

Latvia

[LATVIJAS REPUBLIKA]

RESEARCH PARTNER CENTRE

BIEDRĪBA “SKALBES”

Cristina Vasilescu

Coordinamento dei centri di servizio della Lombardia

Zinta Miezaine

“Skalbes” Association

[CONTACT]

Biedrība “Skalbes”

“Skalbes” Association

Kungu 34

LV-1050 - Riga - Latvia

tel. +371 67222922

fax +371 67214720

skalbes@skalbes.lv

www.skalbes.lv

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COUNTRY FACT SHEET

- **Population** 2008: 2261.3
- **Area** 64,589 sq. km.
- **Population density** 35
- **System of government** Democratic parliamentary republic
- **European elections** 2007¹: 9
- **Social security and welfare system**

State social insurance is one of the areas of social protection that partially compensates those contributing to social insurance for the loss of previous income upon retirement, unemployment, becoming disabled, losing a breadwinner, becoming ill, taking pre- and post-natal leave, suffering an accident or contracting an occupational illness. The Social Insurance Department works closely with the State Social Insurance Agency of the Ministry of Welfare that administers the special social insurance budget and grants social insurance pensions, benefits and compensation and organises their payment. The procedure for the granting of social services and social assistance is prescribed by the Cabinet of Ministers and the local governments. Issues connected with granting and paying social insurance compensation are managed by the State Social Insurance Agency. The Social Services and Social Assistance Act stipulates the principles for receiving and providing social work, social care and social rehabilitation services, the range of people eligible for these services and assistance, as well as the principles of contributions and funding. All citizens of Latvia, non-citizens and foreigners who have been issued a personal identification code – except for persons carrying a temporary residence permit – are entitled to receive social services and social assistance.²

- **Public health system**

Healthcare services are provided by the state, municipal and private medical institutions in Latvia. Patients can receive reimburse-

ments for healthcare services only in those medical institutions that have signed an agreement with the Health Compulsory Insurance State Agency. Primary healthcare is an aggregate of healthcare services offered by primary healthcare providers in outpatient institutions, outpatient departments of the hospitals or at the patient's residence. A patient can receive primary health care services by going to a family doctor, dentist or hygienist, or, as part of a preventive examination programme, upon the request of a family doctor. When receiving healthcare services in Latvia, a patient has to make a patient contribution, which is a substantial amount of money, especially for socially vulnerable groups. Furthermore, access to healthcare is based on residency, being it permanent or temporary.³

- **Level of education**
 - 20-24 years old who have completed secondary schooling 2007: 80.2%
 - 25-64 years old who have completed secondary schooling 2007: 85%
 - Percentage of population who completed higher education (total - male - female) 2008: 25.5% - 19.0% - 32.2%
- **Immigration rate** 2008: 0.16%
- **Growth rate** 2008: 0.629%
- **Employment rate**
 - 15-64 years old (2008) (total - male - female) 69.0% - 72.9% - 65.4%
 - 55-64 years old (2008) (total) 17.8%
- **Unemployment rate**
 - (2007) 7.3%
 - (2009) 12.3%
 - 15-64 years old (total - male - female) 6.0% - 5.9% - 6.1%
- **Exchange rate (Infoeuro 2009)** 1 Euro = 0.7035 LVL

¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_the_European_Union

²EURES The European Job Mobility Portal <http://europa.eu.int/eures>

³Ministry of Health, www.vm.gov.lv

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Glossary

The following sources were used for defining the essential terms regarding volunteering in Latvia:

Dimanta R., Indriksons M., 2007; AVSO 2003; The Associations and Foundations Act.

1 DEFINITIONS

1.1 VOLUNTEER

A volunteer is a person who donates his/her time and skills to help others without being paid. Everybody who wants to use his/her abilities and experience, develop his/her field of interest, get new experience in new fields, impact society's life and be involved can become a volunteer.

1.2 VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY

According to the Associations and Foundations Act, volunteering is a service free of charge performed by a physical person not employed by an association or foundation, who contributes to the goals and objectives defined in the statutes of the organisation.

As underlined by the *AVSO Report on the Legal Status of Volunteering in Latvia*, volunteering is defined as an activity occurring informally (for example, between neighbours) or within a not for profit organisation or other entity. It is often (but not always) of a part time nature, taking place over one day or many years in a range of different fields. It is good practice in Latvia to ensure that formal volunteers are covered by appropriate accident, health-care and third party liability insurance, that they receive appropriate training and management, as well as the reimbursement of all out-of-pocket expenses.

1.3 VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION

Voluntary organisations refer to organisations whose members are volunteers or which organise volunteer work for public benefit purposes.

1.4 VOLUNTEER SUPPORT CENTRE

Volunteer support centres are not defined by the Latvian law. The concept is used in theoretical materials on volunteering. Therefore, it refers to an organisation that serves as an information and methodology centre for voluntary organisations and volunteers.

2 VOLUNTEERS ON VOLUNTEERING (INTERVIEWS)

In the Latvian context, where relationship and help from the state is still rather formal and sometimes even impossible, volunteering consists in making society and services much closer to the citizens. In fact, volunteering is perceived by people active in the field as a donation of time and skills for important social goals.

“People receive help much better from the associations than if it were organised by the state, because everything that is connected with the state is formal. While NGOs put no barriers and citizens have more trust in them.”

“The type of volunteering present in Latvia is much different than, for example, the one present in Germany. Let’s take a concrete example: if the roof of the school is damaged and water comes in, what do people in Germany do? They create an organisation, write letters to the ministry, and complain to the president whomever. The president might say that they don’t have money and that is the ministry who is responsible for this or that someone else is responsible. Within two years, they make a big party for fundraising or whatever, so in two or three years they will have managed to repair the roof. What do peo-

ple in Latvia do? Everybody knows that the state doesn’t have money, therefore, the director or the teacher says: ‘Hey kids, is there any of your parents who can help with materials, is there anyone who might help with repairing it?’ and they just get on with it. It is not fixed anywhere that there should be an organisation to be founded for the repairing, no large amounts of money raised, but the job has been done on a volunteer basis. This type of volunteering is more direct. Because we in Latvia know that the state cannot afford or doesn’t have the money or doesn’t give it, therefore, the need for self regulation is greater and people just solve the problems somehow. Volunteering means that the idea is more important than the money.”

Furthermore, volunteering is considered a way of connecting people and of preventing isolation in contemporary society. One example supporting this definition is represented by the women clubs, popular especially in the countryside.

“Volunteers give their work without being paid for it. On the other hand, they get much: new experience, information, friends, etc.”

Nevertheless, volunteering in Latvia is not always valued as a prestigious way of donating someone’s time or knowledge; it is still believed that voluntary work means some physical work in hospital or monetary donation. Not many people recognise that voluntary work can be part of a career path or relevant for acquiring new skills and knowledge.

“In Latvia, voluntary work is often not seen as prestigious; if abroad it is seen as part of a career, in Latvia this point of view it’s just starting to develop.”

Historical overview

The historical overview of the volunteering landscape in Latvia is based on:

Miezaine Z., Sīmane M., 2007; Šilde A., *Latvijas vēsture 1914–1940* (The History of Latvia 1914–1940), Stockholm, Daugava, 1976; Dimanta R., Indriksons M., 2007; *Rīgas Latviešu biedrība history*; Valpetere (see Internet Resources and Bibliography).

1 ROOTS: BEFORE 1900

There seems to be no studies in Latvia that analyse or give data on volunteering or the third sector during the 19th century. Traditionally, voluntary activities seem to have been a consequence of Latvians' religious values based on the concept of helping others in need and carrying on charity activities.

Literature and traditional songs relating to life in the countryside further express this concept. Many *talka* folk songs known today speak about countryside people that during harvest time or when other work had to be done used to gather voluntarily to help each other with tasks at events called *talka*. Furthermore, traditional literature describes that the duty of farmers was to take care of needy, elderly and ill people.

Some initial formal “third sector” organisations appeared in 1868, with the creation of the Latvian Help Society for Poor Estonians in Need in response to the crop failure of 1868. Later that year, the Riga Latvian Society was founded with the aim to “help and support poor people in need” and to spread “useful knowledge as well as honesty and peace and stimulate spiritual development of Latvians living here”. Spearheaded by the Riga Latvian Association, associations like people's theatres and choirs began to develop in urban areas.

2 THE BRIEF CENTURY: 1900 – 2000

2.1 FROM 1918 TO 1940

After the Republic of Latvia gained its independence on the 18th of November 1918, the civic activities of people continued to flourish. Laws that guaranteed fundamental rights and freedom of association were passed in 1923 (Law on Associations, Unions and Political Organisations; Law on Freedom of Public Meetings). Ten years after the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia, there were 8,094 associations working in the following fields:

• Culture	2905
• Sports	342
• Social assistance	590
• Religion	104
• Cooperatives	2730
• Credit unions	721
• Trade unions	512
• Voluntary Fireman Associations	129
• National social life	
- Latvian	32
- German	15
- Jewish	9
- Russian	5

Many of the associations were on a national scale, having local branches. For example, the Society for Promotion of Culture had 200 local chapters. The Latvian Women's Organisation Council was founded in 1925 comprising many women organisations. The most popular social assistance organisation was The Red Cross, founded on the 20th November 1918. By 1934, it had 51 divisions, 58 health promotion centres, 10 hospitals, 4 sanatoriums, 128 ambulances, 4 pharmacies. The Red Cross organised youth associations and was active in international Red Cross networks.

Most organisations worked on a voluntary basis to promote their ideas.

2.2 FROM 1940 TO 1989

Traditional civil society and voluntary work initiatives were interrupted during World War II and subsequent Soviet occupation of the country. The farms were nationalised, wealthy farmers were exiled to Siberia and collective farming was introduced.

The church and other religious organisations were suspended during these years and people who openly demonstrated their religious beliefs were prosecuted and repressed by the government.

Most pre-war civil society institutions were prohibited and ceased to exist or went underground. Many of the most active civil society representatives emigrated and continued to organise the social life of Latvians abroad.

During the Soviet occupation the main NGOs allowed were *Komsomol* (for youth 15+), the Young Pioneers (10-14 year olds) and October's Children (7-9 year olds). The Communist Party controlled these organisations as well as sports clubs, choirs and theatres affiliated to large enterprises and collective farms. New systems of "voluntary work" were introduced. People "volunteered" for social work, public security, as well as areas such as sports, tourism, environment protection, cultural heritage and arts. The Young Pioneers encouraged schoolchildren to take care of elderly people, by helping them with shopping, "crossing the street" etc.

Komsomol organised students and workers to undertake security raids on streets (called *druzhinniki*). Sport clubs of enterprises organised tourism events, where people used to volunteer as managers of tourist groups. Assistance to museums and nature parks was organised, too. Volunteers acted in amateur theatre productions and participated in song and dance festivals. Nevertheless, these activities were strictly controlled by the authorities to avoid freedom of expression and criticising the system.

