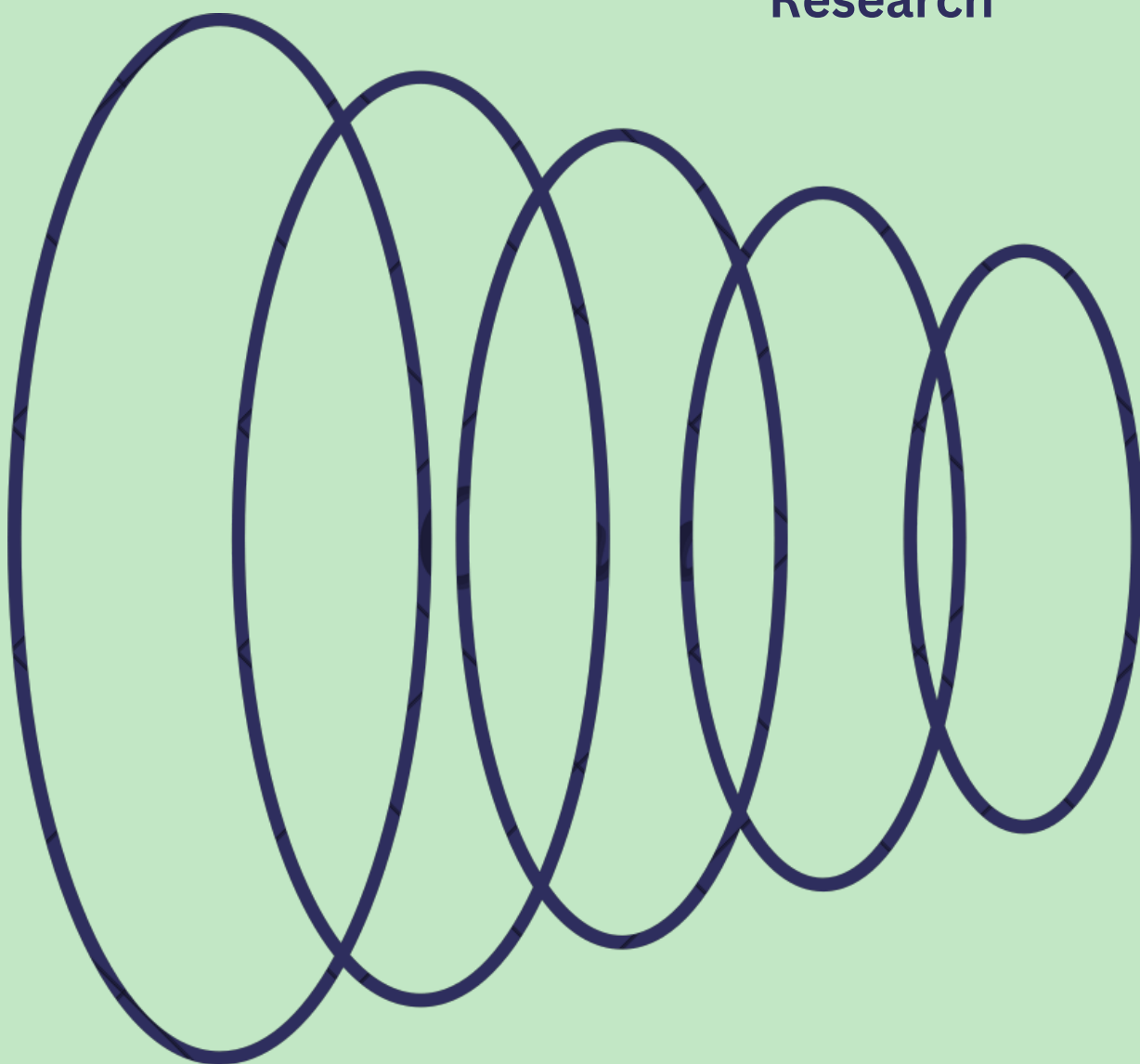


Trends Effective Communication Strategies and Impact of Volunteering

Research



Short Version

Trends, Effective Communication Strategies and Impact of Volunteering

Research

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This research is conducted in the framework of the project “ICON - Capacity building for the IVS movement in impact assessment, communication, and community building” implemented by INEX, PVN, CCIVS and GAIA Kosovo, with the financial support of the European Union,



The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or official policy of the European Union and PVN.



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Introduction

Volunteerism occurs and develops in every society. The concept of volunteering, as well as the forms of its engagement, may vary in different languages and cultures, but the values of volunteering are essentially the same and universal: the desire to contribute to the common good, with free will and with the feeling of solidarity, without expecting any financial compensation back.

Volunteerism is a mutual, reciprocal and intertwined process, with a positive impact at the personal, community, institutional and social level.

Many further developments have happened in volunteering context, by assessing the impact of international work camps and other volunteering projects. The project "ICON - Capacity building for the IVS movement in impact assessment, communication, and community building" a consortium of 4 organisations, INEX-SDA, CCIVS, PVN and GAIA is implementing this project, where research on target groups is undertaken in Czech Republic, Albania and Kosovo.

This research aims to understand citizens' trends, and willingness regarding their voluntary engagement, along with the effective and attractive communication methods for obtaining information on voluntary engagement; and measure the impact that volunteering has had in terms of interpersonal and professional levels to volunteers. The research has gathered data through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data has been gathered through research for the target groups to understand what are the trends of volunteering and the most effective communication methods and techniques they would like to be informed on volunteering opportunities. There have been asked 1200 citizens in Albania, from 15 to 65 years old from rural and urban areas. The questionnaire was distributed online through the snowball technique, as well as send to the contacts of the organizations (not the volunteers), and shared by local partners and municipalities across Albania with the aim to be reached at the national level.

Among the respondents, 68.9% have had volunteering experience and 31.1 % did not volunteer in the past.

The majority of respondents prefer to volunteer during summertime and weekends, followed by short-term volunteering from 2 weeks to 2 months.

The main topics and categories would volunteer are the top priority topics to volunteer for were top priority topics: environment, art and culture, organising festivals, working with kids, community service, and working with animals. The respondents learned about volunteering opportunities, mainly through their peers (33%); in schools and universities (31%) and through social media (29%) However, the majority of respondents would rather receive information regarding volunteering opportunities through social media and e-mail. The most attractive ways

to deliver information and messages about volunteering vacancies is through reels, short posts and videos. The most used communication channel to be informed among youths is Instagram, mostly used in the afternoon and during the night.

