



Capacity building in the social sector

Developing volunteer programmes at social institutions in the CEE region

Movisie is a partner in the SoVol project. Its official title is “Capacity Building in the Social Sector through the Development of Volunteer Programmes at Social Institutions in the CEE Region.”

The SoVol project is led by Volunteering Hungary, Centre of Social Innovation, in partnership with the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations Slovakia, the Association for Civil Society Development SMART in Croatia, Volunteer Centre, Warsaw in Poland, Pro Vobis – National Resource Center for Volunteerism in Romania, and Movisie. The project receives funding from the EU Erasmus+ Programme.

Project goal

The key goal of the project is to strengthen the capacity of social work institutions to deliver good quality help to disadvantaged groups, such as those living in poverty, the elderly, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities in the Central and Eastern European Region. Ngo’s in the partner countries would not be able to operate properly without the contribution of volunteers while at the same time volunteering opportunities offer people lots of skills, experiences and valuable connections. These programmes have huge impact on local communities and overall on the countries’ social capita. However, most welfare institutions are still not open to cooperation with local citizens or volunteers.

CEE experiences

The social institutions in Central and Eastern Europe were influenced by communism in very similar ways. Civil society in communist countries was too weak to mobilize citizens for spontaneous voluntary action. Volunteering was under state control; therefore it was quite frequently compulsory rather than voluntary. State-controlled organisations were essentially bureaucratic, and the tradition of volunteering was ended or made compulsory, especially in public institutions.

That is the reason that staff members in social institutions in the Central and Eastern Europe partner countries do not always fully understand the value of volunteering and its possible contribution to a higher quality of service provision. At the same time, citizens still think of social institutions as rather closed, distant, out of their reach.

Advanced systems

The project looked for international inspiration and examples of good practice to remedy this situation. There are very good examples in Europe of advanced systems of volunteering in social institutions. The Netherlands was selected to present knowhow and help build expertise, based on their system that is demonstrably effective and impactful with regard to infrastructure and competences. The partner organisations received an in-depth introduction during a study visit to the Netherlands. In this way the project enhances the quality and relevance of the learning offer in the field of volunteer management in general and volunteer management in the social sector in particular through the development of tailor-made training curricula.

Learning and sharing

The programme wants to create learning and experience sharing for the participating organisations, and to generate high quality learning materials to support citizens wishing to get involved into public social institutions. At the same time the project wants to enable and encourage social institutions to understand and utilize the added value volunteers can bring. Since the start of the project in September 2016, a number of products have been developed. These are now being tested in pilot versions, before they are distributed and put to the use of other organisations in CEE countries.

Pilot products

The following project results are already available in pilot versions.

- A **guidebook** on how to set up volunteer programmes in social institutions aiming to help all social institutions to start involving volunteers. It is a step-by-step guidebook that contains the key guidelines that have to be followed and provided for a successful volunteer programme in any social institution.
- A **training curriculum on volunteer management for employees** of social institutions, volunteer managers, and mentors, consisting of three training curricula: a sensitizing training for all employees and stakeholders of social institutions, training for volunteer managers, and training for volunteer mentors.
- A separate **training curriculum for volunteers** of social institutions with a focus on specific target audiences such as elderly, children living in foster care, addicts, homeless people, disabled people and psychiatric patients.
- A **handbook on measurement and communication of the impact of volunteering** in social institutions. This output aims to provide social institutions with a practical handbook on how to measure the impact of volunteering and ways to communicate about volunteering in order to raise public awareness on the value that volunteers bring to the social institutions services and to the overall society.

These products are now being tested in selected social institutions in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Poland and Croatia in the frame of pilot activity. After the pilot activity final adaptations will be made on the basis of all outcomes. The outcomes will then be presented during national and international multiplier events and further plans for further multiplication and sustainability of project results will be established.

Resources

The first step of the Erasmus + project was to gather information on existing activities of social institutions in the partner countries in relation to volunteering by means of a joint questionnaire. This exploratory research aimed to identify trends, not to generate representative results. 316 social institutions responded in the 6 countries. Their answers were analysed and country reports were made. All relevant documents and pilot versions of the products are available at the project website: <https://sovol.wordpress.com>. At the end of the project period in August 2019 the final products of SoVol will also be available there.

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