# The Importance of Generic Competences in Adult Education: Case of Volunteering

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**Abstract:** The generic competences are particularly important for all people in our society. It brings more opportunities to stimulate new environment and successfully participate in the activities in lifelong learning. During the participation in the variety of voluntary activities adults have a chance to feel the quality of life. The paper analyses the generic competences in active voluntary activity. It is analysed theoretically the tendency of adult education, funkcions of volunteering and motivation of participation in voluntary activity. The quantitative research revealed that most adults seek to develop generic competences in voluntary activity. Especially for older respondents it is very important to help others and enhance self-confidence.

Keywords: adult education, generic competences, lifelong learning, volunteering.

#### Introduction

The generic competences are particularly important for all people in our society. During the participation in variety voluntary activities adults have a chance to feel the quality of life.

In our days the voluntary activity is significant at national and international level, this activity is closely linked to active citizenship which is the core of democracy. Voluntary activities give opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender, race, nationality, religion, political belief, age or health, to use their skills and experience, gain new skills, make friends, engage in work and change the social life of the country. Voluntary activities promote personal development, expand social benefits, general human capacity – it is beneficial of other activities and the opportunity to educate themselves, improve their personal, professional and social competences. Volunteering is one of the ways in which different nationalities, religions, social and economic environment and people can induce positive change.

The object of the research - voluntary skills in expression of generic competences in adult active life.

The study aims - to substantiate the importance of development of generic competences during adults' volunteering activities.

#### Methodology

The objectives of research:

- discuss the significant generic competences in the development of life in adult education;
- describe the concept of volunteering, functions and the competences of voluntary activities;
- base the motivation of the participation in voluntary activities;
- reveal adults', who in involved voluntary activity, generic competences.

Theoretical and empirical research methods were applied: analysis of the literature and questionnaire.

Quantitative study was organized in 2015. 488 respondents from 11 active non-governmental organizations participated in survey and answered the questionnaire. Investigation of selected non-governmental organizations activities is based on the voluntary activity. Many of the respondents to 45.7 % were 21-25 years of age; at least – 6.4 % to 41 to 60 years of age. The questionnaire shows that the volunteers are mainly working young persons. In addition, it could be argued that Lithuania is the most active youth non-governmental organizations. The analysis of the questionnaire was used SPSS software.

#### **Results and discussion**

#### Theoretical approaches to generic competences and their characteristics in adult education

As globalisation continues to confront the European Union with new challenges, each citizen will need a wide range of generic competences to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world. Education in its dual role, both social and economic, has a key role to play in ensuring that Europe's citizens acquire generic competences needed to enable them to adapt flexibly to such changes (Key Competences..., 2006). Education and training are central to the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs and a key element for its follow-up with the 2020 perspective. Creating a well-functioning 'knowledge triangle' of education, research and innovation which help all citizens to be better skilled are crucial for growth and jobs, as well as for equity and social inclusion. The economic downturn puts these long-term challenges even more into the spotlight. Public and private budgets are under strong pressure, existing jobs are disappearing, and new ones often require different and higher level skills. Education and training systems should therefore become much more open and relevant to the needs of citizens, and to those of the labour market and society at large (Joint Progress Report..., 2010). The European Framework for Generic Competences for Lifelong Learning, identifies and defines 8 generic competences necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability in a knowledge society: 1) Communication in mother tongue; 2) Communication in foreign languages; 3) Mathematical, Science and Technology; 4) Digital; 5) Learning to learn; 6) Social and civic; 7) Initiative and entrepreneurship; 8) Cultural awareness and expression.

The concept of generic competences assumes that individuals and societies share some basic characteristics beneath the variety of approaches to life, life styles, and customs. In order for person to create his or her successful life and to participate in the creation of wealth, it is necessary to mobilize a lot of skills. European Commission reference lists eight generic competences (Figure 1).

*Communication in mother tongue*. It is every citizen's ability properly and correctly use vocabulary, grammatically written and spoken language. To communicate competently using oral language, expressing their views, interviews in discussions.

