

VOLUNTEERING IN CROATIA

Social and historical context

Croatia shares a tradition of solidarity and help, a significant value in the Slavic cultures.

Volunteering in Croatia has a long tradition that can be related to this concept of solidarity, although it has been exercised in different ways than it is understood today. The fact that there had been many political and social turbulences which brought lots of instability in peoples' lives in the region made people rely on help which they could give or receive through humanitarian work and through the work of volunteers.

Official definition

Volunteering in Croatia is defined under the Law on Volunteering "as an investment of personal time, effort, knowledge and skills out of free will with which services and activities are executed for the well-being of another person or wider public, and are executed by persons in a way anticipated by this Law, without existence of any conditions of providing a financial reward or seeking any other material benefit for volunteering accomplished."¹



Key facts about Croatia

Capital	Zagreb
Official language	Croatian
Government	Parliamentary republic
Population	4.437,460 (2001 census)
Currency	Kuna (HRK)
Calling code	+385

Key economic indicators

GDP per capita	US\$11,271
Real GDP growth in 2007	6%
Unemployment rate (Dec 2007)	14.7%
Source: Eurostat & International Labour Organization	

The Republic of Croatia is located in South-Central Europe and it is a country at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, Central Europe, and the Balkans. Zagreb is its capital. Croatia borders with Slovenia and Hungary to the north, Serbia to the northeast, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the east and Montenegro to the far southeast. Its southern and western flanks border the Adriatic Sea.

Croatia is a candidate country for membership in the European Union, was extended an invitation to join NATO in April 2008, and in October 2007, Croatia has become a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2008-2009 term.

Scope and composition

Croatia has no official systematically gathered or researched data on volunteer development in Croatia (including number of volunteers, economic value etc.). Nevertheless, there are individual efforts of local civil society organizations on one side, and certain international donor agencies on the other, aimed at designing and implementing research projects on volunteerism (volunteer frequency, types of volunteer activities and public attitudes towards volunteering). Research that has been conducted showed that volunteering remains mainly within the interest range of civil society organizations. According to the research², citizens who had volunteered at least once in the last 12 months had often organized some actions or activities (39.3%), or had given some practical help (31.8%), advices or information (27.1%), led some group or participated in some form of decision making (20.6%). According to the SMART researches³, from 2001 and 2006, most of the interviewees volunteered in the activities of CSO's (45,4% in 2006 and 43% in 2001). Other activities that interviewees mainly engaged (from 32,3% - 17%) were preparations of events, volunteering for the local community, school or kindergarten and church. The considerable variance in the number of people who volunteer, ranging from 5% to 46%, is due to the use of different definitions of volunteering and the use of non-comparative research methods. The majority of people who volunteer in Croatia are aged between 31 and 60. A noteworthy fact is that senior citizens take a greater part in volunteering than the young ones, and on the other hand, there is no significant difference in gender of people who volunteered.

Volunteer profiles

There is no general data available regarding education level, employment and financial status, but more specific differences between different categories of the each variable. Regarding the education level, highly educated interviewees volunteered more often for their own local community than lower or middle educated persons, while the lower educated ones volunteered for school/kindergarten more than the middle educated. High school pupils and employed citizens were more likely to volunteer in schools/kindergartens than the students and the retired citizens.⁴

Volunteer motivation

The survey from 2000⁵ showed that the majority of interviews believe that the effective organization of volunteering is the most important factor for people's motivation. Other highly rated motivating factors were: a personal satisfaction achieved by volunteering; resolving of their personal problems; provision of personal circumstances such as more free time, stable economic conditions and better health. In the study form 2000, apart from a more effective organization of volunteer activities, other motivating factors are: possibility of finding employment through volunteering, concrete results of voluntary work, more information about volunteering and covered expenses.⁶

¹ Law on Volunteering, (58 6.6.2007)

² Franc, R., Šakić, V., Public Stance Towards Non-Governmental Organizations, Academy for Education Development, 2005

³ Forčić, G. (2006.) "Volunteering and local community development - Research on civil participation in the community initiatives through volunteering", Association for Civil Society Development SMART

⁴ Id. at p.92

⁵ Ledic, J.: Volunteering in Croatia: searching for a Younger Generation's Motivation, in "Presentation of the Third Sector Studies CEE", 2000

⁶ Academy for Educational Development, Volunteering in Croatia: How to make it Attractive, 2000.

Legislation

In May 2007, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Law on volunteering, first of such kind in the country and the region. The law defines relations between the volunteer, the organiser of volunteering and the beneficiary of volunteering in order to secure an adequate social environment for development of volunteering and prevent any possible misuse.⁷ It also regulates volunteering terminology, principles of volunteering, conditions, volunteering contracts, code of ethics and volunteer certificates. In addition, it foresees allocation of governmental funds for the work of the National Board for the Development of Volunteering, as well as the National Volunteer of the Year award.

Government, Local & Regional funding

In general, the support for the development of volunteering from the national as well as local and regional government still has a fairly low profile. Although progress has been made quite recently, in April 2008, when the Ministry of Family, Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity announced a public call for co-funding of the regional volunteer centres, this issue of structured and permanent support still remains one of the greater challenges in Croatia.

Policy, Strategy & Law

- Law on volunteering (2007)
- National strategy for the creation of enabling environment for civil society development including the operational plan 2006-2011 (part of the strategy is devoted to volunteering development)
- Volunteer Ethics Code (2008)

⁷ Horvat, M., *Volunteering Legislation in Croatia*, Ministry of Family Affairs, War Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity and European Centre for Not-for-Profit Law, 2007, p.7

Key challenges

- Strengthening the Volunteer centres as a key pillar of volunteer infrastructure
- Encourage/develop volunteering in schools
- Recognition of volunteering in the process of employment and formal education
- Increasing frequency of volunteering
- Setting up an information gathering system, regarding the frequency of volunteering
- Setting up a system for assessing the economic value of volunteering
- Increasing volunteering in public institutions (i.e. health and social care and local and regional government)
- Setting up a model for continuous research in the area of volunteering
- Promotion of corporative volunteering

Regional Volunteer Centres

There are four regional Volunteer centres in Croatia. The main purpose of those centres is to promote and develop volunteering activities on local, regional and national level, providing education in the area of volunteer management, connecting potential volunteers with volunteer opportunities, running the information and promotional campaigns, writing and publishing publications related to the volunteer management, conducting research in the area of volunteering, organizing community volunteer actions.



Croatian Volunteer Centres Network

In this informal network there are four regional Volunteer centres (Osijek, Rijeka, Split, Zagreb). Volunteer Centres Network is aiming at promoting volunteering, increasing visibility of volunteer actions and development of volunteer infrastructure. Network activities are well recognised by all relevant stakeholders in Croatia.

National Board for Volunteering Development

The National Board for volunteering development is a governmental advisory body, which works on issues of promotion and development of volunteering and creation of the Code of Ethics on volunteering.

Important actors/stakeholders on the governmental level

National Foundation for Civil Society Development
Croatian Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs
Ministry of Family Affairs, War Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity

PROMOTION

- 4 National conferences on volunteering,
- Annual celebration of the International Volunteer Day - regional and national campaigns

RECOGNITION

- National Volunteer of the Year award (2001, 2007),
- Regional Volunteer of the Year award (Osječko-baranjska county since 2006; Primorsko-goranska county since 2007),
- Local Volunteer of the Year award (Split since the year 2000)
- Volunteering and education recordkeeping booklet

