

Volunteering Infrastructure in the Czech Republic

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1. Volunteering infrastructure concept definition

Voluntary activities were striving after 1918, when the independent Czechoslovakia was established. To highlight its political and social significance, many public benefit organisations were directly supported by Thomas Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia. There were volunteer organisations established by political parties themselves; the Communist Left and the Socialists for example had competing volunteer circles. According to research carried out by the Czechoslovakian Statistical Office, in the 1930s the infrastructure of volunteer organisations was dense, spread on all levels, from local to national.

After the German occupation during the Second World War, the previous infrastructure was fully restored until the communist upheaval took place in 1948. The properties of voluntary organisations were confiscated after 1948, when the communists came into power. These organisations either ceased to exist or were forcibly incorporated into the so-called National Front that had been established with the proclaimed objective to build socialism. Many people were forced to take part in “voluntary” projects and soon started to dislike and resent this form of forced “voluntary” activity.

The situation changed after the Velvet Revolution in November 1989. Since then, attitudes towards volunteering have been changing; however the pace of change remains relatively slow. It is of little surprise that the Czech Republic is in this respect still very much behind many other European Union (EU) member states. It is however important to point out that the Act on Voluntary Service passed in 2002 provides rules for the accreditation of projects in order to ensure the quality of services delivered within such projects. Work is currently under way to improve this particular law; an amendment was prepared in 2011, and if the law is approved it should take effect in 2014.

If a voluntary organisation has a publicly beneficial project that fulfils the demands set out in the Law, they are eligible to register the project with the Ministry of the Interior for accreditation and to then claim financial support. Accreditation is not compulsory though, so there are an unknown number of voluntary organisations engaged in publicly beneficial activities that are not accredited. It is possible for one organisation to have more than one project, some of which are accredited and some that are not as the Ministry accredits projects rather than organisations. In 2009, the Ministry of the Interior issued 337 accreditations and every year about 10,000 volunteers participate in these programmes. However, a majority of volunteers (over 90%) take part in non-accredited volunteering projects.

It is necessary to say that the number of individuals volunteering is increasing, and currently volunteers can be found in almost every sector. It is noted that individuals are becoming increasingly concerned about their environment, society and communities, rather than about obtaining money and fame, which may have been more prevalent in the past.

2. Volunteering Landscape

Definition

The definition of volunteering according to research carried out in 2010-2011¹ is as follows:

By volunteering, we mean unpaid work for people beyond the family and close friends, which is also for the benefit of the surrounding environment. The work is considered to be unpaid even in cases where expenses or a symbolic reward is given.

Facts and figures

Formal volunteering, meaning volunteering activities for a volunteering, non-profit organisation or organised via such a group is undertaken by 30% of citizens in the Czech Republic aged 15 and over. The *European Values Study (EVS)*

¹ Pospíšilová, T., Frič, P., Tošner, J., 2011. ‘: “Volunteering Infrastructure in the Czech Republic: Situation - Trends – Outlook”.

rates the Czech Republic with similar shares of formal volunteers (29%)² as countries such as Belgium, Austria, France or Germany (33—24% volunteers).

From the perspective of the share of formal volunteers in the population, the Czech Republic clearly does not demonstrate a particular degree of lagging behind other European countries. Nor does it confirm perceptions of the decay of volunteering in post-communist countries (Jucknevičius, Savicka, 2003; Howard, 2003).

Age - Table 1: Volunteers by Age Group (%)

	Age category (years)					
	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Formal volunteers	32	33	32	33	29	22 (---)
Non-volunteers	68	67	68	67	71	78 (+++)
Total (N = 3722)	100	100	100	100	100	100
Informal volunteers	33 (-)	37	37	43 (++)	42 (++)	32 (--)
Non-volunteers	67 (+)	63	63	57 (--)	58 (--)	68 (++)
Total (N = 3703)	100	100	100	100	100	100

According to GHK in 2010, the number of volunteers aged 15+ ranged from 871,020 to 1,215,363, which is 10% - 14% of the population. Surveys were carried out by the national statistics office. Significant differences in the results are due to different methodologies used. The real figure expected to stand somewhere in-between these figures.³

Education:

In line with expectations and experiences from international studies, from an educational point of view we see that degree of formal volunteering is positively influenced by a higher degree of education (secondary school and primarily university education). However there is evidence that university education is specifically more of a positive factor with regards to formal volunteering, but does not have a great influence on informal volunteering. This suggests that informal volunteering can be viewed as a traditional form of volunteering, less dependent on factors associated with a second wave of modernisation, among which university education is included.