2.3 FROM 1989 TO 2000

Changes in attitudes of the Soviet government during the Gorbachev era led to a more liberal approach towards civic engagement. The Latvian Environment Protection Club, established in the late 80's, was an environmental movement that attracted large numbers of volunteers. Shortly thereafter, the Latvian National Independence Movement and other active social organisations were established that later evolved into political parties. A dearth of organisations was renewed from the pre-Soviet period, from Boy Scouts to fraternities. The Latvian Popular Front, established in 1988, was at the forefront of the transition to a democratic society, organising such voluntary events as

protection of the centre of the capital city of Riga during the barricades period in winter 1991.

3 WHERE WE STAND: 2001 - 2008

After Latvia had regained its independence, Christian traditions of volunteering were renewed for the benefit of members of the congregations and people in need. Nonetheless, only 10.2% of Latvia's inhabitants say that they belong to a church or other religious organisation (2007).

An organised volunteer movement was developed to a large extent as the result of programmes established with foreign assistance in the late 1990's. One of the first volunteer initiatives was the programme "Friend to Friend" in the city of Liepaja in 1998, which encouraged schoolchildren to volunteer as "friends" to younger schoolmates from socially vulnerable families. The programme was implemented and supervised by US Peace Corps volunteers.

However, despite the programmes established with foreign assistance, according to the Euro barometer statistics, in Latvia formal volunteering activity lacks behind Western countries. For instance, in Latvia volunteering activity in organisations ranges from 15% to 20% compared to 51%⁴ in Austria. However, the gap is filled in by informal volunteering activities which are much more developed in Latvia than in other countries (mainly Western countries), as explained in a study on civic virtues and volunteering in Europe that shows higher values of informal volunteer activities in Latvia, compared to other countries: 70% in Latvia⁵ compared to 25% in Hungary or Portugal.⁶

⁴2004 data.

⁵People were asked to declare how often they had actively provided help to other people in need, excluding activities within families, work or voluntary organisations.

⁶Dekker P., *Civic Virtues and Volunteering in Europe*, Paper for the 2008 Conference on Contemporary European Perspectives on Volunteering, page 8.

4 VOLUNTEERING NOW (INTERVIEWS)

The volunteering situation nowadays is twofold. On the one hand, some organisations that were founded on a volunteer basis have grown into serious service providers working with projects and auto-financing themselves. On the other hand, interviewed representatives of the voluntary sector sustain that the volunteer system in Latvia is still rather weak and many organisations lack financial resources for organising and coordinating volunteer work. This aspect is further accentuated by the economic crisis that hit Latvia this year.

"People are responding and willing to participate. The problem is to make it professional enough. Frequently, the involvement fails due to bad organisation. We cannot ask people to volunteer if we do not provide them with the essentials."

"People want to volunteer, but some organisations are not ready to welcome them, due to the lack of resources and knowledge on how to do so. Organisations need administrative and financial resources, which now they are short of. If an organisation lacks such resources then a volunteer is more a bother than else."

The current state of the volunteer sector in Latvia is influenced also by the 2009 economic crisis. In a context where unemployment levels are much higher than in previous years and the state budget has collapsed, there are a lot of organisations that are close to bankruptcy.

"Now when there is an economical crisis, the state budget has collapsed and a lot of people are unemployed, it is hard to say what it will imply for the voluntary movement. In any case, there will be no support from the government. Furthermore, many NGOs in the

country are close to bankruptcy. However, we will continue our work even if our organisation is closed. Of course, it will be more difficult due to the lack of resources for organising the volunteers' work."

The current role of volunteering in the Latvian society seems to be connected to the incapacity of local/regional/national authorities of providing adequate or necessary services, especially in the social field. Therefore, volunteering seems to intervene to complement or to supply interventions designed by the public sector.

"There are many 'holes', unsatisfied basic needs, in the Latvian social care and health system. The most common volunteers' tasks see to be filling in gaps and mending the incomplete state system. If the state or municipality does not complete its duty, people organise themselves and volunteer to improve their lives."

As to people's participation to the volunteering sector, although there is no precise data on dynamics of involvement in voluntary activities, interviewed representatives underlie that the situation in this field has improved in the last years. More and more people, especially youngsters, have been getting involved in voluntary work in Latvia (for example, short term involvement during the NATO summit gathered 4 times more people who wanted to volunteer than was necessary) and also abroad. Important volunteer work opportunities abroad are available now, since Latvian NGOs have been involved in international networks. Furthermore, Internet resources offer volunteering opportunities in various Christian organisations, for instance.

Furthermore, in the youngsters' case, voluntary work experience has started to become an important item on a person's CV, especially for those who are looking for a job abroad. In 2007, a survey on volunteering habits showed that 24.3% of those surveyed responded that they had served as volunteers during the past year.

However, despite the lately increasing participation to volunteer

organisations, interviewed people emphasised that Latvia still lacks behind other European countries. Nevertheless, representatives explain that in Latvia formal volunteering (in organisations) is completed by informal one. People continue to help each other on an informal basis (namely not in organisations), for instance, taking care of the elderly in their communities, assisting local schools (e.g. repairing the classrooms during summer holidays), cooperating in bringing children to school, etc.

"If we look at the statistics, Latvia shows rather lower rates regarding volunteering comparing to western countries. On the other hand, we can recognise many activities done by volunteers without calling them volunteering and this means that real participation to volunteering activities is rather high."

However, all interviewed representatives of the Latvian volunteer sector agree to the fact that the role of volunteering should not be that of tapping the holes of the central or local government activities. Instead, its work should complement and strengthen public interventions and help the public authorities to better define public policies. In this way, volunteering could enhance active citizenship.

"The role of volunteering in a developed society is very important. People have to understand that for civil society to influence socio-political processes they not only have to pay taxes, but also contribute to country progress through their voluntary work and activity. Not only taxes and elections are important, but also engaging and participating. The civic society must be activated and this can be done only by volunteer organisations."

Furthermore, interviewed representatives underlined that, for this to happen, the volunteer sector should be better organised.

"Volunteering should be easy to access. Everybody who wants to volunteer should have fair chances to do it. There should be a coaching programme for volunteers and databases in the country."

Legal framework

1 OVERVIEW OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS

VOLUNTEERING ACROSS EUROPE

There are no legal obstacles to freedom of association in Latvia. The voluntary or not for profit sector is regulated by The Associations and Foundations Act (2003) and The Law on Public Benefit Organisations (2003). Both laws are in force since 2004.

The legal environment for non-governmental organisations can be considered favourable since it does not put an undue administrative burden on the NGOs. The legal framework is advanced, corresponding to the latest tendencies in the regulation of the not for profit sector in Central and Eastern Europe. The registration process takes two weeks and is relatively inexpensive (12 EUR). Documents can also be mailed to the Register of Enterprises. The law does not allow the State to interfere in an organisation's internal affairs.

1.1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

During the period of Soviet occupation, there was no freedom of association in the territory of the Republic of Latvia. The Law on Public Organisations and their Associations was passed in 1992 to serve the needs of the newly independent republic. At the turn of the century, it became clear that the law was outdated for many reasons:

- It did not provide for the establishment of foundations.
- It allowed only a minimum of 10 people to establish an organisation.
- Political parties were regulated by the same law as associations.
- There was no system (and criteria) for differentiating between public benefit organisations that deserve tax deductions and other support from the government and other types of organisations.

In 2003, two new laws, The Associations and Foundations Act and the Law on Public Benefit Organisations, were passed to fix these shortcomings.⁷

⁷Sources: AVSO 2003; expert interviews.

1.2 NORMS SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERING

The Associations and Foundations Act defines volunteering as “gratuity work or service performed by a physical person not employed by an association or foundation”.⁸ 71% of the NGOs involving volunteers surveyed in 2007 sustain that the legal environment for involving volunteers is unclear since there is no law that specifically regulates volunteering. Nonetheless, in most cases respondents do not regard this as a serious obstacle for successful cooperation with volunteers.

Although volunteer work is defined only in relation to associations and foundations, there is no prohibition against volunteering in other types of organisations, for instance, hospitals, government and local government institutions, schools and even private companies (e.g. PR agencies), which actually do involve volunteers in their projects.

However, several issues related to volunteer work are not addressed by the legislation:

- Volunteering is not defined in organisations other than associations and foundations, for instance, hospitals, local governments, schools. Therefore, reimbursement of expenses and other financial support provided to volunteers is not regulated. Other laws - labour, tax and social security laws - can be interpreted in a way that organisations should pay volunteers at least minimum wages, including taxes. This causes grievances between the authorities and volunteer organisations, as well as raises a risk of illegal employment.
- Social protection of volunteers is not regulated by law. There is no legal basis to provide volunteers with insurance and entitlement to public health and social protection. This might cause problems for foreign volunteers who must obtain residence permits in order to receive the minimum health care services and

for Latvian citizens volunteering abroad who lose their rights to unemployment benefits in Latvia.

- Since there are no specific provisions regarding volunteers in legislation concerning immigration, volunteers from abroad are subject to general legislation.⁹

2 PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC POLICY MAKING

This chapter is based on the following sources:

- Internet resources
 - Website of the Civic Alliance – Latvia**
www.nvo.lv/index.php?lang=en
 - Rules of Procedure of Cabinet of Ministers and Constitution**
www.mk.gov.lv/en/valsts-parvaldes-politika/institucionala-sistema/
 - Rules of Procedure of the Parliament (*Saeima*)**
www.saeima.lv/index_eng.html
- Expert interviews as reported below.

The Constitution (*Satversme*) ensures the right of association and freedom of speech.

Rules of Procedure of the Parliament (*Saeimas krtbas rullis*) allow parliament committees to invite experts to the meetings.

Co-operation with the *Saeima* (parliament) is ensured by The Declaration on Development of Civil Society in Latvia and Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations, adopted in 2006. Two NGOs - parliament forums have been held so far.

Rules of Procedure of the Cabinet of Ministers (*MK Krtbas rullis*) regulate the participation of NGOs to the meetings of the state

⁸Sources: AVSO 2003.

⁹Sources: AVSO 2003; Dimanta R., Indriksons M., 2007; expert interviews.

secretaries (the highest administrative level for civil servants). Before the weekly meetings, NGOs may receive information concerning the draft legislation to be adopted and apply for providing expertise. The regulation foresees that the opinions of other ministries and NGOs have equal weight in the decision making process. Ministries can invite NGOs to join the working groups to draft legislation and policy documents. The rules also allow NGOs to submit draft legislation for approval at the Cabinet of Ministers via the minister or the state secretary responsible for the relevant area of activity.