To measure the impact of volunteering on former volunteers themselves, a separate questionnaire was drawn up and shared with 15 former volunteers who had volunteered in Albania and across Europe. It has been asked through an interview and the assessment questionnaire. 15 volunteers who have volunteered in Albania and abroad in different European countries. Respondents stated different reasons why they had volunteered, and almost everyone connected the reason with the motivation to make an impact on their lives and others. Their motivation to make an impact on their life and others. Over 95 % of them stated that volunteering developed their skills, improved competencies and improved their personal and professional life.

Volunteering has a positive impact on beneficiaries and communities, by enhancing quality of life, fostering social ties, improved their life, became more open and flexible, and contributed to the local development. Volunteering fosters community cohesion by exhibiting an environment of mutual aid and cooperation. Youth with fewer opportunities have become more independent, enhanced their participation and restored trust to the organisations and community.

Moreover, volunteering has a profound and multifaceted impact on the organizations and municipalities. By augmenting service delivery, and enhancing community engagement, volunteers contribute significantly to the success and well-being of these entities. Embracing and supporting volunteer efforts can lead to more resilient organizations and vibrant, well-supported municipalities.

The research is organised in four parts/ chapters. The first part summarises the methodology and context of volunteering in terms of benefits, challenges, Albanian reality etc.

The second part, analyses the data about the trends of volunteering and effective communication channels and messages people use and prefer to be informed and engaged about volunteering.

The third part, analyses the qualitative data on the impact of volunteering at individual, community and institutional levels by showcasing the impact volunteering has had on volunteers, beneficiaries, communities, organisations and institutions.

The last part of the research brings some recommendations and conclusions, along with bibliography.

Methodology

The research aims to understand citizens' trends, and willingness regarding their voluntary engagement, along with the effective and attractive communication methods for obtaining information on voluntary engagement; and to measure the impact that volunteering has had in terms of interpersonal and professional levels on volunteers, institutions and local communities.

Research questions

- What are the trends of volunteering in Albania, including the length and thematic?
- What would motivate people to volunteer?
- Which are the communication channels which would attract and be more effective to inform and engage volunteers?
- What is the impact of volunteering on the community, beneficiaries, institutions and volunteers themselves?

The questionnaire questions were compiled to provide a comprehensive understanding of the needs, trends challenges related to voluntary engagement, as well as to understand the effective communication strategies and channels to attract volunteers and engage them in voluntary actions. For the data collection qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed using the preliminary research results and knowledge from desk review, the questionnaire was prepared and the results of the survey were contextualized with the qualitative findings.

- **Desk research** is conducted to draw the panorama of the current volunteering context, why is important, how volunteers can be motivated, how to attract them and how to communicate effectively with them. In addition, it brings an overview of what could be more feasible communication channels to inform and engage volunteers.
- The semi-structured **survey** collected quantitative data and qualitative data on citizens from 15 to 65 years old across Albania to understand the trends of volunteering, what would motivate them to volunteer, which communication channels they use, and how they would prefer to be informed about volunteering opportunities and concrete engagement opportunities. A total of 1200 citizens filled in the questionnaire, targeted randomly at national level, from urban and rural areas. The survey has been distributed online where a company has gathered data, also with a great contribution of local organizations, universities and municipalities in different cities of Albania who made

possible to share the online survey . Collecting such data helps to understand how to reach and how to communicate with the target group.

- ***15 in-depth interviews*** were conducted with voluntary providers such as organisations, municipalities, and youth centres that hosted short or long-term volunteers; volunteers have been engaged to understand the impact volunteering has left on the institutions, organizations and the target group they work with. Interviews are realized face-to-face and virtually with the key stakeholders.

I. About Volunteering

Volunteering generally involves offering time and skills to help others without expecting financial compensation. The context of volunteering can vary widely depending on the location, the needs of the community, and the type of work involved.

About 80% of volunteers who have engaged in direct volunteer activities have affirmed that the reason why they volunteered was to offer their help, but during the process, they realized that they themselves benefited more (Rama and Xhaho, 2020).

Volunteering is a multifaceted activity that benefits individuals, communities, and society as a whole. It promotes personal growth, enhances well-being, and fosters social connections for volunteers while providing essential support to organizations and communities, driving social change, and contributing to a more cohesive and resilient society.

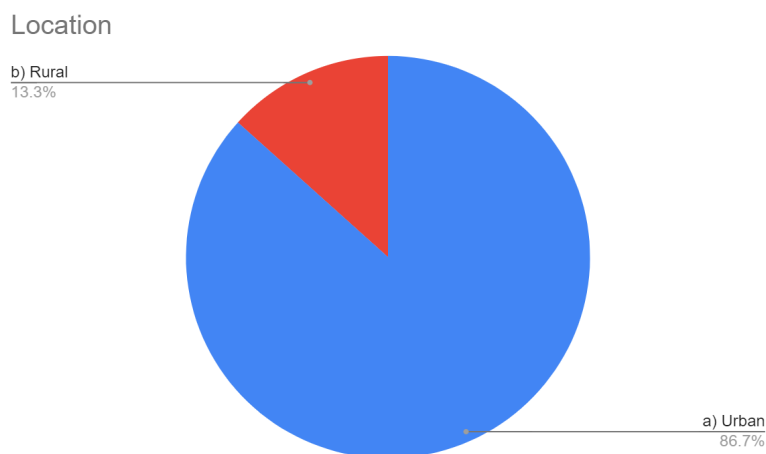
Engaging volunteers effectively involves choosing the right communication channels to reach them and keep them motivated. The most effective communication channels for engaging volunteers often involve a mix of digital and in-person methods, tailored to the preferences of your volunteer base. Regularly evaluate and adjust your communication strategies to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of your volunteers, fostering a strong and engaged community. Some of the most effective channels along with an analysis of pros and cons of each are: **Email**; Social Media; Messaging Apps; Volunteer Management Software; In-Person Meetings and Events; Newsletters and Bulletins; Surveys and Feedback Forms

II. Findings from the survey

2.1 Demographic data

In this survey, citizens over 15 years old to max 65 years old across Albania from both rural and urban areas, where the majority of the online survey reached citizens from urban areas of around 86.7 % (around 1000 citizens) and around 200 citizens from the rural areas . Even though the country has national accessibility to the internet, still reaching the rural areas is a challenge.

The majority of the respondents who answered the questionnaire come from urban areas in contrast to those who live in villages. Although there is internet access all over the country 86.7% of respondents live in a city or town and the rest reside in rural areas/ villages.

