

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LATVIA AND LITHUANIA

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Abstract. This study aims to investigate young people's attitudes towards volunteering, examining the reasons that discourage them from volunteering, and the benefits they perceive or receive from engaging in such activities. The problematic question: what are the key reasons, benefits, and challenges for young people to engage in volunteering? The study uses a quantitative research approach, using a structured questionnaire to collect data from respondents in Lithuania and Latvia. The survey focuses on young people aged 18-29, often considered a key group for promoting civic engagement and social responsibility. 250 respondents from Lithuania and 252 from Latvia participated in this survey. The analysis revealed that young people perceive various benefits of voluntary activities. The most prominent benefit is the professional advantage that youth gain through volunteering. Young people in our study are more likely to engage in volunteering if it offers financial rewards, professional skills development or visible impact. Professional benefits are a higher priority for Lithuanian young people than for Latvian young people. About half of the respondents had volunteered in the past. However, only a small proportion currently volunteer. The results show that young people in Lithuania and Latvia are less likely to volunteer. Youth volunteering is mostly limited to one-off initiatives rather than ongoing commitments. The main challenges to volunteering are lack of time, limited information and lack of financial incentives. These challenges are particularly pronounced among Lithuanian respondents. This study is a new contribution that provides a comparative cross-border analysis of young people's participation in volunteering. While existing studies focus on youth volunteering, this study provides important insights into young people's attitudes towards volunteering, revealing the barriers and incentives that influence their participation. The findings contribute to the academic discourse on civic engagement, social responsibility and youth development, while informing volunteering initiatives. By understanding the specific reasons why young people are reluctant to volunteer, stakeholders can develop more effective strategies to attract volunteers, address barriers to participation and strengthen incentives. To increase participation in volunteering, strategies such as paid volunteering opportunities, integration into academic curricula and targeted information campaigns should be explored. In addition, fostering a culture of civic participation through education and policy initiatives can encourage a long-term commitment to volunteering.

Keywords: volunteering, wellbeing, youth, personal growth, EU Youth Strategy.

JEL Classification: J1, H7

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of youth volunteering has grown in popularity and has become a powerful tool for young people's personal growth, community involvement and general well-being. Volunteering gives young people the opportunity to develop important

skills such as leadership, teamwork and problem-solving, as well as a sense of purpose and fulfilment.

When it comes to volunteering, each country has its own distinct notions, definitions, and traditions. Volunteering encompasses all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal. It is characterized

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by individuals acting under their own free will, guided by personal choices and motivations, without seeking financial gain. As defined by the European Commission (2011), volunteering represents a journey of solidarity, allowing individuals and organizations to identify and address human, social, or environmental needs and concerns. It is often carried out in support of non-profit organizations or community-based initiatives.

In defining volunteering, authors mostly use terms such as activity, society, time, volunteer, social, unpaid, person, society, benefit, volunteer, friend, work, age, etc. (Penner, 2002; Hadzi-Miceva, 2007; Gil-Lacruz et al. 2019; Papa et al. 2019; Nappo et al. 2024). An analysis of the literature suggests the following main features of volunteering: (1) volunteering is carried out within a formal framework or in an informal setting; (2) volunteering is unpaid; (3) volunteering is carried out for the benefit of society, specific organisations or groups of people, or for individuals. Researchers point out that volunteering is unpaid and optional (Dekker & Morrow-Halman 2003; Wilson, 2000; Nappo, et.al., 2024). Nappo et.al. (2024), based on a review of the socio-economic literature, present volunteering as one of the most significant pro-social activities and decisions that people make regarding work and leisure. Montague & Eiroa-Orosa (2018) describe volunteering as service-giving activities that typically operate within existing social systems. Additionally, Liszt-Rohlf et al. (2021) characterize volunteering as a form of learning, emphasizing its role in skill development and personal growth.

Volunteering has been identified as a valuable avenue for young individuals to contribute to their communities while also reaping a multitude of personal benefits. Volunteering not only provides an opportunity for young people to gain practical work experience and develop important skills, but it also fosters a sense of civic responsibility and social awareness (Mustafa et al., 2020). Volunteering is a rewarding experience, but it also comes with challenges that can make it difficult for individuals to fully engage.

The problematic question was raised: what are the key reasons, benefits, and challenges for young people to engage in volunteering?

The study aims to investigate young people's attitudes towards volunteering, examining the reasons that discourage them from volunteering, and the benefits they receive from engaging in such activities.