Cooperation between the public administration and NGOs and their involvement in the decision making process is regulated by the Cooperation Memorandum between Non-governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers, signed by NGOs and the Cabinet of Ministers in 2005. Cooperation is supervised by a Council for Implementation of the Cooperation Memorandum between Non-governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers, consisting of NGOs and representatives of state institutions. The objective of the Memorandum is to put in place a system where the public administration and the civil society confront each other and that facilitates the involvement of the civil society organisations in the decision making process at all levels of the administration. The Memorandum foresees some mechanisms that contribute to easing the participation of NGOs to the decision making process by ensuring that:

- Opinions provided by NGOs are reflected in protocols of coordination of issues.
- Representatives of interested NGOs can participate in coordination sittings, advisory councils and working groups established for developing particular projects.
- NGOs are informed on decisions adopted in relation to proposals submitted by them; substantiation for the adopted decisions is provided.
- NGOs have the opportunity to follow the development of draft legal acts and give opinions on them; NGOs are better informed

on the course of processing of draft legal acts and policy planning documents in the Cabinet and Ministries.¹⁰

There is no common document specifically regulating relations between NGOs and the local governments. However, many local governments have signed cooperation agreements with NGOs (e.g. Riga) and are successfully collaborating with them to pursue goals in such areas as social assistance, sports, culture, environmental protection, etc.

3 FISCAL POLICIES

Associations, foundations, religious organisations and trade unions do not pay income tax. Associations, foundations and religious organisations that have received the status of public benefit organisation (PBO) enjoy various benefits. For instance, enterprises and private persons can deduct donations to PBOs from their income tax. Companies can donate up to 20% of their income tax and the government reimburses 85% of the donated amount. Physical persons can donate up to 20% of the amount of their income tax and the government reimburses 25% of the donated amount (from 2009 – 23%) to the individual. PBOs can also distribute scholarships and be exempt from paying real estate property tax. However, decisions regarding these latter aspects are made on a case by case basis by the Cabinet of Ministers once a year. Furthermore, the Cabinet of Ministers can also decide on renting its government real estate properties to PBOs on favourable conditions or even without fee.

4 ROLLS AND REGISTERS

Several national registers in Latvia relate to volunteer involving organisations.

- The Register of Enterprises: every association and foundation registers its statutes in order to obtain a legal status. The Register

¹⁰Cooperation Memorandum between the Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministries.

of Enterprises is an agency under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice.

- The Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) Register lists all the associations, foundations and religious organisations that acquired the public benefit organisation status. Public Benefit Commission annually approves a yearly activity report for each PBO. The Ministry of Finance is in charge of holding the register and instituting the above-mentioned commission.
- The Register of Organisations Providing Social Services lists organisations that have the right to provide social services. The organisations have to apply certain standards regarding personnel qualifications, resources and procedures in order to ensure quality services. The Ministry of Welfare holds the register.

Political parties and trade unions are registered in the Register of Enterprises. Religious organisations are registered in a register of the Ministry of Justice.

5 LIST OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Law on Public Organisations and their Associations, 1993.

Law on Prohibition of Misuse of the Financial Resources in Government and Local Governments, 1995.

Law on Real Estate Tax, 1997.

Labour Law, 2001.

Law on State Governance System, 2002.

Law on Procedures for Selling State and Local Government Property, 2002.

Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, 2002.

Associations and Foundations Act, 2003.

Law on Public Procurement, 2006.

Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers: Rules of Procedure of the Register of Social Services, 2005.

Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers: Rules of Procedure on Procurement on Amounts from 1000 to 10, 000 Lats, 2006.

Volunteers involving organisations

1 ORGANISATIONAL FORMS

VOLUNTEERING ACROSS EUROPE

The Associations and Foundations Act (2003)¹¹ which regulates the NGO sector provides for two types of voluntary organisations: associations and foundations.

According to the law, an Association is a voluntary group of persons, established to reach the goals set in its statute and which is not aimed at profit making.

A Foundation, also called a fund, is a property donated by the founder(s) to reach the goals set in its statutes, and which is not aimed at profit making.

Trade unions, religious organisations and political parties are also not for profit organisations. Although they can involve volunteers in their work, they are generally not considered as part of the NGO sector, because of their specific aims, and are regulated by other laws.

Both associations and foundations can acquire a public benefit status. This can be given to an NGO if its activities significantly benefit society or a segment of it, especially in the realms of

- Charity.
- Protection of human rights and the rights of an individual.
- Promotion of civil society.
- Promotion of education.
- Promotion of science.
- Promotion of culture.
- Promotion of health and prevention of diseases.
- Promotion of sports.
- Environmental protection.
- Assistance in accidents and extraordinary situations.
- Contribution to the social welfare of society through activities targeted at socially vulnerable groups.

Around 10% of all associations and foundations present in Latvia have become public benefit organisations.

Religious organisations are entitled to receive the public benefit status if they do social welfare work or if their

¹¹Law on Public Benefit Organisations; Law on Religious Organisations; The Associations and Foundations Act.

buildings are on the official list of historical buildings. Religious activities are not considered public benefit activities. Out of 1,130 congregations, 94 are public benefit organisations.

1.1 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

There are 3 types of organisations that can involve volunteers: associations, foundations and religious organisations.¹²

The main difference between an association and a foundation is membership. As described previously, an association is a group of people that strive for a common goal fixed in the association's statutes, while a foundation is a physical property separated for the goals enumerated in its statutes. Consequently, there are differences in the organisational structure of both.

Founders, together with other members form the membership of an association. The general assembly is the association's main decision-making body. It may delegate part of its powers to an elected advisory board (optional) and an executive board.

Founding members of a foundation are active only during the establishment of the foundation. After registration, they lose their influence in the foundation. There is no membership *per se* in a foundation. Foundation property is governed by the board, which is selected by the founder(s). The statutes describe the procedures of selection and rotation of the board members.

There are no differences between associations and foundations in their rights and obligations towards the state. They are entitled to the same registration procedures, accounting requirements and tax regulations. Public participation of both types of NGOs takes place on equal terms.

Religious organisations are officially registered congregations, religious associations (churches) and dioceses. Religion is separated from the state; therefore, religious organisations regulate themselves independently. Their obligation is to act in accordance with the Constitution (*Satversme*) and the Law of the Republic of Latvia. Religious organisations can undertake economic activities, own properties, establish educational and other institutions, etc.

2 RULES AND FUNCTIONING

The basic law governing the NGOs is The Associations and Foundations Act (2003).¹³ The Act contains a set of provisions governing the internal organisation of NGOs. Most of these provisions contain the stipulation "insofar as the statutes of the NGO do not provide otherwise" or minimum rules allowing NGOs to put stricter requirements in their statutes.

The minimum number of persons required to establish an NGO is two. An NGO is free to set up other governing bodies in its statutes and to establish its own internal organisational structure. In the specific case of associations, there are two governing bodies: a general assembly of members and an executive board, both of which may comprise one or several members. If there are two or more members in the executive board, a president must be elected. The general rule is that the president is elected by the general assembly, but, if the statutes provide otherwise, he/she can be elected by the executive board itself or even by any other supervisory body. There is no requirement for a periodical convocation of the general assembly. According to Section 36, the latter must convene as required by the statutes of the respective NGO. However, if at least 1/10 of the members request a general meeting, it must be held as soon as possible.

¹²Sources: Law on Religious Organisations; the Associations and Foundations Act.

¹³Source: The Associations and Foundations Act.

If the executive board does not carry out this task, then members are entitled to organise the general assembly themselves. In any case, the minimum quorum for a valid general assembly is “more than one half” of all the members. Other provisions of the Act, however, allow the members to appoint delegates to attend on their behalf. Members or their delegates have to meet at least once a year to approve the Annual Report.

Furthermore, no permanent auditor or board of auditors is required. The executive board alone may carry out the auditor’s duties.

Whenever an NGO is created, its statutes have to be registered to the NGO Register of the Register of Enterprises in order to become a legal entity. If the public notary finds that the statutes do not correspond to the requirements of the law, registration is postponed and a time-limit is set for the NGO to amend its statutes. If this is not done, the registrar can refuse to register the NGO. Such a decision may be appealed to the administrative court according to the general provisions on administrative procedure.

The Register of Enterprises must be notified also if any amendments are brought to the statutes of NGOs.

Furthermore, the Act lists the situations when an NGO can be dissolved by a court order. This happens only in cases when the activities of the NGO are contrary to the Constitution or the law. Two authorities are entitled to apply to a court for such dissolution: a public prosecutor or the local tax administration. In order to lodge such an application, these authorities are required first to issue a warning to the NGO concerned, and, only if the latter does not comply with it, they may proceed with the dissolution procedure. Even the court itself is not necessarily obliged to dissolve the NGO immediately: after having analysed the nature and the degree of the irregularity, as well as the activities of the NGO in question, the court may also limit itself to issuing a formal warning.

3 RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC SECTOR

3.1 OVERVIEW

The relationships between the public sector and NGOs have evolved from mutual cautiousness towards an acceptance of various cooperation scenarios. Formally, from a legal point of view, the 2005 Cooperation Memorandum between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers regulates the relationship between the public administration and NGOs, as mentioned above. The relationship between NGOs and the public sector at national level is based on enhancing cooperation between the two systems and therefore putting into place mechanisms¹⁴ that facilitate NGOs’ participation to the decision making process. In accordance with regulations, all ministry websites should contain a section on public participation that lists the most active NGOs in the relevant field, issues and draft documents for discussions, and contact details of persons responsible for cooperation with NGOs.

3.2 FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW (INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES)

Despite the formal mechanisms put in place by the central government to enforce cooperation between NGOs (including volunteer organisations), questioned organisations and interviewed representatives of the voluntary sector sustain that the partnership between the public sector and the voluntary organisations strictly and NGOs in general is still rather weak.

This seems to be due, on one hand, to the authorities’ feeble actual interest in involving NGOs (including volunteer organisations) in the decision making process, on the other hand, to the organisations’

¹⁴See Legal Framework, chapter 2.

capacity of using the formal mechanisms not only for ensuring their participation to the decision making process but also for influencing the final decision.

“Our organisation is always asked to give its opinion on state policy documents and to participate in working groups, because the state cannot pass any legislation without consultation with the target group whose interests are touched by legislation. The problem is that, usually, at the end of the decision process, the legislative document can change a great deal, disregarding the initial proposals of NGOs. Another problem is that in legislative documents everything might look right, but when we come to real life, it looks much different.”

“Government bodies sometimes take into account NGO proposals. The exception is when these interfere with the economic interests of the political party sponsors or when they require additional financial resources.”

However, even though nowadays relationship between volunteer organisations in particular and NGOs in general is still viewed as weak, looking back at the Latvian history in the communist period, some representatives of the volunteer sector considered that state – third sector partnership is in course of development.

