



Volunteer infrastructure in Albania

- Status quo and developments

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Executive Summary

As a negative result of the communist regime in Albania, after the 90s the volunteer work was seen very badly in the country, it almost provoked people an allergic reaction that reminded them the forced work they had to do then. Later with the passing of years, with lots of effort of the civil society sector the field started to develop step by step, youth started to approach the idea of volunteer work and contribution to the community and solidarity, parents became more tolerant in accepting that their children engage in non-curricular activities that help the community, and the general society started to appreciate volunteer work.

When it comes to organized and structured volunteering Tirana became the first and only city to have established a program on structured volunteering during 2011. Beyond Barriers Association with the collaboration of the South Eastern European Youth Network (SEEYN) through the financial support of Instruments for Pre Accession (IPA) Funds, established the Local Volunteer Service of Tirana. The program run by Beyond Barriers is the first known form of structured volunteer work that existed in Albania and even after the funding ended BBA managed to keep the program running until 2015. This initiative also involved the preparation of a Draft Law on Volunteer Work in Albania, which was prepared and consulted with several organizations, young people, experts and ministries but never managed to pass in parliament due to the political change at the time.

It was in fact, in April 2016 that the Albanian Parliament approved the Law 45, Law on Volunteering. The law seeks to define the basic principles, conditions and criteria for conducting and implementing volunteer work. Law 45/2016 also aims to boost the civic engagement and participation of citizens in community development. The law approval was also one of the fulfilments of the nine priority areas as identified in the 2015 Road Map for Albanian Government Policy Towards a More Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development. Even though, as per procedure the law entered into force 15 days after its publication in the official journal, it took the government 4 years to issue the first by-laws which were only published in late 2019.

The approval and later the non-implementation of the law for 4 years, did always arise discussing and debate among civil society actors. A lot of debate went over the fact that the Law was not consulted with the civil society, that the expert's opinions were not considered and even that the recommendations and lessons learned from the region were not taken on board.

Unfortunately besides the big debate, the law effected also the concrete volunteer work and its development. It looked like the volunteer development stopped to 4 years ago and during these 4

years there was not so much work nor more discussion, somehow volunteer work was less and less mentioned, while terms such as activism and participation started being used around the term of volunteering. The specific issue that “scared” the CSO sector in this relation, is the introduction in the Law of the aspect of insurance in case of accidents for the volunteers. This issue was as much as unknown to the sector, as much as non- applicable at same time. Most organizations argue that they have no funding that allows them to equip volunteers with the insurance and the fact that this specific law comes without any financial package it makes it very difficult to implement in practice.

At present, wanting to take volunteering up again and re-start the debate and invigorate its practice, BBA gathered local and national partners under **ROUTE WB6** project to re-open the debate about volunteer work, to re-vitalize the sector and to also establish a dialogue with the implementing public institutions that are in charge to issue the bylaws and implement them in practice. Thus, the following questionnaire and its analyses in this report is to serve us as a found bases to continue our work in the volunteering field while first of all opening the discourse with the local partners and other CSO-s in order to get more data and information in relation to it.

What is ROUTE WB?

ROUTE WB6 is a 3 years project that started implementation in 2019, with the partnership among Regional Youth Cooperation Office-RYCO, South East European Youth Network- SEEYN in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Youth Cultural Center Bitola in North Macedonia, Young Researchers of Serbia in Serbia, Association for Democratic Prosperity – ZID in Montenegro, LENS in Kosovo*¹ and Beyond Barriers in Albania. The project is financially supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The project emphasizes the role of youth in WB region as the main drivers of reconciliation and socio-economic reconstruction, able to apply European values, initiate and lead intercultural dialogue and regional cooperation towards socio-economic and democratic development. It seeks to strengthen capacities of the National Volunteer Services to advocate for volunteering policy at regional and national levels in order to make an enabling environment for development of volunteering as the effective tool that contributes to reconciliation and mobility of youth in WB6 region. As another main objective and goal of the project is to establish the WB regional volunteer infrastructure and youth cross-border volunteer exchange programs that contribute to intercultural dialogue, societal reconstruction and bottom up approach in implementation.

¹ "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence."

of the reconciliation policy. At the same time through this project the partners shall support CSOs and youth from the WB region to participate in the ROUTE WB6 program, in order to facilitate intercultural dialogue, mobility and cross-border cooperation of youth from the region.

