

State of volunteering in Kosovo: Challenges and Perspectives



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State of volunteering in Kosovo: Challenges and Perspectives

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SEE	Southeast Europe
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Executive Summary

Today, as the research data have indicated, volunteering is becoming more popular in society due to an increasing number of voluntary projects, organisations and networks. Indeed, volunteering has remained largely within the domain of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). More than one third of Kosovars have engaged in voluntary action somewhere in the past year or so. The highest level of volunteering is among the youth. However, not all social groups are equally involved in volunteering. A gender gap has been discerned indicating the persistence of the under-representation of women in public and community affairs. In addition, out of all the ethnic groups in Kosovo, volunteering is by far the lowest among the Kosovo Serbs (D4D 2017 Survey).

In Kosovo, as in the other countries of Southeast Europe (SEE) volunteering is made part of public policy. It has assumed a role within youth policy. Moreover, volunteering has been made a policy priority as part of the state's strategy on cooperation with civil society. However, volunteering policy needs further development to expand the spaces for an engaged citizenry. Increased volunteering inspires a higher level of civic participation and interaction between state and non-state actors, carrying with it the potential for a socially inclusive Kosovo.

Overall, volunteering is understood in altruistic terms. The survey data have also indicated that the main motivation for volunteering relates to the public interest followed by individual motivation, i.e., seeking to increase social capital, education and employment prospects. Moreover, research has revealed that the benefits of volunteering are perceived to be social, individual and organisational (D4D 2017 Survey). Thus understood, volunteering offers a platform for bonding social capital, increasing trust and promoting

democratic decision-making. This paper discusses policy issues, challenges and opportunities for volunteering in Kosovo. By focusing on the institutional and social environment it has sought to identify gaps and opportunities to promote voluntary action. The paper highlights the need for policy interventions to support volunteering towards community-based initiatives and enhance the interaction of citizens with the state, civil society and the business sector.

Introduction

Volunteering is not a new phenomenon to Kosovo's citizens. It is embedded in the social practices and in the ideas of Kosovo as a shared community. However, as in many other social fields, volunteering is developing, carrying potential for democratic consolidation and social cohesion. Volunteering is premised on citizenship rights as a precondition for a well-functioning democracy where the rule of law is enacted within the realm of institutions and everyday life.

Today, volunteering is accepted within the domain of public policy and included on the agenda of the civil society sector. Indeed, CSOs have played a significant role in promoting and spearheading volunteering projects across Kosovo. While some progress has been made in the field, a number of challenges and barriers continue to prevent the fuller development of volunteering.

The objective of this paper is two-fold; first, to identify opportunities and potential challenges that might arise for volunteering and second, to provide specific recommendations for state institutions, civil society and business sectors alike, to address the gaps in volunteering policy and practices in Kosovo.

¹ Terms volunteering, volunteerism and voluntary action are used instead of voluntary work to avoid the implicit connection with paid work.

Methodology

This study is based on quantitative and qualitative data stemming from a Kosovo-wide survey, focus group discussions (FGDs), and a review of the policy dimensions related to volunteering. The survey was based on 1,065 *face-to-face* interviews with respondents aged 18+ years from all ethnic groups, including Kosovo Albanian, Kosovo Serb, Bosniak, Gorani, Turkish and Roma communities. Data collection was conducted in December 2017. Questions covered topics related to volunteering practices within the time span of the past 12 months; motivations and fields of volunteering; and civic participation. The 2017 survey data were compared with the results of the 2016 survey. The aim has been to identify trends along with the levels of motivation and spaces for future volunteering.

The survey offered a wide range of data on volunteering across gender, ethnicity, age, education, employment status and type of residence. However, the analysis presented here has maintained a specific focus on volunteers from diverse socio-economic strata. To explore deeper and gain a better understanding of volunteers' practices and motivations, two FGDs were conducted, one with experienced volunteers and another with prospective volunteers. The criteria for selection of participants in the FGDs were drawn from the survey data on the incidence rate of volunteer practice and the level of motivation for voluntary action. The FGDs followed a semi-structured approach with a list of pro-forma questions to guide the discussion on social frames, perceptions, motivation and participation in volunteering. The FGDs took place in January 2018.