“Relationship between volunteer involving organisations and the public sector is still in a development process. There are some good examples about public institutions involving volunteer organisations in the decision-making process. However, often the public sector doesn’t acknowledge what benefits can be gained by involving volunteers.”

Data collected from interviews with representatives of the volunteer sector and questionnaires to volunteering organisations show that relationship between the public sector and the third sector, in particular volunteering, is denser when it comes to certain sectors such as youth policies.

“I see positive co-operation forms; governmental institutions are interested in developing voluntary work, but they focus more on youth organisations, ignoring other important target groups, i.e. elderly people.”

When referring to the relationship between the public sector and the volunteer organisations at local level, this differs from one city to another. There are local institutions that have designated one person to liaise with the NGOs present on the territory. In some cases, public institutions acknowledged the benefits of involving NGOs (including volunteer organisations) in the decision making process, while, in other cases, there are disagreements when local government institutions are providing services that NGO can provide, e.g. social care. In the latter cases, local governments are keen on maintaining their financial resources and task under the justification of doing a better job.

As shown before, the relationship between the public sector and the third sector is still rather weak, despite some experiences of positive cooperation. Therefore, it seems that the participation or, better said, the influence of NGOs (including volunteer organisations) on the decision making process of public policies is still somehow reduced and the public sector should ensure a better involvement of NGOs in the definition of public policies.

“The voluntary sector can have a significant contribution to developing new ideas and strategies as usually voluntary organisations are more flexible. Furthermore, cross-border projects give voluntary organisations remarkable amount of experience that can be used. Therefore, they should be more involved in the definition of public policies.”

“NGOs are most active in presenting the public opinion as they are daily in touch with the needs of different society groups. That is why active participation in policymaking is so important.”

Data overview

1 RESEARCH AND STATISTICS HIGHLIGHTS

VOLUNTEERING ACROSS EUROPE

As reported below, in Latvia research on volunteering as an independent sector is not so developed. However, there are some studies on the non-governmental sector in general. The most important studies and books for understanding the volunteering sector in Latvia and the general framework for the non-governmental sector are presented below.

1.1 Books

Curika L., *Valsts finansējum nevalstiskajām organizācijām* (Government Funding for Non-Governmental Organisations), Civic Alliance - Latvia, Riga, 2007.

The study compiles all the available information about Government and Parliament funding to NGOs and the ways in which these funds are released to NGOs. The author concludes that sometimes there are no criteria for the release of funds and that there is no systematic and equal approach of the institutions. Sometimes political and personal sympathies are the basis for deciding the NGO to be financed.

Karlsberga A., *Tiesiskais regulējums pašvaldību iespējām atbalstīt nevalstiskās organizācijas* (Legal Regulations on Local Government Options in Supporting NGOs), IUMSILS, 2008.

A study that describes legal solutions for various types of assistance that the Local Governments can offer to NGOs.

Miezaine Z., Simane M., *Cik demokrātiska ir Latvija, "Politiskā līdzdalība"* (How Democratic is Latvia, chapter: Political Involvement), Zinātne, 2007.

The chapter analyses changes in public participation, including some findings on voluntary work during 2005-2006.

Miezaine Z., *NVO Prakse ņemt maksu par pakalpojumiem* (Practices of NGOs Providing Services), IUMSILS, 2006.

The study discusses the legal aspects and practices of NGOs developing economic activities and providing services.

Miezaine Z., *Pāreja uz sociālo pakalpojumu tirgu* (The Transition to a Market for Social Services), IUMSILS, RSA, 2005.

The study gives an overview on practices concerning the procurement of social services from NGOs by local governments. Particular attention is given to NGOs that work on a voluntary basis and are not yet service providers. Local governments are encouraged to provide funding for these groups that serve the social needs of their members.

1.2 INTERNET RESOURCES

Dimanta R., Indriksons M., *Kā trūkst Brīvprātīgo kustības izaugsmei Latvijā*, (What is Missing for the Advancement of the Volunteer Movement in Latvia), NVO Institūts, Rīga, 2007.

The research focuses on the proportion of volunteers involved by NGOs and the reasons for the current situation. Based on expert interviews, the study concludes that only around 50% of NGOs (associations and foundations) involve volunteers.
www.integracija.gov.lv/doc_upl/Petijums_brivpratigie.pdf

Indriksons M., *Rokasgrāmata sabiedriskā labuma organizācijām* (Manual for Public Benefit Organisations), NVO Institūts, Rīga, 2008.

A practical advice book on legal rights and obligations of Public Benefit Organisations, containing an analysis of cases; comparative tables on regulations for the various types of organisations; statistics on donations; relevant laws and regulations.
www.nvoinstitutus.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/SLO_rokasgramata_208.pdf

Indriksons M., *Brīvprātīgo darbības metodika* (Methodology of Work with Volunteers), NVO Institūts, Rīga, 2007.

A very practical advice book for NGOs, containing examples of job descriptions, information on how to motivate volunteers, sample code of ethics etc.

www.integracija.gov.lv/doc_upl/Brivpratigo_metodika.pdf

Miezaine Z., *Public Administration and Non-Governmental Organisations - Opportunities for Cooperation*, PROVIDUS, 2004.

www2.politika.lv/en/index.php?id=15950

NGO Sustainability Index 2007, USAID, 2008.

The Index gives an overview on the developments in the NGO sector on a yearly basis. Conclusions are drawn from an expert panel discussion.

www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoin dex/2007/latvia.pdf

2 ECONOMIC AND STATISTICAL INDICATORS

Statistical information about the economic relevance of the not for profit sector is not collected in a systematic way. There have been various attempts from both NGOs and the Secretariat of the Special Assignment Minister for Social Integration (2001-2008) to introduce a system of data gathering. However, insufficient political motivation and funding have obstructed its introduction.

Only a few indicators can be indirectly derived from the figures available at the State Revenue Service. For example, since the total amount of social taxes paid in 2007 is 1,377,382,000 LVL, and NGOs (including trade unions) have paid LVL 6,278,193, one can deduce that the third sector employs 0.45% of the contributors to the social budget in 2007.

NGOs have paid 3,111,373 LVL in other taxes (such as income tax and real estate tax) in 2007.

2.1 TYPES AND RANGE OF NOT FOR PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

The Register of Enterprises offers the following information about the quantity and types of NGOs (02.2009):

• Associations	9113
• Foundations	661
• Public organisations	213 (in liquidation process) ¹⁵
• Trade unions	159
• Open public funds	73 (in liquidation process)
• Public sports organisations	60 (in liquidation process)
• Political parties	42 (to be moved to new register of Political Parties)
• Political organisations	18 (in liquidation process)
• Professional associations	4 (in liquidation process)
• Associations of political parties	3
• Association of sports organisations	1 (in liquidation process)

(Source: Ministry of Justice www.tm.gov.lv; The Register of Enterprises www.lursoft.lv)

In addition, there are 98 religious organisations registered at the Ministry of Justice including approximately 1,130 congregations.

2.2 FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Financial resources¹⁶

Before joining the EU, there were various donors supporting civil society development, funding small projects of NGOs and interest groups. There were also programmes supporting the administrative expenses of NGOs, for instance, a joint 3 year NGO support programme funded by UNDP Latvia and Soros Foundation-Latvia distributed around 3,000,000 USD between 1998-2001. The Baltic-American Partnership Fund was established in 1998 by the United States Agency for International Development and the Open Society Institute (The Soros Foundation) as a public-private partnership. Each founder

provided 7.5 million USD to the BAPF, which was spent over ten years. Embassies of EU member states, the US and Canada also supported various NGO initiatives. NGOs also received small grants from the World Bank. The largest donors who supported civil society development left Latvia after it had joined the EU, as it was considered that Latvia was ready to become a donor state itself. Although there are some local funds available, resources are very limited for advocacy organisations, especially for those who work on human rights protection, anti-corruption, civil society and community development, development cooperation, gender equality and consumer rights protection. Private donors, both enterprises and citizens, concentrate their support to organisations working in the fields of sports, children, and culture. Therefore, many organisations, especially in the advocacy field, run into financial difficulties.

However, in the last years there has been some progress in the funding provided by local authorities. The Ministry of Finance has estimated that 15 million LVL were provided to NGOs in 2005 by the national government. NGOs report that they have received 20 million LVL from the government and local governments in 2005, so local governments may have contributed with almost 5 million LVL to NGOs.

Experts estimate that local government support has increased but it does not cover the excess costs created by Latvia's high inflation. Several local governments (e.g. *Jekabpils*, *Jelgava*, *Liepāja*, *Aluksne*) have developed systems that allow for the co-financing of NGO projects. Sometimes, local governments help to cover some administrative costs of local organisations, such as heating and electricity, transport and office rental. For example, the local NGO Support Centre in the *Alksne* region cooperates with the local government. They have concluded a cooperation agreement that provides the NGO Support Centre with premises for the implementation of projects which are of interest to the local government, such as education programmes for

¹⁵Organisations in liquidation processes are still in the register, but are not active.

¹⁶Sources: Register of Public Benefit Organisations, Ministry of Finance www.fm.gov.lv; *Tirgus un sabiedriskās domas pētījumu centrs SKDS, 2007 gada jūlijs (primārie dati)*; *Tirgus un sabiedriskās domas pētījumu centrs SKDS, Sabiedrības integrācijas aktuālākie aspekti, 2006. gada marts – maijs; Valsts ieņēmumu dienesta dati uz, 1.07.2006; Miežaine Z., 2006; NGO Sustainability Index 2007.*

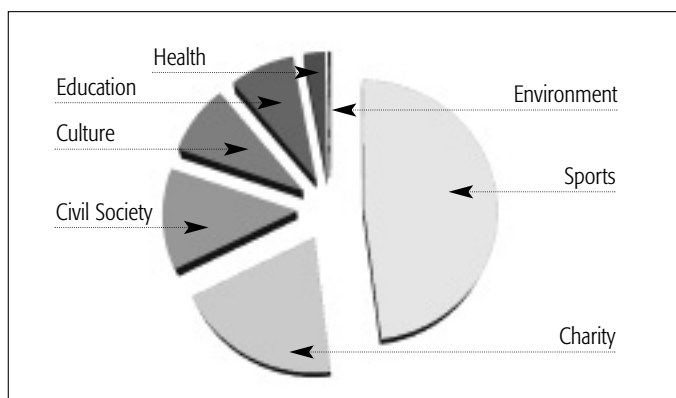
youth, after-school activities for school children, work with children from socially vulnerable families. Furthermore, local governments also offers small administrative grants to local NGOs that work with social-vulnerable groups, e.g. people with special needs.

However, a study conducted by the Civic Alliance - Latvia shows that there is no clear system or criteria for releasing governmental funds to NGOs.

