

2.1 General context

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Youth volunteering is an important part of Czech society. However, there are only limited comprehensive studies on this subject. Volunteering is usually spoken about in general terms. Furthermore, legislation in this area is limited.

[In its report on volunteering in youth field from 2008](#), the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports states 'Youth voluntary activities realised in the framework of non-governmental, non-profit organisations have a fundamental significance in the Czech Republic. [...] According to serious estimations, the **share of young volunteers under 30 years of age is 50 % of all volunteers.**'

According to the research [Political participation of Youth in V4 countries](#) realized by the National Youth Councils from the Czech Republic and Slovakia and Hungarian sociologists from Rubeus in 2017, for the age group 16 - 24 years:

- **11% of young Czechs participate regularly in voluntary activities**
- 20% of young Czechs participate in any voluntary activity but it is rather exceptional
- 30 % of young Czechs were involved in some voluntary activities but are not anymore
- **40 % do not have any voluntary experience.**

In February 2018, **3 695 non-governmental organisations active in the field of organising activities for Children and Youth** (CZ-NACE code 94 991, [NKU 2018](#) acc. to ARES 2018). 2219 were associations (60,05 %), 1386 were adjacent associations (37,51 %). The rest covers other legal forms as foundations (0,05 %), Funds (0,11 %), Church legal entities (0,03 %) and others.

Historical developments

A Brief History of volunteering in the Czech Republic is given in the [Study on Volunteering](#) (Governmental policy concept towards NGOs until 2020). There is also an [alternative study](#) from the civil society sector.

Volunteering, as understood today, emerged in the period of the [Czech National Revival](#) in the 19th century. Organised patriotic activities led to the establishment of different clubs, foundations and Civic Associations. The organisations aimed at supporting art, culture, science, education, and also sport, singing, fire-fighting and other activities. Many of those are still active, e.g. *Hlávka Foundation*, *Sokol*, *Volunteer Firemen's Associations*, and other.

In the 1870s more than 3000 associations existed, in the 1890s more than 10 000 did. Before the 19th century, church and social activities were based on voluntary aid.

In 1911 the [Scout movement came to Bohemia](#) and it gained a strong position in the field of youth work and youth engagement in societal development. Scouts actively participated in the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. In the first days and weeks of freedom and independence, the Czech scouts joined the services of the Czechoslovak government and ensured reliable and fast mail deliveries between different agencies. By WWII there were more than 60 thousand members (both men and women). After 1945, more than 200 000 people applied to become members of a renewed Scout movement, called 'Junák' in Czech, which was more than three times bigger than it was in 1938.

A distinctive dimension of youth volunteering was also within the [Czech Tourist Club](#) (Klub českých turistů). The Tourist Club was developed mostly by young members for various sports activities, but also for the protection of nature, development of a touristic marking system or construction of tourist lodging houses, etc. Marking tourist trails and their regular maintenance is still one of the most important Club member activities. Since 1889 they have marked trails for pedestrians, since 1997 they have also marked trails for skiers and cyclists, and since 2005 they have also covered horse tracks. The network of marked trails for pedestrians is considered the best in Europe, concerning its density, quality, and coverage of all the Czech territory.

After the foundation of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918, youth organisations and schools were the centres of social life of young people. These organisations were usually a part of a well-structured network including a wide range of centres, from local to provincial or national.

During the Second World War, many voluntary organisations were dissolved or transformed according to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia's administration goals. The German Nazi occupation created the Children and Youth Curatorium to influence Youth (for details see e.g. Kouřil 2015) which was the tool of Nazi power over Youth.

In the Communist period after 1948, youth organisations were reduced; church youth organisations especially were dissolved (Orel, YMCA, YWCA, Junák) and sometimes replaced with their communist substitutes (such as ŠSTV, ŠSM, Pionýr), or just subordinated to the regime's control. All organisations from a specific location were united into the all-state organisation, the so-called "National Front".

Only communist party members could acquire a higher level position, which led to weaker ideologisation on a local level where non-members of the communist party were acting.

As a specific model of a voluntary organisation in socialist times, we can consider the dissent organisations of regime opponents. They often had a high professional quality, were not centralised and managed to get out of the regime's control. Some Young people were also active there.