Therefore this research on volunteering in Albania comes as a product of the Advocacy campaign that Beyond Barriers is leading on behalf of the project and seeks to provide us with more knowledge and data about the actual situation in the volunteering field in Albania.

ROUTE WB6 is financially supported by:



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Objectives

The main objective of this survey is to gather data and information regarding the volunteer engagement in civil society organizations in Albania. The questionnaire targets civil society organizations in Albania, specifically those working with young people, and seeks to analyze their knowledge on volunteer programs, infrastructures and actual legal frameworks. The main purpose of this analyses is to provide us with more information and a background as to where volunteer related knowledge is at the present, in a way that we can further plan next steps and gather the interested parties that want to contribute for the further volunteer development.

Research Methodology

This report reflects the engagement of volunteers in Albanian civil society organisations and the knowledge that CSOs have on the topic, in relation to infrastructure and legal framework of volunteering and volunteer work.

The applied methodology consisted in data collected through an online questionnaire, sent to organization by email at the beginning of October 2019. The questionnaire was sent to a database of more than 3000 organizations all over Albania, covering different working fields and thematic areas. The database used is from Agency for Support of Civil Society, which is available publicly in their webpage.²

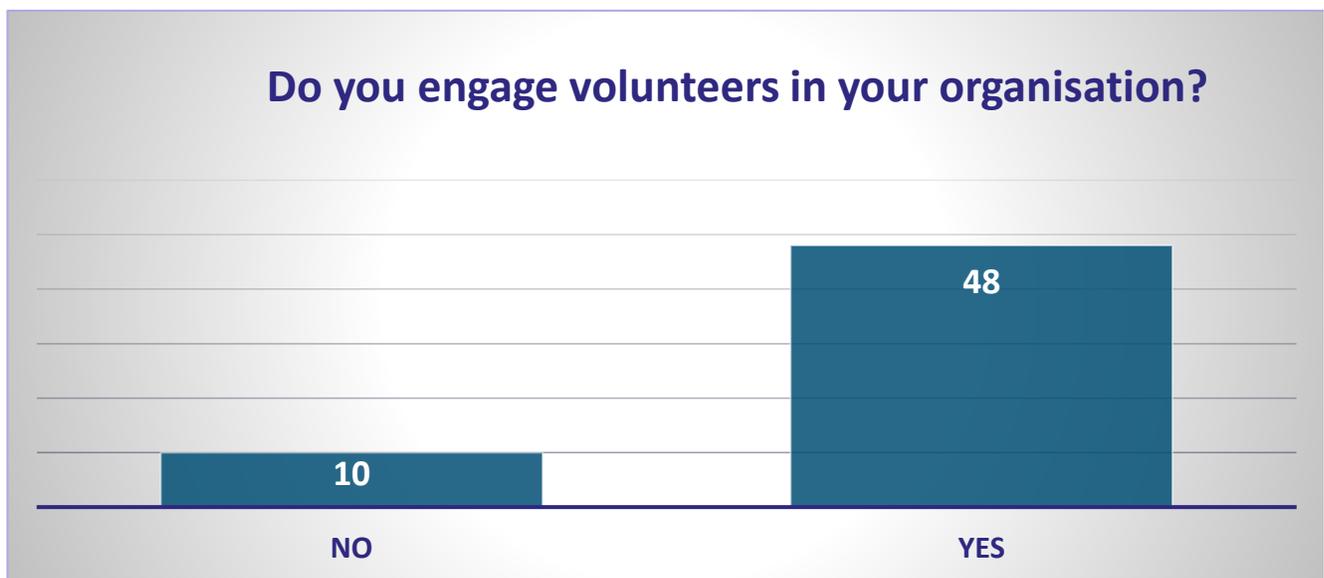
The questionnaire was composed of 12 closed and some open ended questions and last question is a request for comments and suggestions. Questions 1,2,3, 5 6, 7, 10 are closed questions with alternative answers. Questions 4, 8, 9 are open questions were respondents are requested to elaborate on the question. Question 12 leaves space too respondents to give their suggestions and comments regarding the topic of the questionnaire.

This report seeks to analyze if and why the organizations engage volunteers, what type of volunteering programs do they use and what is the knowledge and information of the organizations in regards to volunteer infrastructure, programs and volunteer legal framework.

