



aces

Academy of Central European Schools



# CAN and HELP



"Zinca Golescu" High School  
Pitești, RO

Vocational School of Economics "Aleko Konstantinov"  
Kardjall, BG



is an initiative of



ERSTE Stiftung

coordinated by



in cooperation with



and associated with



*Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness. ~Seneca*

**Project Title:**

***CAN and HELP***

**Name of coordinating school:**

Colegiul National " Zinca Golescu"

**Romania**

**Coordinating teacher:**

***Aida Grecu***

**Name of partner school:**

Profesionalna Gimnaziya Po Ikonomika

‘Aleko Konstantinov’

**Bulgaria**

**Coordinating teacher:**

***Valentina Draginova***

Our project will enhance volunteering and solidarity in our schools. It will promote social awareness, inclusion and active citizenship as well as strengthen the students' knowledge and learning strategies in the areas of social, economic, geographic, environmental and health issues at local and global levels. Students will appreciate the value of personal and local volunteering initiatives, the responsibility each citizen has to contribute to the resolution of common challenges and the positive impact all volunteering actions can have on understanding the importance of personal responsibility.

The project aims at raising participants' volunteering knowledge and gaining new experiences on volunteering in their communities as an innovative way of acquiring solidarity. According to ACES vision that our project tackles, we are all responsible for the wellbeing of everyone belonging to an enlarged European community; it is our duty to care about each other and initiate actions meant to raise understanding, respect and equity.

This project is focused on discovering means of using volunteering as a motivator and way to increase awareness of social and environmental responsibility as well as to enhance solidarity with the less privileged people in our societies. Schools will address the following: knowledge and understanding of the importance of social inclusion and active citizenship locally and globally; how to optimize natural capital more responsibly; the promotion of cross border connections; intercultural understanding and tolerance; collaborative learning by teamwork; boosting English communicative skill; acquiring life-long learning skills.

As spotted at the stage of partner identification, our 15-17-year-old students come from school and local communities that share similar problems: marginalized students due to their shyness, financial standard, family background, special needs teens, orphans or abandoned elders. By means of volunteering, they really want to make a difference in their life and increase solidarity.

***We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. ~Winston Churchill***

***By the Project Team***

## Survey on volunteering

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine whether the respondents are familiar with the term volunteering and its types. The survey will provide information about the degree of respondent's willingness for participation in voluntary and charitable initiatives. The questionnaire is anonymous and it is created by representatives of Vocational School of Economics "Aleko Konstantinov" Kardzhali for the needs of the project CAN and HELP on the initiative of ACES (Academy of Central European Schools).

You can mark more than one answer to some questions. Filling in the questionnaire takes approximately 15 minutes.

Thank you!

### I. General Information

#### 1. Gender:

Male    Female

#### 2. Age:

14-19    19-25    26-35    36-45    45+

#### 3. Residence:

#### 4. Education:

Primary            Pre-Secondary            Secondary            Higher

#### 5. What is your hobby or interest?

Sport

Outdoor activities like hiking, fishing, camping, etc.

Literature, theatre, music

Travelling / Tourism

Computer games, films, TV

Other:

### II. Questions related to volunteering

#### 1. Are you interested in volunteering / charity and have you participated in any way in such initiatives?

No, I am not interested in such initiatives and activities.

Yes, I am interested, but I have never participated in such activities.

Yes, I am interested and I have participated (if you want, specify in the field "Other")

Other:

2. Would you like to participate in voluntary or charitable initiatives in future?

No

May be if these activities are of interest to me

Yes

Other:

3. What would motivate you to participate in such initiatives?

Positive emotions and feelings of personal satisfaction

Meeting new people and creating contacts

If they comply with my schedule and with my personal willingness to participate

The opportunity to travel and visit new places

Receiving certificates for participation

Presents like notebooks, pens, etc.

Other:

4. In what kind of activities would you like to participate as a volunteer?

Blood donation

Caring for elderly / sick / lonely / people

Helping people in need through donations of money, clothing, food

Helping sick children, children with special needs or orphans

Helping to protect the environment

Helping injured people who have experienced disasters, accidents and catastrophes

Giving of gratuitous services and consulting

Raising money for different purposes

Involvement in various causes for support on the Internet

Creating thematic groups in social networks

Signing petitions

Other:

5. Do you approve the virtual forms of volunteering (e.g. the creation of thematic groups in social networks and gathering supporters/followers?)