*Communication in foreign languages.* The duty of every citizen, no matter of age, is to be proactive in intercultural communication. Ability to communicate in a foreign language expands human capabilities. However, foreign language proficiency level depends on what are your listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Foreign languages, one or more, are important for many reasons. As one of the necessities, being the member of the European Union/under the European Union supervision, in cooperation with other nations, in developing business and others.

*Mathematical Science and Technology*. It signifies that every citizen should master mathematical skills such as number, measurement units, basic mathematical operations and actions in everyday life.

*Digital.* Living in the twenty-first century, it is more difficult for people to be active participants in digital sphere. The digital literacy has become a necessity, because computer is as a tool for information literacy, which assisted in the presentation and exchange of information, communication, development of cooperation networks. New social networks, as Facebook, Skype and others, information society technologies help citizens to communicate with each other, to share information, and finally to spend their leisure time. These skills help individuals to enhance critical and creative thinking and to develop information literacy skills.

*Learning to learn*. All competences are interrelated. Learning to learn is a complex process in which we learn to analyse learning situations reflectively, trying to identify themselves. Therefore, in learning to learn, citizens can identify their strengths and weaknesses, and thus to use appropriate learning strategies. For this reason, it is important learning motivation, confidence and faith in what you are doing, linking an existing practice.

*Social and civic*. All human life runs while being and participating in society just in different functions. In other words, a person is born to express his attention and life depends in greater part on the surrounding (the institutions). Thanks to them he succeeds to socialize and integrate in society and to be important. This ability includes personal, interpersonal and intercultural skills. Therefore, through the expression of general skills a man reveals himself. Seeking this ability, a person learns to be tolerant, honest, confident, he learns to understand and evaluate his own and others' opinions in a constructive communication and cooperation way while creating a democratic, justice-based environment. Only civil skills, such as democracy, citizenship, justice, equality development support the public unity, maintain order and stability. In other words, only in democratic society citizens are united by devotion to the freedom and equality principles.

*Initiative and entrepreneurship.* Through this competence human creativity (the ability to formulate new ideas, to be resourceful, curious, enterprising for innovations and changes), thrusting (optimistic glimpse

into the future, vigorous pursuit of accomplishing these tasks), the desire to be independent (to have your own opinion, the ability to make own decisions, the ability to work independently) is displayed. Faith affects your success and the ability to achieve goals. In other words, human devotion for work, entrepreneurial skills, i.e. ability to successfully organize and manage your life and business, profitably produce goods or provide services is revealed. This competence necessary for every citizen to be able successfully lead you to work in a competitive job market, trying to keep a job place or creating for them a job place setting up a business.

*Culture awareness and expression.* This competence refers to an individual's cultural knowledge. Culture, expressing the human world-view and world-picture, is not just a phenomenon in its own notion. Cultural awareness is important for national and international orientation of culture. In other words, knowledge about other cultures characteristics will give the pre-offer insight and help to successfully communicate, better recognize the differences, the development of various nations historical, religious and cultural development.

All these competences are equally important for every citizen, because only they can help to orient to a knowledge society in lifelong learning processes. These competences are directly linked with each other, overlap and complement one another.

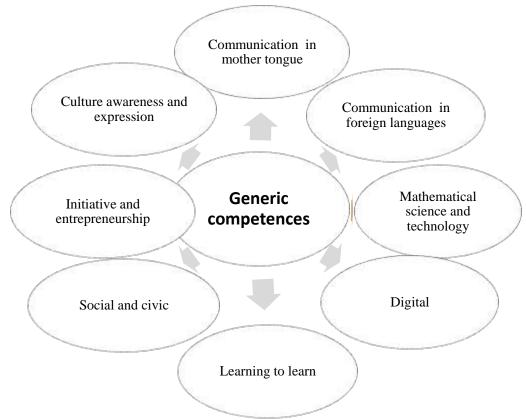


Figure 1. Generic competences (Key Competences..., 2006).

