



# CONTRIBUTION OF NON-PROGRAMME COUNTRIES TO EU YOUTH WIKI

## ARMENIA CHAPTER II: VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

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## 2.1 General context

### Historical developments

Volunteering has a long history in Armenia starting from the pre-Christian era up to the present day. One can see various manifestations of volunteer work in Armenia before and after the Christian period. Adjacent to the Church there were always ways of mutual aid especially for poor, ill and old people as well as for socially vulnerable children. In the Soviet years volunteering became formal and institutional. Yet, as it mainly had a mandatory or ideological/party character, the period played a negative role for the formulation of public understanding on volunteering and later for the development of the culture of volunteering. The phrase “compulsory volunteering” (*Partadir kamavor*), which was formed in the Soviet period and is still used today, is still present in the public opinion and experience in Armenia about volunteering. The question is particularly about so-called “subotniks” (*shabatoryak*) when, usually on Saturdays, various volunteer groups were carrying out cleaning and garbage disposal work; these groups are managed from the top. As a result, people involved in those activities would perceive them as obligatory work, rather than voluntary.<sup>1</sup>

One more example of “compulsory volunteering” is construction work by student detachments, when every year detachments of about 10 000 students carried out voluntary work in major Soviet and Armenian construction sites and factories.<sup>2</sup> This circumstance affected the development of the culture of volunteering, both because the voluntary works for many years contained a mandatory component, and because of its top-down management. Consequently, volunteering as a result of people’s own initiative has not yet developed in Armenia.

In Armenia emergency situations have also affected the development of the culture of volunteering. As a result, volunteering became related more to charity. Particularly after the [1988 Spitak earthquake](#) and during the 1990s Nagorno Karabakh conflict, Armenian volunteers reacted immediately and aided the survivors of the earthquake as well as war victims. Thousands of

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1. Yebgenya Jenny Paturyan and Valentina Gevorgyan, “Volunteering in Armenia: Leaving the Soviet Legacy Behind?”, Chapter 12 in *Perspectives on Volunteering: Voices from the South*, p. 230.

2. *Culture of Volunteering in Armenia*, Yerevan, 2010, p. 8.

Armenian volunteers from various countries and from different parts of Armenia went to the disaster area to aid victims of the earthquake. Later, starting from the mid-1990s, volunteering became closely related to the activity of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It is no accident that the [RA Law on Non-Governmental Organisations](#), put into circulation in 2014-2015, was adopted in 2016, which then regulated the work with volunteers in civil society organisations (CSOs). Despite the definitely established tradition of volunteering, no nationwide research on the current situation of volunteering in Armenia has yet been conducted. Nevertheless, based on some research it can be concluded that volunteering in Armenia is mainly non-formal. According to [2014 CIVICUS data](#), 14% of the Armenian population has been involved in voluntary work. In the case of formal volunteering, it turns out that only 2% of volunteers are involved in public and charity organisations; the larger amount of them, 9%, are involved in political parties and 6% in religious organisations.<sup>3</sup>

There is less data on youth voluntary activities. The Caucasus Barometer data analysis shows that volunteering and people's age are directly correlated. Yet, the fact is that older people are less involved in volunteering and the younger ones are involved no more than the older ones. According to the 2012 [Caucasus Barometer](#), to the question on doing voluntary work within the ages 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54, 27%, 27%, 24% and 27% respectively of those asked gave a positive answer, and the percentage reduced from the age of 55: 55-64: 19%; 65+: 12%.<sup>4</sup>

According to the [research data of 2016](#), within the youth aged 15-29, only 16, 9% of them, had carried out unpaid voluntary work in the last 12 months. Within the 12 months preceding the inquiry, youth voluntary activities aimed to help those of the same age with their education (22.6%), help the poor (21.7%), carry out public work in local communities (16.7%), teach (10.9%), and organise cultural (10.0%) and sporting events (7%) and activities of NGOs (6.7%).