Yes

No

6. If there are polluted areas in the place where you live, will you participate in their cleaning?

Yes

No

7. Would you help the elderly, orphans and sick children / children with special needs?

Yes

No

8. Would you go to another country as a volunteer?

Yes

No

9. In your opinion, which organizations work most often with volunteers?

Civil organizations

The Red Cross

International organizations (e.g. UNICEF, Greenpeace etc)

Social institutions

Religious institutions

10. Do you think that the volunteers are important?

Yes, because we should not think only about ourselves

Yes, because it benefits the whole society

Yes, because the state does not perform its functions and people should help themselves

Yes, because people should not work only for money

Yes, because tomorrow I might need help

Yes, because volunteering educates the citizens

Volunteers are OK, but it is possible without them

Volunteers are not useful

I cannot decide

11. What would prevent you to participate in voluntary initiatives?

The lack of detailed information about the initiative – What? Where? How?

If the cause does not coincide with my values and beliefs

When I consider that I have not the necessary skills

If I have other urgent arrangements

If I do not like organizers of the initiative

If the initiative is away from my residence

If I do not have enough money

I always find a way to participate

12. Do you believe that your knowledge and efforts can make the world better?

Yes

No

*By Dimitriya Hristova, BG*

### **Survey of the willingness to participate in voluntary initiatives**

Survey within the project “CAN and HELP” initiated by ACES (Academy of Central European Schools), founded by ERSTE Foundation and coordinated by Interkulturelles Zentrum (Austria), in cooperation with VČELÍ DOM (Slovak Republic).

#### **General information**

##### **Investigated group of people:**

Students and teachers from the both partner organizations in the project "CAN and HELP" - Colegiul National "Zinca Golescu" Pitesti, Romania – Coordinator and Vocational School of Economics "Aleko Konstantinov" Kardzhali, Bulgaria- partner.

##### **Methods of survey:**

- Quantitative survey without fulfilling a quota and without preliminary selection for ensuring maximum coverage of the target group.
- Registration by filling in an online questionnaire prepared in two options - Bulgarian and English.
- Registered number of participants: 290

**Activities:** Development of a methodology; Preparing a questionnaire; Technical organization and distribution of the questionnaire; Carrying out the survey; Processing and analysis of the results  
Reference period: October 2015-November 2015

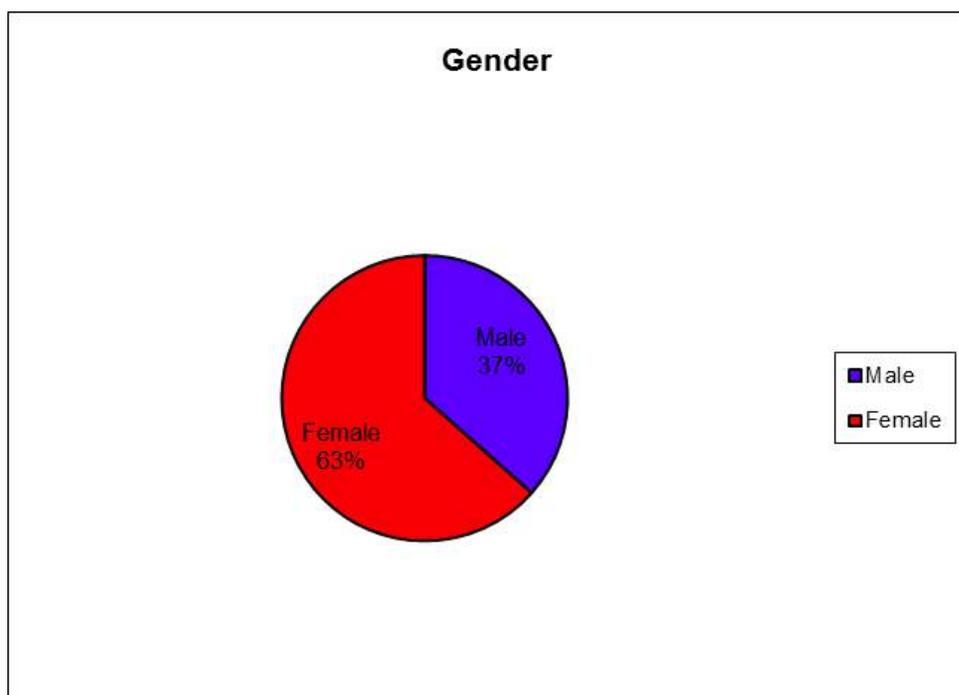
##### **Aims and context of the survey**

The aim of the survey was to determine whether the respondents are familiar with the term volunteering, its forms and expressions. The survey provided information about the degree of willingness of the students to participate in voluntary and charitable initiatives. The questionnaire was anonymous and was prepared in two options - Bulgarian and English.