Lifelong Learning guaranteed competences are considered particularly important in a knowledge society, because they ensure more flexibility in the labour market, more adaptation to constant change. Self-competence also increases students' motivation, attitude to learning and its uniqueness. (Key Competences..., 2006). Every citizen their skills, knowledge should improve continuously, actively participating in social life and acting successfully in a changing labour market and the business world.

Competence is the common basis for all national and European initiatives and is committed for all contributing to the creation of education lifelong learning – learners, employers, providers of education and politics. Consequently initial education and training should support the development of these generic competences to a level that equips all young people – including the disadvantaged – for further learning and working life. Adult education and training should give real opportunities to all adults to develop and update their generic competences throughout life. The Recommendation of the European

Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on generic competences for lifelong learning states that generic competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. Continuously upgrading the skills of people in line with the needs of the labour market (Key Competences..., 2006).

Today, we are confronted with important and complex challenges such as rapid social and technological changes, economic and cultural globalization, increasing uniformity, and at the same time, increasing social diversity, instability of norms, large-scale value changes, substantial global inequality of opportunities, increasing marginality of certain segments of the population, and ecological pressures.

Lifelong learning has become a necessity for all citizens. People need to develop their skills and competences throughout their lives, not only for their personal fulfilment and their ability to actively engage with the society in which they live, but for their ability to be successful in a constantly changing world of work. Growing internationalisation, the rapid pace of change, and the continuous roll-out of new technologies mean that Europeans must not only keep their specific job-related skills up-to-date, but also possess the generic competences that will enable them to adapt to change. It is very important that education in its dual role, both social and economic, has a key role to play in ensuring that Europe's citizens acquire the key competences needed to enable them to adapt flexibly to changes.

Any conceptual or theoretical foundation for defining and selecting generic competences is inevitably influenced by conceptions about individuals and society, and by what is valued in society and in life under particular socio-economic and political conditions.

Generic competences are consistent with the principles of human rights and democratic values. A number of international texts and agreements form a solid basis for describing the universal principles governing a modern, democratic society. This literature emphasizes, among other things, democratic values: respect for the law and for the rights of others; the importance of education for imparting knowledge, skills, and competences to the population; and learning as a lifelong endeavor. Defining generic competences in a manner that is consistent with these principles is a political and ethical challenge for countries and societies. For example, generic competences should be determined and developed in a way that is consistent with the values of autonomy and liberty. Generic competences give individuals the capacity for a good, successful life. Generic competences should reflect a notion of what constitutes a good and successful life for individuals beyond the satisfaction of elementary personal needs. Consistent with any major moral theory, a good and successful life includes close relationships with other people, an understanding of oneself and one's world, autonomous interaction with one's physical and social environment, and a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment. Generic competences are not incompatible with social and individual diversity. The concept of generic competences assumes that individuals and societies share some basic characteristics beneath the variety of approaches to life, life styles, and customs. For instance, the importance of social influences and the capacity for autonomous action are elements of the human condition, not dependent on any society or culture (Contributions to..., 2002).

# The definition of voluntary activity

Voluntary activity has played an important role in every civilization, and social voluntary activity is defined as a non-profitable, without monetary compensation and non- business carried out by individuals for other people, community or society. A voluntary activity has a variety of forms and includes the traditional mutual assistance in the event of a crisis in community, as well as in dealing with conflicts and reducing poverty. Voluntary activities include local and national efforts, as well as bilateral or international programmes, which are carried out without the borders (Lietuvos Respublikos..., 2011). Volunteers carry out those works which are the most relevant to the public at that time. Voluntary activity also promotes personal development: the development of social awareness on the one hand and, and on the other hand, the development of generic competences and skills, making volunteers more employable and enhancing their active participation in society. There are three criteria, which distinguish voluntary activity from others.

1. Voluntary activity does not create material benefit. However, any man who is employed on a voluntary basis must be reimbursed the costs associated with voluntary activities.