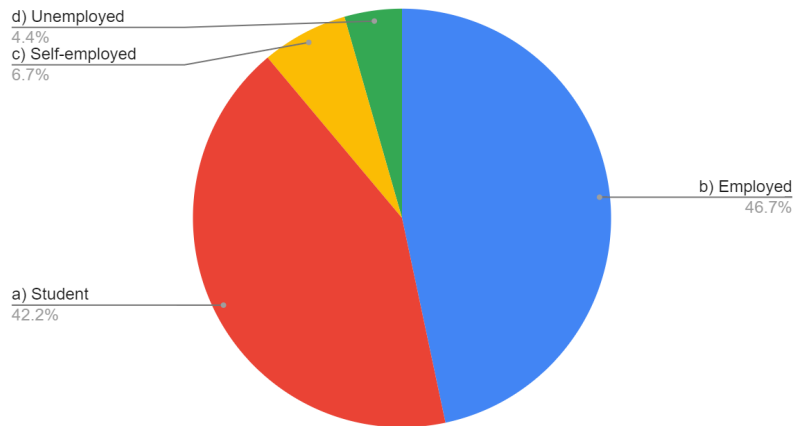


Graph 1: Residence

Among 1200 citizens asked majority of them, 46.7% are employed (552 citizens) , followed by 42.2 % (504) who are students. This enables us to identify and compare the trends of

volunteering between employed and unemployed people.

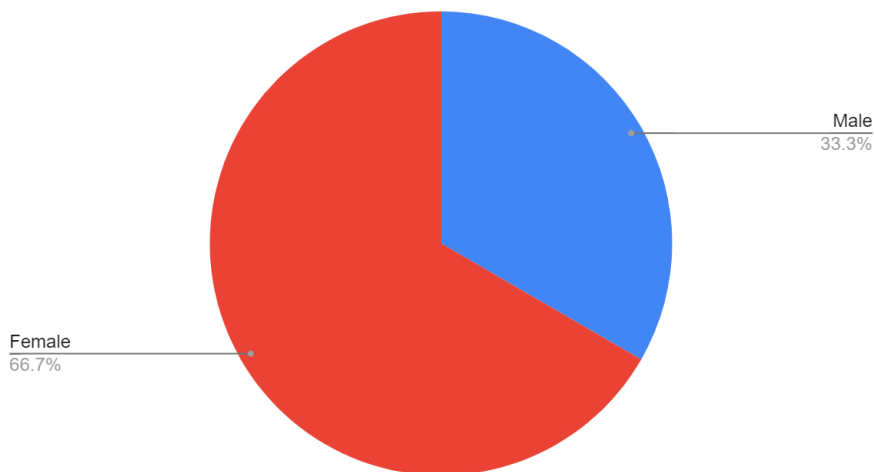
Occupation?



Graph 2: Occupation

The majority of people filling out the survey have been girls and women with around 66.7%, this trend is easily reflected even in voluntary activities where girls and women are more interested and more engaged in voluntary actions.

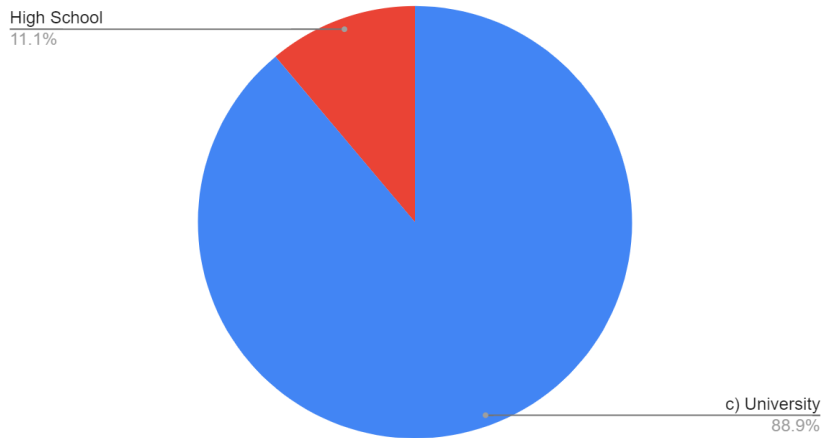
Sex



Graph 3: Sex

88.9 % of respondents had finished university.

Education

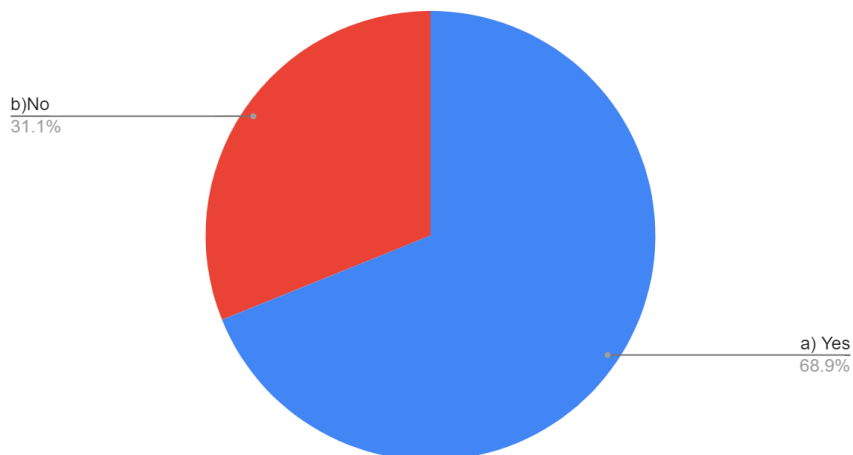


Graph 4: Education

2.2 Trends of Volunteering

The survey aim was to understand the trends, challenges and willingness of the people who did not volunteer and understand their perspective for future volunteering. Among the respondents, there has been 68.9% who have had volunteering experience and 31.1 % who did not volunteer. Both target groups bring valuable perspectives to understand and analyze how we can reach them in terms of communication and PR.