Volunteering: The Kosovo Context

In Kosovo, volunteering has been shaped by political and social developments in the post-socialism, war and postwar reconstruction periods. The legacy of the socialist state, conflict and postwar institution-building have posed opportunities and challenges for volunteering. During the 1990s, Kosovo sustained itself through volunteering within a set of parallel institutions. Indeed, volunteering pervaded the domains of economy, politics and everyday life (Clark 2000). In the immediate post-war period, volunteering declined considerably. Research indicated that in the post-war period the majority of Kosovars attached relevance to volunteering only in connection with tangible short-term individual and beneficial outcomes (UNDP 2004, p.50). The decline of volunteering signaled the erosion of social trust in Kosovo.

The development of civil society has been made possible by the availability of donor funds as part of the post-war reconstruction and institution-building. The increasing number of NGOs, both international and local, sought ways to increase civic engagement, including volunteer engagement. Certainly, NGOs and CSOs have been at the heart of civic engagement and voluntary action.

A major breakthrough was the institutionalisation of volunteering and its becoming a part of the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth (Law No. 03/L-145, 2009). As stipulated in the law, volunteering is a way of increasing youth participation in decision-making and informal education. The law defines volunteering as beneficial to society and enabling young people to enhance their prospects, improve professional skills and experiences (Article 14). Moreover, volunteering has been made part of the Kosovo Youth Strategy 2013-2017, of the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports, and Kosovo state's strategy on

cooperation with civil society (see Office on Good Governance Strategy on Cooperation with Civil Society 2013-2017).

Within the legal framework, volunteering is envisioned as maximising youth potential. However, it falls short in bridging volunteering practices of citizens across the age spectrums. Civil society actors are looking for new ways to improve the volunteering policy, institutional and social environment, in order to allow volunteers from different age, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and areas of interest to engage in volunteering activities for the public good in Kosovo.

Kosovo's Volunteering Sector in a Comparative Regional Perspective

Voluntary action is the corner stone of civic engagement. Volunteering entails civic responsibility. It enhances civic participation and decision-making on the issues that affect the lives of the community. Voluntary action contributes to the development of a culture of reciprocity and solidarity. Increased volunteering is an indicator of an enhanced interaction between a state and its citizenry. It can be a measure of good governance and civil society development. In Kosovo, research on volunteering has begun to emerge. Policy action studies have been conducted by several NGOs (Sutaj and Vidačak 2017; GAP 2017; Hoxha 2016; Çeku 2013) pointing out the potential of volunteering for democratic consolidation and social inclusion.

Volunteering spans a vast array of activities at the local, national and transnational level. At the same time, volunteering is context specific. The level of engagement in voluntary action across states in SEE varies. Overall, the number of citizens, who are volunteering remains low. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it amounts to four percent, Serbia five percent, and Macedonia seven percent (Gallup 2016, p. 9). In Kosovo, the rate of volunteering during 2016 reached 15 percent (Sutaj and Vidačak 2017, p. 61).

Kosovo's 2016 Civil Society Index indicated that 60 percent of CSOs engage volunteers in their work. The types of engagement of volunteers within the CSOs, however, vary. They are carried out through formal and informal ways. More than one third of CSOs engaged volunteers through formal contracts; 25 percent through verbal agreements; 32 percent considered there was no need for a contract due to the short duration of the voluntary action; and 5 percent did not see contracts as relevant since they are not mandatory by law (Hoxha 2016, p. 57).

The countries of SEE are aspirants of membership in the European Union (EU). As part of the European integration process, Kosovo and the neighbouring countries are enacting institutional and legal reforms. This has had an impact on the policy on volunteering as well. Countries in the region have adopted laws on volunteering (Croatia 2007, Macedonia 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2008, Serbia 2010, Montenegro 2010, Slovenia 2011 and lastly Albania, which adopted a law on volunteering in 2016 (Sutaj and Vidačak 2017, p. 61). The legislation on volunteering seeks to bridge the state, civil society and business sector through voluntary action for the public good (Sutaj 2017, p. 20).