The methods of the research. Analysis of research literature sources, systematization, synthesis, generalization, and comparison were applied at the theoretical level. Quantitative research and data processing methods were applied in the empirical research. The analysis includes Lithuania and Latvia youth.

2. Literature Review

Volunteering regulation. Volunteering in the European Union is regulated by various legal and policy frameworks at both the EU level and in individual member states. Several documents emphasize the importance of volunteering, such as the EU Strategy on Volunteering (2011), which aims to support and develop volunteering across the EU by improving recognition and creating an enabling environment.

Volunteering plays a crucial role in the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), which focuses on three core pillars: Engage, Connect, and Empower. It is seen as a key tool for young people's civic engagement, personal development and social inclusion. Through initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+, the EU provides opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities, gain valuable experience and foster a sense of European identity. The document from **European Commission** (2021) titled "**Communication on EU policies and volunteering...**" is an official communication from the discusses the role of volunteering in the European Union (EU). This document provides a foundation for later EU initiatives aimed at strengthening volunteering networks and creating more opportunities for people to contribute to society across borders.

National-level institutions and documents also regulate the specificities and principles of volunteering, the rights and responsibilities of the volunteer, the procedures for organizing volunteering, the insurance of volunteers, and the reimbursement of volunteering costs. In Lithuania, voluntary activities are regulated by several key legal acts that establish the principles of organizing voluntary work, as well as the rights and obligations of participants. The main legal acts governing voluntary activities include: The Law on Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania (2011). This is the primary legal act that defines the concept of voluntary activities. It outlines the rights and obligations of both organizers and volunteers, as well as provisions related to voluntary activity contracts and other relevant regulations. The Law on Youth Policy Framework of the Republic of Lithuania (2003). This law focuses on voluntary activities among young people. It encourages youth participation in non-governmental organizations and promotes their active engagement in voluntary work. The Law on the Development of Non-Governmental Organizations of the Republic of Lithuania (2013). This law regulates the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are closely linked to voluntary activities. It establishes the framework for the operation and support of NGOs in Lithuania.

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for youth policy. Youth policy in Latvia is a set of

targeted actions across all national policies to promote the comprehensive and multifaceted development of young people, their integration into society and the improvement of their quality of life. (Youth policies in Latvia, 2021). In Latvia, voluntary activities are governed by the Volunteer Service Law of the Republic of Latvia (2015). This is the main law regulating voluntary activities in Latvia. Defines the concept, objectives, forms of organization, and responsibilities of volunteers and organizers. The document establishes that voluntary activities can be conducted in non-governmental organizations, the public sector, and, in certain cases, private companies; provides regulations on volunteer agreements and compensation mechanisms.

Additionally, as in other European Union (EU) countries, Lithuania and Latvia adheres to international documents and EU guidelines that promote the development of volunteering. These guidelines aim to enhance the role of voluntary activities in social and community development.

Benefits of Youth Volunteering. Numerous studies have documented the myriad benefits associated with youth involvement in volunteer activities. Volunteering has been shown to improve mental and physical health, enhance life satisfaction, and contribute to overall well-being (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007). One of the primary benefits of youth volunteering is the enhancement of career prospects and employability. Participating in volunteer activities allows young individuals to acquire skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, which are highly valued by employers. Furthermore, volunteer experience can demonstrate a commitment to community engagement and a willingness to go above and beyond the traditional academic or professional path (Mustafa et al., 2020). This can be particularly advantageous for students who are still in the process of exploring their career options, as volunteering can help them gain insights into different fields and industries.

H1: Career development has a strong relationship with finding purpose of life through volunteering

Volunteering has become especially popular in European countries, where individuals from diverse backgrounds dedicate their time and skills to various causes. University students, in particular, are drawn to volunteering as a means of personal growth, skill development, and community engagement (Bakri et al., 2021). Voluntary service activities in higher education institutions cultivate a culture of volunteerism, fostering character development and social responsibility. Such experiences expose students to the challenges faced by marginalized groups, encouraging empathy, compassion, and a deeper understanding of social justice (Pen & Niu, 2023). Key motivations for university students to engage in volunteering include a desire to

help their communities, acquire new skills, gain valuable experiences, and enhance future career prospects (Bakri et al., 2021). Additionally, social interactions fostered through volunteering contribute significantly to personal and professional growth by facilitating meaningful dialogues, building trust, and encouraging reflection on societal contributions (Díaz-Iso et al., 2020). Belonging to youth activist groups has also been shown to promote a sense of belonging and foster connections with peers, further enhancing overall well-being (Montague & Eiroá-Orosa, 2017). Additionally, youth volunteering has been shown to have a positive impact on personal development and well-being.