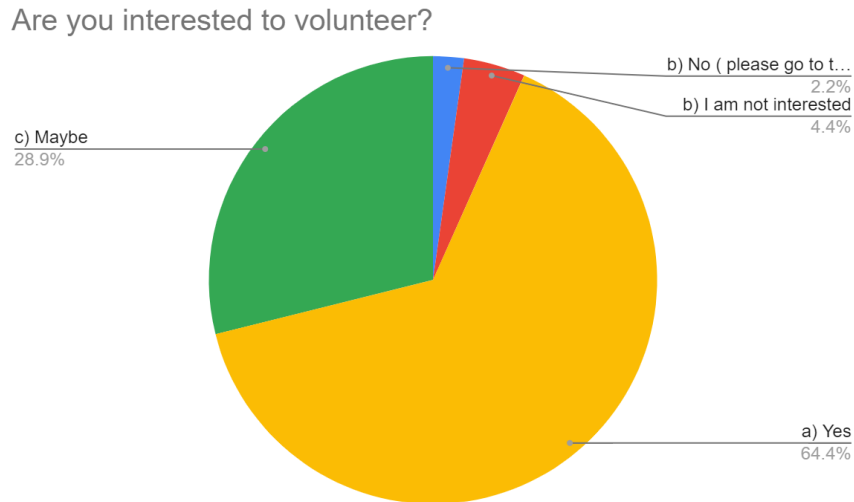
Have you ever been a volunteer?



Graph 5: Volunteering engagement

The majority of respondents (64.4%) are willing to volunteer, this from both respondents who have been volunteering and those who have not had the opportunity to volunteer. There is a

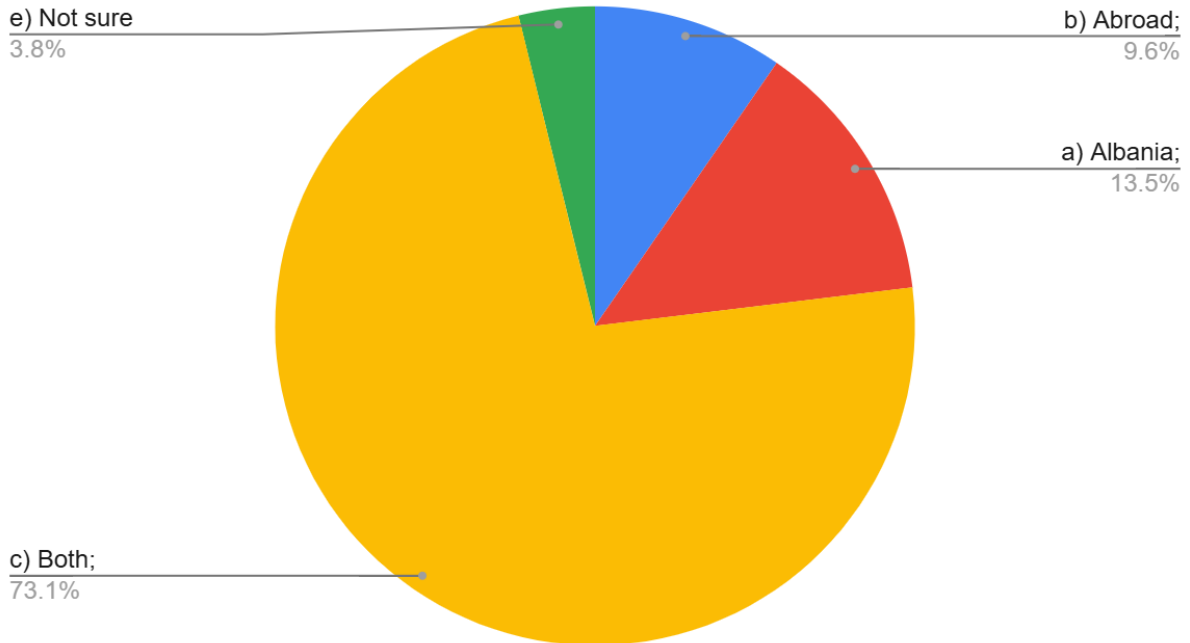
considerable number of respondents 28.9 % who are not sure if they want to volunteer or not, this target might be motivated and engaged if they were offered interesting volunteering options, topics, length, the right motivation and communication strategies.



Graph 6: Interest on volunteering

The majority of respondents are interested in volunteering in Albania and abroad, 72.1 %. This flexibility is quite positive due to existing volunteering opportunities, especially with the workcamps which are organised all around the globe and Albania has ongoing and sustainable volunteering opportunities for people with no age limit.

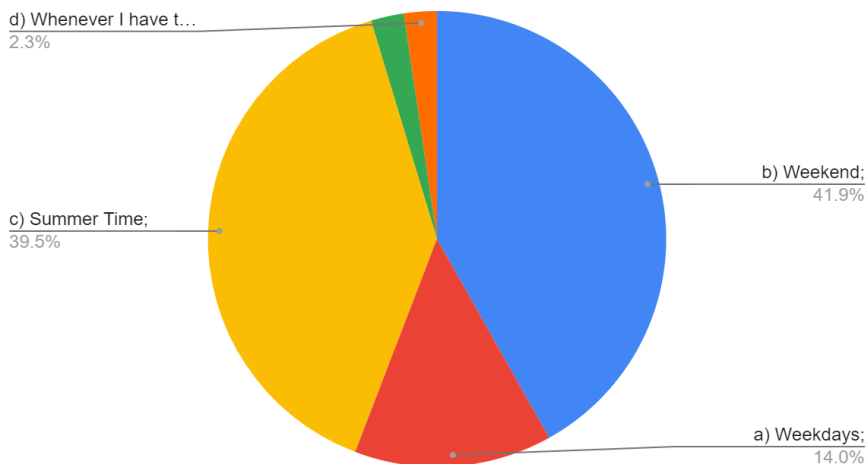
Where would you like to volunteer in?



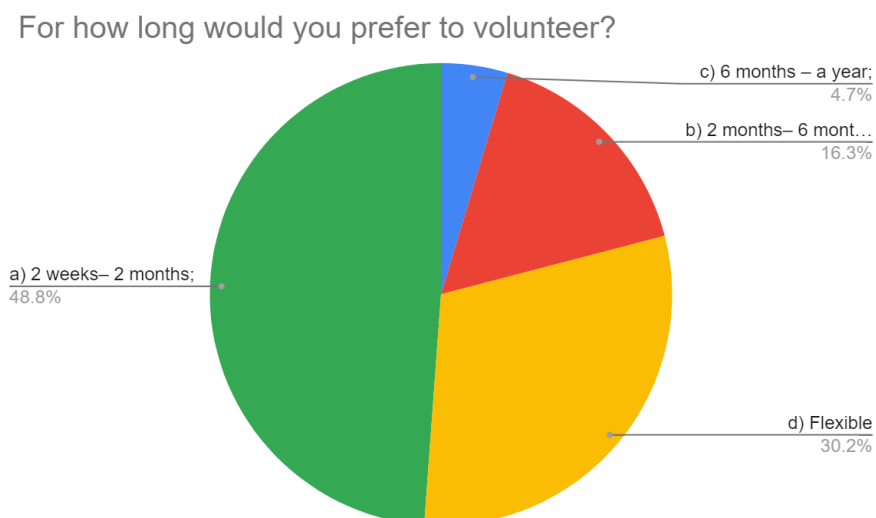
Graph 7: Where is the interest in volunteering

The majority of respondents prefer to volunteer during summertime and weekends, followed by preferring short-term volunteering from 2 weeks to 2 months over long-term opportunities. However, there is around 14% who are willing to volunteer during the weekdays, and 30% very flexible to volunteer for any length of volunteering.

