**COUNTRY REPORT OF LITHUANIA**

**1) Short introduction about volunteering in your country:**

**Short historical background**

Voluntary organizations started to establish in Lithuania in the 18th century. Mostly it was the charity organizations designed to prevent poverty and begging. In 1919 the Lithuanian Red Cross Society was established which is one of the biggest volunteering organizations in Lithuania nowadays. 1918-1939 years many private and national social initiatives were established and attracted more and more volunteers. However the loss of independence was also the end for volunteering in the country because Soviet authorities began to restrict volunteering activities. Volunteering has become mandatory for all citizens. So the forced public work opposed the idea of volunteering and eroded voluntary activity. Strict Soviet control of public life also had a significant impact on the voluntary initiative. This increased the people's distrust of one another. Suspicion, doubt about the sincerity of the other survived to the present day: a study in 2005 showed that only 17% of Lithuanians believe that others are sincere, reliable and benevolent. (1)

After the restoration of independence (1990), according to the existing legislation, the first volunteers in the country were not civil society, but military volunteers, called Lithuanian volunteers. The restoration of independence raises a lot of challenges to Lithuania, volunteering was one of them. Most Western countries have made a great contribution to the development of civil society in Lithuania and strengthening voluntary organizations. (2)

The development of volunteering in Lithuania post - 1989 has also been marked by a revival of some voluntary organisations which were active in the independent inter - war Lithuanian state (1918-1940), especially religious organisations and groups, strongly supported by the Catholic Church (e.g. Caritas). A strong impetus for development of volunteering in Lithuania has come from abroad, including the activities under the United Nation’s International Year of Volunteers in 2001, the EU youth programmes and other activities sponsored by foreign donors. (3)

Nowadays there are more than a thousand nongovernmental organizations that involve volunteers in their activities. Some of the biggest: „Gelbėkit vaikus“ (“Save the Children”), „Lietuvos Caritas“ (“Lithuanian Caritas”), „Maisto bankas“ (“Food Bank”), „Jaunimo linija“ (“Youth Line”), „Paramos vaikams centras“ (“Children Support Centre”). Most organizations work in social and health care areas, others - education, environment, sports, culture and so on. (4) According to some studies the most attractive volunteering activity is preserving nature (28%), taking care of homeless animals (22%), social work with lonely and disabled people (21%). (5)

**Statistical information**

One of the first public opinion polls conducted in 1998 by “Non-governmental organizations Information and Support Centre” showed that only 5% of the population is participating in volunteering activities. The main reason for such a low percentage leads the end as an unfavourable public opinion about volunteers and also the fact that no one invites people to volunteer. According to Eurobarometer data on volunteering in Lithuania in 2007 11% of the population were volunteering, and by 2011 (poll conducted by Vilmorus) this number is three times higher. The survey data showed that the biggest obstacles for development of volunteering in Lithuania are: the lack of volunteering tradition (this is confirmed by 51% of respondents), as well as poor infrastructure and lack of information (42% of respondents). (2)

There is no new statistical information about the geographic dislocations of volunteering in Lithuania. The Civil Society Institute survey (2005) showed that people living in big cities (more than 200 000 inhabitants) are most actively involved in volunteering activities. People least likely to get involved in voluntary activities live in small localities (with less than 2 000 inhabitants) (3). Nowadays it seems to be a very similar trend. In 2011 most non-governmental organizations were dislocated in the biggest districts of the country – around 30% in Vilnius, 20% in Kaunas districts, and 10-11% in Siauliai, Panevezys and Klaipeda, 4% in Telsiu district. (6) Study by Vimorus showed that 28% of all volunteer in Lithuania are from Vilnius (capital city). So it leads to the conclusion that nowadays still most volunteering activities are held in the largest cities. (6)

There is no new statistical information about volunteers’ gender, age groups, education levels, but The Civil Society Institute survey in 2005 (quoted in NISC 2007 report) showed such a numbers: almost equal participation in volunteering by men and women; the young people aged 18-25 were most actively involved in volunteering (24%), whilst people over 66 were least active (7%); and people with a university education tended to participate more in volunteering activities (29%) than those without tertiary education (3).