The volunteering organisational structure included work teams. A considerable part of management was moved to enterprises and different work places. The motivation for state-enforced volunteering were competitions and symbolic remunerations. Under political pressure and propaganda, volunteering was used for 'building' a socialist society (big socialist constructions, voluntary jobs, cleaning etc.). Non-participation in 'voluntary activities' was progressively penalised, and that devalued any spontaneous civil activity.

[Friš and Pospíšilová](#) (2010) describe the approach of socialism towards volunteering in three gradually merging and replacing phases:

- An agitation phase - characterised by enthusiasm for volunteering in favour of socialism that was awakened by propaganda.
- A repressive phase - characterised by enforcing volunteering through intimidation and blackmailing, which in turn caused a voluntary activity to lose its authenticity.
- A ritualist phase - Voluntary activities lost the sense, both functionaries and citizens were only simulating, to a certain degree, volunteering in favour of the regime and avoided it. The only thing that was left was a false ritual.

Changes came during the so-called '**Prague spring**' in 1968, but the subsequent Soviet invasion stopped most of them until the end of the regime. In the 1970s most civic activities and associations were officially banned, including Scouts, or even the oldest Czech ecological NGO Independent association of nature's friends (Nezávislé sdružení přátel přírody).

A current independent youth organisation existing from the communist era is the 'Brontosaurus Movement' ([Hnutí Brontosaurus](#)), established in 1974. The movement is promoting education and ecological responsibility.

'Pionýr' (Pioneers), which was the official youth organisation of the Communist party turned into an apolitical movement after the communist regime fell.

After the Velvet revolution in 1989, citizens started to be interested in the surrounding world and humanistic values, and a nongovernmental sector arose again. The idea of a civil society based on cooperation and mutual solidarity of autonomous and free citizens became the underlying issue (the main proponent of this idea was president Václav Havel). A new national network of organisations emerged. The majority of organisations kept their membership in big unions, but also registered themselves formally and gained a legal subjectivity.

Many associations abolished by the communists were re-established such as YMCA, Sokol, and Scouts or Junák. Many new associations were founded, covering culture, sport, children and youth, charities, social issues, and health.

New civil society and association legislative included:

- Laws on [citizens' associations](#) (Act no. 83/1990 Sb.)
- Act on [the freedom of religious faith, and the position of churches and religious societies](#) (Act no. 308/1991 Sb.)
- Later Act [on public beneficiary corporations](#) (Act no. 248/1995 Sb.) and [on foundations and funds, an Amendment of the Civil Code mentioning interest associations](#) (Act no. 227/1997 Sb.) were adopted.

Professional voluntary centres

First emerged at the end of the 1990s. The first National Voluntary Centre was called [HESTIA](#), and it opened in

1999. It was founded with the support of the Open Society Fund and the Points of Light Foundation (as one of the national voluntary centres in 14 countries of the former communist bloc within the project called Programme for Volunteering Development).

There is also [Concept of volunteering development in the Czech Republic with emphasis on ensuring regional and professional accessibility of volunteering in the form of volunteer](#). The implementation period of the project is 2016 - 2021. The project also deals with the analysis of youth volunteering and gives examples of good practice of volunteer centers in the regions.

Political and legislative influence

A significant contribution to volunteering development was the UN General Assembly's Resolution no. 52/17 from January 18th 1998, that was co-authorised by the Czech Republic, designating 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers and encouraging a legal arrangement for volunteering.

The Act on [voluntary service](#) (Act no. 198/2002 Sb.) came into force on January 1st 2003. However, it only **concerns a small part of the voluntary sector** – voluntary service, not other forms of volunteering.

In relation to youth, it only includes a partial arrangement (consent of a legal representative is required for a child to join a voluntary service).

2011 was designated as the European Year of Volunteering in order to support active citizenship. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic helped promote and implement the issue during the Czech EU presidency. On a national level, it has been supported by the Ministry in the form of a special grant programme called '[European Year of Volunteering](#)'. Within the programme the Ministry financially supported NGO activities in the field of volunteering.

In sum, we can observe a long history of volunteering in the Czech territory. We can also see a fundamental disruption of the ethos of volunteering during the Second World War and in the communist era.

The Czech voluntary sector restoration started after the fall of communism. It was mostly due to NGO sector activities, without overall coordination or systematic legal and financial support.