What is your favorite time of the year to volunteer?



Graph 8: The favourite time of the year to volunteer



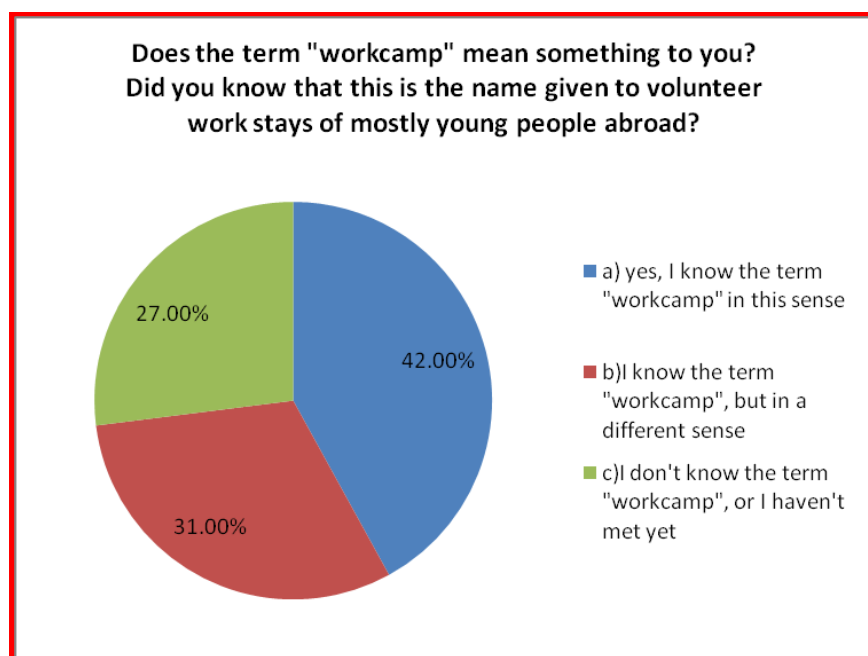
Graph 9: Length of volunteering

Regarding the question of what are the main topics and categories to volunteer for, there were four top priority topics: environmental topics, artistic and culture, work with kids, and working with animals.

Categories	Number of respondents
• environmental protection	854
• support of municipalities and local communities (work in the public space of municipalities, revitalization of public life)	734
• artistic and cultural projects	722
• other topics : sports activities, social issues/ mental health, Youth and democracy, peace education, community services	723
• organisation of festivals	679
• work with kids	602

• working with animals outside of agriculture (shelters, zoos...)	597
• work in agriculture	589
• renovation and care of cultural heritage	437
• work with seniors	398
• working with people with disabilities	350
• none	27

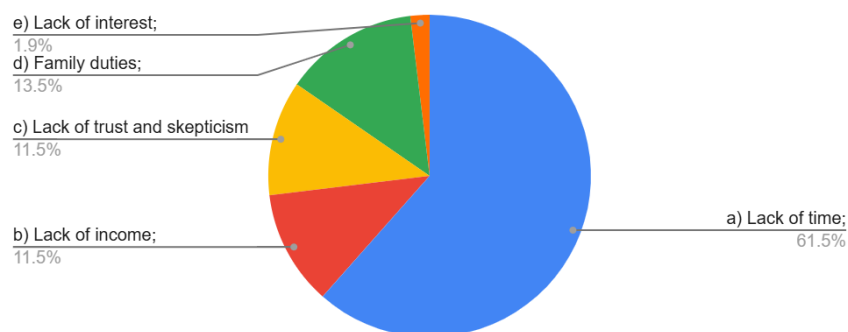
When asked if they know the term "workcamp" refers to volunteer work stays of 1-3 weeks abroad or in your own country, where mainly young people from all over the world go and help local non-profit organisations and municipalities in various environmental, community, cultural, social or other activities, there were 42 % who responded yes, I know the term "workcamp" in this sense, 27 % I don't know the term "workcamp", or I didn't know yet, and 31 % knew the term "workcamp", but in a different sense.



Graph 10: The term workcamp

Seems that the main reason why people can not volunteer is the lack of time, with 60.5% of respondents, that seems that short-term volunteering, summertime and weekends are more feasible options for people.

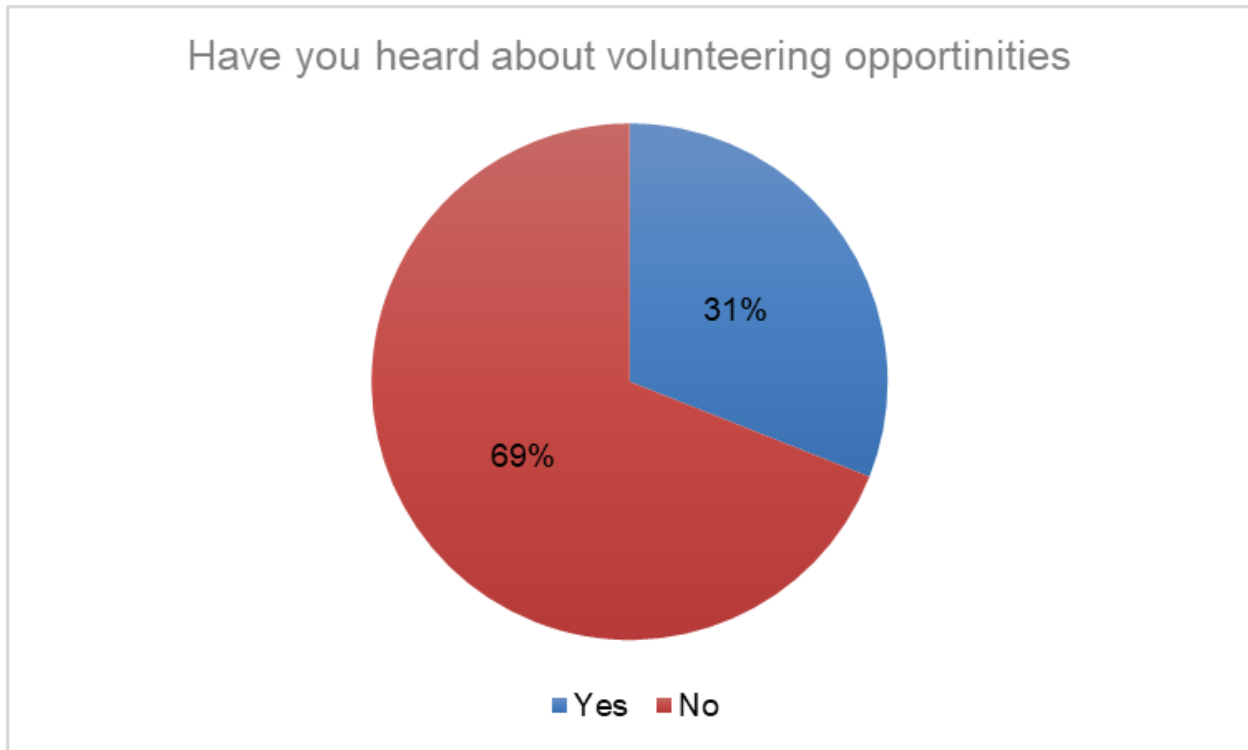
What would discourage you to volunteer?