H2: Youth engagement in new social networks is strongly linked to the development of stronger communities.

Challenges in Youth Volunteering. Youth volunteering faces some challenges, even with all its benefits. The gaps in student volunteering and the reflection processes of university students in different European countries point to areas that need to be addressed. For example, some studies suggest that more targeted efforts should be made to integrate volunteering into the curriculum in order to create a lasting impact and to foster a healthy volunteering environment. The limitations of short-term or task-oriented volunteering highlight the need for more comprehensive and long-term engagement strategies (Li-li & Jialin, 2023).

Managing the time and emotional costs of volunteering in health and social services is another barrier. Barnard & Furtak (2020) note that volunteers working in these fields face burnout and mental health problems such as burnout, stress and lack of adequate supervision. These challenges can undermine the personal benefits usually associated with volunteering. Burnout is exacerbated by the inability to regulate workload and set limits. Volunteers may feel pressured to prioritize their roles over caring for themselves, which can lead to moral difficulties and a diminished sense of compassion.

H3: Young people are less likely to volunteer because unpaid work does not align with their financial needs and career aspirations.

3. Research methodology

The quantitative research focuses on young people, as this age group is often perceived to have the potential to make a significant contribution to solving social problems through volunteering. By questioning young people in Lithuania and Latvia, we want to identify common trends, regional differences and successful strategies that could encourage more people to get involved.

Research method. This study uses a quantitative research method, utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect data from Lithuanian and Latvian respondents.

Research instrument. Respondents from Lithuania and Latvia were given a questionnaire consisting of three groups of ordinal-scale questions, one nominal question, and a demographic section. The first set of ordinal questions aimed to assess the reasons for low involvement in volunteering. The second group focused on factors that could encourage young people to engage in volunteering. The final set of ordinal questions explored the perceived benefits of volunteering. The nominal question inquired whether young people had volunteered and where. Lastly, the demographic questions were designed to gather information on the respondents' age, gender, and societal position.

Research sample. Young people from 18 to 29 years old from different Lithuania and Latvia countries. There is no universal consensus on what “youth” is. Youth is socially constructed and refers to the period of complex transitions to autonomy, from childhood to adulthood. Definitions of young people vary between countries. The age range 15-29 is often selected for statistical purposes at EU level (Youth policy essentials, 2019). The questionnaire was distributed on the: <https://pollmill.com/> website.

In this survey participated 250 respondents from Lithuania and 252 from Latvia. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 29 years old. 89.2% from Lithuania and 97.2 from Latvia was students. 24.4% from Lithuania and 11.5% from Latvia was employed respondents, some of them are students also. 37.6% from Lithuania and 56.3% from Latvia was male. 60.8% from Lithuania and 40.5 from Latvia was female. Other prefer do not to disclose their gender.

Data processing. The collected empirical data were processed using the SPSS (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*). In the data processing descriptive statistics were used, such as percentiles, mean, mode and standard deviation. The data was also processed by parametric Independent Samples test.

The analysis of the items shows the mean and p-value, which indicate significant differences between countries (significance level $p \leq 0.05$). The standard deviation of the statements analysed ranges from 0.590 to 1.012.

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the question scale. A properly and qualitatively constructed item scale should have a Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7. Respondents to the survey were asked to rate a three-range scale,

where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. In our case, the item analysis of the questionnaire scales showed that Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.810 to 0.956, while Cronbach's alpha for the standardised items ranges from 0.812 to 0.956. This indicates that the scale has been appropriately developed.

Research ethics. The research was conducted in accordance with the following ethical principles:

- The principle of benevolence was ensured by questionnaire statements, which were presented in a respectful style, without creating the conditions for respondents to lose their privacy.
- Applying the principle of respect for the person, the purpose of the research was explained to the respondents.
- Voluntariness is manifested in the free will of the research participants to participate or not to participate in the research.
- Anonymity and confidentiality of data were guaranteed to the research participants.

4. Results of the research

We asked respondents whether they had ever volunteered or planned to do so in the future. Among them, 56.8% of Lithuanian and 48.0% of Latvian respondents had volunteered in the past. However, only a small part currently volunteer – 7.2% of Lithuanian and 6.7% of Latvian youth. Additionally, 30.4% of Lithuanian and 31.7% of Latvian respondents had never volunteered, but 12.8% of Lithuanians and 25.4% of Latvians expressed a willingness to do so in the future.