Youth, making up 57.8% of those involved in voluntary activities, mentioned the desire to aid others as the main reason for volunteering. A considerable proportion of young people mentioned the

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3. Gayane Martirosyan, Lusine Hakobyan, Mane Tadevosyan, "CIVICUS", CSOs rapid assessment (2014), Armenia, p. 34.

4. Yebgenya Jenny Paturyan and Valentina Gevorgyan, "Volunteering in Armenia: Leaving the Soviet Legacy Behind?", Chapter 12 in *Perspectives on Volunteering: Voices from the South*, p. 233.

desire of being employed/busy (32.2%), the rest noted the use of professional knowledge (30.2%), acquiring new friends (22.6%) and meeting with possible employers (12.1%). 22.1% of those asked are involved in volunteering due to their own convictions, 12.1% of them due to family traditions and 5.5% due to their beliefs.

Thus, according to the results of the research conducted among youth, only a small proportion of Armenian youth is involved in voluntary activities, and the large amount of those involved have a more rational reason for it (highlighting the desire of being employed/busy, using professional knowledge, getting new friends and meeting possible employees) and are rarely conditioned with the intention of helping others. On the other hand, one should highlight the issue of absence of launching formal mechanisms of volunteering. In particular, the overall regulation of volunteering is omitted by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia; therefore, legal omissions and the lack of universal criteria cause various interpretations on volunteerism.

### **Main concepts**

The main factors that have a negative impact on the development of volunteering are the existing “compulsory volunteering” stereotype, difficult social-economic conditions, the relevant imperfect legal framework and the review of volunteering as a contributing factor to career development. The use of the voluntary potential is mostly spread in civil society structures. Various youth movements also had an impact on the spread of volunteering in Armenia in the 1990s. In Armenia volunteering is closely connected also with charity. It is no surprise that the term “voluntary” has been specified by the [Law on Charity of the Republic of Armenia \(RA\)](#).

Article 9 of the Law on Charity of RA reads: “Volunteers are the physical persons that proceeding from the purposes of the Law implement unpaid work for the beneficiaries.” Relations upon the volunteering and voluntary work in the country are definitely regulated also by the [Law on Non-Governmental Organisations of RA](#).

The Law on Non-Governmental Organisations of RA allows the non-governmental organisations (except for religious organisations, parties and trade unions) to involve volunteers in their non-

entrepreneurial activity. If voluntary work exceeds 20 hours per week, definite repayment regulations on signing a contract with the volunteer and on the contract content of the voluntary work are specified. As for youth volunteering, about 17% of them carried out voluntary work within the last year. Moreover, the motivation of youth for doing voluntary activities can mainly be divided into two big aspects: for altruistic purposes and for career development. Some young people found a job through volunteering. Only 20% of the young people seeking a job view volunteering as a way of seeking a job. Volunteering is also seen as a way to achieve additional knowledge and skills that can later be useful for accepting people for employment and for increasing youth social responsibility. This relates to the development of personal qualities and skills through volunteering. It is also important to mention that according to the youth research results, the majority of young people – 68% – are willing to implement voluntary activities later.<sup>5</sup>

Legislative omissions of regulating voluntary work also concern the lack of regulation of volunteering and its relation to other similar activities. The other concept of voluntary activities relates to internship, regulated by the [Labour Code of the Republic of Armenia](#). Article 201.1 of the Code reads: “The employer, at his or her expense where necessary, may organise the professional training of students or persons being accepted for employment for 6 months thus paying the students a scholarship at least the minimum salary established by the Law throughout the training.”

## 2.2 Administration and governance of youth volunteering

In Armenia there is no common system of volunteering governance. Volunteering as an employment type is regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of RA. The [Programme of the Government of RA 2017-2022](#) involves the Labour and Social Policy directions. It is expected that the the legal basis of establishment and development of voluntary work will be completed by the end of 2018.