Graph 10: Why people could not volunteer

2.3 Communication and PR

While we talk about volunteering projects and engagement, communication and PR remain crucial. Choosing effective communication channels, attractive and understandable messages, time slots, and clarity, influence the level of information and engagement for volunteers. It is important that people know about their engagement and the concrete contribution they can make. The survey shows that the majority of people asked 69 % have not heard about existing volunteering opportunities, therefore even if they have time and are willing to volunteer, they don't have the basic information. The remaining 31 % have heard about existing opportunities. For those who have heard, it has not been clear how they can contribute and participate. A good consideration and emphasis should be taken for the majority who do not have information, it is crucial to increase the level of information through effective communication strategies and tools by voluntarism providers and volunteers themselves.

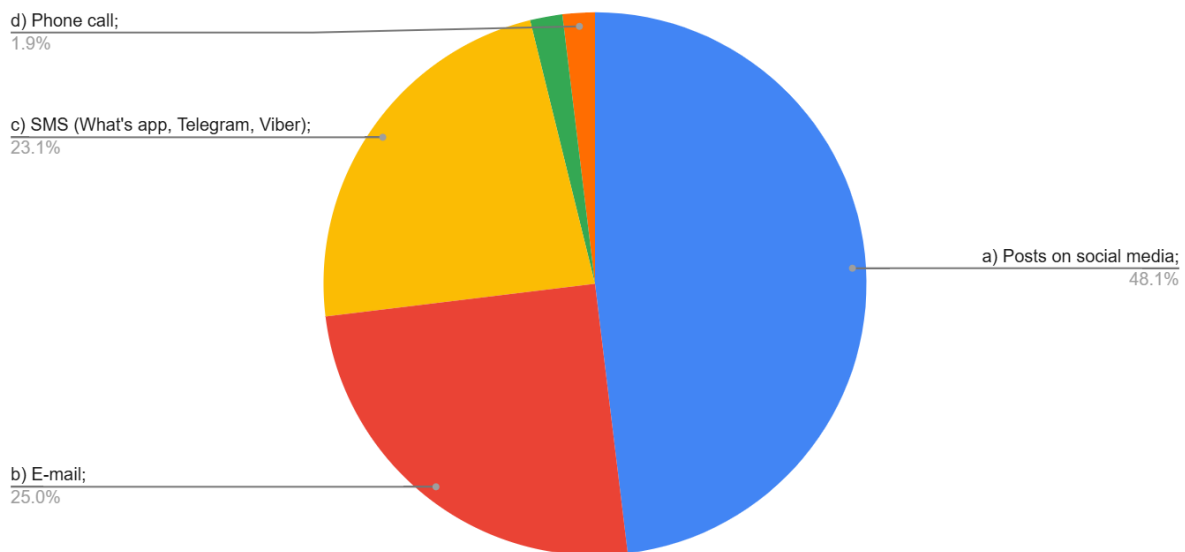


Graph 11: Knowledge about existing volunteering opportunities

survey shows that people have heard about volunteering through their peers (33 %); in schools and universities (31%) and through posts on social media (29 %), the rest heard about it through institutions, media, and promotions.

Even though they heard or were informed about volunteering by their peers and face -to-face meetings, respondents would like or prefer to be informed through social media (55.8%), followed by e-mail (23.3%). . On the theoretical part of this study, both social media and e-mail are listed as effective communication channels to inspire and engage volunteers, with their pros and cons. These data help the organization to plan and design communication plans according to the needs and requests of the target groups.

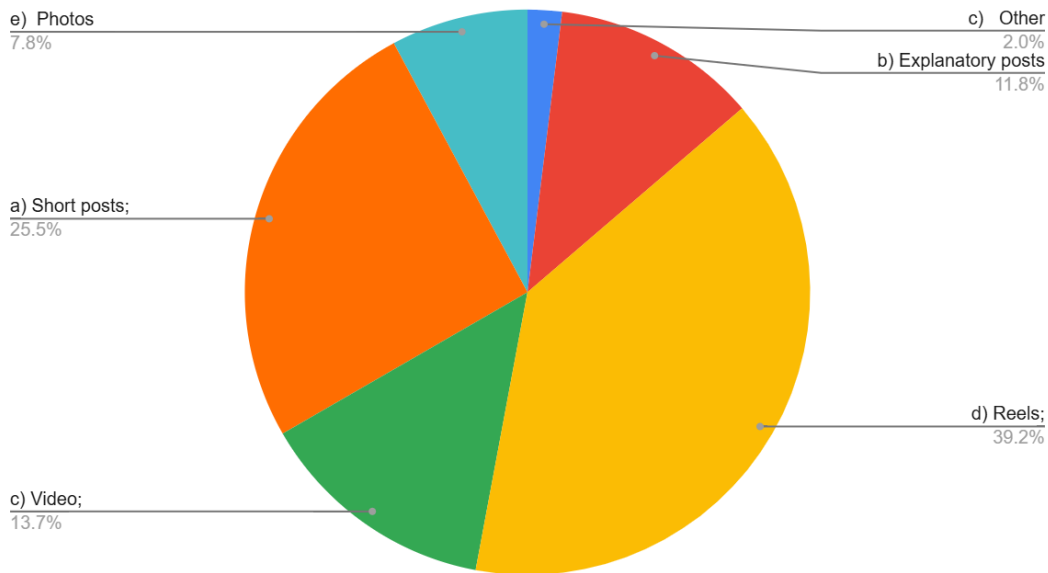
How would you prefer to be notified??