We also asked young people to indicate where they are currently volunteering or have volunteered in the past. The survey participants identified the following areas of involvement:

1. *Event Organization and Community Engagement (Organized marathons, nationwide teacher seminars, concerts, children's activities, and camps; Helped plan holiday events for children and festive celebrations; Hosted a party in a mercy house; Contributed to student council initiatives, including event planning and campaigns etc.).*

2. *Social Support and Assistance (Volunteered for six years with individuals with disabilities; Assisted elderly people informally, without official volunteer status; Helped students with the Erasmus+ application process; Provided household assistance within the church community).*

Table 1

Reliability Statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficient

Question Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Reasons for low volunteering	.875	.875	11
Reasons to engage in volunteering	.810	.812	6
Perceived benefits of volunteering	.956	.956	15

Source: created by authors based on the research data 2025

3. *Youth and Student Involvement (Participated in Young Maltese and KASP (Riflemen's Union); Engaged in activities with the Lithuanian School Students' Union; Supported children, the elderly, and veterans as part of social work studies; 4. Animal Welfare and Environmental Efforts; Volunteered at a dog shelter and the T. Ivanauskas Museum; Cared for animals at the food bank (through a school initiative); Helped clean up litter in public areas).*

The results of the survey showed that while a significant number of young people in Lithuania and Latvia have previously volunteered, the number of volunteers is still quite low. Nevertheless, there is a high level of interest in volunteering in the future, especially among Latvian respondents. Overall, it is clear that volunteering is primarily focused on helping people and animals, promoting social well-being and contributing to community engagement.

Volunteering plays a very important role in community development, but young people often face barriers that limit their participation. Based on the data presented here, we can identify a few main reasons why youth participation in volunteering remains low. The most significant reasons are: lack of time to volunteer (mean-3.63; mode-4), lack information about volunteering opportunities (mean-3.68; mode-4) and that volunteering is not financially rewarding (mean-3.58; mode-4). The majority of respondents only partially agreed with the other statements.

Respondents are least deterred from volunteering by emotional and psychological barriers such as fear of high responsibility (mean-3.37; mode-3); Fear that volunteering may be exploited (mean-3.28; mode-

3) or that volunteering may trigger various emotions (mean-3.28; mode-3) (see Fig. 1). Organizations can still address these emotional concerns by offering clear role descriptions, emotional support programs, and mentorship opportunities. Providing a safe and supportive environment for volunteers can further reduce these barriers.

Respondents are least discouraged from volunteering by not being recognized (mean-3.15, mode-3) or having to look for volunteering opportunities (mean-3.18, mode-3) (see Fig. 1). Time constraints, lack of adequate information and lack of money are still the biggest barriers and need to be addressed in order to find ways to increase the participation of young people in volunteering.

To see if there are any differences between the analyzed countries, an Independent Samples test was applied. A significant difference was observed, in that Lithuanian respondents more often stated that they lacked time for volunteering (mean difference +0.544) also, Lithuanian respondents were more likely to agree that volunteering is not financially rewarding (mean difference +0.208) than respondents from Latvia. No statistical differences were observed among other statements (significant results are marked in black in the table 2).

The main reasons for engaging in volunteering would be a paid salary (mean-3.92; mode-5), visible results of the work done (mean-4.02; mode-4), desire to gain new skills (mean-3.96; mode-4), and family support (mean 3.78; mode-4). Commitment to meet requirements (e.g., mandatory community service for