Looking at the legal and institutional framework, in the regional context, it is evident that volunteering is defined as an unpaid individual endeavour for the benefit of the public interest. But what sets Kosovo apart in the legal framework from the other countries in the region is its definition of volunteering from the perspective of youth and subsequently as noted earlier, regulated *via* the law on youth (Law on Youth 2009). In contrast to Kosovo, neighbouring countries set no age limits for volunteering, thus extending volunteering across the age spectrums, allowing interaction of individuals and groups from different backgrounds.

Challenges related to political, economic and social development in Kosovo have had a profound impact on youth, as Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe. The rate of youth unemployment in Kosovo is the highest in Europe. In 2016, youth unemployment was 52.4 percent. Youth unemployment among women is higher (65.4 percent) than among men (47.2 percent) (Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2016, p.10). Thus, foregrounding volunteering within youth policy is one way to tackle youth unemployment as volunteerism can equip volunteers with the skills needed to find jobs.

Today the CSOs in Kosovo are advocating for a specific law on volunteering. Indeed, 87.4 percent of CSO representatives have maintained that volunteering should be regulated by law. Moreover, they believe that volunteering should not be confined solely to youth. They perceive this as limiting and one of the major barriers to development of volunteering along with the lack of regulation related to rights and responsibilities, incentives, and benefits for the volunteers and organisations (Sutaj and Vidačak 2017, pp. 44-45).

Social Environment and the Dynamics of Volunteering in Kosovo

Volunteering is becoming a meaningful way of social interaction for citizens in their everyday lives. More than one third of Kosovans have engaged in volunteering during the past two years; 38.5 percent in 2016 and with a decline to 32.7 percent in 2017 (Sutaj and VIDAČAK 2017, p.11). Regarding ethnicity, the 2017 survey has shown that out of 13.3 percent of respondents who stated that they had volunteered in the last three months, 27.4 percent are members of the Other ethnic communities, as opposed to 14 percent of Albanians and only 0.7 percent of Serbs (see Figure 1). Not all volunteers participate equally. The research data shows, however, that volunteering differs according to gender. Women have a lower level of volunteering in contrast to men. The gender gap is discernible amongst all age groups. For instance, 16.3 percent of men, as opposed to 11.1 percent of women, reported that they had volunteered in the last three months of 2017.

Moreover, the survey of 2017 shows that in Kosovo, volunteers are predominantly young, coming primarily from the age group 18-24 years old, e.g., constituting 14.3 percent of those volunteering in the last year or so. In terms of time, out of those who are willing to volunteer if given an opportunity, more than one third would volunteer up to 10 hours or two working days per month (34.9 percent), 5.3 percent would volunteer up to 20 hours or four working days, and only 2.1 percent would be willing to volunteer more than 25 hours or more than five working days.