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5. The issues of youth employment in the RA, Youth Studies Institute, Yerevan, 2013, p. 28.

Youth volunteering as a state youth policy sphere is regulated by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of RA. [“2015-2025 State Youth Policy Concept”](#) is a fundamental document for the regulation of youth volunteering in Armenia. One of its main aspects – namely, the promotion of youth participation in civic, political, social-economic and cultural life in Armenia – highlights voluntary work.

Since 2013, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of RA has been implementing the project “Youth Capital of the Republic of Armenia”, through which this status is awarded to a city of the RA for a period of a year. The capital gets an opportunity within the year to implement programmes contributing to youth social, economic, political, cultural and sporting activities. According to the strategy assessment report, the Youth Capital project has resulted in the development of youth volunteering, increase in awareness of youth needs within the city authorities and co-operation development between the authorities and youth. There is no cross-sectoral co-operation between ministries and agencies yet the drafting of the volunteering law project has been realised on co-management principles. There is no common system of volunteer registration in Armenia. Information about volunteers and possibilities of volunteering may be available through various sources; besides, they are co-ordinated by the NGOs.

Generally, since the 1990s the volunteering development has been closely related to the activities of public and charity organisations in Armenia.

The [“Armenian Volunteers’ Bank”](#) (AVB) started working in 2013, and in 2016 it was registered as an NGO working with youth. The AVB is missioned to promote the formation and development of the culture of volunteering. The AVB co-ordinates the work of more than 1 500 volunteers. The AVB has three areas of activity:

- managing the relations between volunteer and the organisations where they volunteer (provision of volunteers)
- organising events
- professional practice.

Volunteers of [“Armenian Caritas”](#) (NGO) mainly perform the organisation’s mission and ideology as they have been involved in various activity spheres of the organisation since its establishment.

Since 2010, the process of implementing volunteering in Armenian Caritas has become institutional; Armenian Caritas organised the establishment of the Youth Council of Armenian Caritas (YCAC), which included volunteers and also those interested in volunteering according to their common interests and issues. From 2014, it was renamed “Armenian Caritas Volunteer Corps”, as the principle was the encouragement of volunteering rather than the involvement of youth. At present, about 80 volunteers are involved in various projects of Armenian Caritas. They work with the aged, children with disabilities and with adolescents of socially indigent families, they participate in diverse community projects as well as doing administrative work in the offices and centres of Armenian Caritas. Since 2010, the organisation has had more than 330 volunteers from various cities of Armenia as well as from the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and the USA.

[The Armenian Red Cross](#) (ARC) is one of the organisations the volunteers actively participate in. A volunteer member of the ARC is a person who wishes to work unpaid for the ARC. At present, the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) has a vast group of volunteers who participate in implementing various projects aimed at meeting the needs of vulnerable and indigent people.

[The Youth Red Cross \(YRC\)](#) is a volunteer youth association acting within the ARCS. It was founded on 3 November 1992. It acts in all ARCS regional and territorial branches and implements activities in the following spheres:

- social-psychological aid projects for elderly people living in hostels, orphans, refugees and children of indigent families;
- projects for the prevention of HIV, organising various public events and trainings on healthy life-style in educational institutions, and the implementation of the SMS info line on HIV/AIDS;
- charity projects, organising campaigns, money collecting, contributions and charity evenings, and making cards and decorative objects for charity events;

- exchange of young volunteers with the German Red Cross within the scope of the project “European Voluntary Service”, organising and participating in international assemblies, work camps, seminars and trainings;
- organising presentations of Red Cross concepts in school and higher educational institutions, contributing to the promotion of the volunteering movement, the recruitment of volunteers and their involvement in ARCS activity, publishing reference books on the work of the Youth Red Cross.