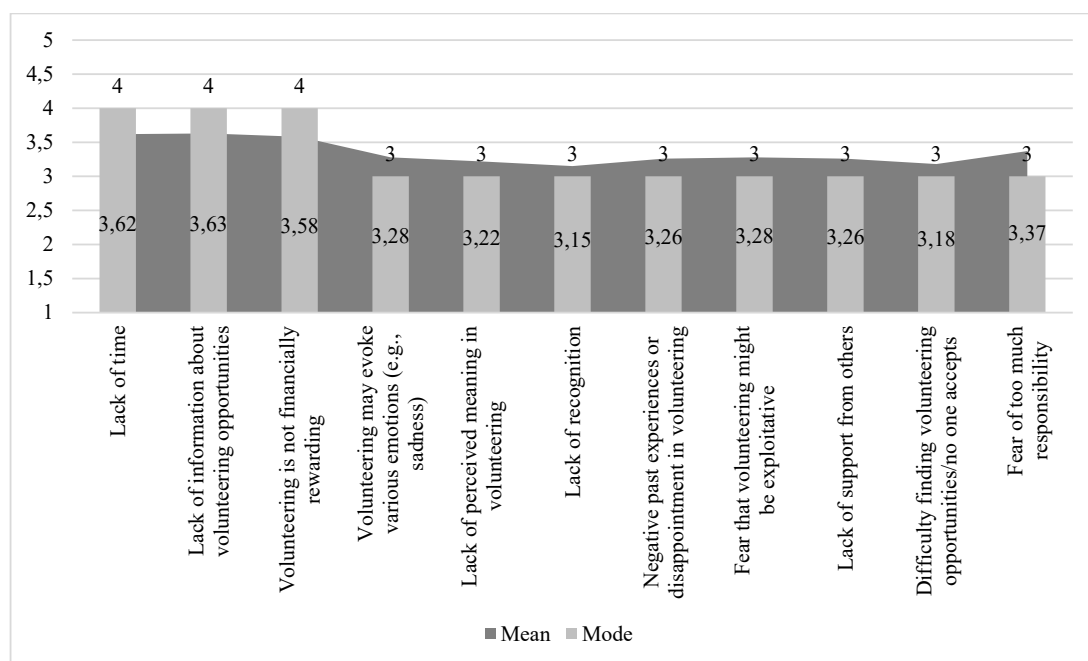


Figure 1. Reasons for Low Volunteering Rates Among Respondents

Source: created by authors based on the research data 2025

Table 2

Reasons for Low Volunteering Rates Among Respondents

Statements	The country	N	Mean	Mean difference	Sig.
Lack of time	Lithuania	244	3.89	.544	<.001
	Latvia	252	3.35	.544	
Lack of information about volunteering opportunities	Lithuania	244	3.66	.057	.864
	Latvia	252	3.60	.057	
Volunteering is not financially rewarding	Lithuania	244	3.69	.208	<.001
	Latvia	252	3.48	.208	
Volunteering may evoke various emotions (e.g., sadness)	Lithuania	244	3.35	.130	.720
	Latvia	252	3.22	.130	
Lack of perceived meaning in volunteering	Lithuania	244	3.30	.188	.855
	Latvia	252	3.12	.188	
Lack of recognition	Lithuania	244	3.15	.005	.874
	Latvia	252	3.15	.005	
Negative past experiences or disappointment in volunteering	Lithuania	244	3.43	.347	.158
	Latvia	252	3.08	.347	
Fear that volunteering might be exploitative	Lithuania	244	3.45	.332	.762
	Latvia	252	3.12	.332	
Lack of support from others	Lithuania	244	3.18	-.169	.641
	Latvia	252	3.35	-.169	
Difficulty finding volunteering opportunities/no one accepts	Lithuania	244	3.07	-.208	.984
	Latvia	252	3.27	-.208	
Fear of too much responsibility	Lithuania	244	3.45	.173	.362
	Latvia	252	3.28	.173	

Note: Statement evaluated from 1- Completely disagree to 5-Completely agree

Source: created by authors based on the research data 2025

school, work, or legal reasons) would less encourage only a part of young people to engage in volunteering (mean-3.39; mode-3) (see Fig. 2). These findings indicate that young people are **highly motivated by tangible benefits**, whether financial (salary), personal growth (skill acquisition), or social encouragement (family support). In addition, any effort and visible results increase engagement by fostering a sense of achievement and direction. Organizations seeking to increase youth engagement should consider funding opportunities such as scholarships, work-study programs, focus on skills and career development, and promote their work in the community to show the impact of volunteering. In addition, involving families in volunteering programs could create an environment that encourages participation.

Comparing the results across countries, significant differences were observed between the statement that encourage young people to volunteer (significant results are marked in black in the table 3). Respondents from Lithuania would be more motivated to engage in volunteering by: a paid salary (mean difference +0.070); a visible result of the work done (mean difference +0.315); the desire to gain new skills (mean difference +0.172) compared to Latvian respondents. This suggests that Lithuanian respondents value volunteering more as a means of achieving financial benefits, professional growth and measurable impact,

while Latvian respondents may have different priorities when considering volunteering.

When young people were asked what benefits they see from volunteering, data analysis revealed that the greatest benefit of volunteering would be professional benefits (mean-3.96, mode-5) (see Fig.3), like career opportunities; networking with professionals; learning opportunities; gaining practical experience and improving your CV. Personal benefits and social benefit are also important, but the greatest benefits are, however, seen in professional development which contributes to career opportunities.