Table 2: Volunteers by Education (%)

	Education categories ⁴			Total
	Elementary School	Secondary School	Higher education/ Higher Vocational School	
Formal volunteers (N = 3791)	43 (---)	41 (+++)	15 (+++)	100
Informal volunteers (N = 3775)	47 (---)	41 (+++)	12	100

Other parameters of volunteer activities

Stability

Only 5% of volunteers work for one organisation for less than six months; thus only a fraction of overall volunteers are involved in short-term volunteering. Around a fifth of volunteers are involved in medium-term volunteering (functioning for one year). Combined, medium and short-term volunteers represent a quarter of volunteers; the

² Representative examination of a sample of the population from 18 years of age; last wave of EVS for 2008.

³ GHK, 2010. „Volunteering in the European Union”. http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf, p. 60.

⁴ Highest level of completed education: (1) elementary; (2) education without equivalent A-Levels, secondary school without equivalent A-Levels (1+2 codified as elementary school), (3) education with equivalent A-Levels, (4) secondary school with equivalent A-Levels (3+4 codified as secondary school), (5) higher vocational school, (6) higher education (5+6 codified as higher education).

remaining three-quarters can be deemed long-term. Among these, there are also many 'die-hard' volunteers who work for an organisation for more than ten years (29% of formal volunteers).

Table 3: Stability of Volunteering Activities per Individual Organisation (%)

Length of activities for one organisation ⁵	Formal volunteering		
One year or less	25	Short-term mode	41
2-3 years	16		
4-5 years	15	Long-term mode	59
6-10 years	17		
More than 10 years	29		
Total	100 ⁶		

N = 1114

Table 4: Likelihood of Volunteering Activities (%)

Frequency of activities ⁷	Formal volunteering		
Daily	4	Regular form	74
Weekly	33		
Monthly	37		
4x per year	17	Occasional form	26
1-2x per year	9		
Total	100		100

N = 1132

Three-quarters of volunteers devote regular time to volunteering; the regular volunteering style is thus a norm, with occasional volunteering being the exception, which only relates to a quarter of volunteers. But it was also found that the regular form of volunteering activity correlates positively with the long-term (stable) form. This means that among regular volunteers we find, with a greater likelihood, long-term volunteers. Conversely, among occasional volunteers, there is a greater likelihood of the short-term volunteer form.

Table 5: Context of Regularity and Stability of Volunteering Activities (%)

Volunteer form	Stability of volunteer activity for single organisation		Total
	Short-term	Long-term (more than 3 years)	
Regular	38 (-)	62 (+)	100
Occasional	46 (+)	54 (-)	100

N = 1099

Among volunteers, occasional and also short-term volunteers only form a small group (12%). However, the largest group is formed by long-term volunteers (more than 3 years) and regular volunteers (46%). The remaining volunteers fall under a mixed style of activity (42%).

This brings up a third aspect of forms of volunteering, namely the **intensity of activity**, measured as the volume of hours worked. The average number of hours worked by formal volunteers in all civic organisations (further, only OOS) per year is 47 hours.

Perception

An impression of the wide and varied climate existing in the Czech Republic can be ascertained via the following findings: Three out of five (61%) of surveyed citizens believe that in the Czech Republic, there is a prevalent attitude that each person should at least once in their lives undertake volunteer work for the benefit of others. 71% of

⁵ How long have you engaged in volunteering work for this organisation? Less than six months; six months to one year; more than one year (denote).

⁶ Percentages in rows add up to more than 100% because we rounded off numbers upwards.

⁷ How often during the last 12 months have you performed volunteer work for this organisation? Almost daily; every week; at least once a month; approximately once every three months; only once or twice.

respondents believe that in the Czech Republic, the majority of people view volunteering work as something that they can be proud of. A “pro-volunteering climate” is evidently prevalent, albeit one that does not necessarily move everyone. Indeed, it can be stated that in the eyes of a significant proportion of Czech society, volunteering has a bad image and low legitimacy. Around a quarter (24%) of respondent citizens view volunteers as naïve people who fail to understand that they are being used. What is notable is that one-fifth of formal and informal volunteers share this view. Non-volunteers, unsurprisingly, have the most common negative views of volunteers.