As to private donations, funding grew from 14 million LVL in 2000 to 63 million LVL in 2007. Local enterprises, banks and corporate foundations donate to various events primarily in the fields of sports, culture, and charity. Individuals also actively donate to organisations working with children, people with special needs, and talented children who lack financial resources for their studies.

The latest report of the Ministry of Finance shows that from 32,011,984 LVL donated to public benefit organisations (PBOs), 48% went to sports, 19.6% was given for charity and the welfare of social-vulnerable groups, 12.6% to human rights and civil society development organisations, 8.7% to culture, 8.1% to education and science, 2.7% to health care and prevention of diseases and 0.2% to environmental organisations.

Table 1 Proportion of private sector donations to PBO by field of activity



Source: see note 16.

Besides state funding and private donations, another form of financing used by NGOs is auto-financing. Therefore, organisations try to develop business services such as translation services, shops and coffee shops. The income of NGOs from providing services grew from 2,981,703 LVL in 2000 to 35,704,937 LVL in 2007.

Human resources

As explained before, there seems to be no national statistics on human resources in the volunteering sector. However, according to experts and interviewed representatives of the voluntary sector, it seems that formal volunteering (in organisations) level is still behind the one in other EU countries, although lately an increase has been registered, while informal volunteering (outside organisations; direct help) is quite advanced if compared to other EU countries.

Areas of activities

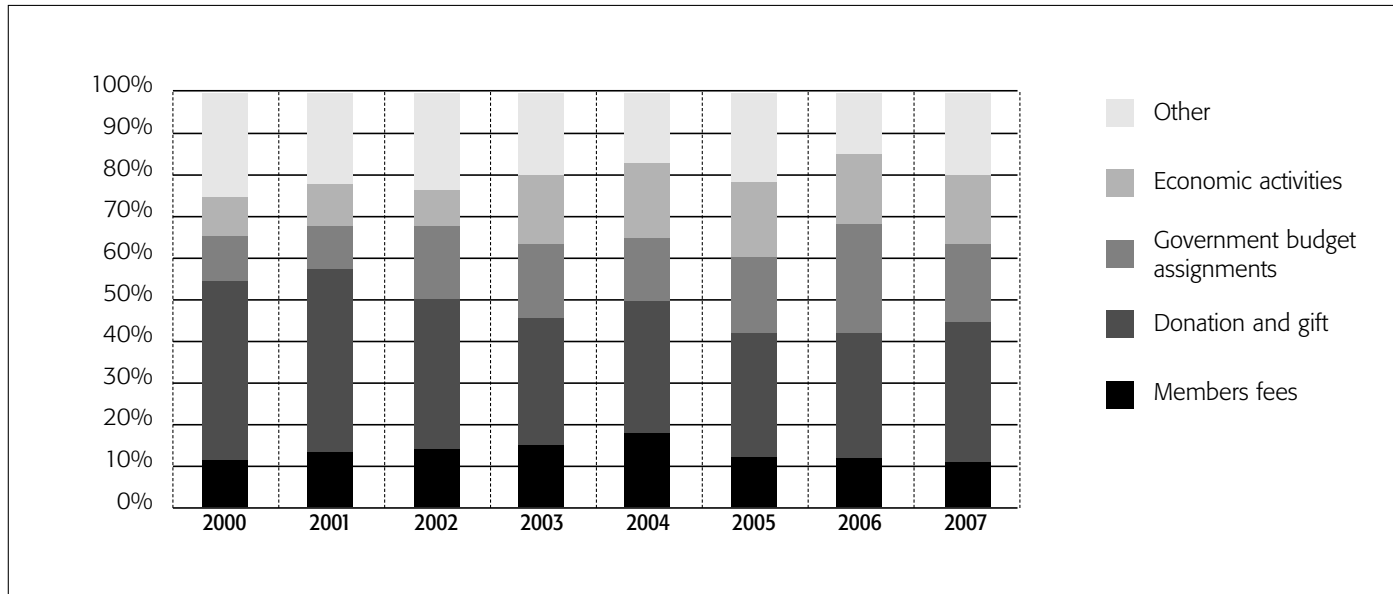
2007 data shows that the usual activities that volunteers perform in organisations involving volunteers are: assistance during public events, campaigns (69% of NGOs which employ volunteers), project activities (64%), everyday office activities (47%) and short term technical work (46%). 67% of the organisations surveyed in 2007 say they have long term cooperation forms with volunteers. Most of organisations involve volunteers once a week; while 10% involve volunteers only during special events.

2.3 FUNDING

Associations and foundations are allowed to receive funding¹⁷ from donations and gifts, members fees, economic activities (providing services), and other sources (e.g. participation in projects). The income structure of NGOs has not significantly changed over last years.

The table below illustrates the proportion of the various sources of income of associations, foundations and trade unions.

Table 2 Proportion of sources of income

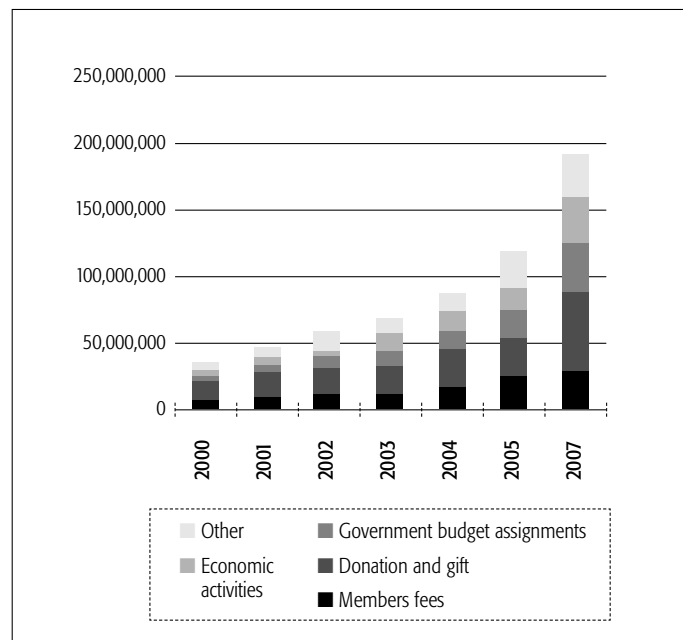


Sources: *NGO Sustainability Index 2007*; Miezaire Z., Simane M., 2007, 77-82.

Available statistics show a growth trend in all forms of funding. Annual income has steadily increased from 32.7 million LVL in 2000, to 194 million LVL in 2007. Statistics are expected to show significant deterioration of NGO income, especially from donations and the government budget in 2008 and 2009 due to the economic crisis.

The table below shows the changes in the amount of income by source of associations, foundations and trade unions between 2000 and 2007.

Table 3 Changes in the amount of income by source



Although it seems that financing of the sector is diversified, most NGOs depend on a single type of income source. (The sources vary among different fields of NGO activity, for instance, sports and culture and social assistance NGOs rely on donations, while human rights, anti corruption and gender equality NGOs mostly depend on projects funded by international donors).

NGOs are not asked to report on international funding, so this type of income is usually reported as “other” or “government budget assignments” (if the income comes, for example, from EU Structural Funds which are administrated by government institutions). The level of international funding of Latvian NGOs has undergone some structural changes related to Latvia’s accession to the EU. Most development assistance funding for the promotion of democracy and civil society ended in 2004. Organisations that relied on support from the Latvian Soros Foundation, UNDP, small grants from the embassies of the EU countries, US and Canada lost that support. New opportunities, EU programmes, presented some unfavourable conditions and high financial risks for NGOs. Pre-funding and co-funding conditions, as well as low amounts granted to some types of projects and heavy administrative burdens, excluded many NGOs from accessing these funding sources. Although in absolute figures, foreign funding available for NGOs is large, only few NGOs have the necessary resources to benefit from these opportunities. Many smaller NGOs had to reorient themselves to other sources of income such as commercial activities, donations and government funding.

NGOs can perform public utility service by providing services (subject to procurement principles) or by being delegated tasks. Delegation is however rarely practiced. EU and Latvian government funding has led to a slight improvement in NGO service provision in 2007. Both these funding sources support service provision. Nevertheless, in order to acquire necessary financial capital, NGOs tend to introduce fees for services to their constituencies and develop services for businesses and wealthy clients.

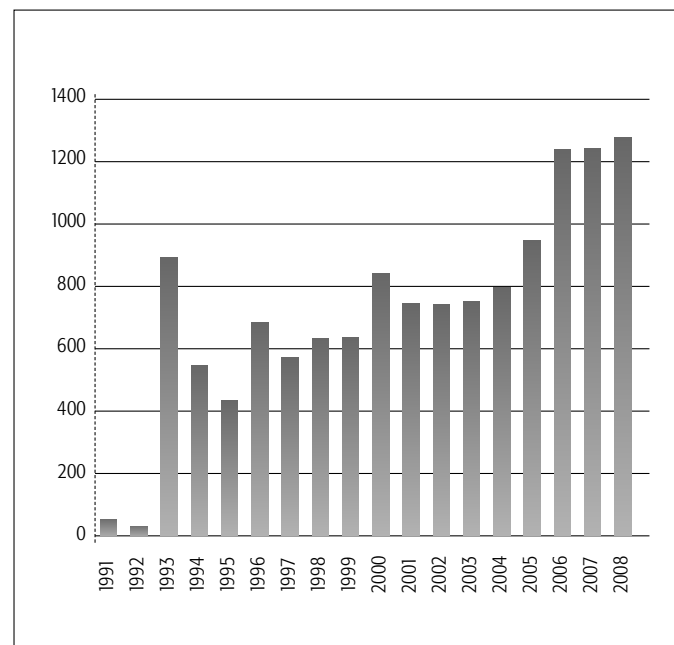
Although NGOs can freely compete with businesses for service

provision contracts, they are in a poorer position to recruit workers to deliver those services when compared to institutions established by the central and local government. For example, only those social workers who are employed by government institutions get their study credits repaid by the state. Local governments set prices for the services, not calculating the administrative costs of the bidding organisations. They also think NGOs should offer less expensive services because NGOs traditionally have access to foreign funding, donations and volunteer work.

2.4 GROWTH TRENDS

Statistics show that people establish around 1,000 new NGOs every year.¹⁸

Table 4 Number of newly established NGOs



The table illustrates the number of newly established NGOs (until 2003, including trade unions and political parties; after 2003, associations and foundations only).

There are no comparative surveys on the development of various aspects of voluntary work; therefore, it is difficult to demonstrate growth or decreasing trends.

However, 2007 data reveals that the involvement of volunteers is not very popular among NGOs. Only about 50% of them involve people in voluntary activities.

3 OF VOLUNTEERS AND ORGANISATIONS (INTERVIEWS)

3.1 MOTIVATIONS AND BARRIERS

According to interviewed representatives of the volunteering sector, the most common motivations for getting involved in volunteering activities seem to be values such as empathy, altruism, willingness to give and share with the others.