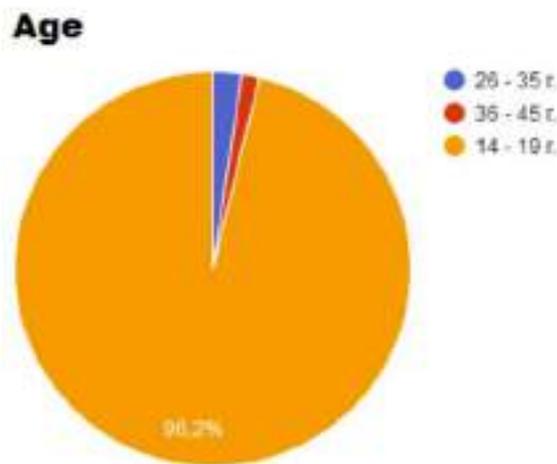
The survey was prepared by representatives of Vocational School of Economics "Aleko Konstantinov" Kardzhali for the needs of the project CAN and HELP initiated by ACES (Academy of Central European Schools). For the aims of the survey, there were no quotas and maximum participants were registered. The total number of the surveyed people was 290 (210 from Bulgaria and 80 from Romania).

### Profile of respondents

The distribution of the respondents belonging to each sex is presented in the following figure.



It is evident that in the target group that took part in the survey, female students are more than male ones. The distribution of the respondents by age shows that they were mainly students aged between 14 and 19 years. A few teachers took part in the survey.



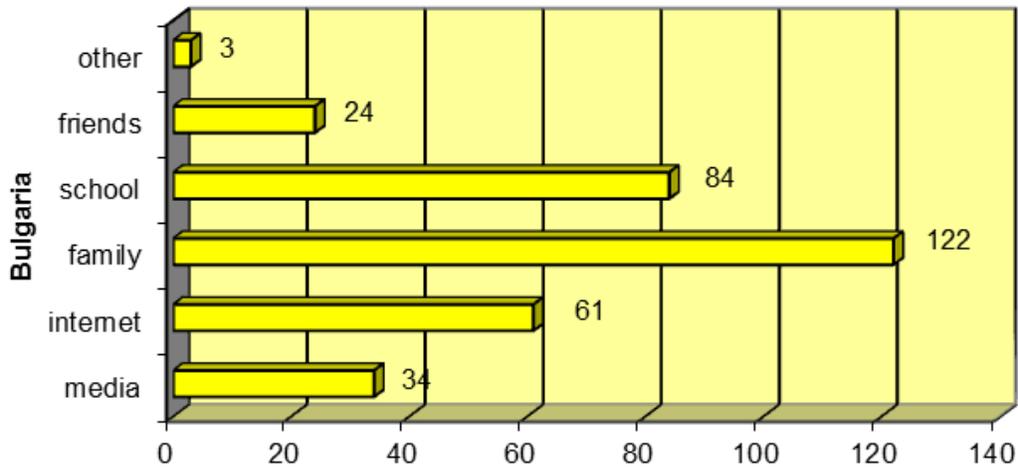
### Volunteering Common Vision

Trying to know how respondents understand the term volunteering (What is it or what is not? Who provides it? Which organizations work with volunteers? Is it important at all to exist volunteers and is voluntary work valuable?), there were set out various predefined categories in the individual questions. Some of the questions suggest a selection of more than one possible answer, while others need to specify a particular response.

#### What is volunteering?

Volunteering is a multi-aspected social phenomenon for which there is no universal valid definition. For the aims of the survey, the respondents were given the opportunity to specify their own definition of "volunteering" according to their views and attitudes. The most common definitions were related to "grant for needy", "voluntary employment or assistance related to any type of humanitarian activities", "mutual aid, cooperation and tolerance," "kindness, compassion," "to be dedicated to others or to help without expecting anything in return". Some respondents even saw volunteering as "an opportunity to participate actively in changing the community environment, organization, relationships etc". Over 50% of Bulgarian respondents replied that they first known about volunteering from their families. Next in the list came the school institution and the Internet. In Romania, the answers of that question differed significantly from those in Bulgaria. 63.8% of Romanian respondents replied that their school has given them basic information about volunteering, and 38.8% have received this information from friends