Table 8: Attitudes Towards and the Poor Reputation of Volunteering (%)

Volunteers are naïve and don't realise that they are being used.	Relationship to volunteering		
	Formal volunteer	Informal volunteer	Non-volunteer
I definitely or probably agree	19	20	35
I definitely or probably disagree	81	80	65
Total	100	100	100

N = 3373

With a certain degree of simplification, in the case of the perceptions of the legitimacy of volunteering, marked differences between volunteers and non-volunteers could be attributed to positive levels of satisfaction, which volunteers gain from their activities. On the other hand, the assertion of the volunteer ethos and the legitimacy of volunteering is a component of a wider process of social learning, which assists in the understanding of a vision of volunteer work as a realistic progressive alternative to consumer society.

3. Legal framework on volunteering and its implementation

The 2002 Czech Law on Voluntary Service (Zákon o dobrovolnické službě) was not conceived as a framework law for volunteering: the law only defines forms of voluntary activity and specifies the conditions under which the Czech State will support them. Other forms of voluntary activity may still take place outside the scope of application of this law.

The application of the Czech Law on Voluntary Service falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and the Crime Prevention Department, within which a department for Volunteer Service was established in 2002. This department arranges: the accreditation of “sending” non-governmental organisation (NGOs); financial support to these organisations; the running of the public list of accredited ‘sending’ organisations; their monitoring, financial inspection and evaluation etc.

In the Czech Republic, a system of accreditation has been developed for twelve volunteer programmes. The activity defined as voluntary must fall under at least one of these fields:

- Assistance to persons suffering from domestic violence
- Assistance in the care of children, youth, families in their leisure time
- Assistance to elderly people
- Assistance to disabled persons
- Assistance to people addicted to drugs
- Assistance to ethnic minorities
- Assistance to immigrants
- Assistance to poor people
- Assistance during natural, ecological and humanitarian disasters
- Organising collections for charitable purposes

In 2007 27 voluntary organisations were accredited, as were 40 sending organisations in 2006. The accreditation is valid for the following 3 years. Accreditation of organisations to one or more of these programmes results in financial support from the Czech Ministry of the Interior. The fundamental principle is to promote the development of a wide range of voluntary activities and the social protection of volunteers performing these activities. This means that under the law, responsibilities regarding the engagement of volunteers must be met by the non-profit organisation. It is

important to note that there is a distinction between two different types of volunteering: mutually beneficial volunteering (informal volunteering) and publicly beneficial volunteering (formal volunteering). The 2002 Law on Voluntary Service applies to formal volunteering only. The criterion to describe activities that are considered publicly beneficial volunteering is based on the extent to which the activity is of help in one's community (e.g. scouts, maternity centres, sports clubs etc.) or the extent to which it is considered as helping others (e.g. day centres for senior citizens, clubs for children with disabilities, animal welfare etc.).

So far in the Czech Republic, universal legislation supporting volunteering has not been enacted. Law no. 198/2002 relating to voluntary service has been in effect since 2003, and only directs the state towards "transmitting organisations" or "organisations of the agency character which mediate volunteering, or large, sufficiently financially and institutionally secure organisations". (Tutr, 2005, pg. 16). This finding, which comes from undertakings by Vojtěch Tutr in 2005 based on surveys across 36 OOS, continues to this day. Representatives of the majority of OOS still believe that the state only recognises 'accredited volunteers' (sent by transmitting organisations), which when compared to the rest of the volunteer sector, are actually in the overwhelming minority (only up to 5.4% of formal volunteers).

As one important result of the European Year of Volunteering (EYV) 2011, an amendment of this law was prepared in which we finally see universal legislation supporting and defining volunteering. The possibility of using volunteering work as match funding is also mentioned in the amendment. If the law is approved it should take effect in 2014.