Comparing the results by country, significant differences were found, with Lithuanian youth perceiving greater benefits of volunteering in the personal domain, such as skill development (mean difference +0.204), improved mental health (mean difference +0.108), engagement in new social networks (mean difference +0.089), and self-esteem and self-confidence (mean difference +0.133). In the professional domain, they also reported higher benefits in career opportunities (mean difference +0.269), networking with professionals (mean difference +0.276), learning opportunities (mean difference +0.175), and improving their CV (mean difference +0.330) compared to youth from Latvia (significant results are marked in black in the table 4). Respondents from both countries assessed social benefits very similarly.

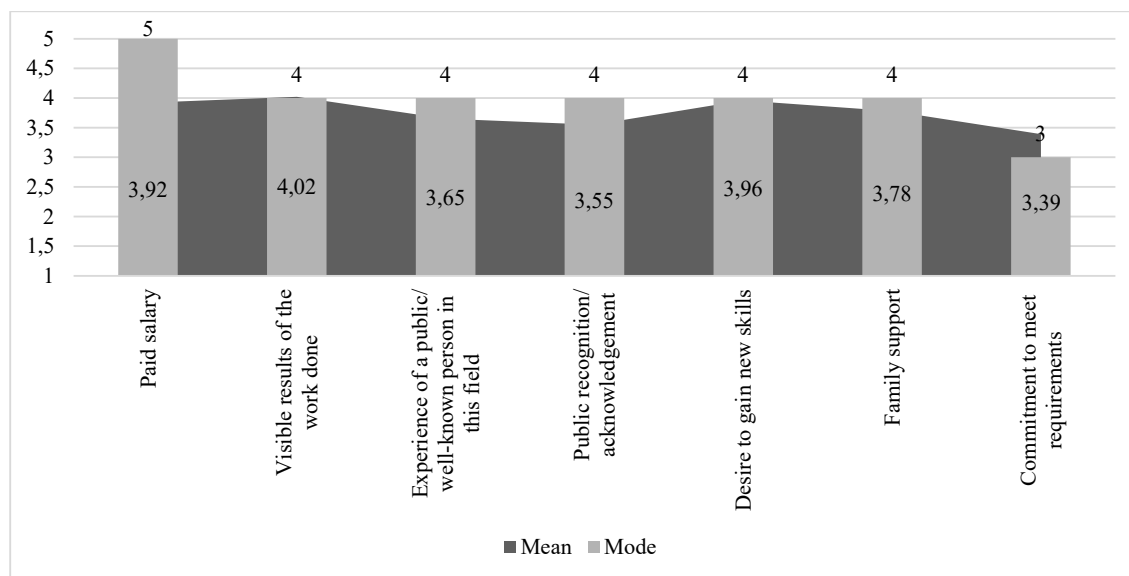


Figure 2. Reasons to Engage in Voluntary Activities

Source: created by authors based on the research data 2025

Table 3

Respondents' Opinions on Factors that Would Encourage them to Engage in Voluntary Activities

Statements	The country	N	Mean	Mean difference	Sig.
Paid salary	Lithuania	244	3.95	.070	.006
	Latvia	252	3.68	.070	
Visible results of the work done	Lithuania	244	4.18	.315	.012
	Latvia	252	3.86	.315	
Experience of a public/well-known person in this field	Lithuania	244	3.62	-.044	.629
	Latvia	252	3.66	-.044	
Public recognition/acknowledgment	Lithuania	244	3.51	-.059	.200
	Latvia	252	3.57	-.059	
Desire to gain new skills	Lithuania	244	4.05	.172	.002
	Latvia	252	3.88	.172	
Family support	Lithuania	244	3.82	.085	.467
	Latvia	252	3.73	.085	
Commitment to meet requirements (e.g., mandatory community service for school, work, or legal reasons)	Lithuania	244	3.33	-.097	.446
	Latvia	252	3.42	-.097	

Note: statements evaluated from 1- Would not encourage at all to 5- Strongly encourage.

Source: created by authors based on the research data 2025

Voluntary activities provide a balanced mix of personal growth, career advancement, and social contribution. The most valued benefits are skill development, practical experience, networking, and providing support to vulnerable groups. While mental health and civic engagement are recognized, they are not the top priorities for volunteers. Volunteering is highly beneficial for individuals looking to develop skills, build confidence, advance their careers, and make meaningful social contributions. Based on the results of the study, we accept the raised hypotheses

H₁: Career development has a strong relationship with finding purpose in life through volunteering. *Chi-square test: $p = 0.01 < 0.05$ (Significant relationship)*

H₂: Youth engagement in new social networks is strongly linked to the development of stronger communities. *Chi-square test: $p = 0.01 < 0.05$ (Significant relationship)*