### How did you understand about volunteering for the first time?



media 34 16.2%

school 84 40%

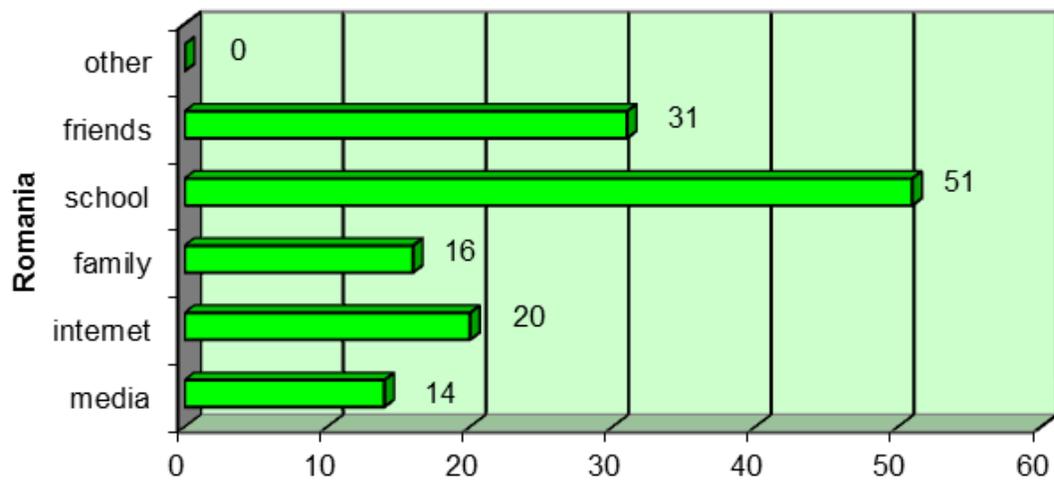
internet 61 29%

family 122 58.1%

friends 24 11.4%

other 3 1.4 %

### How did you understand about volunteering for the first time?



media 14 17.5%

internet 20 25%

family 16 20 %

friends 31 38.8 %

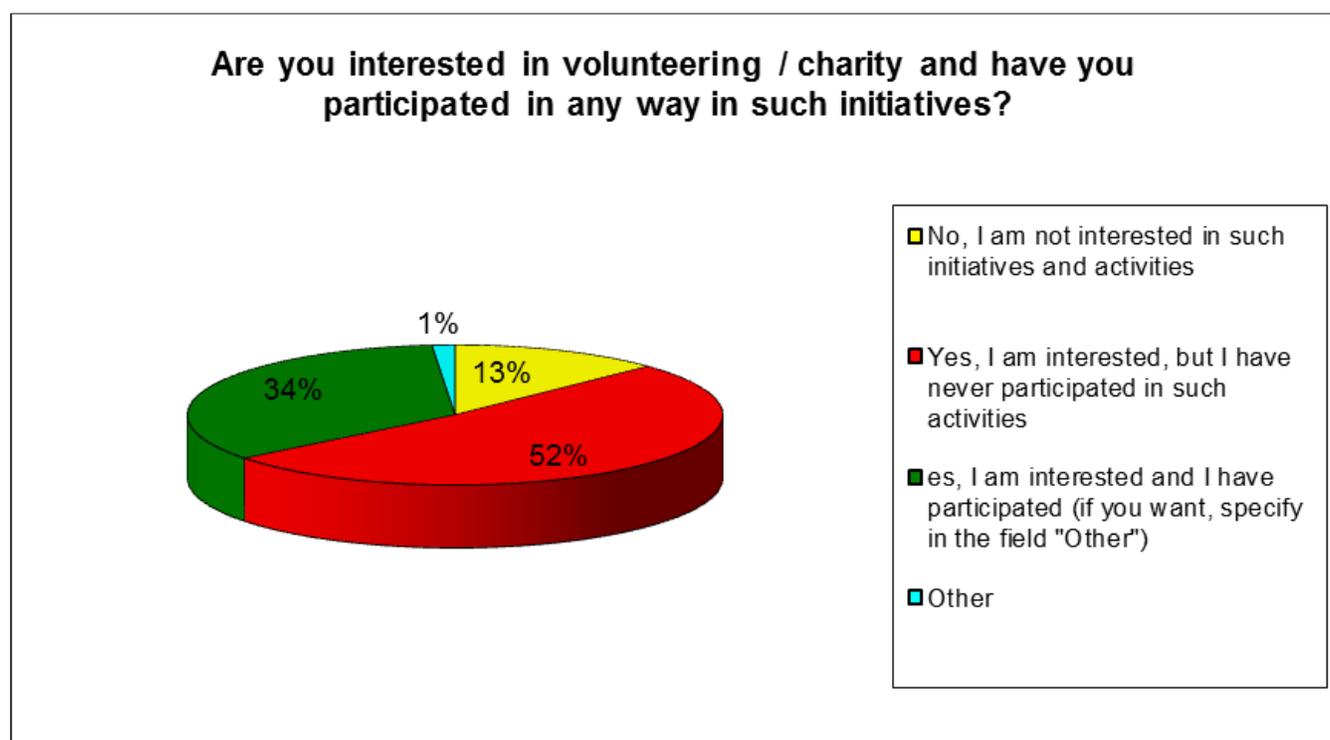
school 51 63.8%

other 0 0 %

The data analysis shows that it would be better if Bulgarian schools increase their promotion of volunteering and attract students to participate in voluntary initiatives.