For a long time, legislative embedment of volunteering has been unsuccessfully debated (unlike specific voluntary services, defined in 2002).

Main concepts

There is **no specific definition on youth volunteering, nor volunteering as such**.

In the [State Policy toward Non-governmental organisations](#), it is only stated that volunteering is an extraordinary positive phenomenon which is essential and typical for civil society and it is a means of citizen participation in public and political issues.

The state policy differentiates two kinds of volunteering:

1. Voluntary service, which is marginal in numbers
2. Wide volunteering, which is not legislatively covered but is usually acted out within non-governmental organisations

The Act [On voluntary service](#) (Act no. 198/2002 Sb.), §2 defines **voluntary service** as follows:

'(1) Voluntary service is the following activity performed by a volunteer:

- a) Assisting the unemployed, persons dependent on welfare, the disabled, the elderly, ethnic minorities, immigrants, persons released from prison, drug addicts, victims of domestic violence, and children, youth, and families in spending their free time;
 - b) Assisting during floods, environmental, or humanitarian disasters, protecting and improving the living environment, protecting and maintaining cultural heritage, and organising cultural and charitable activities;
 - c) Assisting in the process of implementing development programmes as well as in operations, projects, and programmes organised by international organisations and institutions, including NGOs.
1. Activities performed to satisfy the personal interests of an individual, activities performed as a part of a business or any other income generating activity, and/or performed by an employee, a member of a service, or a member of an organisation shall not be considered voluntary service.
 2. Voluntary service shall be in its nature short-term or, should it exceed three months, long-term.'

§3 of the Act no. 198/2002 Sb. also defines, in a **narrow and utilitarian way**, the term **volunteer**:

(1) **A volunteer** may be any physical person who is:

- a) Over 15 years of age, should the activity in question be a volunteer service performed in the territory of the CR;
- b) Over 18 years of age, should the activity in question be volunteer service performed abroad and should such person have volunteered, based on his/her capabilities, knowledge, and capacity, to perform volunteer service abroad.

(2) A volunteer shall perform a volunteer service in keeping with a contract concluded with the deploying organisation; for a long-term volunteer service or in the case of a short-term volunteer service performed abroad, the contract shall be concluded in writing.

(3) Should the physical person be employed, be a member of a service, or a member of an organisation, or should he/she be a student, he/she shall perform the volunteer service in his/her free time, i.e. not as a part of the employment, service, membership in an organisation, or school.

(4) Military conscripts or persons serving the alternative civilian service shall not perform volunteer service.

(5) Members of a social cooperative cannot render voluntary services for their own social cooperative.

As seen above, it is possible to consider youth volunteering within the framework of the Act on voluntary service, since voluntary service is available to young people from the age of 15, or 18 in the case of voluntary service performed abroad.

In practice, volunteering in the Czech Republic is implemented mostly outside of the scope of this Act.

A commonly used distinction between formal and informal volunteering, or in other words, between volunteering performed within and outside of the organisational structures (mostly NGOs), is inapplicable in the

Czech Republic, because so-called formal volunteering can be performed either within the scope of the Act on voluntary service, or outside of its scope.

The **only legal reference to 'youth voluntary service'** can be found in the Act [On the residence of foreign nationals in the territory of the Czech Republic](#) (Act no. 326/1999 Sb.)

It is a part of transposition of European legislation (Directive 2004/114/EC) facilitating obtaining a long-term residence permit in case of young people volunteering in a Czech host organisation.

The **definition of 'youth voluntary service'** according to the factual intention of this Act (no definition is contained in the Act itself) is:

'It is the voluntary service of a youth between 18 and 25 years of age aimed at acquiring practical and professional experience of a foreign national and carried out in a domestic host organisation, provided that the same is taking place as a part of a project under a programme or an initiative of the European Union or under a similar governmental programme and provided that the same is organised or coordinated by a legal entity accredited by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and established in the Czech Republic or a legal entity established abroad but having its organisational unit in the Czech Republic.

- The duration of stay will be established for a period of 1 year, in exceptional cases, if a programme will take longer than one year, for a period that is adequate to the duration of a programme. Duration of stay cannot be extended and the purpose of the stay cannot be changed.
- In the framework of the application procedure for a long-term residence permit, a foreigner will not be requested to prove his/her knowledge of the Czech language.'