2. Voluntary activity is based on free will. This criterion helps to identify true voluntary activities from other activities.

3. Voluntary activity brings benefits not only for volunteers, but also to a third part. This criterion helps to distinguish voluntary activity from leisure activities (Carlo, Okun, 2005).) (Figure 2).

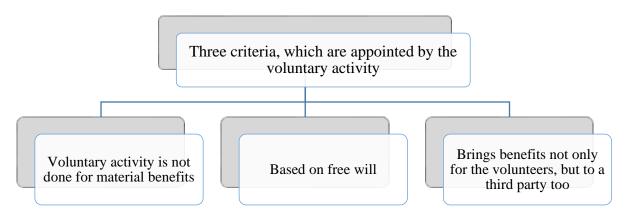


Figure 2. The criteria, which distinguish voluntary activity from others.

These criteria describe voluntary activities in general. It is necessary to emphasize that volunteers contribute significantly to the processes of industrialization and the development of the Member States, as well as to the United Nations in the humanitarian and technical assistance, the promotion of human rights, democracy and peace programmes. As regards voluntary activities we need to remember that various activities are often carried out in social, environmental, non-formal education organizations. To carry out the voluntary activity, legal environment is necessary, which ensures a secure and flexible voluntary, convenient to a volunteer and the host organisation.

To sum it up, we can say that volunteering is a human's deliberate decision to engage into activity which is redirected to help others and devote time for social activity.

# **Motivation for voluntary**

As long as a person and people are not prepared to do everything that depends on them, without focusing on creative forces and do not develop all initiatives, they have no right to wait for help from others. We can seek global welfare only through the progress of individuals and the promotion of global solidarity of nations. According to the European Economic and Social Committee, the motivation which underlies voluntary activity, that is the desire to make a contribution on one's own initiative to the common good and to help shape society, promotes values such as altruism and solidarity and thus forms a counterweight to increasingly widespread isolation and egoism in modern societies (Lietuvos Respublikos..., 2011).

According to I. Jonutytė, voluntary activity is directed to meet the requirements themselves enhancing the value, new skills-building, personality development, warrant for the future perspectives, understanding of loneliness. Voluntary activity is *directed* to meet the requirements of others: concern for the community, help other people (Jonutytė, 2007).

The motifs of voluntary activity are important before starting the activity in non-governmental organizations. They often depend on the human aspirations to acquire voluntary competence or discover their professional way. A number of volunteers participating in voluntary work, looking for values, so rarely found in everyday life (sincere relations between people helping the community). Nevertheless, the most common approach of youth is that voluntary work provides an opportunity to supply vocational and special needs (Carlo, Okun, 2005). Voluntary activity in each non-governmental organization is different. It depends on the Organization's activities; however, it is possible to distinguish the features of voluntary activity:

- in voluntary activity, self-esteem of participants is growing;
- by meeting individual needs and interests, personal and community life, environmental systems, activities of political systems are improved;

- there is genuine and sincere interest in the voluntary activity;
- the problems of the society and individual are sold in a humane way; •
- creates teams in which the individuals discover their own ways in society; •
- volunteers learn from other's abilities and talents;
- the possibility of each person to become a responsible and active member of society (Bax, Moens, 1997).

These features characterize the benefits of participation in voluntary activity. This shows that in voluntary activity people of different ages may participate. The adults, who become volunteers, have the opportunity to unfold, dominate and attend various teams even to learn from each other. The following expression of the adult consolidates the personal existence and quality of life. The voluntary value derives from voluntary features for volunteer as a person. Adult volunteers would always like to find out if this activity is useful for them and others.

Through voluntary activities unfold the characteristic of the motivation of voluntary activity; the importance of voluntary to volunteer and society (Table 1).