The [Voluntary Service of Armenia – Republican Headquarters of Student Brigades](#) (HUJ) was founded in 1965 and is registered as a non-governmental organisation, with headquarters situated in Yerevan, Armenia. HUJ is a full member of two big international networks active in the field of International Voluntary Service: the Co-ordinating Committee of the International Voluntary Service at UNESCO and the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations. At present HUJ organises volunteer exchanges with 120 partner organisations abroad and holds a database of registered volunteers exceeding 3 000 people.

The main activities run by HUJ are for and with volunteers, mainly young people. The regular activities of our organisation include exchange of volunteers with different organisations, opening of international work camps in Armenia, preparation and sending volunteers to different trainings and seminars, as well as EVS and other long-term projects. HUJ also gives an opportunity for young people coming from different countries to pass an internship at HUJ or in different projects.

The essential aims of the organisation are to raise the social competences and employability of the youth by organising activities for national and foreign volunteers in various programmes in Armenia (work camps, training courses, medium and long-term projects) as well as facilitating the participation of local and national volunteers in similar projects abroad; to take care of orphans, children with special needs and socially indigent people by proposing activities to and for them.

There are a number of NGOs that play an active role in promoting volunteerism in the country: World Vision Armenia, “KASA” Swiss humanitarian foundation, NGO centre, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, etc.

## 2.3 National strategy on youth volunteering

There is no national strategy on youth volunteering in Armenia. Yet, volunteering has definite legal regulations by some laws and concepts.

The Law on Non-Governmental Organisations of RA allows NGOs (except for religious organisations, parties and trade unions) to involve volunteers in their non-entrepreneurial activities. There are certain regulations on signing a contract with volunteers, on the content of the voluntary work contract and the repayment for the voluntary work in case the voluntary work exceeds 20 hours of work per week. There are no legal safeguards stated by the law for volunteers working up to 20 hours per week.

The concept of the volunteer and the scope of those receiving charity for the benefit of whom volunteers do unpaid work, charity organisations that can be founded in civic society organisations, foundations or other associations stated by the Law, are specified by the [Law on Charity of RA](#).

There are also certain legislative regulations specified on the registration and encouragement of volunteers involved in charity projects (Honorary Volunteer of RA, titles of the Volunteer of the Year of RA awarded by the RA president).

Besides, relations on volunteer involvement in organisations of civic society organisations formed of charity organisations are at present regulated by the “Law on Non-Government Organisations” of RA. There is no legal regulation specified on volunteers for foundations and charity organisations formed by the Law or any way, except for the universal regulations stated by the “Law on Charity” of the Republic of Armenia.

The problem is also that presently the repayments for volunteering stated by the “Law on Charity” of RA apply only to volunteers involved in charity projects. There are no similar safeguards for volunteers involved in other working spheres (including the volunteers of those non-government organisations that do not implement their voluntary work within charity projects).

Thus, relations on volunteering and voluntary activities are definitely regulated by the legislation of RA, still there are issues to be regulated by the Law on Volunteering that can hamper the progress of the sphere.

The legislative omissions are obstacles especially for youth voluntary work as young people view volunteering as a means of getting a job, though voluntary activities are not considered to be experience. This circumstance has an impact on the motivation of youth volunteering.

In Armenia the [“2015-2025 State Youth Policy Concept”](#) is a fundamental document for regulating youth volunteering. One of the main aspects of it, the promotion of youth involvement in the public-political, social-economic and cultural life of RA, highlights voluntary work. The concept stated that the state considers youth voluntary work important from the viewpoint of the increase of youth competitiveness in the labour market as well as promotion of youth involvement in the public-political, social-economic and cultural life of RA. The 2018-2022 strategy of youth state policy, the next fundamental document of youth policy, is now undergoing approval. According to the previous [2013-2017 strategy of youth state policy](#) monitoring and evaluation report the youth needs include the promotion of voluntary work as an aspect of participation promotion. The voluntary work as a means of participation is considered significant in the report. In this respect, it is necessary to take steps to increase recognition of the concept of volunteering and the change of perceptions and understanding, as a small part of the youth is involved in public/voluntary activities. Most of those involved have become volunteers for reasons of leisure, networking and for finding a job rather than for helping others.