H₃: Young people are less likely to volunteer because unpaid work does not align with their financial needs and career aspirations. *Accepted – Chi-square test: $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ (Significant relationship)*

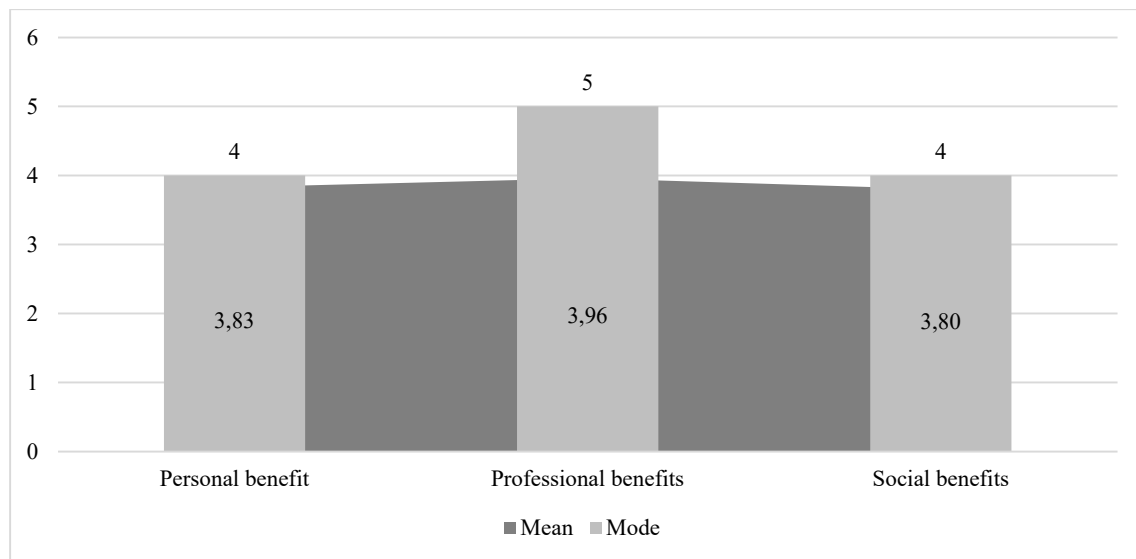


Figure 3. Perceived Benefits of Voluntary Activities According to Respondents

Source: created by authors based on the research data 2025

Table 4

Perceived Benefits of Voluntary Activities According to Respondents

Statements	The country	N	Mean	Mean difference	Sig.
Personal benefit					
Skill development	Lithuania	244	4.18	.204	.026
	Latvia	252	3.98	.204	
Improved mental health	Lithuania	244	3.64	.108	.041
	Latvia	252	3.53	.108	
Finding purpose in life	Lithuania	244	3.69	-.002	.053
	Latvia	252	3.69	-.002	
Engagement in new social networks / new acquaintances, friend	Lithuania	244	3.94	.089	.045
	Latvia	252	3.85	.089	
Self-esteem and self-confidence	Lithuania	244	3.93	.133	.024
	Latvia	252	3.80	.133	
Professional benefits					
Career opportunities	Lithuania	244	3.96	.269	.003
	Latvia	252	3.69	.269	
Networking with professionals	Lithuania	244	4.06	.276	<.001
	Latvia	252	3.79	.276	
Learning opportunities	Lithuania	244	4.02	.175	<.001
	Latvia	252	3.84	.175	
Gaining practical experience	Lithuania	244	4.27	.283	.050
	Latvia	252	3.99	.283	
Improving your CV	Lithuania	244	4.13	.330	.002
	Latvia	252	3.80	.330	
Social benefits					
Strengthening communities	Lithuania	244	3.84	.047	.088
	Latvia	252	3.79	.047	
Civic engagement	Lithuania	244	3.82	.264	.096
	Latvia	252	3.56	.264	
Example and inspiration for others	Lithuania	244	3.84	.146	.126
	Latvia	252	3.69	.146	
Strengthening the social and cultural environment	Lithuania	244	3.86	.123	.079
	Latvia	252	3.74	.123	
Providing support to vulnerable groups	Lithuania	244	4.05	.232	.084
	Latvia	252	3.82	.232	

Note: statements evaluated from 1- Completely disagree to 5- Strongly agree

Source: created by authors based on the research data 2025

5. Discussion

Although each country has its own cultural, social and economic context, in many ways volunteering has similar features across countries. People who choose to volunteer share many common motivations – they want to give back to their communities, help those in need, act on their values or find fulfilling ways to improve their lives. However, the number of people who volunteer is too low to meet the growing needs of many organizations, despite the positive aspects. This could be due to several factors, such as lack of time or limited awareness of volunteering opportunities. In addition, young people may sometimes find volunteering less attractive than other activities such as paid work, studies or leisure.

