some organisations working with youth got easier access to the cross-sectorial cooperation and collaborative activities take place oftener.

It is much easier to implement a cooperative activity at the regional and/or local level. As the Ministry of Education approved the Concept, it identified the main implementers of it as the following: main departments for ideological work, culture and youth affairs of the district executive committees, Minsk city executive committee along with the Republican Volunteering Centre that is run by the National Centre for Children and Youth Art.

Consequently, the departments and Republican Volunteering Centre having met with the formulation in the Concept on finding and using external sources of financing (except for the governmental support), encourages their personnel for potential partnership in the region between different organisations and structures such as youth organisations, initiatives, schools, vocational and professional educational institutions, higher educational institutions. The statistics for the high number of young people involved into volunteering can be assessed easily with quantitative methods due to the presence of the local and regional “cells” of the all-country youth organisation [“Belarusian Republican Youth Union” \(BRSM\)](#) in the educational institutions, large enterprises, public health institutions and state authorities. The Youth Union BRSM has the largest membership number in Belarus among youth organisations and gets the majority of state financial support from the republican budget. As a result it can initiate various youth volunteering activities with a wide range of areas to work in patriotic training, healthy lifestyle, social and cultural projects as well as reconstruction and building at the state-owned property.

There is the [Belarusian National Youth Council “RADA”](#) in Belarus. It is a youth volunteering umbrella organisation for 20 youth associations, being created with the purpose of consolidating of youth organizations and initiatives of Belarus. De jure, Belarusian National Youth Council was liquidated in 2006 due to judicial restrictions imposed by the state towards public associations and organisations. Since then RADA has been operating underground and independently in financial and ideological policies as some other youth organizations and activists. The Youth Council “RADA” provides opportunities for volunteering in youth rights at local, national, European and international levels as well as for support of youth initiatives in those areas.

At the same time, there is a wide range of youth non-governmental organisations providing young people with the possibility of participation in different youth programs like those by the

[Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs](#). Concentrating on the national activities it gives the opportunity for the local and international volunteers contribute to Belarusian society through working in the volunteer camps on cultural heritage and reconstruction, teaching in linguistic camps, involving into art and clown therapy activities for children with fewer physical and mental opportunities, partnership building, intergenerational dialogue and cross-sectorial dialogue building during various festivals, forums, conferences.

Much higher popularity has been spread among youth for self-organising and initiating volunteer activities out of the formal structure of any organisation. This way of youth volunteering activism at the local and national levels is highly supported by the civil society organisations providing open, fair and transparent platform for getting material and institutional support from the small, medium and large enterprises in Belarus. With regard to youth volunteering, the civil society organisations in Belarus plays the role of provider and mediator in the cross-sectorial cooperation. One of the highlighted and long-tradition example is the social projects competition "[Social Weekend](#)". This competition is held regularly. The organizers treat the competitors equally allowing anyone to initiate, promote and get the support for further development. Youth volunteering initiatives take one of the most often initiatives proposed at the competition.

The national activities in the youth volunteering in Belarus can also be measured by the local dimension and involving of volunteers to solving and mediating local problems. A good example appears by the Office for European Expertise and Communication under the title "[A Good Neighbour](#)". The initiative is oriented at enhancing local cooperation and cross-sectorial cooperation in meeting the challenges at the local level. Though there is no clearly defined whether the youth is priority or not but surely will not be discriminated from participation in such activities.

One of the largest NGOs in Belarus working for providing Belarusian youth with volunteering opportunities abroad is the [League for Youth Voluntary Service](#). More than 500 young people take part in the youth volunteering activities provide by that NGO. The organisation is the member of the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations that allows this Belarusian organisation to involve youth from Belarus to various exclusive international volunteering activities.

2.5 Cross-border mobility programmes

Belarus has the possibility to participate in the EU programmes on volunteering such as European Voluntary Service only as a partner country what means not accessing the direct process of application for support and coordination of the projects possibly implemented there. In accordance to the information provided by the [SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre](#) the number of volunteers sent and received within the projects of Erasmus+ Youth volunteering is very low keeping the approximate number of 45 both for sending and hosting regardless the term they were involved to.