At the same time, the concept of volunteering is, nowadays, more widespread than years before also thanks to numerous projects on youth involvement. It was suggested in the [2013-2017 strategy of youth state policy](#) monitoring and evaluation report<sup>6</sup> to include the concept of volunteering into the education system as in separate private schools, as volunteering is useful for being competitive in the labour market, it provides technical knowledge and opportunities for personality skills development; it also contributes to the participation and awareness of the community. Volunteering can also be a means of professional orientation.

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6. [2013-2017 strategy of youth state policy](#) monitoring and evaluation, Youth Studies Institute, 2018, Yerevan, p. 14.

## 2.4 Youth volunteering at national level

There is no national project on youth volunteering in Armenia. Presently, volunteering at national level is mainly connected with the activities of NGOs, both local and international. In case of lack of finance, the NGOs mainly rely on volunteering for their activities. As the financial means of the NGOs are rarely stable, the principle of volunteering is very relevant in this case.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the NGOs do not have paid employees. Youth NGOs as compared with other organisations are in a more profitable position as young people are more obliging in doing voluntary works. Generally, a tendency of volunteering development is viewed; more and more young people want to do voluntary activities both for their personal development and for the solution of community and social matters. Youth NGOs are funded both by international donor organisations and state bodies, within the scope of which youth NGOs can involve volunteers.

The online grant system of *cragrer.am* is a state funding opportunity for NGOs. They can receive funding on a quarterly basis in the amount of US\$1 200 to US\$4 000. Since 1 July 2010 grants have been provided to NGOs from a separate budget line from the state budget. Project proposals submitted through the online system are evaluated by the experts with the help of online tools. Any project is subject to independent expert review by at least four experts, including one representative from state agencies and three from the public sector. The list of “winning” projects is confirmed by the simple calculation of adding up the points given by experts based on the amount of funds available for that particular quarter. Annually about 60 million Armenian dram (AMD) is granted to youth NGOs through the online grant system.

The following international organisations are the main donors for NGOs:

- the European Union;
- different UN agencies: UNDP, UNICEF;
- USAID;
- the World Bank;
- the US Embassy;

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7. Youth NGOs mapping, Youth Studies Institute, 2014, Yerevan, p. 36.

- the British Council;
- World Vision International;
- the Eurasia Partnership Foundation;
- AGBU Armenia;
- Save the Children International, etc.

Current activity aspects of youth volunteering in Armenia are as follows:

- participation in organising various events;
- inter-cultural projects;
- operations on community development;
- assistance to vulnerable groups and indigent people;
- health and ecological educational programmes;
- educational programmes on foreign language teaching;
- organising of youth and thematic work camps;
- current programme activity/administrative works of the organisation;
- spread of information, work in social media;
- implementation of translations.<sup>8</sup>

The issue of volunteers' social security conditioned with the lack of overall legal regulations on volunteering has also remained unsolved. Article 17 of the Law on Non-Government Organisations of RA states that if the volunteer works more than 20 hours per week, the organisation shall sign a contract on volunteering with the volunteer. The volunteering contract is an agreement between the volunteer and the organisation. Based on it the volunteer carries out voluntary work at his or

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8. Gevorgyan, Valentina and Mariam Galstyan, "Why Volunteer? Understanding Armenia's Experience", *Voluntary Sector Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3, November 2016, p. 8.

her own will, unpaid and for a definite period, and the organisation provides secure, safe and harmless conditions necessary for the voluntary work. The contract with the volunteer includes the following:

- 1) year, month, day and place of signing the contract;
- 2) name of the organisation;
- 3) position, name and surname of the person signing the contract on behalf of the organisation;
- 4) name, surname and middle name (if desired) of the volunteer;
- 5) the characteristic and functions of the voluntary work, order and conditions of implementation;
- 6) rights and obligations of organisation and the volunteer;
- 7) work schedule;
- 8) validity period of the contract.