### Participation in voluntary initiatives

The data indicate that the majority of the students have not participated in voluntary and charitable activities so far, but they are willing to join in future. A small number of people are not interested in such kind of activities.



115 of Bulgarian respondents replied that they would like to participate in voluntary or charitable initiatives. 75 respondents answered that they might participate if the initiative is of interest to them. 15 respondents would not like to be included in such kind of activities, and 5 respondents indicated answer "Other". In Romania, 54 of the respondents replied that they would like to participate in voluntary initiatives, 23 still hesitate, and three respondents would not like to take part in them.

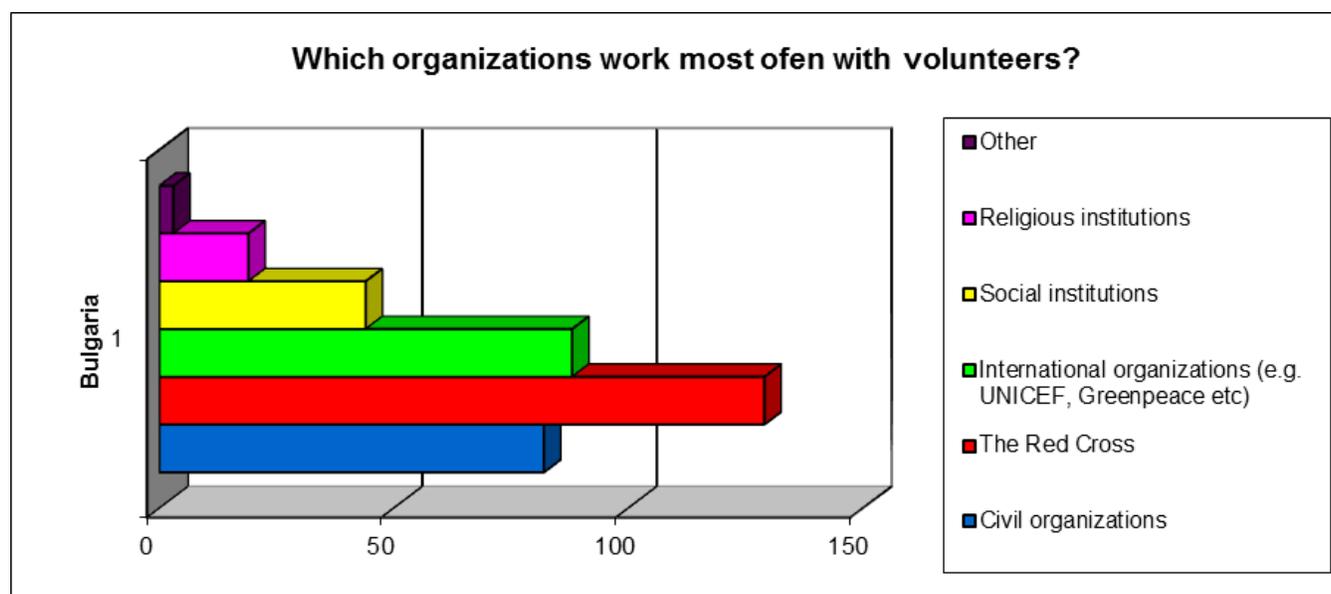
### Motivation to take part in voluntary initiatives

