

VALUE: Poland National Report
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1. Overview of volunteering – university interaction

1.1 Volunteering in Poland

The commonly accepted definition of volunteerism in Poland is *‘an unpaid activity, freely given and for the good of others – beyond family and friends’*. A study on Polish Volunteerism and Philanthropy published in December 2001 revealed that only 10% of the 1000 adults surveyed had been volunteers (http://www.cev.be/data/File/Poland_legalstatus.pdf). That means the government is not supportive of volunteering and does not encourage volunteering.

There are about 30,000 non-profit organisations active in Poland. About 87% of them work with volunteers, and some 60% do not employ any staff, depending entirely on the efforts of volunteers. There has therefore been very strong support within the Third Sector for a regulation to legalise the work of volunteers.

1.2 The political and legislative context in Poland

The low level of participation in volunteering can be attributed in part to the country’s legacy of ‘compulsory volunteering’ organised under the previous Communist regime, and in part to its economic and social situation. A draft law on Non-Governmental Organisation and Volunteers was presented by a group of Polish Associations and Foundations in 2001 and 2002.

This law, entitled the Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism, came into force on 29th June 2003 and provides a specific regulatory framework for volunteers and volunteer organisations.

The adoption of the law is undoubtedly a significant step forward in the wider promotion of volunteering within Polish society. It should also serve to strengthen the development of, and participation in, civil society organisations. Nonetheless, the exact practical implications of the law will only become evident over the coming months and years.

1.3 The volunteering – university interaction in Poland

Staff from universities in Poland are involved in a wide variety of voluntary activities through various groups outside the University, especially Universities of Third Age, of which there are more than 100 hundred in Poland (counting all of them together – huge ones and smaller ones). The University is keen to work

with such local Community Groups. Nowadays a successful adult education movement can be observed in Poland, providing opportunities for older adults to enjoy a range of activities, led by the staff from the University. There are 16 Polish Universities of Third Ages, which have strong links with universities. These belong to a national association which is integrated into the Warsaw Medicine Faculty. There are some, which ask universities to accredit their volunteers or try to get access to their volunteers to university courses. Generally courses vary widely in content, style of presentation and format: from open lectures and negotiated access to established university courses up to contracted courses, workshops, excursions and physical health programmes. The original focus on older people by universities also began to broaden to include other educationally disadvantaged groups. In many places the programmes are advertised for early retirees, housewives, the unemployed and those with physical handicaps.

2. Good practice examples and effectiveness of the interaction

2.1 Successes and challenges

Some data collected in the years 2001-2005 show engagement of people in voluntary activities in Poland. In that time the number of adult volunteers has almost doubled.

2.2 Good practice examples and principles

2.2.1 Examples of good practice

One example of a good practice is the co-operation between “Centrum Wolontariatu” and Warsaw University. “Centrum Wolontariatu” acts as a co-ordinating organisation for the network of 16 regional centres and organisations working with the European Voluntary Service.

There are over a dozen regional and local Volunteer Centres operating in the Volunteer Centres Association. Representatives of Volunteer Centres take part in regular meetings to discuss matters concerning among others: cooperation with other organisations and institutions, points of law and the expansion of the Volunteer Centres activity within the non-governmental and public administration sectors.

The representatives of specific centres help to create new local Volunteer Centres within their area of jurisdiction. This provides a constant influx of new volunteers, not exclusively from large cities. As principle overseers, they help to organise new Centres, giving advice and sharing ideas. Through workshops for the volunteers and their coordinators, they prepare both sides to facilitate future work for the society.

All organisations within the Volunteer Centres Association are working in accordance with the activity standards of the Regional Volunteer Associations and the national Volunteer Centres.

One of the most notable achievements of the Volunteer Centres Association to date is its contribution of adding legacies concerning volunteer work to the act of law on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work.

Simultaneously it co-ordinates the activity of all the volunteers from Warsaw University, who give lectures or courses for the U3As. The volunteers are adults from the staff of the University.

The U3A, created at Kraków Jagiellonian University is largely university funded. The University makes provision for qualified older students to participate in the normal academic programme. Tutors and organisers are not paid, but running costs are covered by a small annual membership fee.

2.2.2 Principles of good practice

3. Barriers and opportunities for future development

3.1 Barriers

Volunteering is still not particularly widespread in Poland. Furthermore, a crucial problem for further development of voluntary service is the lack of co-operation among Polish associations in order to tackle common issues.

3.2 Opportunities

The adoption of the law is undoubtedly a significant step forward in the wider promotion of volunteering within Polish society. It should also serve to strengthen the development of, and participation in, civil society organisations.

Most of the students have opportunity to know new cultures and people. They see the possibility to improve foreign languages and their chances to get a better job in the future.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Initial conclusions and summary

Staff from universities are involved in a wide variety of voluntary activities through various groups within the University and on a personal level. The number of active volunteers grows up systematically

Since Poland became a member of European Union in 2004 awareness of the advantages of being a volunteer has been increasing. More and more adults have got the possibility to go to other European countries without any barriers. They have become the volunteers abroad and they have widely brought the idea of volunteering home.

Most Polish universities give volunteers opportunity to be socially active. This could, for example, include:

- assisting with the presentations and lecturers for local societies;
- assisting with organising different fairs and events;
- promoting the university programme for volunteers at different meetings.

4.2 Recommendations

5. Further information

5.1 Bibliography and references

1. Musiala, A. (2003) “The Legal Aspects of voluntary Work” PhD dissertation, Warsaw University
2. Sieveking, K. (2001) European Voluntary Service for Young People. Questions of Status and Problems of Legal Policy. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter
3. Supiot, A. (2001) Beyond Employment. Changes in Work and the Future of Labour Law in Europe. Oxford: Oxford University Press

5.2 Further resources

5.2.1 Websites

www.fip.ngo.pl – Initiatives Forum

www.wolontariat.org.pl – the website of Volunteering Centres

www.klon.org.pl/ - KLON Association

www.icnl.org/ - The International Centre of Non-for-profit Law

www.msz.org.pl – Mazurian School of Sailing

www.badania.ngo.pl/ - Civicpedia

www.ngo.pl/ - the website of nongovernment organisations

http://www.cev.be/data/File/Poland_legalstatus.pdf - European Volunteer Centre

<http://www.circle-network.org/activity/newcastle2001/poland.htm> - Circle Network

5.2.2 Glossary

Volunteerism – all forms of voluntary activity, formal or informal, full-time or part-time, at home or abroad. It is undertaken of a person’s own free-will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain.

Volunteering – occurs informally or within the structures of a non-profit organisation. It can be full-time or part-time. It may occur over one day or many years in a range of different fields.

Full-time voluntary service – full-time project-based voluntary activities, that are carried out on a continuous basis for a limited period of time.