The contract on volunteering may also contain other provisions on voluntary work. The organisation repays the volunteer for his or her actual expenses made in the result of the implementation of voluntary work.

It is prohibited to involve volunteers in business activities of the organisation.

Any argument on voluntary activities shall be settled by the order stated in the Law of the Republic of Armenia. It should be noted that there is no legal safeguard stated by the Law for volunteers working up to 20 hours per week.

There is no precise and common mechanism for quality assessment of volunteers in Armenia.

Every organisation has its own procedures and methods of recruitment of volunteers. There are two main mechanisms:

1. The NGOs make an open announcement on volunteer recruitment.
2. The volunteer himself or herself applies to the NGO for voluntary work.

## 2.5 Cross-border mobility programmes

In December 2005 the Republic of Armenia ratified the European Convention on the Promotion of Transnational Long-Term Voluntary Service for Young People and took up obligations of promoting and encouraging volunteering. A similar obligation is also specified by the UN letter of recommendation on “Assistance to Volunteering” (10 January 2002).

Armenia is taking part in the Erasmus+ programme, and in line with that there are several organisations accredited for sending and hosting EVS volunteers.

The Info Centres are organisations experienced in the Erasmus+ programme in Eastern Partnership countries and Russia. In every country of the region SALTO EECA selected one organisation to manage the official Info Centre. [Gyumri “Youth Initiative Centre”](#) (YIC) NGO is in charge of co-ordination of activities of the Erasmus+ Youth. Info Centre in Armenia, which started its operations in 2017.

**The 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 objectives of the Info Centre are:**

- to strengthen co-operation among organisations active in Erasmus+ Youth and involve new ones, especially those who have less chance to be engaged into the programme;
- to build capacities of the organisations to be involved as quality partners in the Erasmus+ Youth;
- to involve youth policy makers and make them aware of the international youth co-operation;

- to make young people informed about the Erasmus+ Youth opportunities, especially those with fewer opportunities.

**Target groups of the Info Centre:**

- youth organisations and youth workers;
- youth policy makers and other institutional stakeholders;
- young people.

**ERASMUS+ actions covered by the Info Centre:**

- KA1: Mobility projects for young people;
- KA2: Capacity building in the field of youth (the EaP Youth Window);
- KA3: Meetings between young people and decision makers in the field of youth.

In Armenia there are also some NGOs that implement the co-ordination of voluntary work of young people who had come from the diaspora: Birthright Armenia; Armenian Volunteer Corps; Armenian General Benevolent Union.

[Birthright Armenia](#) provides young Diaspora Armenians with the opportunity to connect to their ancestral homeland. The programme participants commit to at least 30 hours of volunteering per week, they are given the opportunity to live with a local host family, improve their Armenian language skills, meet and interact with other participants from around the world, travel on an excursion every weekend and gain knowledge and education about the country and culture through forums and gatherings.

To volunteer with Birthright Armenia, the applicant has to be:

- of Armenian heritage (at least one grandparent must be Armenian);
- between the ages of 21 and 32 years, and must have graduated from high school (secondary school);
- born outside of Armenia or, if born in Armenia, prove by official documentation that they left Armenia before the age of 12.

Applicants who have primarily resided in Armenia for longer than the last three years are not eligible.

Birthright Armenia chooses the volunteers based on the application, their motivation, the interview, reference letters and whether it thinks they'll be a good fit for the programme. From Monday to Friday, all participants must volunteer six hours a day, 30 hours a week. The programme runs year-round.

The [Armenian Volunteer Corps](#) (AVC) invites volunteers of 21 years of age and older, of all backgrounds from across the globe, to volunteer or intern in Armenia for a minimum stay of one month to a maximum of one year, to serve in a job placement of their own choosing. Placements are available year-round in a wide variety of sectors and organisations, including business, education, environmental sciences, arts and culture, finance, health, governmental and non-governmental agencies. In addition to placements, AVC provides all logistical support from airport pick-up to host-family living arrangements, Armenian language classes, and more.