Table 1

The value of voluntary to volunteerThe value of voluntary to society- helps to feel useful;- voluntary activity implementing persons- enables to acquire missing experience, develop- voluntary activity implementing persons- enables to acquire missing experience, develop- voluntary activity implementing persons- helps to broaden the circle of dating, make new- voluntary activity implementing persons- helps to broaden the circle of dating, make new- voluntary activity implementing persons- helps to broaden the circle of dating, make new- voluntary activity implementing persons- achieve a new experience in different situations,- fill gaps in education, environment,- achieve a new experience in different situations,- helps to preserve the values of the- develop teamwork skills, communication skills,- helps to preserve the values of the- opens up the opportunities for informal and nonformal learning;- arousing human values, develop- learns to manage crisis situations;- contributes to economic and political- makes the opportunity to insight into the world- is an indispensable aid in various lifewith different eves- is an indispensable aid in various life	The characteristics of the motivation of voluntary activity				
<ul> <li>enables to acquire missing experience, develop personal qualities to personal goals and career;</li> <li>helps to broaden the circle of dating, make new friends;</li> <li>achieve a new experience in different situations, which helps to know oneself;</li> <li>develop teamwork skills, communication skills, encourage interaction;</li> <li>opens up the opportunities for informal and nonformal learning;</li> <li>learns to manage crisis situations;</li> <li>aquires organizational skills;</li> <li>makes the opportunity to insight into the world</li> <li>or their teams draw attention to public, social, human and environmental problems;</li> <li>fill gaps in education, environment, social work, economic areas;</li> <li>helps to preserve the values of the society;</li> <li>enhances citizenship;</li> <li>aquires organizational skills;</li> <li>makes the opportunity to insight into the world</li> </ul>	The value of voluntary to volunteer	The value of voluntary to society			
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Participation in voluntary activity increases volunteer self-esteem (one of the most satisfactory upper A. Maslow (Маслоу, 2008) pyramid needs – to respect).

Informal, respect based communication, free expression of opinion, emotions, the possibility to become a responsible, active member of the society – these features of voluntary activity also demonstrate that the higher human needs identified by A. Maslow: security, social needs, respect, freedom of expression, are satisfied by voluntary activities (Plužek, 1996).

The factors of satisfaction fulfil these needs: achievements, recognition, new challenges, increased responsibility, growth and development. The factors of dissatisfaction - working conditions, relationships, monetary reward do not directly affect human motivation, but if people fail it they lose their motivation (Jucevičienė, 1996).

Even if the working conditions and the atmosphere are good, but if the work is boring and irrelevant people tends to work non-creatively. In many cases, voluntary work is similar to paid work. Therefore, the leaders of the non-governmental organizations and volunteer coordinators should provide volunteer work as responsible and creative tasks in synergy with the volunteer's possibilities (Jordan, Ochman, 1998). By taking part in voluntary activity people are seeking to satisfy the needs of new challenges, achievements, recognition, increased responsibility, growth and development needs.

#### **Results of empirical research**

Generic competences which respondents gain in voluntary activity and how many percent of the respondents believe that they acquire skills by taking part in one or other of the activities of nongovernmental organisations (or not acquired these skills) (Figure 3). Social skills (communication, collaboration, learning from others, respect for different opinions, self-assessment, problem solving, understanding other people's emotions, the assumption of responsibility and resistance to stress), plus planning, leadership, search for the information and project writing skills were used to make this question.

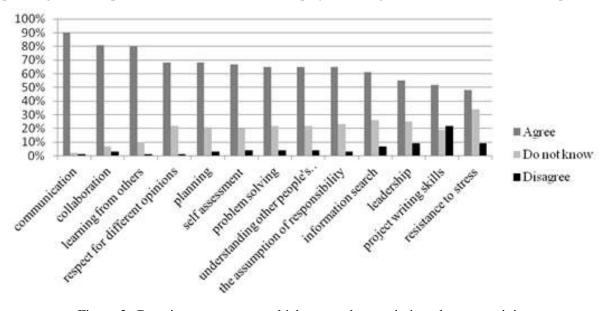


Figure 3. Generic competences, which respondents gain in voluntary activity.