Survey results

The survey questionnaire was sent by mail to more than 3000 organizations all over Albania. The questionnaire is composed of 12 questions. It is directed to organizations working with youth and for youth, as well as any other organization that does not necessarily work with young people. In this way we did not want to limit the volunteering to only young people but to see a general trend of how, and what types of volunteers the organizations engage. The question results are as following:

Question one (See Graph below) seeks to gather information on how many of the responding organizations engage volunteers in their work and how many do not. In total 58 organizations responded to the question, where the majority of 82.75% of the responding organizations do engage volunteers in their day to day activities and/or projects. While only 17.24% respond that they do not engage any volunteers.



Graph 1.

The *second question* is correlated with the first and targets only those respondents that replied yes in previous question. In order to analyze what are the most used volunteer programs that organisations use to engage volunteers the question offers 5 alternatives which refer to local volunteers, regional volunteers, European Volunteers (European Voluntary Service program, now known as European

² <http://www.amshc.gov.al/web/ojf/>

Solidarity Corps), Peace Corps Volunteers, Servis Civil International – SCI, and the option of No volunteers engaged at all.



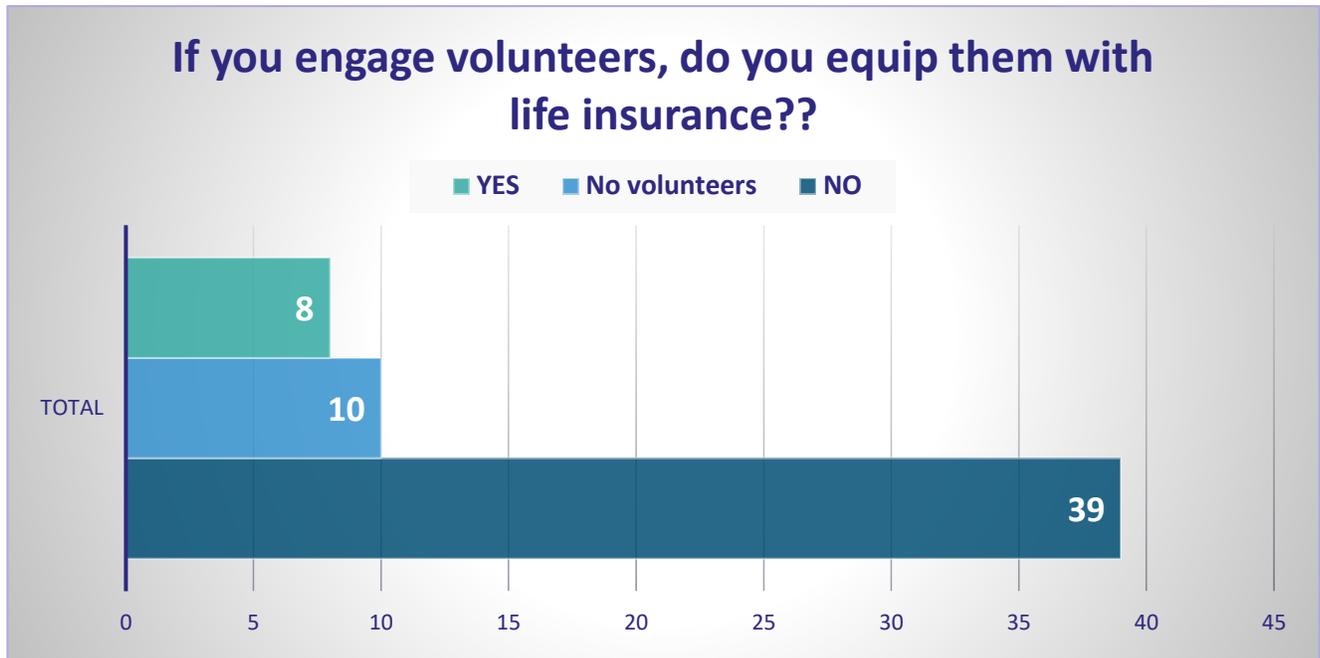
Graph 2.

Graph. 2 shows us that majority of 58 % of the respondents engage local volunteers. This means they are volunteers from same city, area or country where the organization operates or implements their activities.

Nine organizations equaling the 11% respond that they engage Peace Corps volunteers, while right after this, the value of 10% refers to 8 organizations that engage volunteers from ex- European Voluntary Service, nowadays reformatted as a separate program under the name European Solidarity Corps, supported by European Commission. Four organisations (5%) respond that they engage regional volunteers, without specification to what type of program or project. To our knowledge, there is no existent regional volunteer program in the Western Balkans, therefore the gap in information or recognizing what are volunteer programs remains also visible among associations. After a few check with the respondents, we found out that organisations misinterpreted the project based volunteering in short time periods, the participants traveling for trainings of exchanges, with the term of volunteering.