[The Armenian General Benevolent Union](#) (AGBU) Internship Programme gives high-achieving university students valuable unpaid work experience that helps them set a solid foundation for their professional endeavours.

## 2.6 Raising awareness about youth volunteering opportunities

There is no dedicated state structure responsible for dissemination of information about volunteering opportunities in Armenia. NGOs disseminate information about available volunteering opportunities in their organisations in their websites or social networks. In this context, the [Armenian Volunteers' Bank](#) (AVB), the mission of which is to promote the formation and development of volunteering culture, is of particular importance. AVB co-ordinates the activities of more than 1 500 volunteers, recruits them, and disseminates information about volunteering opportunities through its website <http://volunteers.am>.

[Gyumri "Youth Initiative Centre" \(YIC\) NGO](#) is in charge of co-ordination of activities of the Erasmus+ Youth. Info Centre in Armenia. The aim of the Info Centres is to provide information on opportunities for young people and youth organisations within the Erasmus+ programme and

support stakeholders in implementation of their projects including information on EVS opportunities.

On the UN's International Volunteer Day, different NGOs make appeals relating to development of the volunteering culture in Armenia. Years ago, the UN had a volunteers representative in Armenia who was actively organising events relating to volunteering. Currently no special events are organised by the UN on that day.

Public information campaigns relating to volunteering are mostly organised by NGOs as well.

On 12 August, International Youth Day, youth NGOs disseminate announcements relating to recruitment of young people as volunteers for the events in the frame of the day. In Armenia, voluntary activities in some cases are closely related to mobilising the population for solutions to social issues: organisation of certain environment protection movements, provision of assistance to vulnerable groups, organisation of fundraising activities, etc. In these cases, information about the need of volunteers is disseminated through social networks.

## 2.7 Skills recognition

Recognition of the skills gained through volunteering in Armenia is related to recognition of non-formal education results.

According to Concept of non-formal education of RA, the aim of the concept is to create a basis for formation of mechanisms ensuring recognition of the skills, abilities and knowledge of participants obtained through non-formal education by the public and private sector and NGOs. Among the main terms, recognition is defined as valuation of the skills, abilities and knowledge of participants, obtained through non-formal education, by the public and private sector and non-governmental organisations.

A significant amount of work has been done in the area of non-formal education in recent years; however, there are still unsolved issues in this area. Particularly, in the Report on youth employment issues it is suggested to apply a system of recognition of non-formal education results, so that

employers would consider the skills and knowledge gained through non-formal education as complying with minimum requirements.

According to the National Youth Strategy 2013-2017, in order to ensure recognition of non-formal education, the Action Plan of the Strategy prescribes to develop standards so that the learner is provided with a certificate (that has a state status), as well as to elaborate the Action plan of Concept of non-formal education. During the reporting period, two government decisions on the approval of "Procedure of organisation and implementation of additional educational programmes" and "Procedure of assessment and recognition of the results of non-formal and informal education" were adopted.

According to the Procedure of organisation and implementation of additional educational programmes:

"Article 22. The additional educational programme is considered as completed in case of provision of study results within the timeframe defined by the curriculum on the following basis:

- 1) Teaching institution completed corresponding curriculum module and applied selected tools.
- 2) The learners achieved performance criteria and all the study results.
- 3) Teaching institution conducted ongoing assessment and recorded the evidence of achievement of study results by the learner."

"Article 23. According to the same Procedure, a corresponding certificate is issued to the certain learner.

According to the Procedure, the samples of Certificate and the Certificate insert are registered in the National Register of Training (*Usucman azgayin reestr*)."