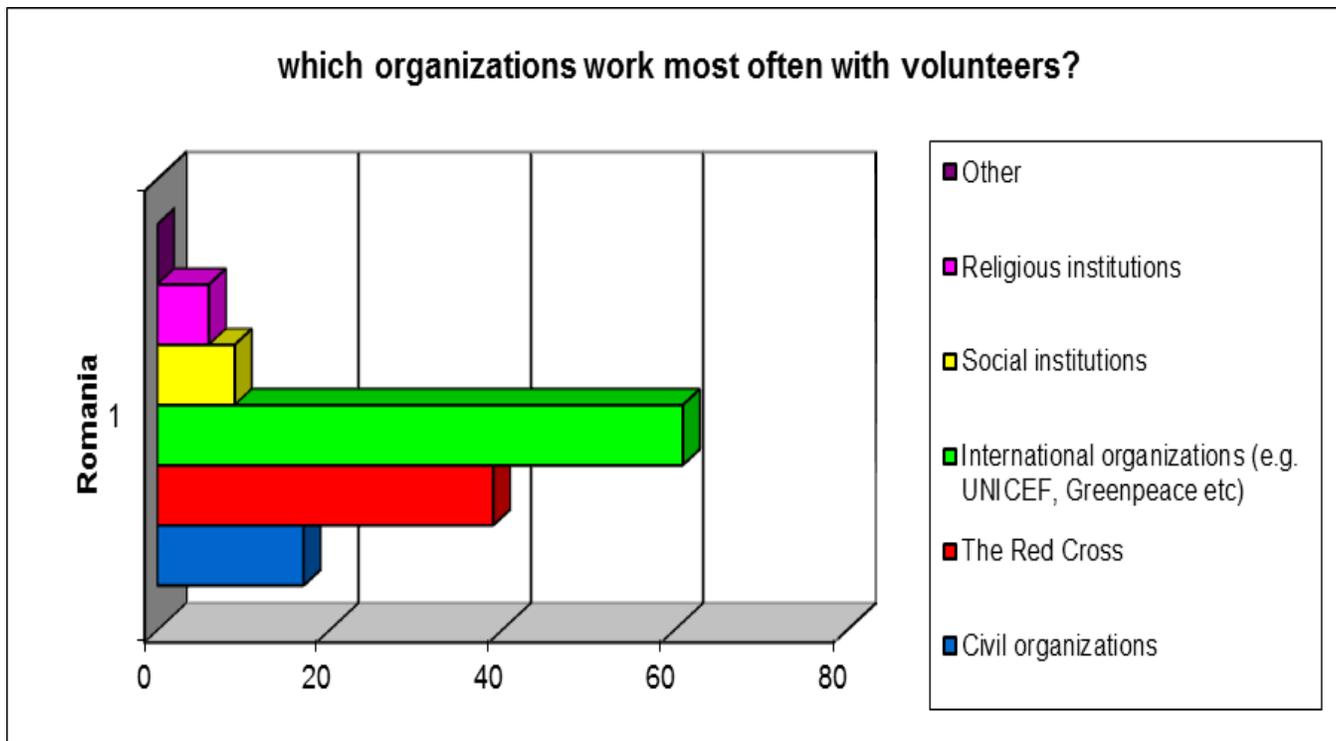
The motivation of students to participate in such kind of activities are mainly positive emotions, a feeling of personal satisfaction, meeting new people and creating contacts, as well as the opportunity to travel and visit new places. The majority of the respondents would like to participate in undeniable voluntary activities such as helping people in need through donations of money, clothes or food; helping sick children, children with special needs or children deprived of parental care; caring for sick people/lonely / adults; helping to protect the environment; blood donation. According to the respondents, the

less common voluntary activities are giving of gratuitous services or consulting - 4% and raising money for different purposes - 7%. There was a distinction of real volunteering from virtual one in the answers of the respondents. Considering the weaknesses in such definition, virtual volunteering is every form of voluntary work that takes place in cyberspace, the Internet. In the survey, there were mentioned two activities that belong to this category: "Involvement in various causes for support on the Internet" – with 4% approval and „Creating thematic groups in social networks” - also with 4% approval. 4% of the respondents identified the signing of petitions as volunteering. In the survey sample dominated the notion that volunteering is not happening on paper or in front of your home computer. Voluntary activities are actually engaged participation of the individual or group of people in activities addressing specific needs or causes. The support of causes in format LIKE / UNLIKE, creating, maintenance or participating in thematic groups in social networks is often an accompanying activity which is part of a real volunteer initiative. This largely explains the responses of more than half of the respondents who approved the virtual volunteering. About 90% of the respondents were absolutely convinced that they would like to take part in initiatives for cleaning up polluted areas in the place where they live and would like to help elderly people, orphans, sick children or children with special needs. Not a small number of respondents replied that they would not like to go to another country as volunteers - 36.7% of the surveyed Bulgarian respondents and 31.3 percent of the Romanian ones. This indicates that the respondents believe that they can be helpful and are able to do more for their own countries.

### Organizations that work often with volunteers

There is a significant difference between the answers of the both target groups of respondents. Bulgarian students thought that the undisputed leader among the organizations which work with volunteers is the Red Cross. The next in their list with very similar values are various international civic organisations. According to the Romanian respondents the most common organizations that work with volunteers are the internationally recognized organizations UNICEF and Greenpeace.