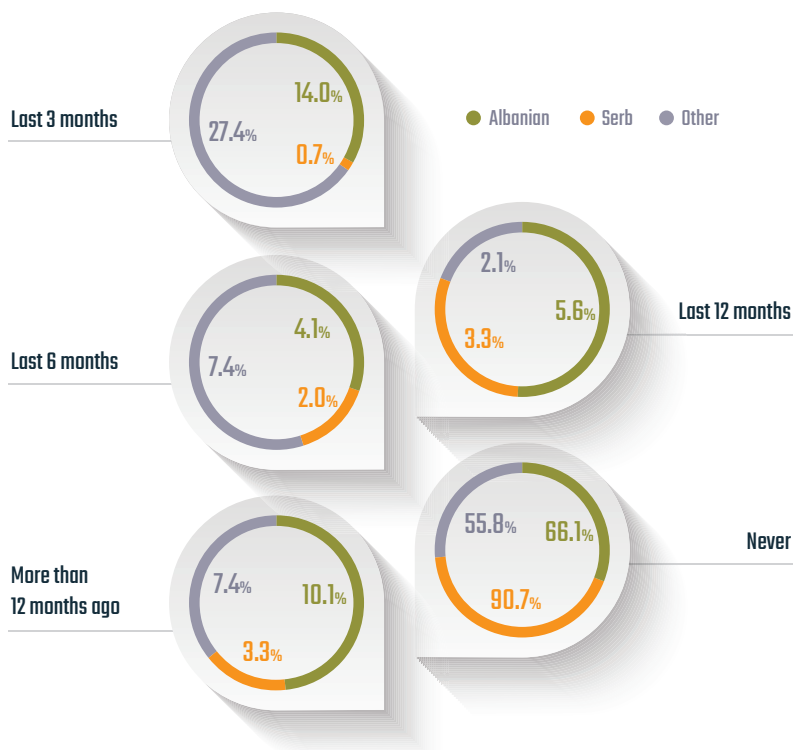


Figure 1. Volunteering Dynamics in Kosovo

Source: D4D 2017 Survey.

Motivation for Volunteering: Value vs Individual Motives

The research data indicates that volunteering rests in between value motivation and individual motives. With a decrease from the previous survey results, from 80.6 percent in 2016 to 75.8 percent in 2017, the main motivation for volunteering is to make a contribution to community. Indeed, these data place Kosovo high on altruistic motivation. However, motives for volunteering are also individual. They include the desire to enhance social capital through networking (41.4 percent), employment prospects (40.5 percent), followed by the education motive (37.2 percent).

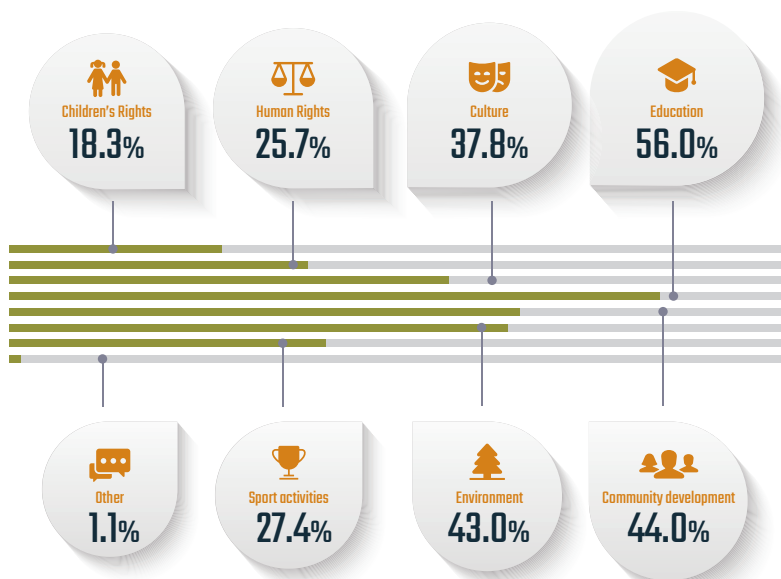


Figure 2. Kosovo's Fields of Volunteering

Source: Democracy for Development 2017 Survey.

In comparison with last year's survey data, where fields of volunteering seemed to cover care for people with disabilities, children and the elderly (43-46 percent) followed by civil society programs (33 percent) (Sutaj and Vidačak 2017, p. 27), a shift was discerned in 2017. This time, it is education which is the key area for volunteering followed by community development, environment, culture, etc. (see Figure 2). Education was the second field in the 2016 survey.