Interviewed representatives of the volunteering sector consider that another motivation relates to the opportunities offered by the volunteer sector with regards to accomplishing one's own passions or purposes. Furthermore, volunteering is also seen as a way of combating loneliness.

"There are winners on both sides in the 'giving and receiving' process of volunteering: belonging to a group, reducing loneliness, as well as learning from each other, are mutual processes."

"Volunteering is value based. It is a good way to share one's interests and to fulfil one's goals by working together with others. It gives people the possibility to use their energy, skills and knowledge to change something in society. This contributes to fulfilling individuals' needs."

"Volunteering is a possibility for self-realisation: one can fulfil those parts of one's personality and interests which otherwise could not be realised."

Another motivation refers to the importance of volunteering for

individuals' professional background. This is especially the case of youngsters or people wishing to work abroad.

"Although recognition of volunteering by the Latvian society is still at the beginning, more and more youngsters see it as a good item for their CV and as an additional advantage when applying for higher education institutions or jobs."

Despite good motivations for engaging in volunteering activities, interviewed representatives of the volunteering and other third sector organisations underline also a series of "barriers" that stop people from volunteering. Some of the most relevant relate, on the one hand, to the historical past of Latvia (Communism), on the other hand, to the actual economic situation.

Looking at tradition of volunteering in Latvia, it can be noticed that during the Soviet time "volunteering" was enforced from the top and was not a spontaneous gesture of people. Furthermore, Communism managed to impose a society characterised by lack of criticism, diversity and activism especially in the public sphere. People used to believe that nothing could be changed and that all should be the same. This, in volunteering representatives' opinion, has an enormous impact on Latvians' way of seeing volunteering, especially in the case of the "old" generations.

"When we are leading seminars in schools and ask kids active in schools what is the most difficult thing for them, they say that they don't get support from their peers, they are looked upon as strange for being active. There are still some old 'rudiments' inherited from the Soviet time. For instance, in Soviet times it was dangerous to be active; if somebody was a little bit more active, he/she was deemed dangerous for the Communist party. Therefore, in the families, everybody was more or less taught to be quiet, not to say too much, not to be too active; that was the lesson of the Soviet system and changing this mentality is a question of generations in Latvia. Another Soviet time 'rudiment' is the fact that people don't believe that they can change things in Latvia."

"In Soviet times volunteering was not effective and was forced from above. Sometimes volunteering continues to be seen like this."

Consequently, volunteering is not recognised as an added value and the level of civic consciousness is quite weak.

"One more problem is the attitude of society towards voluntary work: it's not considered very prestigious, and people who volunteer are very often ranked as 'strange'."

Another barrier has to do with the poorer living conditions of Latvians compared to their European peers. This means that people have to face harder financial conditions and more preoccupations related to daily life that prevent them from considering activities on a voluntary basis.

"There are so many things which are going wrong that people don't know where to start and, if they try to change something, it is such a hard job because of bureaucracy or whatever that a lot of them gets frustrated. And that is one of the main obstacles to being a volunteer – the entire system and the daily life are so 'strange' and time consuming – for example, to get children into a kindergarten is so difficult that in many cases people feel they should give a bribe to make things happen etc. These things make hard for people to find energy and motivations to become active on a voluntary basis."

"Usually, people have to work so hard to satisfy their basic needs and to support their families. When people are not paid that can be an obstacle for a long lasting activity. Furthermore, abroad, many retired people are active volunteers, while in our country, usually, they are too tired or too sick or many of them work even during retirement and therefore do not volunteer."

Besides culture and financial conditions, other obstacles that representatives of the volunteering sector raise is the lack of information on volunteering and the weak organisation of the volunteering sector. In fact, statistics show that only 54% of organisations have a person who is responsible for volunteer supervision, motivation etc, while only 50% of organisations cover costs for volunteers. Furthermore, 80% of organisations do not quantify volunteers' work which makes the introduction of a motivation system difficult.

"We have big problems with the organisations' system. A frequent mistake made is that volunteers are not offered any kind of

training. If a volunteer comes to volunteer, but spends time in vain without doing anything, he/she will not come anymore."

"There is no information about volunteering in general and volunteering opportunities in particular. There is no advertising about what volunteering is. If people had information, they would respond for sure. When we explain people what volunteering is about, many answer to the call."

3.2 NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Finding financial resources is one of the big challenges of the volunteering sector in Latvia. Another challenge directly connected to the lack of financial resources relates to attracting high qualified volunteers for jobs that are usually highly paid (lawyers, bookkeepers, people that create and manage complex projects, etc). Nowadays, most of the volunteers are low qualified. This means strengthening NGOs' capacities related to involving volunteers.

"In future we need to think about human resources and their quality. Very frequently, we see that NGOs are not very well prepared. There should be one or two persons in the organisation who are able to represent the organisation, and that is a problem. It is up to the organisation to think of human resources and how to develop them."

"One challenge would be to involve volunteers for highly qualified jobs, not just for low qualified ones, which is the more frequent case. This aspect could be more developed in the future. Resources for NGOs are very poor and, for example, bookkeepers or lawyers would be very helpful."

Another challenge is related to officially defining the term volunteering. As mentioned at the beginning of the report, in Latvia there is no such definition. Sometimes, people do not recognise that they do volunteer work and state that they do not volunteer (for instance, in some cases people participated, on voluntary basis, to school reparations, but they did not recognise it as volunteering). Therefore, interviewed representatives underlined that "branding" volunteering

should be a solution to this problem. This could contribute to increasing participation on the one hand and on the other to having real statistics on volunteering.

Lack of financial resources, especially for administrative expenses, was mentioned by interviewed representatives of the volunteering sector also as a need of their organisations. Furthermore, the lack of financial resources usually blocks organisations from continuing projects after official funding ends; this makes results very limited in time. Moreover, interviewed people agree on the fact that volunteers' involvement as a process would be more efficient and stronger if organisations involving volunteers had enough financial resources for managing the organisation and volunteering work.

Interviews to five different representatives of the volunteering sector show in fact that the most important difficulties for NGOs,

theirs included, are represented by the lack of money and highly qualified human resources. Lack of money and of highly qualified human resources necessary for strategic planning and organising volunteering as a process usually stops organisations from involving volunteers in their daily projects:

"Resources (money, space, human resources) necessary for the development of voluntary work are insufficient. Usually, it is hard to involve volunteers as we do not have the necessary resources."

"The greatest difficulties regard the financial management of the organisation."

"For instance in my organisation, one big problem is represented by the lack of financial resources necessary for managing the Youth in Action programme. Although we had 18 applications from volunteers wishing to come to Latvia, we have funding only for 3 of them. In order to have volunteers, we need money for organising volunteer work (phone costs, flats' rent, etc) and it is difficult to find."

Representation and coordination bodies

1 FEDERATIONS AND UMBRELLA ORGANISATIONS

VOLUNTEERING ACROSS EUROPE

There are no government funded consultation bodies for NGOs and volunteer organisations.

The most significant umbrella and support organisations serving the needs of their member organisations and other NGOs are:

Civic Alliance Latvia (CAL), an umbrella NGO headquartered in Riga, Latvia, which unites more than 92 non-governmental organisations and private members. The goal of the association is to improve the legal and financial environment for the non-governmental sector in Latvia and to strengthen NGOs' capacity for efficient public advocacy performance. Civic Alliance Latvia (CAL) defends the interests of the not for profit sector in Latvia, supports and fosters participation of NGOs in the decision making process and represents their interests in the relation with public authorities. CAL provides information about EU issues, legislation, funding, education, motivation and engagement and it offers legal and book-keeping advice. CAL is a member organisation of CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation and European Civic Forum. www.nvo.lv

NGO Institute, a programme of the philanthropy foundation Ziedot.lv, offers services, consultations, informational and methodological support to each interested NGO. It also offers volunteers opportunities to seek organisations, as well as organisations to seek volunteers. www.nvoinstitut.lv

The National Youth Council of Latvia (*Latvijas Jaunatnes Padome* - LJP), the umbrella organisation of 49 youth organisations in Latvia. Its mission is to improve the living conditions of young people and to represent the interests of youth organisations at the national and international level. Youth Council's member organisations join around 30,000 young people across Latvia. The National Youth Council of Latvia is one of the main youth policy leaders in the country. LJP provides information to the public and promotes civic participation of young people, encouraging them to engage themselves in youth organisations, non-formal education activities and shelters the youth organisations. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Youth_Council_of_Latvia

The Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organisations SUSTENTO was founded in 2002. At the moment, it has 23 national member organisations representing about 20,000 people with disabilities. It is a member organisation in the European Forum of People with Special Needs and in ECOSOC. www.sustento.lv

2 NETWORKING (INTERVIEWS)

As there is no single umbrella organisation of volunteers involving NGOs, interviewed representatives of the voluntary sector appreciate that it is confusing for state institutions or international organisations to understand which one is the “real” umbrella organisation in the country and who represents their interests at national level. This usually hinders working together for common goal and is recognised as an obstacle.

“It is a pity that in the Latvian field of diabetes there are two strong organisations which do not work together. They both receive suggestions from their European umbrella organisations and this is not good.”

However, networking is perceived as a very important resource for organisations. Usually, networking occurs in the social field.

“Networking with other organisations is a very important resource for an organisation. We have always had good cooperation experiences.”

Support bodies

1 SUPPORT MEASURES (QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS)

Questioned organisations are quite critical towards the government and emphasise that there is a lack of governmental support and awareness regarding the voluntary movement and its benefits for society. In fact, representatives of questioned organisations underlie that the lack of support from the state refers on the one hand to the financial support and on the other to the legislative framework that could regulate the volunteering sector and thus recognising its value officially: *“There is not enough support for volunteering work. Furthermore, governmental institutions do not have a clear vision on why and how to involve volunteers.”*

“Public initiatives to support volunteering in our country are very weak. There is no support system or any system on this subject supported by state at the moment. Currently, the perspective seems quite gloomy as most of the NGOs are worrying about their existence.”

“Both financial and informational support for volunteering in Latvia is very basic nowadays. The law on volunteering would help to develop the voluntary movement in Latvia, by giving acknowledgement and prestige to volunteering.”

The same critical attitude towards the government is expressed by interviewed representatives of the volunteering sector. According to the interviewed representatives, public support for the volunteering sector seems to be minimal or totally absent in certain cases.

“It seems that the government and the ruling coalition are even afraid of active people, who analyse the policies. There is no recognition from the governmental side of the fact that the voluntary movement is valuable and must be supported and promoted.”

“Public organisations that have understood the meaning and importance of volunteers continue to work with them. But there is no

system to support volunteering in the country at the moment.”

“There is no infrastructure at all. It’s just the NGOs that are interested in such infrastructure. We have hundreds of NGOs and there are strong organisations because people feel the need to organise themselves in order to make their lives better. There is almost no interest from the state.”