The time assigned to volunteering varies from 1 to 30 hours per week (longer - in certain situations, e.g., the implementation of the project). In most cases Lithuanians are volunteering 2-4 hours per week. (1), (7).

**2) National overview of existing mentoring practices**

Unfortunately, there is no organization in Lithuania that would care about overview, control and support of mentoring programs. There are, however, two strong organizations caring about volunteering – VšĮ Socialiniai partneriai and VšĮ Savanorių centras.

**VšĮ Socialiniai partneriai**’s webpage [www.savanoriaujam.lt](http://www.savanoriaujam.lt) includes more than 260 organizations looking for voluntary help, some of which are searching for mentors. Their numbers, however, account for a much lower percentage than organizations looking for help with homeless dogs and cats, sport organizations and young initiative organizations. This catalogue is the only one in existence in Lithuania and can be a valuable guide in planning or selecting an appropriate volunteering or mentoring program. Information on where a service is provided and how it can be joined can be easily found here.

**VšĮ Savanorių centras** belongs to Vilnius county municipality and has been an “open desk” for everyone willing to do voluntary work in Lithuania and abroad since 1998. The purpose of the organization is to promote the idea of volunteering, providing information to every interested young person, and to coordinate the application process reflecting their needs. Concrete possibilities are no advertised. Nevertheless, the centre creates an open space for questions and conversations about one’s actual needs regarding volunteering. VšĮ Savanorių centras also runs a webpage [www.savanoriucentras.lt](http://www.savanoriucentras.lt) and is a member of The European Volunteer Centre.

Despite the lack of an organization managing a catalogue of mentoring programs provided in Lithuania, there are many mentoring programs all over the country. There are many mentoring programmes for business sector and adults in need, but unfortunately only few mentoring programmes and projects care about helping children and teenagers. None of them receive stable financial support by the governmental or business sectors for long and stable work. In addition, the programs differ in purpose, length of provided help and beneficiaries groups.

There are only two big mentoring programs in all Lithuania stably working with children for more than 15 years: “Big Brothers Big Sisters” and “Mentor Lithuania”. Both of these programmes are brought to Lithuania from foreign countries and were successfully adapted to Lithuania’s needs.

**Mentors Lithuania** belongs to an independent, privately founded non-governmental organisation and works in the sphere of drug misuse prevention among youngsters worldwide. The mission of Mentor Lithuania isto prevent drug abuse through the promotion of health and well-being in children and young people. More information about their work can be found on the webpage [www.mentor.lt](http://www.mentor.lt) .

**“Big Brothers Big Sisters”** has been working in Lithuania since 1995. Its main purpose is to provide professionally supervised mentors with emotional support and children in crisis or in a critical period of their life with a good personal example. Every year this program helps for more than 100 children, not only in Vilnius but also in Kaunas, Klaipėda and some others smaller towns. Their webpage is <http://www.pvc.lt/lt/big-brothers-big-sisters> .

Supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme, VšĮ „Kauno socialinių paslaugų ir statybos verslo darbuotojų prpfesinio rengimo centras“ was a partner in **SUPREME**, a project based on Dutch good practice, in the last 2 years. The Supreme project addresses student drop-out issues in vocational schools by setting up a mentoring program and ensuring intensive and continuous cooperation between vocational education and SMEs. The project has an innovative approach to drop-out prevention in vocational education. More information on

<http://e-vanderwerff.jimdo.com/en/about-the-project/> .

**LT Big Brother** is the first and only global voluntary professional mentoring program for Lithuanian students around the world (also in Lithuania). The main goal of the project is to facilitate the transfer of professional knowledge and experience among established Lithuanian professionals and ambitious Lithuanian students. For already 6 years, the project has been trying to nurture professional skills in young Lithuanians as well as to contribute towards the development and creation of a better future for Lithuania. The webpage of the project is [www.ltbigbrother.com](http://www.ltbigbrother.com).

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