The findings of this study highlight the motivation and barriers to participation in volunteering among young people in Lithuania and Latvia. Although volunteering is widely recognized as a way to build self-esteem and contribute to the well-being of society, the level of engagement among young people in the countries under study remains relatively low. The study reveals that while half of respondents report having volunteered at least once, their participation often consists of one-off initiatives rather than ongoing commitments.

The main barriers to volunteering identified in this study are lack of time, lack of information about opportunities and lack of financial incentives. These findings are in line with previous studies which show that young volunteers often find it difficult to balance volunteering with academic, work and personal responsibilities (Kane & Klasnja, 2009). It should be noted that Lithuanian respondents were more likely than Latvian respondents to identify lack of time and financial problems as the main barriers, suggesting that economic factors may be more important in shaping participation in volunteering in Lithuania.

In contrast, in terms of benefits, both groups preferred volunteering opportunities with visible benefits, such as remuneration, visible results and skills acquisition. These motivations reflect broader trends in young people's engagement in volunteering, where volunteering is increasingly seen as a tool for career and personal growth (Sahri et al., 2021). This is in line with previous research (Bocsi et al., 2017), which has linked motives for contemporary volunteering to career development, human capital accumulation and employability. Young people in Lithuania were more likely to see volunteering as a way to gain professional experience, reinforcing the idea that volunteering is perceived not only as an altruistic activity but also as a strategic career move. Jedicke et al. (2024) also note that identifying career development opportunities is common in volunteering activities.

Studies by Lanza et al. (2023) and Millora (2023) confirm that volunteering contributes to mental and physical well-being, reduces anxiety and promotes resilience in young people. While the potential health benefits of volunteering are highlighted in various studies, this study shows that financial rewards remain a key factor in increasing participation in volunteering. This finding is at odds with the traditional perception of volunteering, which is usually unpaid, but it also highlights the possibility of mixed volunteering models, where scholarships, learning incentives or academic credits could encourage young people's participation.

According to Surujlal & Dhurup (2008) volunteering has benefits for three different sets of people: the volunteers themselves, the organizations they help, and the communities they volunteer in. The role of universities and youth organizations in promoting volunteering cannot be overlooked. As suggested by Li-li & Jialin (2023), university-driven volunteer programs can bridge the gap between **civic engagement and academic learning**, creating a structured framework that maximizes the personal and societal benefits of volunteering. In terms of structural aspects, volunteering is increasingly recognized as an organized activity rather than a spontaneous act of goodwill (Dekker & Morrow-Halman, 2003). Universities and youth associations play a crucial role in providing structured opportunities that integrate volunteering into education, career development, and civic participation (Li-li & Jialin, 2023). The analysis of Holdsworth & Brewis' (2014) revealed that students resist volunteering expectations if it is perceived to diminish the value of their participation. Both students and stakeholders agree that efforts to promote volunteering should focus on aligning institutional practices with young people's expectations in order to effectively support and encourage their participation. Addressing accessibility barriers and fostering a culture of volunteerism can enhance youth engagement and maximize the benefits of volunteering for individuals and society alike.

6. Conclusions

The results show that young people in Lithuania and Latvia are less likely to volunteer. Youth volunteering is mostly limited to one-off initiatives rather than ongoing commitments.

The main challenges to volunteering are lack of time, limited information and lack of financial incentives. These challenges are particularly pronounced among Lithuanian respondents.

Young people in our study are more likely to engage in volunteering if it offers financial rewards, professional skills development or visible impact. Vocational benefits are a higher priority for Lithuanian young people than for Latvian young people.

The study highlights that volunteering can promote mental and physical health, self-confidence and personal growth. However, financial considerations still influence decisions to volunteer.

The role of institutions in promoting volunteering is crucial. Universities, youth organizations and policy makers need to develop structured programs

to promote volunteering. To increase participation in volunteering, strategies such as paid volunteering opportunities, integration into academic curricula and targeted information campaigns should be explored. In addition, fostering a culture of civic participation through education and policy initiatives can encourage a long-term commitment to volunteering.

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Received on: 12th of November, 2025

Accepted on: 07th of January, 2026

Published on: 17th of February, 2026