“The 5th of December is the day of volunteers, but few recognise it. This system is not effective, partly due to a passive governmental attitude.”

Furthermore, interviewed people underline that mostly the voluntary movement is based on the enthusiasm and initiatives of specific NGOs, since some of the NGOs promote volunteering on their own initiative.

As to how volunteering should be promoted, interviewed representatives of the volunteering sector mentioned some possible strategies.

- Since the legal basis of the volunteering sector is not sufficient yet, it should be developed in the future. It becomes therefore important to lobby the idea of volunteering in the ruling circle of politicians.
- Support in awareness building of a positive attitude towards volunteering by promoting the idea of volunteering and the concept of active civic society through the education system. Furthermore, volunteers must be awarded for their contribution. There is a need to raise public awareness that voluntary work is a real value for society.
- Governmental support for trainings, especially on how to perform administrative management of organisations working on voluntary basis.
- Administrative support from the government: there should be a

paid co-ordinator in volunteer organisations, as well as a coordinating body for NGOs performing voluntary work, which should organise consultations with volunteering NGOs, experience exchanges etc.

- Practical financial support from the government regarding reimbursement connected to expenses for volunteer activities.
- Municipalities should offer some practical support for organisations working on voluntary bases.¹⁹

¹⁹Interviews data.

Focus on support bodies

(Questionnaires)

“brīvprātīgais.lv” Association

[CONTACT]

Biedrība “brīvprātīgais.lv”
“brīvprātīgais.lv” Association
 a/k 231
 LV-1010 - Rīga 10 - Latvia
 tel. +371 26010761
 fax +371 26010761
 brivpratigais@brivpratigais.lv
www.brivpratigais.lv

The *brīvprātīgais.lv* association was founded on the 20th April 2006. The association studies the situation of voluntary work in Latvia and implements activities aimed at the development of civic society. It operates on a national and regional level. The association's goal is to encourage people's participation to social political processes and to promote the development of volunteering in Latvia. Members are working to raise the level of the quality of life of Latvian society and at the same time to stimulate citizens' society to take part to public life. The association has developed a communicative platform and a portal which includes information on volunteers and volunteering work offers. It also has developed projects consisting in educational programmes for informing pupils about the importance and the role of civic society.

The association has implemented several projects aimed at promoting volunteering among pupils and at the development of Latvian civic society.

Member of “I volunteer” network.

QUESTIONNAIRES

“brīvprātīgais.lv” Association

▪ Territory covered	Latvia	
▪ Volunteers	3	
▪ Activities	Promotion of citizens' rights and tutelage Fight against discrimination and violence	
▪ Volunteering support activities	CONSULTING AND ASSISTANCE	Project writing and presentations to bids Communication Access to European funds
	INFORMATION & DOCUMENTATION	A database of volunteers (www.brivpratigais.lv/datubaze)
	COMMUNICATION	Publication of periodicals and newsletters Press Releases Press Conferences Own web site
	PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES	Promotional campaigns on mass media Public events Meetings and conferences Publications

“Apeirons” Association for Disabled People and their Friends

[CONTACT]

Invalidu un viņu draugu apvienība

“Apeirons”

“Apeirons” Association for disabled people and their friends

Kr.Valdemara 38

LV-1010 - Rīga - Latvia

tel. +371 67299277

fax +371 67299277

info@apeirons.lv

www.apeirons.lv

Apeirons is an organisation of people with disabilities and their friends and as such has been actively operating since 1994. In 1997 it was registered as a non-governmental organisation.

The main goal of *Apeirons* is the integration of people with disabilities in society as well as creating a more tolerant attitude towards them. Their core activities include the gathering and spreading of information on disability legislation, human rights, citizenship, social services, etc. through the Centre for Information VAR; the establishment of partnership and cooperation through the creation of networks for enforcing NGOs capacity in this field; research and monitoring.

Achievements

In 2004 *Apeirons* created the VAR Centre (Environment, Training and Resources) which is still operative. In 2000, *Apeirons* implemented the research programme “Human Rights of People with Disabilities in Latvia” and, in 2002, it implemented the project “Monitoring of Social Services for People with Disabilities in order to Provide Participation”. Thanks to these initiatives, for the first time in Latvia there were some reports about the real living conditions and human rights situation of people with disabilities. Furthermore, in 2002, it established a network of NGOs with the aim to create a common strategy and provide a wide network of information for people with disabilities. The actions of the association have contributed to a raised awareness of disability issues in Latvia. The active partnerships with the government, at both a national and local level, supported the implementation of the UN Standard Rules nationwide.

Member of *Latvijas Pilsoniskā alianse* (Civic Alliance Latvia)

QUESTIONNAIRES

“Apeirons” Association for Disabled People and their Friends

▪ Territory covered	National	
▪ Volunteers	20	
▪ Staff	2 full time for volunteer support activities. 4 for other activities.	
▪ Activities	Rehabilitation programmes Social assistance Re-education/reintegration in society of people with disabilities Social secretariat Call centre and phone help Support for learning Research, studies, documentation Citizens' rights and tutelage	
▪ Volunteering support activities	TRAINING	Courses Long distance training Individual classes and seminars
	INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION	Books, manuals, booklets Videos Database
	COMMUNICATION	Presence in local and national newspapers Publication of periodicals and newsletters Press releases Press conferences

QUESTIONNAIRES

“Apeiron” Association for Disabled People and their Friends

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Own web site
Videos and CDs

Promotional campaigns on mass media
Public events
Meetings and conferences

“Skalbes” Association

[CONTACT]
 Biedrība “Skalbes”
“Skalbes” Association
 Kungu 34
 LV-1050 - Riga - Latvia
 tel. +371 67222922
 fax +371 67214720
 skalbes@skalbes.lv
www.skalbes.lv

Skalbes is a non-governmental organisation which has been working in the field of mental health for over 10 years, providing psychological and legal help in crisis situations: domestic abuse, violence, acute stress situations, permanent illnesses, etc. The mission of the association is to strengthen psychological well-being and mental health in our society, as well as human rights, and to facilitate individuals' rights and possibilities of receiving help in crisis situations.

Skalbes provides help-line and face to face psychological consultations, as well as legal consultations. Furthermore, it organises training courses for professionals and volunteers; it provides information and educational programmes on mental health matters; it engages in law initiatives and political processes and it co-operates with other local and international organisations and public bodies and various networks (WAVE, MHE, EAPN).

Achievements

In 2007, it provided more than 1,535 psychological and legal help consultations and answered to more than 3,500 calls received by the help-line, providing consultations and information. It also organised a support group for women suffering from domestic abuse. It took part in several projects: in the framework of the Mental Health Project it carried on an overall assessment of the social exclusion situation of people with mental health problems in Latvia; it translated and printed informative material about family mediation for EK DAPHNE II programme project MIND; it planned an anti-bullying programme for schools in Latvia and organised 7 seminars about bullying in schools in the framework of the EK DAPHNE II programme project “Creating Bullying-free Schools in Latvia and Lithuania”; it completed a 3 years project in the framework of the EK TACIS IBPP programme “Break the Cycle of Violence” consisting in providing experience and knowledge to professionals in Russia on how to organise multi-institutional cooperation so as to protect children from domestic violence and to help children victims of domestic violence.

Member of

- *Latvijas sieviesu organizāciju sadarbības tīkls* (Latvian Women Organisation Network)
- *Latvijas Pilsoniskā alianse* (Civic Alliance Latvia)
- European Anti-Poverty Network
- WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe)
- Mental Health Europe

QUESTIONNAIRES

“Skalbes” Association

▪ Territory covered	Riga Riga Region Latvia	
▪ Volunteers	20	
▪ Staff	3 part time for volunteer support activities. 2 full time and 5 part time for other activities.	
▪ Activities	HEALTH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND TUTELAGE	Psychological help Listening, call centre and phone help Legal advice
▪ Volunteering support activities	CONSULTING AND ASSISTANCE INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION COMMUNICATION	Project writing and presentations to bids Trainings Books, manuals, booklets Information office (the Head Office functions also as an information office where people can receive information and sign up for consultations) Own web site

“Papardes zieds” Latvia’s Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health

[CONTACT]

Latvijas ģimenes plānošanas
un seksuālās veselības asociācija
“Papardes zieds”

“Papardes zieds”

**Latvia’s Association for Family
Planning and Sexual Health**

Grecinieku iela 34

LV-1050 - Rīga - Latvia

tel. +371 67212700

fax +371 67226787

info@papardeszieds.lv

www.papardeszieds.lv

Papardes zieds Latvia’s Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health was founded on the 26th November 2004 and is a democratic not for profit organisation operating in the field of sexual and reproductive health, based on volunteer activism, professional expertise and leadership. The Association supports the values of the International Planned Parenthood Federation: health, choice and rights. The association is committed to advance sexual and reproductive health and the rights of each individual and to ensure that each individual has access to high quality services and can make informed choices by

- Advocating positive changes in legislation, policies, and promoting research and solutions (good practices) in cooperation with governmental and non-governmental actors and partners.
- Raising awareness among the population and groups at risk in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially with regards to HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), abortion and contraceptives.
- Promoting and providing equal access to quality information and sexual and reproductive health services and sexuality education, especially for young and vulnerable people.

The 2006-2009 Strategic Plan of the association focuses on the following programme themes or 5 “A”:

- A 1: Adolescents and young people. Making adolescents and young people able to make informed choices on sexual reproductive health and rights, protecting themselves from unwanted sex, unplanned pregnancies and STIs, HIV/AIDS.
- A 2: HIV/ AIDS and STIs. Ensuring that the rights of infected and affected people are recognised.
- A 3: Access. Promoting equal access to quality information and quality services on SRH.
- A 4: Abortion. Offering appropriate information on women’s rights to safe abortion and ensuring that women have access to supportive and qualitative medical assistance services.
- A 5: Advocacy.

Achievements

The Association managed to achieve positive changes in legislation, policies, and promoting research and solutions (good practice) in co-

operation with governmental and non-governmental actors and partners. The Association has opened the first Youth Friendly Health and Information Centre in Riga. Through projects such as “Raising Awareness on Global Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights”, “Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health of Persons Living with HIV in Europe”, “Health, Rights and Choice for Everyone. Integrating Development Issues into the Sexual Health and Rights Framework”, the association has raised awareness among people with regards to HIV, AIDS and STIs, abortion and contraceptives.