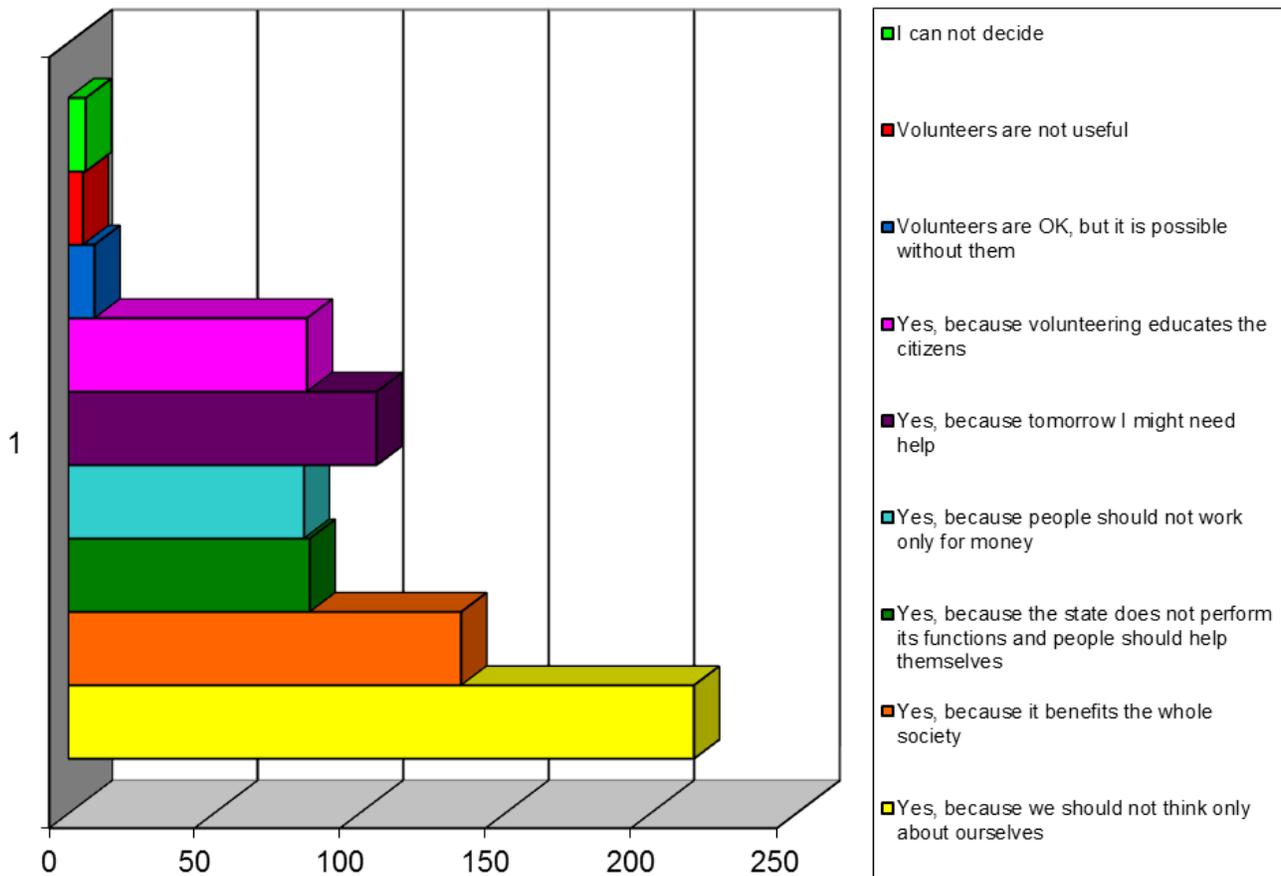




### Role and significance of volunteers

For the majority of the respondents volunteering is a social phenomenon concerning the very existence of the society. The respondents share the view that they shouldn't be selfish and think only about themselves. They think that volunteering gives people in need and educates people who give. It reminds belonging to the larger social group beyond the family and friends. Moreover, volunteering is a feature of high civic culture and it "educates adequate citizens." A lot of surveyed people answered that they show solidarity because someday they may need help. According to some of the respondents volunteering compensates the weaknesses in the public sector, resulting from the fact that the state does not fulfill its functions successfully as a regulator of the public sector.