Only 2 organisations (3%) respond that they engage volunteers from the Service Civil International, specifically from Italy within the same program known as Servizio Civile Internazionale. The 13% corresponding to 10 organizations remain under the no volunteers engaged.

Third question is related to volunteer insurance and if those organisations that engage volunteers do equip them with life insurance, a prerequisite also defined by the Albanian Law on Volunteering.³



Graph 3.

If we compare to graph 3 with graph 1, we will see that 48 organisations say that they engage volunteers, as shown in graph 3 a very high majority of the respondents, (39 organisations in the case) do not equip the engaged volunteers with life insurance. A smaller number, only 8 of them, respond that they pay life insurance to the volunteers. This positive reply links directly to international volunteer programs, such as the Peace Corps, ISC and ESC that include the insurance for each exchanged individual as a mandatory prerequisite, while also covering the cost of such insurance in the program cost.

In order to analyze the answers of this question in more details and to gather information on the reasons why, the **question number 4** is an open ended one, which asks them to respond to:

Q. 4 - If you replied NO to question 3, please explain the reasons why?

Among the most frequent answer the lack of funds is dominating, while there is also several other reasons that the organisations give such as:

³ Law 45/2016 - <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2016/04/28/45>

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- ✦ Lack of funds to cover insurance cost;
 - ✦ We don't have enough information about the insurance policy required by law for the volunteers;
 - ✦ We don't insure them because they are short term volunteers (i.e 2-3 days only);
 - ✦ The whole organisations operates on volunteer bases, with no staff employed;
 - ✦ We don't insure them because their engagement is on volunteer bases;
 - ✦ We don't have any information on this aspect;
 - ✦ Lack of internal organizational structure to address this issue;
 - ✦ We don't have clear information, and when we contacted the Employment Office in our city they also gave us no information;
 - ✦ Our volunteers are students of the Social Sciences Faculty and they undertake their practice with us, in agreement with the university. They only work 5 hours a day, so no insurance is applied;
 - ✦ Our activities are very short term (i.e 1 day), which do not require a lot of engagement;

As it can be seen from the responses, majority of the respondents besides lacking funds, they also have lack of information on the insurance policy, its necessity and applicability, as well as they do confuse the term "volunteering" with activism, interns, and participants! Hence, this last issue is present in the whole questionnaire, and clearly shows that there is lack of information and awareness on what is a volunteer's job, what are responsibilities and rights.

The next three question (5,6,7) elaborate on the technicalities and functioning of the working conditions and relation among organizations and volunteer. All three questions relate to the Volunteer Contract, Ethical Code and Rules and Procedures for volunteers, and question 8 leaves space for the respondents to elaborate their answers with the respective reasons in case when their reply is No.

Question 5 seeks to gather information on how many organizations do equip the volunteers with a Volunteer Contract. As you can see in Graph 5, out of 48 organisation that engage volunteers, only 22 of them respond that they do equip volunteers with a Volunteer Contract, while a slight majority of them, 26 organization responded with No. Having more than half of respondents that do not use, have or apply contractual bases for volunteer is telling on the level of formality that this engagement has.



Graph 4

Referring to previous Graphs where we could see that several organisations consider the volunteer work mostly as “informal activity”, here we can also estimate that by not using a volunteer contract for the engagement of volunteers, might also be a factor of showing that the volunteer engagement is not usually considered as “real engagement”, therefore is not treated as any other job where employees or experts are hired within contractual terms. Nevertheless, this is an assumption, since the issue of contractual obligations are a much deeper issues in the sector.

Further on *question 6*, we asked about the Ethical Code. Graph 6 shows an increased number of organization that replied positively, respectively 28 of them (6 more than previous question), said that they have an ethical code for the volunteers.



Graph 5.

Still, as we can see 20 organisations responded negatively, saying that they don't have an ethical code. This is a red flag that shows lack of capacity of the organizations not having enough capacity to internally establish criteria, ethical conduct and procedures. These respondents belong mostly to young and youth driven organisation, though among them there are also organizations that work in the CSO field for years already.