Belarus is not open for cooperation within the EU Aid Volunteers programme and the possibilities for the European Solidarity Corps are still kept not cleared for the participants either willing to participate from Belarus or in it.

There is also an opportunity for youth volunteering activities to get the financial support for their cross-border mobility programmes within the various funding programmes and implement their activities either at the national level inviting volunteers from abroad to participate in Belarus hosted activities or to send their volunteers. These programmes are UN Volunteers, UNICEF, Global Fund, the National Endowment for democracy (USA), and USAID.

League of Youth Voluntary Service being one of the major youth NGOs in Belarus and acting as the member of the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations <http://www.alliance-network.eu/> , provides the opportunity for cross-border volunteering not only across the EU but also in other countries. At the same time, this NGO implements the programme of long term volunteering partnership programme with Germany under the title [Voluntary Social/Ecological Year in Germany](#).

Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs invites and hosts volunteers from different countries to have them involved into their local and national projects by volunteering in teaching foreign languages, reconstructing and cultural preserving as well as in HIV prevention and inter-generational dialogue.

As for the legal coordination of the youth volunteering, there is not a document applicable and supporting incoming volunteers from various countries. Anyway, the law system in Belarus identifies incoming youth volunteers under the unified [Law on Legal Residence of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Belarus](#). There is a special support document that should be provided to an incoming volunteer in order to get the permission to stay for more than 90 days (maximum term of a Belarusian travel visa).

Citizens of 80 states (all EU) can travel to Belarus visa free if they fly to Minsk and stay there up to 5 days (does not apply to people who travel from/to Russia), Sources:

[Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. Visa free travel \(general information\).](#)

[Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Information on visa-free travel via the checkpoint "Minsk National Airport"](#)

Citizens of 77 states (all EU) can travel to some Belarusian districts of Brest and Hrodna regions and stay there up to 10 days if they enter the territory of Belarus through the following border checkpoints:

- By car/bus: Brest (Тerespol/Тересполь), Domachevo (Slovatichi/Словатичи), Peschatka (Polovtsy/Половцы);
- By railway: checkpoint at the railway station Brest (Тerespol);
- By air: checkpoint at the airport "Brest".

Source: [The Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus](#)

2.6 Raising awareness about youth volunteering opportunities

The top-level public authorities and bodies responsible for disseminating information on volunteering opportunities for young people in Belarus are mentioned in the Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus where information promotion and media coverage of the volunteering activities acts as one of the objectives. Consequently and logically, the actors involved as information providers are Ministry of Education, main departments for ideological work, culture and youth affairs of the district executive committees, Minsk city executive committee and the Republican Volunteering Centre run by the [National Centre for Children and Youth Art](#). Meanwhile the role for information provider is laid upon any actor involved into a volunteering activity. Therefore, the information promotion of youth volunteering in Belarus is more characterised by the immediate action support rather than of a strategic information and communication planning between the stakeholders: providers and beneficiaries of the youth volunteering activities, i.e. organisations or initiatives and potential youth volunteers.

As for the promotion of the cross-border volunteering opportunities, there is an Erasmus+ Youth InfoCentres in Eastern Partnership and Russia that is run by the [Office for Initiatives Promotion](#) in Belarus in cooperation with the [Erasmus+ SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre](#).

The InfoCentre is an organisation experienced in Erasmus+ programme providing information and support to young people and youth organisations. Main aim of the Info Centre is to provide information on opportunities for young people and youth organisations within the Erasmus+ programme and support stakeholders in implementation of their projects.

The InfoCentre in Belarus has a set plan for the activities and aims at promoting youth activities among the young people in the regional towns and small towns of Belarus biasing the cooperation with local and regional stakeholders in the issues of youth volunteering (schools, local cells of Youth

Union BRSM, departments for education as well as departments for ideological work, culture and youth affairs in the district executive committees.