Graphs 12: Preferred informations channels to receive information

In times when social media is the most used by people and is listed as one of the main communication channels is crucial to understand what types of posts and what lengths are more attractive for people. The survey showed that reels are the most favourite on social media (39.5%), followed by short posts (20.9%) and videos (16.3%).

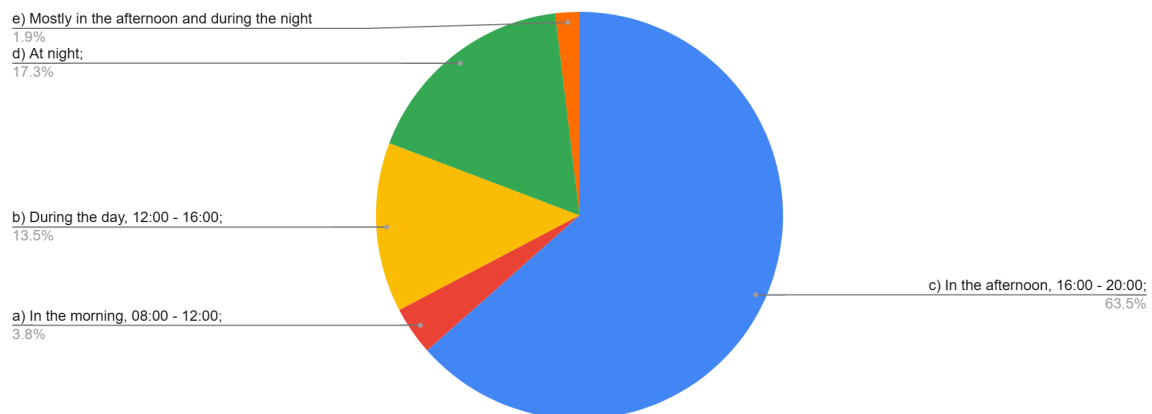
What sort of social media posts would draw your attention?



Graph 13: Attractive social media posts

On the question of when you use most social media, it seems that the majority of respondents use social media in the afternoon and during the night. Following this trend the organisations should consider using social media at this time slot.

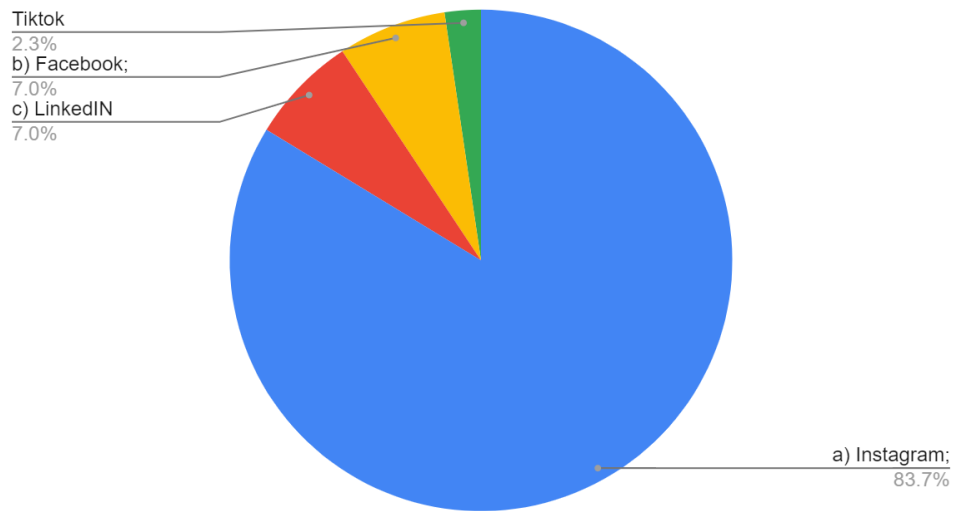
At what time do you use social media most?



Graph 14: Timing of social media usage

Instagram remains the most used social media with 83.7 % of responses, which is the main trend, especially among young people.

Which social media platforms you use the most?



Graph 15: Which social media platform use most

IV. Recommendations

Based on the literature review, the research on target groups/surveys and the interviews with the volunteers, organisations and institutions who organise volunteering activities, there are a couple of recommendations for organisations in order to meet the requests and needs of the current and potential volunteers.

4.1 Recommendations for organizations and institutions

Increase Awareness and Education

- Conduct Informational Campaigns: Use social media, local media, and community events to spread the word about the benefits and opportunities of volunteering.
- Partner with Educational Institutions: Integrate volunteering education into school and university curricula to foster a culture of service from a young age.
- Host Workshops and Seminars: Provide sessions that explain what volunteering entails, its benefits, and how to get started, hat benefits. Make such promotion workshops periodically
- Collaborate with traditional media: like TV, radio channels etc to share the information

Host High-Profile Events

- Organize Launch Events: Host events to kick off new volunteering programs or campaigns, attracting media attention and community involvement.
- Participate in Community Events: Get involved in local festivals, fairs, and other public events to raise awareness and attract potential volunteers.

Showcase the Benefits of volunteering at the interpersonal and professional level

- Share Success Stories: Highlight personal stories and case studies of how volunteering has positively impacted individuals, organizations, institutions and communities. Showcase specific projects or initiatives that have achieved significant results due to volunteer efforts.
- Quantify the Impact: Use data and testimonials to demonstrate the tangible benefits of volunteering, such as skill development, competencies, networking opportunities, and personal fulfillment.

Address Skepticism

- Provide Evidence-Based Information: Offer research and reports that support the benefits of volunteering, addressing common misconceptions and concerns.
- Create a FAQ Resource: Develop a comprehensive FAQ that addresses common questions and doubts about volunteering.

Make Volunteering Accessible

- Offer Flexible Opportunities: Provide a range of volunteering options that cater to different schedules and availability, including short-term, remote, and micro-volunteering opportunities.
- Remove Barriers: Ensure that volunteering opportunities are inclusive and accessible to people of all backgrounds and abilities.
- Simplify the Sign-Up Process: Make it easy for people to learn about and sign up for volunteer opportunities with clear, direct calls-to-action in your communications.
- Provide Immediate Opportunities: Highlight volunteer opportunities that are immediate or upcoming to create a sense of urgency and prompt action.