Another aspect we wanted to check with the questionnaire is also the rules and Procedures for volunteers. Considering that CSOs have their internal rules and procedures, we wanted to gather information if they have specific ones for volunteers. **Thus question 7**, shows us that a majority of 53% responded positively and 31% say that they don't have any specific rules and procedures for volunteers.



Graph 6

This question is followed by the next one, in order to see what the specific reasons for the answer are.

8. If you reply YES to question 7, please elaborate what kind of rules and procedures do you use?

Among the most common responses, the following are what respondents highlighted:

- Besides the volunteer form when they register, volunteers are interviewed and further given a training on the tasks they have to perform in the organization.
- We don't have a specific volunteer contacts but we use a service contract for activities. While the relationship with the volunteers are defined in the organization's manual for internal procedures.
- Internal rules of the organization are also applicable for the volunteers.
- We use the rules and procedures of the partners that send us the volunteers (referred to SCI).
- We establish the rules and procedures with the volunteer before engaging them in any activity. We don't have any basic rules.
- Code of conduct and forms that they fill in before volunteering.
- Communication code, engagement and responsibility among both parties.

Organisations seem to also not have a specific procedure related to the volunteers, therefore a gap to be filled in and more work to be done on this aspect is needed.

The next question ask the respondents to elaborate on the training and information that they provide to the volunteer once they are recruited for the placement. So question number 9, asks:

9. What type of guidance, training and information do you provide to the volunteers during their placement? Please elaborate below:

- Training about the philosophy of the organisation, projects we implement, mission and focus of the organization, rules and ways of organizing events etc.
- They are trained and given guidance how to work in ICT field, what are the recent developments of the field as well as informed about our foundations key components.
- Training about communication skills and guidance on Labour Code.
- They are given information depending on the topic of their work.
- Depending on the project they will be implementing, they are informed about the activities, timing, security issues, and accommodation facilities.
- Information about the organization, training in the fields of their interest, information about past projects, information that they can use when needed.
- Before each activity they receive a training about the concrete job they need to perform.
- Guidance about the writing and implementation of the project, guidance about education and profession of each member, guidance about the role and importance of the organization and the volunteer in the society, etc.
- Yearly training about staff and volunteers in order to increase their professional capacity, ethical code of work, contemporary terminology to be used.
- They receive training about the organisations works and also get included in the staff training.
- Volunteers receive oral and written guidance, and they vary upon the job they will perform.
- Training about social skills, communication, relationship management, conflict management and training in the medical field, training in the field of youth, gender, leadership etc.

The answers show a general picture of what type of guidance, training and information do the volunteers receive before and during the volunteer placement. In a summarized way, prevails the information given about the organizations mission and work, which is a good way to introduce the volunteer in the organisations daily routines, rules and procedures.

Others also focus on providing the volunteer with the training that they say they like or need, hence no answers reflect a clear moment where the organization identifies specific training to provide them with. While is a good approach to allow volunteers to choose what training they like, it would be best if while volunteers are performing the host organization identifies what type of other skills they should improve and offer them tailored training upon.

The latest replies that provide trainings about specific topics come from the organisations that have such mission in their work, and this shows that they are preparing the volunteers to better work in their organisations and contribute to its growth.

Further, the last 2 questions are more concrete and seek to analyze what type of information is available among respondents about the Law on Volunteering in Albania.

As you can see in *Graph 7*, majority of respondents say that they are informed about the volunteering law. Nevertheless the a bit more than half of respondents have no information regarding the law. The difference here is very tight, which shows that the response is almost 50/50 on the level of information about the specific law!



Graph 7

To elaborate more on this the Question 11, asks respondents to elaborate more on what type of information and knowledge they have about the respective law.

Q 11. If you respond with YES to question 10, please briefly elaborate below what do you know about the Law:

- The law reflects an approach of the Albanian Government to regulate and formalize volunteering in the country, to regulate the relations among volunteers and organizations or institutions which offer volunteer work. Anyways we think that the law needs to be further discussed and that there is still issues to implement it in practice, with the recent developments in the country.
- The law is inapplicable and there is no bylaws yet! It's not complete and it was done without consulting the youth associations that work in the field. There is a huge need for institution and organizations to know more about the law.
- We think that the Law 45 needs to be re-check by the Government once again, and we had proposed this in every meeting prior to the law approval.
- This law reflects the volunteer engagement, it regulates volunteering with the aim to have a better citizen engagement in the society and to help develop values of human solidarity.