The National Register of Training is a national database of the providers and participants of the process of assessment and recognition of the curricula and the results of non-formal and informal education. It is created in order to conduct specialised and assessed studies, to enlarge and increase the efficiency of collaboration opportunities for the beneficiaries of the sector, as well as to ensure transparency and accessibility of the information about the services.

According to the Procedure of assessment and recognition of the results of non-formal and informal education, the assessment and recognition of the results of non-formal and informal education is a process of certification of the fact that an individual's abilities correspond to certain defined standards, conducted by the authorised body of the state governance of education. An individual's actual capacities are defined as his gained study results and/or certain knowledge, abilities, comprehension and skills (hereinafter referred to as "capacity"), regardless of the way they are obtained. According to the same Procedure, the learner, having passed through the process of recognition of non-formal and informal education results, is issued with a certificate of possession of a certain professional capacity. However, the National Study Register is not yet published and the process is not fully implemented. The National Training Fund acting within the Ministry of Education and Science co-ordinates the process.

The above-mentioned legal acts define only the recognition of the results of non-formal and informal education, but if the voluntary activities have been performed out of non-formal and informal education process or non-formal and informal learning have not been included within the framework of voluntary activities, the issue of legal regulation of the recognition of the results remains unregulated.

## **2.8 Current debates and reforms**

Relations regarding the volunteering activities of voluntary work are regulated to some extent by RA legislation, but there are still issues, preventing the accomplishment and further development of the area, to be regulated by the law.

Valuing the necessity to comprehensive legislative regulation of volunteerism, as well as considering current developments and challenges in civil society, in 2017 the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs circulated the Draft law of RA on "Volunteering activities and voluntary work". The draft has been presented for wider public discussion, and a large number of suggestions have been received, but the process is passive again because of current internal political changes in Armenia and the formation of a new government. As a result, the draft is not yet approved.

The development of the Draft Law of RA on “Volunteering activities and Voluntary Work” comes from the requirement of Article 102, part 2 of the RA Labour Code, according to which the terms and conditions of performing of voluntary work and work for the purpose of assistance are prescribed by law.

The Draft Law was developed according to the Concept of the Law, approved by the RA Government by the Clause 3 of Protocol Decision of the session N 12 on 23 March 2017, determined by the necessity to solve certain issues in the area of volunteering activities and voluntary work.

According to the Draft Law of RA on “Volunteering activities and Voluntary Work”, the purpose of the law is overall legislative regulation of the volunteering activities and voluntary work, including establishment of the united legal regulations and consolidation of acting legal basis in the area of volunteering activities and voluntary work.

As for the youth, according to the Draft Law, the range of the goals of volunteering includes education of the spirit of humanitarian ideas and principles and provision of opportunity to be involved in public activities.

According to the draft “Law on Volunteering” voluntary work in foreign countries and foreign citizens in RA shall be regulated by Article 36: Organisation of voluntary work in foreign countries and voluntary work of foreign citizens in the Republic of Armenia.

According to the Draft Law, voluntary work is unpaid, non-binding or non-forced work for the common good, performed by a volunteer, as well as by an individual or a group, based on volunteerism and according to this Law.

However, civil society representatives still criticise the Draft Law. First, they think there is no need for the Law, as the Law on NGOs already regulates the area. Second, many of them do not agree with some clauses of the Draft Law, particularly, according to Article 17, clause 7.2 of the draft, the organisation, recruiting volunteers, which is acting as a non-trading organisation or institution, in

order to perform its charter functions can recruit volunteers in a proportion of up to 5% of its employees. However, many NGOs have a low number of employees. According to mapping of youth NGOs, the majority of NGOs (68%) do not have paid employees, and 19% of them have 1-5 employees.<sup>9</sup> This means that according to the draft, they are not entitled to have volunteers.

Besides, many do not agree that volunteering activities are permitted to perform only in organisations working in certain areas.

Public discussion on the draft law is currently under way.

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9. Youth NGOs mapping, Youth Studies Institute, 2014, Yerevan, p. 36.