Member of

- International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)
- ASTRA (Central and Eastern Europe Women’s Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights)
- YouAct (European Youth Network on Sexual and Reproductive Rights)
- EuroNGOs
- AIDS Action Europe
- Latvian Youth Council
- Civic Alliance Latvia
- *Latvijas Platforma Attīstības Sadarbībai* - LAPAS (Latvian NGDO Platform)

QUESTIONNAIRES

“Papardes zieds” Latvia’s Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health

▪ Territory covered	National (Latvia) International	
▪ Volunteers	22	
▪ Staff	3 part time for volunteer support activities. 5 full time and 5 part time for other activities.	
▪ Activities	HEALTH	Health care Psychological help
	SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	Animation and /or education of street children Peer education about sexual health Hot e-mail helpline Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Advocacy
▪ Volunteering support activities	PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES	Promotional campaigns on mass media Meetings and conferences Public events Fundraising activities
	CONSULTING AND ASSISTANCE	Project writing and presentation to bids Fund raising Training processes Access to European funds Communication
	TRAINING	Individual classes or seminars

QUESTIONNAIRES

“Papardes zieds” Latvia’s Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health

INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION

Books, manuals, booklets

Videos

COMMUNICATION

Press release

Press conferences

Presence in local and national newspapers

Own web site

Latvia Rural Women Association

[CONTACT]

Latvijas Lauku sieviešu apvienība

Latvia Rural Women Association

Republikas laukums 2

LV-1010 - Rīga - Latvia

tel. +371 26522857

fax +371 26522857

maijazaluma@inbox.lv

www.lsa.lv

The Association of Rural Women in Latvia (henceforth in the text: the Association) is a public organisation whose activity goal is to promote education and information for rural women, to co-ordinate the organisation of different events promoting the interests of these women. The mission of the association is to educate and to give rural women knowledge necessary for the development of their ideas and actions and thus to promote development in rural areas.

The activity tasks of the Association are to promote the professional growth of rural women; to promote rural women's involvement in social and political activities at local, regional and national level; to raise rural women's self-esteem; to promote the development of entrepreneurship in the country by encouraging rural women to open their own businesses; to teach women how to create family budget by giving them basic knowledge of economics; to change the social and economical status of the rural women; to promote keeping folk traditions and transmitting them to the next generations; to co-operate with similar organisations and associations in the state.

Achievements

The Association has widely broadened and opened 18 resources centres for women and has founded the Support Fund for Latvian Rural Women Entrepreneurship.

Member of ACWW (Associated Country Women of the World).

QUESTIONNAIRES

Latvia Rural Women Association

▪ Territory covered	Latvia	
▪ Volunteers	2,025	
▪ Activities	HEALTH	Psychological help
	CULTURE AND CULTURAL GOODS	Training Cultural promotion
▪ Volunteering support activities	PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES	Meetings and conferences Cultural events
	CONSULTING AND ASSISTANCE	Training processes
	INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION	Books, manuals, booklets
	COMMUNICATION	Periodical publications or newsletters

Development policies

VOLUNTEERING ACROSS EUROPE

1 PUBLIC INCENTIVES

There are not so many public initiatives for supporting volunteering as the interest of the public sector towards volunteering is quite weak at the moment. However, even though symbolic, one public initiative for valuing volunteering is worth mentioning. Since 1999, NGO resource centres around Latvia, the Union of Local Governments, the Ministry of Welfare and the largest daily newspaper *Diena* organise an annual event called “The Good Star” on January 6. People submit descriptions about people who have helped others without any self-interest and ceremonies to honour these people are held in the largest cities. Usually the President of the Republic of Latvia takes part to the ceremony in Riga.

2 CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES

From 1998 till 2004, the Volunteer Centre organised a “Volunteer Day” event on December 5th, when the best volunteers and best organisations involving volunteers were given public recognition.

There have been no other special events at national level organised by the third sector for promoting volunteering since then.

3 ON INFRASTRUCTURE FOR VOLUNTEERING (INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES)

Volunteering infrastructure is quite weak at the moment in Latvia. Currently, there is no official volunteering support centre in Latvia and public resources available for supporting the creation or management of existing volunteering organisations are extremely meagre as questioned organisations underline. This aspect is further accentuated by the economic crisis that hit Latvia, whose consequence was a reduction of funds for the third sector in general.

“Public initiatives to support volunteering in our country are very weak. There is no support system sustained by the state at the moment. Nowadays recognition of NGOs’ work is much higher than at the beginning, but real help is still missing.”

“There is not enough support for voluntary work. Non-governmental organisations often do not have even the minimal resources for involving volunteers and that’s why sometimes volunteering is seen as a problem and not as a possible resource.”

Moreover, weak infrastructure is also due to a lack of an official framework. As mentioned before, currently, there is no law that regulates the volunteering sector.

4 STRATEGIC GOALS

Some strategies for the development of the volunteering sector are envisaged: the law on volunteering and the governmental programme “Strengthening the Civil Society Development”.

A draft Law on Voluntary Work has been developed by an inter-ministerial working group including NGOs. It still needs to be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The government programme “Youth Policy 2005 – 2009” lists as one of its goals “to promote the development of young people who are (...) and active in voluntary work.”

The government programme “Strengthening the Civil Society Development 2008 – 2012” sets as one of its goals enlarging the percentage of people who are engaged in voluntary work. The target to be reached is 30% of the population in 2009 and 40% in 2012.

The following steps are envisaged by the programme:

- To issue an e-newspaper on voluntary work once every 2 months, as well as to publish information on the website of responsible ministry and involve the mass media.
- To pass the Law on Voluntary Work.
- To organise a Forum on Voluntary Work once every two years.
- To establish annual awards for the best volunteers and organisations involving volunteers.
- To ensure financial support to NGOs which promote voluntary work and offer consultations and guidance to NGOs.

However, these measures have yet to be implemented.

5 EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE (INTERVIEWS)

Interviewed representatives of the Latvian volunteering sector consider that in western countries volunteering is much more devel-

oped than in eastern and especially post-soviet countries. This is due, on one hand, to a longer tradition of volunteering and to a positive attitude towards volunteering, translated in people being proud about undertaking volunteering, on the other hand, to a higher financial support for the development of a volunteering infrastructure and better partnerships between the state and volunteering NGOs.

Furthermore, interviewed people underline that volunteering in western countries is very well recognised as adding value to functions which are performed by the state, while in Latvia volunteering fills in for tasks which are not appropriately done by state. Thus, volunteering in Latvia helps to provide for the basic needs of people, while in other (western) countries it ties up to a higher quality of citizens' life.

Interviewed representatives of the Latvian volunteering sector show themselves very interested in taking part to projects involving organisations from other European countries. The most common motivation for cooperating with other European organisations is related to learning from experience and knowledge exchanges.

“There is no need to ‘invent the wheel’ if it exists already. It is good to learn what works already in other countries.”

“If organisations can see how things are done in other countries, it is educating and motivating at the same time.”

However, almost all interviewed representatives of the volunteering sector underline that, despite the good motivations for collaborating with other EU organisations, the lack of financial resources and sometimes high qualified human resources makes it much more difficult.

“We could make common projects with partners in other countries, but at the moment the capacity of the association is too small. This would require people with foreign language knowledge and it is a problem as well. We would be interested in cooperating more with other countries if we had more resources at our disposal.”

“If there were resources to expand voluntary work in our organisation, we could engage in international projects for gaining experience from other organisations on what they have found as valuable in volunteering work and volunteers' involvement.”

A possible role of an European initiative supporting volunteering could be the encouragement of experience and knowledge exchanges between volunteering organisations in “old” and “new” EU countries, since “old” EU countries have extended traditions in this sphere.

“Networking between similar organisations throughout Europe could be very relevant and useful for Latvian volunteering NGOs, in particular, and for other Eastern European countries as well.”

Another EU role could reside in providing EU funding for nation-

al NGOs. However, cultural and political differences of various EU countries should be taken into account: what fits for one country may not fit for other one; therefore, there should be a country-specific approach.

Besides funding and exchanges of experiences, some of the interviewed representatives mentioned higher support for youth programmes as participation of young people in youth programs is extremely important for creating an inter-cultural dialogue and promoting EU civic values and active EU citizenship.

LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED**Ginta Ratniece**

One of the first people in Latvia who in 1997 started to implement volunteer work in hospital. She was working as psychologist with cancer patients. She used to work for the Volunteer Organisation *Brīvotgo centrs* that ceased to exist due to financial difficulties.

Gunta Freimane

Founder of the Latvian Diabetes Association (LDA); a volunteer with 16 years experience in her organisation, where she has been working as supervisor and trainer of volunteers. Since LDA is a member of the National network SUSTENTO, she has been involved in their activities as a volunteer as well. She has European level experience, since LDA is also a member of European networks.

Nina Mengele

One of the first 25 trained volunteers in Independent Latvia in 1995. She is the founder of the NGO "Apeiron", a volunteer based organi-

sation with the aim to improve the situation of disabled people in Latvia. Since 1997, when the organisation was created, she has been involved in several projects and has been working with volunteers, coordinating them. She has been trained as a volunteer manager.

Ruta Dimanta

Her experience in volunteering goes back to her study years when she volunteered in various organisations. She was a volunteer in a centre against violence and other organisations. At the moment, she is a director of the portal ziedot.lv, which helps NGOs to organise volunteer work.

Andris Gobins

President of the European Movement in Latvia. Chairman of the board of the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation. His activities within the organisation European Movement in Latvia are on a voluntary base. Active in Nongovernmental organisations, strengthening Civil Society.

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www.fm.gov.lv
[Latvian] [English]

Parliament of the Republic of Latvia (*Saeima*)

www.saeima.lv
[Latvian] [English]

Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

www.csb.gov.lv
[Latvian] [English]

Former Secretariat of Minister for Special Assignments on Integration

www.integracija.gov.lv

Ministry of Welfare

www.lm.gov.lv
[Latvian]

Cabinet of Ministers

www.mk.gov.lv
[Latvian] [English] [Russian] [French]

The Register of Enterprises

www.lursoft.lv
[Latvian] [English] [Russian]

Socrates Programme

www.socrates.lv

Latvian Student Portal

www.studentnet.lv
[Latvian] [English] [Russian] [French] [German]

Agency of International Youth Programs

www.ltn.lv/~yfe/2akcija.htm
[Latvian]

European voluntary work

www.jaunatne.gov.lv/lv/jspa/akcijas/akcija2/a2
[Latvian]

Youth exchange

www.jaunatne.gov.lv/lv/jspa/akcijas/akcija1/apraksts
[Latvian]

European Youth information Network – Eurodesk

www.jaunatne.gov.lv/lv/eurodesk
[Latvian] [English] [Russian]

Latvia in:
Volunteering across Europe. Organisations, promotion, participation.
Finland, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Luxembourg.
v. IV.
Rome, Spes, 2009. pp. 41 - 92.

For publications, initiatives and collaborations please contact:

SPES - Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio

Via Liberiana, 17

00185 Rome - Italy

Tel.: +39.06.44702178

Fax: +39.06.45422576

E-mail: europa@spes.lazio.it

Website: www.volontariato.lazio.it