- It defines what volunteering is and how it will be implemented in the Albanian territory. The law defines who the volunteer the minor volunteer, the foreigner is, it establishes rules and procedures, rights and responsibilities, volunteer passport, ethical code contracts etc.
- We know that each volunteer that works more than 5 hour with us, we must provide them with health insurance, but we need more detailed information.
- We are aware and informed about the Law and the latest decision (bylaw) of 17.07.2019 about the Ethical Code for Volunteers.
- We are aware the law exists and that insurance for the volunteer is mandatory, but we never understood how this is exactly done.
- We know that the volunteer must be equipped with a working contracts and insurance.
- The government has followed similar model from the WB region and the recommendations of European Commission. The law seeks to regulate volunteering, in order to increase the individual participation in the social life of the community. From the base research of the Law it results that at least 1 in 5 youngsters in Albania are engaged in volunteering.
- We have a very limited information about this Law and definitely need to know more about it.

Clearly enough the information given in this answer falls in 3 main blocks: 1. Organisations that have read and are informed about the Law and its content, 2. Organisations that think the law is problematic and inapplicable, or it needs to be discussed again, 3, organisations that simply know it exists as a law and require more information and knowledge about that. The recent block is the most common among answers followed by the second block that elaborates on the problematic issues of the law. While the first block responds that they know the existent, their answers do not provide enough information to its details, but rather a generic approach about its existence.

In the *closure of the questionnaire* the respondents were given space to address us any comments and/or suggestions among which they elaborate the below answers:

- We need to know more about this Law; we need support in understanding the Law and implementing it.
- Volunteering is very important and its revitalization even more.
- This questionnaire is a very interesting and valuable idea. It is about time to positively re-evaluate volunteering, or even “re-invent” a new form of it in all directions.
- I would like to ask you to support us with more information on the insurance aspects.
- We would like to start involving volunteer in the organization but we need your support to teach us how to do it properly.
- There is a need to support the increasing of capacities for the CSO sector in relation to the volunteer structures.
- We congratulate you on the initiative and we are willing to support any further meeting or consultation relating to volunteering and the Law in Albania.

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- We think that volunteer work must be mandatory for at least 1 year, and this way the experience can be a very useful one for the CV of each individual.
 - Info session about the Law on Volunteering are need to inform CSOs and Institutions about the law.
 - From our experience with volunteering we have noticed a few problematic issues therefore we suggest the following:
 - Any individual must be benefiting by having the volunteer engagement recognized as a professional preparation, and hence receive priority in the employment sector.
 - There have been cases that while applying the insurance in case of accidents, the volunteers have had issues with losing the social and economic benefit of the parents which come from unemployment.
 - It is very difficult for the organization to secure the reimbursement of costs for the volunteer that are engaged in rural and/or remote areas due to the informality (i.e. transport cost, food expenses). We recommend to negotiate about a minimum quote of expenditure without taxation (which should not be considered individual income).
 - We also have problems with the foreign volunteers, whom in order to obtain the temporary residence permit they must have a valid contract of volunteer engagement.

These are some of the comments and recommendations received by the respondents and it is obvious that there is still an arising need to further inform the CSO sector on the Law, the procedures and how does it regulate certain aspects.

Recommendations

After receiving this feedback and response from the CSOs that responded to the questionnaire, we remain certain that there is a lot of work to be done in regulating structured volunteering; promoting the volunteer values and benefits in the wider community and re-vitalising the sector in its general aspect. After carefully analyzing the data gathered, consulting with other experts of the field and an in-depth analyses of the present situation, we acknowledge that the challenges remain present and the following recommendations proposed could serve as a booster and guidance to help us in moving volunteering further.

- As per the response received, it is obvious that the information gap among CSO sector in regards to volunteering rules and procedures remains high. Thus, there is a need for more information, info sessions and workshops to be organized around the country, where awareness on such elements can be spread.
- National Service of Employments, in charge of the bylaws and implementation of Law 45 should consult and involve more the organisations that are experienced in the volunteering field, as they can be contributing and supporting the institution with the missing aspects and pieces of information needed to make the law applicable.
- CSOs in general need for training and capacity building in understanding structured volunteering and implementation of the obligations arisen by the law.
- Meaningful and mutual cooperation among CSO sector and public institutions is a must.
- Promotion of volunteer values and benefits among the community, especially among youth is necessary.

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