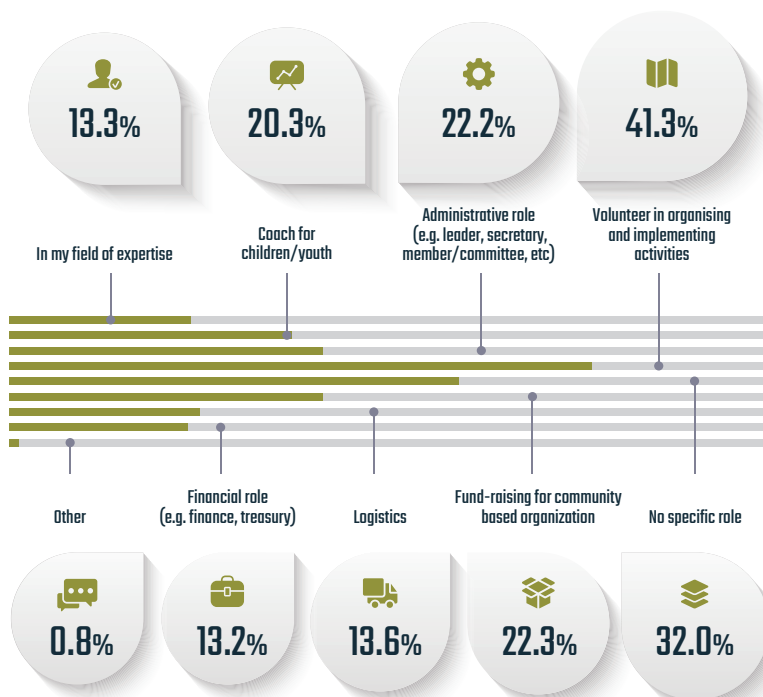


Figure 3. Views on Volunteering Roles

Source: D4D 2017 Survey.

While the motivations for volunteering are diverse, the roles that the volunteers would ascribe to themselves also vary. As

shown in Figure 3, 41.3 percent would like to have a role in organising activities in contrast to 32 percent who prefer to have no specific role. Whilst 22.3 percent of volunteers perceive themselves as having a role in fundraising for community-based organisations, almost the same - 22.2 percent – say they would like an administrative role, followed by coaching children and youth. The three last desired volunteering roles are logistics (13.6 percent), volunteering within one field of expertise (13.3 percent), and lastly finance, at 13.2 percent.

Overall, volunteering is believed to have manifold benefits to NGOs and CSOs. Volunteering mobilises citizens around an organisation's mission; It increases an organisation's effectiveness, and also saves time and other resources. As a participant in the FGDs stated:

“We have a pool of volunteers on whom we rely to take a certain amount of work on our school project. Volunteers who come on the project can also become members. Our organisation is membership-based and thus volunteering is a mechanism not only enabling successful implementation of the project but also extending our membership, and thus forging a closer link between the organisation and the community” (youth NGO leader from Peja).

However, survey and FGDs findings have indicated that challenges to volunteering, relate to social and institutional frameworks. They include: lack of awareness, lack of information about opportunities for volunteering, lack of regulations on rights and responsibilities of volunteers, lack of incentives for volunteers, and the lack of a culture of recognition of volunteering.

Recommendations

Government of Kosovo

- The Law on Volunteering should be developed to allow volunteers from diverse social strata, socio-economic and identity backgrounds and sectors to engage in voluntary action and be recognised for their contribution. The Law should regulate the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and voluntary organisations. The Law should mandate how and to what extent public institutions should engage volunteers in volunteering activities for the benefit of social well-being.
- The Government should develop a national strategy on volunteering through a participatory process together with the civil society sector, communities, public institutions and economic actors.
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) should integrate volunteering into the Kosovo education strategy. Volunteering should be integrated into school curriculums at all levels of education and school projects.

Civil Society

- Civil society actors and academic institutions should continue developing and delivering training programmes on volunteering.
- Training should be open and available to the wider public.
- Data collection, analysis, monitoring and reporting on volunteering should be done on a regular basis by the state, civil society and business organisations.
- An online voluntary platform should allow volunteers older than 24 years of age to register.