4. Structure of the non-profit sector involved in volunteering

The Czech Republic has not systematically developed a structure for voluntary organisations. According to Fryc's survey from 2009, the types of organisations using volunteers include: civic associations, churches, church institutions, public-benefit companies, foundations, municipalities, state institutions, trade unions, and private companies. Some regional volunteer centres can be found but they are run by different founders, and significant parts of them are independent local organisations. During the European Year of Volunteering 2011, some basic quality standards for these centres were established, but there is still a long way to go before these standards are put into practice. Most regional volunteering centres are members of the Alliance for Development in Volunteering and some of them are working in close cooperation with the National Volunteering Centre, or among themselves.

Organisations that promote volunteering and facilitate co-operation and the exchange of information in the Czech Republic:

National Volunteer Centre

HESTIA, founded in 1993 in Prague, plays the role of both the national volunteer centre and the country's methodological and educational centre. The mission of HESTIA is 'Promotion, support and development of volunteering'. HESTIA had 10 employees in 2012. Main activities include: volunteering research; training and education on volunteering; publications; consultation, supervision and networks for volunteers and volunteer professionals; making national and international contacts with institutions engaged in similar activities and initiatives; publicising activities and promoting the organisation of regional activities; working with volunteers themselves (administration and localisation); providing legal advice to organisations and individuals; and additional services including the insurance and training of volunteer coordinators.

Alliance for Development in Volunteering

The main programmes HESTIA runs are freely used by HESTIA partner organisations throughout the country, according to the needs and facilities of the region. The involvement in at least one of Hestia's programmes in line with the conditions of volunteering management are main requirements for Regional Volunteer Centres (RVC) to become members of the Alliance for Development in Volunteering.

There are other organisations that involve volunteers with their own network of volunteer centres all over the country. The largest and best known are:

The Czech Catholic Charity which runs more than 200 charitable homes throughout the country as well as aid centres and consulting rooms. It is a member of the international Catholic charity, Caritas Internationalis.

The Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (DECCB) is a Christian non-profit organisation providing social services in 31 centres and 8 special schools. They offer social, medical, educational and pastoral care.

People in Need is a humanitarian organisation working at both the national and international level, focusing its mission on social integration and the defence of human rights.

Adra, a Czech agency of the international ADRA organisation (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), was founded in 2002 and has 12 volunteer centres throughout the country. Adra focuses on voluntary help in natural catastrophes (floods in 2002), running asylum houses and diverse social programmes.

The Major Information Network website (www.dobrovolnik.cz) offers a large amount of information about volunteering. This website was largely developed during the European Year of Volunteering 2011, and currently there are more than 10 volunteering fields. Each of these fields has its own administrator, who is responsible for articles, news and other relevant information.

5. Other stakeholders

Apart from voluntary sector organisations, the main stakeholders involved in providing voluntary activities or promoting volunteering activities are state institutions and local authorities. The state established social services that are important to the development of volunteering. Many of them run volunteering programmes accredited by the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport was given the responsibility of promoting and developing volunteering within EYV 2011 and prepared the amendment to the Law on Voluntary Service. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs also runs some projects.

Volunteering is also increasingly important in the business sector. Most of key companies are involved in volunteering activities such as mentoring, consulting, and short- or long-term company volunteering activities in NGOs. Hestia coordinates corporate volunteering programmes and has noticed an increased interest in this topic. It is estimated that every year, within the programme of employee involvement, company volunteers cooperate with approximately 500 public-benefit organisations of various specialisations throughout the Czech Republic.

The Donors Forum is another institution in the Czech Republic providing the service of employee volunteering in NGOs and is the national coordinator in the ENGAGE Initiative. This international campaign is focused on increasing the number of company employees engaged in community development.

In the Czech Republic there are also many schools connected with volunteering centres. They try to support their students in volunteering, but there is no official framework given by the Ministry of Education. Enthusiastic teachers or school head teachers drive most of these activities.

6. Funding opportunities

In the Czech Republic there are many sources of financial support for volunteering, but none of them could be considered a main source, and nor can we refer to the existence of any systematic financial support. The main source of financial support is the Ministry of the Interior, but this support is appointed solely to accredited volunteering programmes. For 2011, the Ministry of the Interior had a budget of 417,000 Euro and 173 organisations requested financial support. The number of requests is growing, but the amount of money available has remained the same for the last few years.