Engage Potential Volunteers

- Host Volunteer Fairs and Events: Organize events where individuals can meet with organizations and learn about available volunteer opportunities.
- Create a Volunteering Portal: Develop an easy-to-navigate online platform where people can find and sign up for volunteer opportunities.
- Volunteering Calendar: Make a list of volunteering activities and calendar that your organization/institution offers

Provide Support and Recognition

- Offer Training and Resources: Provide volunteers with the training and resources they need to succeed in their roles and responsibilities. Training should be organized for the volunteers coordinator on managing the volunteers, and to the volunteers themselves how to undertake their roles with clarity
- Supervising and mentorship: supervise periodically volunteers by an experienced supervisor, and offer guidance and mentorship at each step
- Periodic evaluation: Make formal and informal evaluation meeting and questionnaires with the volunteer in order to measure the progress and assess the impact.
- Recognize and Reward Contributions: Implement systems for acknowledging and celebrating the efforts of volunteers, such as awards, certificates, or public recognition.

Utilize Technology

- Leverage Social Media: Use social media campaigns to promote volunteering opportunities and engage with potential volunteers. Use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to promote volunteer opportunities, share success stories, and engage with potential volunteers.
- Use short stories and mostly Instagram for reaching volunteers
- Create Engaging Content: Post diverse content such as videos, infographics, and blog posts that illustrate the benefits of volunteering and provide updates on ongoing projects.

Develop a Strong Brand Identity

- Develop a consistent and compelling messaging strategy that conveys the value of volunteering and aligns with your organization's mission.
- Design Eye-Catching Materials: Use visually appealing graphics and materials in your communication efforts to capture attention and interest.

Solicit Feedback, Utilize Data and Insights

- Conduct Surveys: Regularly gather feedback from volunteers and potential volunteers to understand their needs and preferences.
- Adapt Based on Input: Continuously adjust and improve volunteering programs based on feedback and changing trends.
- Analyze Engagement Metrics: Monitor the performance of your PR and communication efforts to understand what resonates with your audience and refine your strategies accordingly.

Engage with Influencers and Ambassadors

- Partner with Influencers: Collaborate with local influencers, celebrities, or community leaders who can endorse and promote volunteering opportunities.
- Establish Volunteer Ambassadors: Recruit enthusiastic volunteers to act as ambassadors who can share their positive experiences and advocate for the cause.

Foster Community Connections

- Build a Volunteer Community: Create online forums or social media groups where volunteers can connect, share experiences, and support each other.
- Promote Team Volunteering: Encourage group volunteering opportunities to attract teams from workplaces, schools, or social groups.

4.2 Recommendations for volunteers

Here are some recommendations for volunteers to be more proactive in both local and international volunteering:

- Stay informed about pressing local issues and areas where volunteers are needed by engaging with community organizations, local news, and government initiatives.
- Reach out to local nonprofits, charities, and community groups, municipalities to learn about their current needs and how you can help.
- Identify how your unique skills and interests can address local needs. For instance, if you're a graphic designer, you might help with marketing materials for a local charity.
- Offer to run workshops or training sessions for local organizations in areas where you have expertise.
- Collaborate with local schools, businesses, and organizations to create and support new volunteering opportunities.
- Share information about local volunteer opportunities through social media, community boards, and word-of-mouth.
- Actively participate in local volunteer activities and inspire others by sharing your experiences and the impact of your work.
- Research international volunteer organizations thoroughly to ensure they are reputable and align with your values. Look for reviews and ask for references if needed.
- Learn about the culture and context of the region where you plan to volunteer to ensure your efforts are respectful and effective.
- Connect with global networks or online communities that focus on international volunteering to find opportunities and share experiences.
- Partner with international volunteers or organizations on projects that have a global impact or need cross-border cooperation.

V. Conclusions

This study aimed to explore trends and willingness related to voluntary engagement among citizens, evaluate effective communication methods for promoting volunteering, and assess the impact of volunteering on volunteers and key stakeholders. The findings from this comprehensive study provide several key insights and conclusions:

1. **Engagement with Volunteering:** A significant majority of respondents (68.9%) have had volunteering experience, indicating a strong culture of volunteerism within the target population. This suggests that volunteering is a well-established practice among the Albanian citizens surveyed, and there is a solid foundation for encouraging further engagement.

2. **Preferred Volunteering Timing and Duration:** Volunteers generally prefer to engage in activities during the summer and on weekends, favoring short-term commitments ranging from two weeks to two months. This preference underscores the importance of scheduling flexibility and short-term opportunities to maximize volunteer participation.
3. **Popular Volunteer Topics:** The study highlights that environmental issues, artistic and cultural activities, festival organization, working with children, community service, and animal welfare are the most appealing areas for volunteers. These insights can guide organizations in tailoring their programs to align with the interests of potential volunteers.
4. **Effective Communication Channels:** The preferred methods for receiving information about volunteering are social media and email, with a notable preference for engaging formats such as reels, short posts, and videos. Instagram emerged as the most utilized platform, especially during the afternoon and night. Organizations should leverage these insights to enhance their communication strategies, ensuring that they reach their audience effectively through the most popular channels and engaging content formats.
5. **Lack of Awareness as a Barrier to Volunteering:** The majority of respondents (69%) are not aware of existing volunteering opportunities. This indicates that, even if individuals are willing and able to volunteer, their lack of basic information prevents them from participating. Effective communication strategies and outreach efforts are essential to bridge this information gap and make potential volunteers aware of available opportunities. Addressing this lack of awareness can significantly increase volunteer engagement and participation.
6. **Need for Improved Communication Strategies:** Although 31% of respondents are aware of volunteering opportunities and have a clearer understanding of how to contribute, the larger portion of the population remains uninformed. To enhance overall volunteer participation, it is crucial for volunteer organizations and providers to implement more effective communication tools and strategies. This could include targeted outreach, informative campaigns, and easy access to information about how to get involved. Improving these communication efforts will help ensure that more people are informed and can actively engage in volunteering.
7. **Encouragement of Volunteerism:** The study underscores the need for targeted communication strategies and flexible volunteer opportunities to maximize engagement. By addressing the preferences and motivations of potential volunteers, organizations can better attract and retain volunteers, thereby amplifying the positive impacts on both individuals and their communities.

In conclusion, the research highlights the significant role of effective communication and understanding volunteer preferences in promoting engagement. The positive outcomes of volunteering, both for the volunteers and the communities they serve, affirm the value of

volunteerism in enhancing social cohesion and contributing to local development. Future initiatives should build on these findings to further support and expand volunteering efforts.

VI. Litterature

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