Most of the respondents agree that they acquired communication (90%), cooperation (81% of respondents) and learning from other people (80 % of those polled) skills. This is confirmed by the statistically important difference ( $\chi^2 = 8.89$ , df = 3, p<0.003). Most of the respondents do not agree that they acquired project writing (22 %) (p<0.001), leadership (9 %) (p<0.05) and resistance to stress (9 %)(p<0.05) skills.

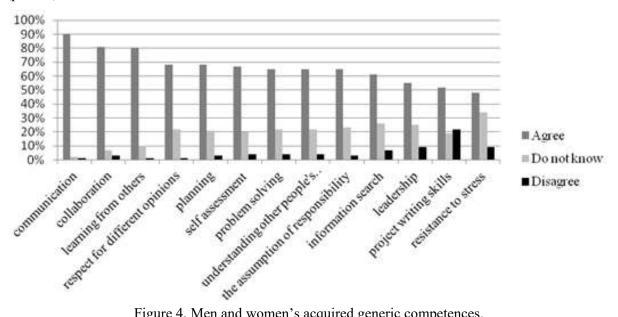


Figure 4. Men and women's acquired generic competences.

As it has been mentioned earlier, the distribution of respondents according to gender revealed that more women than men participated in the research, so the results are as distributed answers of men and women about the acquired skills. (The differences in trends are shown in Figure 4). As you can see, mostly men (90 % of respondents) have the ability to plan (p<0.001); at least the men claimed - the resistance to

stress (p<0.001) and writing projects (48 % of respondents) skills (p<0.001). This finding is confirmed by the statistically important difference ( $\chi^2 = 8.89$ , df =3, p<0.003).

The research revealed that most women (81 % of respondents) have acquired the capability of understanding the emotion (p<0.001); at least (59 %) – resistance to stress. It could be stated that both men and women have learned to cope with stress. It is confirmed by the statistically important difference ( $\chi^2 = 8.89$ , df =3, p<0.003).

It was relevant in the research to find out how many respondents have gained knowledge, values and social skills. It was presented the four possible answers: very much; much, neither much or nor, a little. By summarizing the results, it could be stated that most respondents gained social skills in the activities of non-governmental organizations.

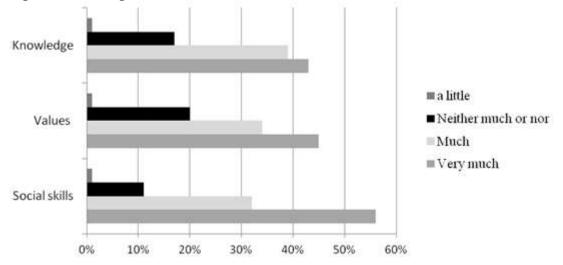


Figure 5. Knowledge, skills values purchased in volunteering.

As we can see in *figure 5*, social skill pointed 56 % of responds "very much" (It is confirmed by the statistically important difference, p<0.001), "much" pointed – 32 %, "neither much or nor"– 11 % and "a little"– 1 %. Values "very much" choose 45 % of respondents, "much"- 34 %, "neither much or nor" answered 20 % and "a little" – 1 %. Knowledge "very much" pointed 43 %, "much"– 39 %, "neither much or nor" – 17 % and "a little" – 1 %.

Analysing the results of the research it was found out that 31 % of respondents agree and 25 % fully agree with proposition "The elderly do not have an opportunity to enjoy public life and to be the part of it"( $\chi^2 = 20.70$ , df =5, p<0.001), 28 % of respondents disagree with this proposition "The elderly are the most discriminated people", 32 % of respondents fully agree with this proposition "The elderly people cannot enjoy high prestige and high status in our society", 32 % of respondents disagree with this proposition "Retired people are forgotten, nobody respects them, not interested in them", 45 % of respondents agree with this proposition "Retired people are forgotten, nobody respects them, not interested in them", 45 % of respondents agree with this proposition "Volunteering for elderly is opportunity to stay social active" ( $\chi^2 = 36.49$ , df =4, p<0.000), 48 % of respondents agree with this proposition "In charitable activity time the elderly *affinity group, to* learn to work in a team"( $\chi^2 = 38.069$ , df =3, p<0.000), 37 % of respondents agree with this proposition "In charitable activity the elderly have to know how to work in a team", 38 % of respondents do not know if "In voluntary is important to control crisis situations", 41 % of respondents agree with this proposition "Understanding of those who are poor is important in voluntary activity", 40 % of respondents agree with this proposition "Voluntary can be useful not only for the emotional but and physical health"( $\chi^2 = 15.33$ , df =4, p<0.006) (Table 2).