Some regional volunteering centres are co-financed by local municipalities, but their funding is often dependent on their relationships with local authorities and on the priorities of those authorities. Most volunteering centres work from project to project. Even HESTIA, a national volunteering centre, doesn't have any consistent financial support.

In the non-governmental sector as a whole, organisations are funded mostly via public budgets, and the rest of their funding comes from companies, foundations and individual donors.

Diversification of financial resources in NGO budgets exists in terms of the number of sources. NGOs normally have three to four separate sources of funding. The problem lies in the disproportionate amounts provided by these separate sources. In general, up to two sources provide over 80% of all income for an NGO. NGOs are usually financially secure for several months or, at most, up to one year into the future.

7. Research done regularly and systematically

The most recent and largest research “The Patterns and Values of Volunteering in Czech and Norwegian Society“ was carried out by HESTIA in cooperation with the Charles University and Norway Institutt for Samfunnsforskning (Institute for social research) in 2010-2011. The output is the publication “Volunteering Patterns and Values of Volunteering in Czech Society at the Beginning of the 21st Century” by Tereza Pospíšilová a Pavol Frič.

A recent study of grassroots volunteering was written by Tereza Pospíšilová, “Study of Grassroots Volunteering: Definition, Concepts and Themes” is based on a commission by the AGORA civic association under the “Grassroots Europe For Local Wellbeing” project, which aims to strengthen the dialogue between citizens and European Union institutions.

Other research projects have generally been carried out by civic society organisations: HESTIA, AGNES and Nadace rozvoje občanské společnosti (Civil Society Development Foundation) in cooperation with the Charles University in Prague.

Additional data is also collected by the Czech Statistical Office. A 2009 survey of volunteering in sports was carried out by the Czech Sport Association.

8. Ethics and quality standards for volunteering

During the EYV 2011, quality standards in volunteer centres and standards of volunteering in general were established. This is the first systematic attempt to set general and ethical volunteering standards. These standards are to be put into practice soon.

9. Awareness about volunteering opportunities

HESTIA runs a website (www.dobrovolnik.cz/ www.volunteer.cz) where information on volunteering in general and also in specific fields is available. There are also databases of volunteer opportunities with registered organisations or individuals offering volunteer opportunities. Volunteers can choose the most appropriate opportunities according to region, individual interest and skills matching the needs of the organisations.

Hestia organised the Flint and Steel Volunteering Award in 2001. This award was established to recognise the work done by volunteers, to call more attention to volunteering and the non-profit sector, and to stimulate interest in volunteer work and respect for volunteers among the general public. The prize started in the capital, Prague, and has expanded to other regions and cities. Currently it can be found in 18 cities across all regions of the Czech Republic, and there have been more than 350 awarded volunteers.

Since the main theme of 2011 in the EU was volunteering, there has been an increased focus on volunteering and many opportunities to cooperate with the media. It was a successful year for the promotion of volunteering. Several TV documentaries on volunteering were prepared, and a spot on volunteering was run on national TV. Since volunteering offers many fascinating stories, it attracts relatively substantial media attention.

10. Any other additional country specificities

As the Czech Republic is a post-communist country, a lot of differences can be considered when compared to other EU countries. Since 1989 attitudes towards volunteering have been changing; however the pace of change remains relatively slow. It is closely connected with the development of civic involvement and responsibility.

11. Recommendations

A better volunteering infrastructure can be ensured by:

- Europe-wide support of volunteering in the community
- Emphasis on cooperation of municipalities and citizens on volunteering programmes
- Additional support for non-formal education

12. List of resources

198/2002 Sb. ZÁKON ze dne 24. dubna 2002 o dobrovolnické službě a o změně některých zákonů (zákon o dobrovolnické službě) Available at: http://www.msmt.cz/file/16274_1_1/

GHK, 2010. "Volunteering in the European Union". Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

HESTIA www.dobrovolnik.cz, www.volunteer.cz

Pospíšilová, T., Frič, P., Tošner, J., 2011: "Volunteering Infrastructure in the Czech Republic: Situation - Trends – Outlook"

Pospíšilová, T., 2011. Grassroots Volunteering: Definitions, Concepts and Themes