- Civil society sector should foster public dialogue on citizenship rights, equality, solidarity, and reciprocity.
- CSOs should engage in awareness-raising projects on social issues as a platform for volunteering.
- CSOs, public institutions, businesses and communities should promote and recognise volunteering.
- CSOs should continue promoting volunteering as well as supporting civic participation at the community level. Attention should be paid to gender and diversity issues. Women and ethnic minorities should be encouraged to engage in community-based initiatives and volunteering projects.
- Public institutions, especially in education, health and welfare, along with the business sector should open up to volunteering projects and initiatives.
- CSOs should enhance international networking and volunteering to enable Kosovo volunteers to engage in volunteer projects in the region, Europe and beyond. Kosovo volunteers would benefit from sharing experiences and would be better equipped to address social issues at the micro level while maintaining the macro perspective. International volunteering would break any feeling of insularity and also contribute to a culture of cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion

In Kosovo, volunteering has assumed a role in public policy and shaped civil society activism. Research on volunteering is emerging, enabling a critical understanding of actors, practices, motives, fields and spaces for voluntary action. Volunteering is considered a priority policy for youth empowerment, and it has also been made a key objective in the state's strategy on cooperation with civil society.

However, there is still a need for more regulation to allow volunteering to thrive across public, civil society and business sectors. Indeed, any future steps towards regulating the volunteering field should strive for a coherence of objectives to meet the needs of volunteers, and ensure the rights and responsibilities for volunteers and voluntary organisations alike. Moreover, a citizenry that is engaged through volunteering should take into account gender and diversity issues to allow citizens of different backgrounds to participate equally in community and public affairs.

While enhancing the legal framework on volunteering is important, equally important is sustaining civic engagement to identify and address issues of public concern. The research data has shown that volunteering is primarily perceived on altruistic terms – a practice with a social purpose – oriented towards the community, followed by individual motives related to networking, education and employment prospects. Understood in this vein, volunteering carries a potential to foster cultures of solidarity and reciprocity as well as enhance interaction between citizens and the communities with state and non-state actors on public issues. Civil society has an important role to play to harness experiences and contribute towards that goal.

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Elections and Political Parties

- #1 D4D Institute. September 2011. Deconstructing Election Trends 2000-2010.
- #2 D4D Institute. March 2012. An Impression of Reform: How to Restore Trust on Elections?
- #3 Malazogu, Leon, Visar Sutaj and Drilon Gashi. November 2012. Kaçanik Voters' List Audit: A Sample for Kosovo.
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- #5 Malazogu, Leon and Selatin Kllokoqi. September 2013. Translation of Trust Perception of Representation and Participation.
- #6 Malazogu, Leon and Selatin Kllokoqi. September 2013. Electoral Deform: Two years later, reform is back to square zero
- #7 Leon Malazogu and Brenna Gautam; With contribution by Rezarta Delibashzade & Ngadhnjim Halilaj. 26 November 2014. Kosovo's Political Compass – Mapping Party Ideology
- #8 Dardan Berisha with contribution by Driton Qeriqi, Mjellma Hapçiu-Alijaj & Rina Vokshi, July 2015. Bringing Justice to Elections
- #9 Leon Malazogu with contribution by Ngadhnjim Halilaj and Rezarta Delibashzade, July 2015. Election Trends 2000-2014-A Numerical Analysis of Participation and Representation
- #10 Thomas Atherton, Driton Qeriqi and Rina Vokshi, February 2016 Manual for Gender Equality in the Electoral Process

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- #3 Compiled by D4D Institute. 29 November 2011. Repairing the voters list
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- #3 Sutaj, Visar and Leon Malazogu. January 2013. Let the Real Civil Society Please Stand Up! The Role of Membership Associations in Shaping Decision-Making to Serve the Public Interest
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The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts who were increasingly worried that the state-building exercise had neglected democracy. D4D's mission is to influence the development of public policy in order to accelerate socio-economic development, improve governance, and strengthen democratic culture in Kosovo.

D4D's vision is to promote an active and educated citizenry that both fully participates in the public space and utilises the public arena of representation and decision-making to deliberate and build consensus over smart, efficient, and sustainable resource allocation as well as equitable development.

For more information about D4D's activities please visit our website: www.d4d-ks.org.

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