A various number of the promotion activities held by youth organisations and initiatives. Along with the aims at building partnership, sustainable development and solving social and economic issues organisations target at promoting volunteering as one of the key opportunities for people of various are, and youth particularly, to get involved into the local community cooperation. Among such civil society forums and cross-sectorial meetings are the following:

- [Rada Forum](#) organised by the Council of Youth Organisations;
- [“Meetings in March”](#) held by the consortium of civil society organisations;
- [Belarus Future UnConference](#) realised by the media platform “Idea”.

2.7 Skills recognition

In Belarus there is not widely spread the tools for recognition of volunteering experience among the youth. Though there are, some initiatives proposed and are at the stage of its implementation at some extent allowing transferability and recognition of the competences.

In the Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus, the key document on youth volunteering in Belarus, there is mentioned only the statement on the necessity for transfer of the skills, experience, building professional personnel and realising the programme on youth volunteering at the national and local levels only from the perspective of the youth volunteering implementers, i.e. main departments for ideological work, culture and youth affairs of the district executive committees, Minsk city executive committee and the Republican Volunteering Centre run by the National Centre for Children and Youth Art.

At the same time there some attempts for the national recognition of the volunteering work have been done. For example, the largest youth organisation in Belarus Youth Union BRSM has introduced the [“Personal Record of a Volunteer”](#) as the key element of volunteering experience of the youth involved into their activities. By now there are no specific results reached for improvement of recognition of youth volunteering experience. There are also difficulties in formal and institutional supporting youth in their entrepreneurial and/or political promotion. However those who have been volunteering in the projects within the activities of the Republican Volunteer Centre and Youth Union BRSM may get support and promotion in career building in the state authorities.

Nevertheless other organisations and initiatives also try to promote their tools for skills and competence recognition of volunteering experience, mostly for their internal activities and/or partners projects. The scheme can be like that: a volunteer A participated in the organisation B volunteering activities, the organisation B recommends a volunteer A for recruitment to their partner organisation C, relating to a volunteer experience and dedication during the volunteering activities.

A very similar scheme can be also applied for the cross-sectorial cooperation and promotion of youth that having had experience in volunteering for being recruited at any business organisation or even governmental organisation, if the last one is aware of the volunteering activities held by the recommending organisation.

Youth organisations that are involved into the international activities of Erasmus+ widely use and promote among national stakeholders the tool of skills and competence recognition as [Youthpass](#). However, there is no unified system for introducing the Youthpass to the process of skills recognition and learning experience. The method of reference and coe letters is still applied for ensuring the competence presentation by a volunteer applied for a job offer.

2.8 Current debates and reforms

Understanding that the key legal document on youth volunteering activities has been accepted and is in the process of implementation nowadays in Belarus, it is necessary to underline the relevance for the current debate is nowadays taking place upon the core issues of youth volunteering in Belarus. They are:

- Recognition of youth volunteering skills and competences,
- Equal opportunities for youth organisations and initiatives for financial support both at the local, national and international levels.

Recognition of youth volunteering skills and competences is highly demanded by the volunteers themselves and by the actors in the economic and social areas defining the relevance for unifying information and possible evaluation of the competences acquired by a volunteer. It is necessary that except for the information and promotion activities that are operated fragmentary for meeting that challenge, there must be a recognition step in youth policy and volunteering concept planning and implementing. By now, debates on the possible ways of unified recognition tools of youth volunteering are not raised neither by the civil society organisations nor by the state ones, leaving that issue exclusively in the field of economic relations in front of the actors in business sector and volunteers themselves.

As for the point on equal opportunities for youth organisations and initiatives for financial support both at the local, national and international levels, it is rather important not only for running and organising activities on youth volunteering but also for the capacity building of the organisations and partnership building within the sector and out of it. Most of the social problems that require volunteering support are also in need for the essential financial support of the equipment and tools for volunteers to work with during their activities. This dispute is applicable to all the levels of potential youth volunteering in the local, national and international activities.