The respondents were asked who will stimulate them to work in voluntary activity, the data of research showed (Table 3) that 58 % of respondents will stimulate the circle of new friends, 57 % would stimulate the wish to get away from home and to share their experience, 50 % of them said that will stimulate them the wish to participate in social activities. It is confirmed by the statistically important difference ( $\chi^2 = 8.89$ , df=3, p<0.003).

Table 2

Proposition	Fully agree	Agree	Do not know	Disagree	Fully disagree
The elderly do not have an opportunity to enjoy in public life, to be the part of it	25	31	17	20	7
The elderly are the most discriminated people	24	23	20	28	5
The elderly people cannot enjoy high prestige and high status in our society	32	25	11	25	7
Retired people are forgotten, nobody respects them, not interested in them	25	28	13	32	2
Volunteering for elderly is opportunity to stay socially active	23	45	22	7	3
In charitable activity time the elderly affin <i>ity</i> group, to <i>learn</i> to work in a team	37	48	10	0	5
In charitable activity the elderly have to know how to work in a team	28	37	30	2	3
In voluntary activity it is important to control crisis situations	20	37	38	5	0
Understanding of those who are poor is important in voluntary activity	25	41	32	2	0
Voluntary activity can be useful not only for the emotional but physical health	25	40	28	7	0

# The opportunities of elderly of involvement in voluntary activity (%)

Forty-three percent of respondents will stimulate increased self-confidence, 33 % - wish to fully use their skills and at least 20 % of the respondents pointed the surrounding respect.

Table 3

Self –expression of elderly in voluntary activity (%)			
What stimulates to engage in voluntary activity	Percent		
Bigger self-confidence	33		
New circle of friends	58		
Respect	20		
Wish to improve as the person	22		
Wish fully to use skills	28		
Wish to share experience	57		
Wish to escape from the daily routine	43		
Wish to come out from home	57		
Wish to participate in the social activities	50		

Self –expression of elderly in voluntary activity (%)

Summarising we can say that for volunteers it is important to gain social skills which contribute to develop the social dialogue in a multicultural environment.

# Conclusions

Voluntary activity is defined as a non-profit, without monetary compensation and non-business activities carried out by individuals for neighbours, community or society. A voluntary activity has a variety of forms and includes the traditional mutual assistance in the event of a crisis in community, as well as in dealing with conflicts and reducing poverty.

According to the European Economic and Social Committee the motivation underlying voluntary activity, that is the desire to make a contribution to one's own initiative to the common good and to help shape society, promotes values such as altruism and solidarity, and forms a counterweight to increasingly widespread isolation and egoism in modern societies.

Volunteering is one of the ways in which different nationalities, religions, social and economic environment and people can affect positive change. Voluntary activities promote personal development, expand social benefits, general human capacity – it is time for the benefit of other activities and the opportunity to educate themselves, improve their personal, professional and social competences.

The quantitative research revealed that voluntary work is chosen more by young people who are studying at universities, colleges, and who are younger. To young volunteers it is the most important to get practical knowledge which helps in professional activity, as well as to communicate with young people. They are more focused on a more dynamic and creative activities. Through volunteering in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) respondents got the following skills: communication, cooperation and learning from other people. At least they got – the project of writing skills, leadership and stress resistance. Most of involved in the non-governmental organizations respondents got 'a lot' and 'very much' values, social skills and knowledge.

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