### Do you think that the volunteers are important?



### Factors hindering participation in voluntary initiatives

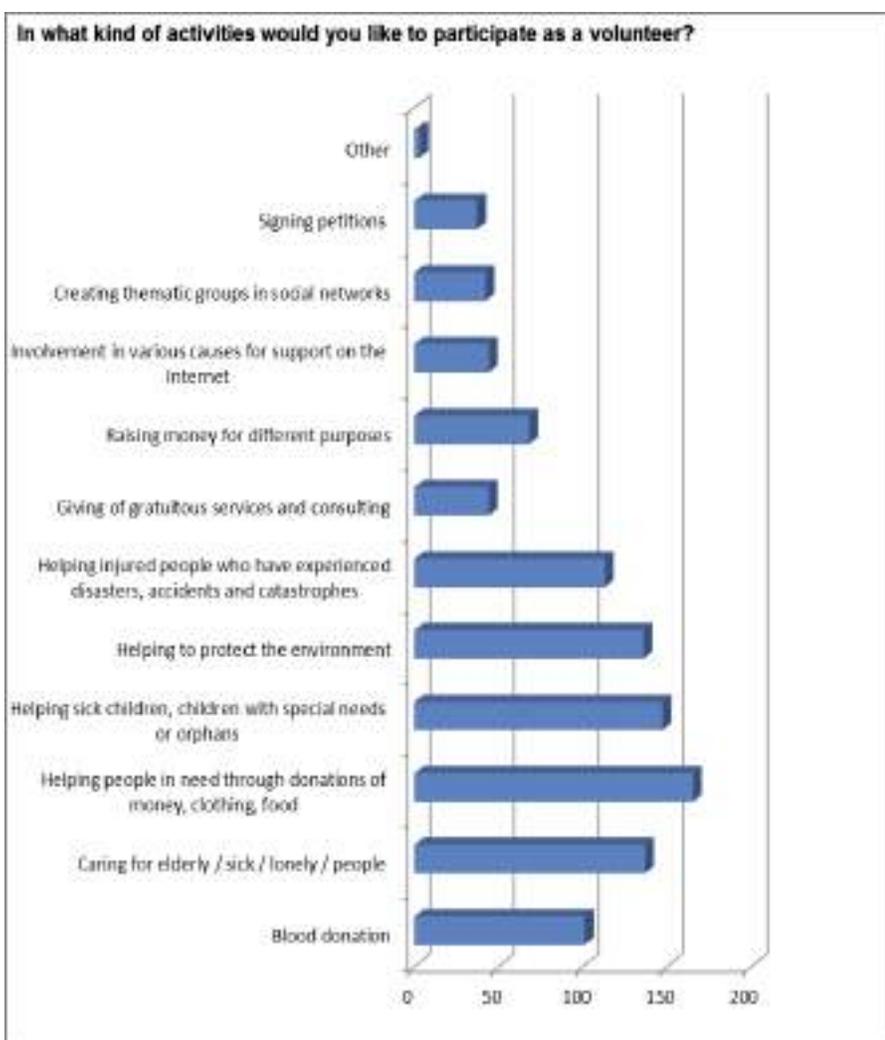
There are a lot of important factors that discourage or prevent participation in voluntary initiatives. According to the respondents of primary importance is the lack of detailed information about volunteering initiative and place of its holding. Value barriers or life circumstances of the respondents are the other reasons which discourage them to take part in voluntary initiatives. They also added in this group the lack of time, urgent arrangements, the recognition of the cause and assessment of personal skills. 9% of the respondents would not like to participate in certain initiatives because they haven't got enough financial resources. 7% of the respondents pointed out the disapproval of the organizers.

## Conclusion:

The survey covered a large part of the target group and achieved its aims of giving information about the degree of willingness of students to participate in voluntary and charitable initiatives. The surveyed group of people has a clear idea about the essence of volunteering. It connects it to voluntary employment and to help people in need. The respondents associate it with compassion, empathy and cooperation. They regard it as an opportunity to be dedicated to others or to help without expecting anything in return, to participate in changing the community environment, organization and relationships between people. Almost all of the respondents have expressed their readiness to participate in various voluntary initiatives such as helping the elderly, orphans, sick children or children with special needs, cleaning polluted areas or raising money for charity. The main motivations for them are positive emotions, a sense of personal satisfaction and making new friends and contacts, as well as the opportunity to travel and visit new places. In the surveyed group of people dominated the view that working with volunteers is reserved for civil society organizations and that significantly overlaps with

the real situation. Volunteering is a widespread practice in the activities of civil society at local and international level and it is hard to place it in public. Religious institutions and community centers are assigned to the civil sector because of the specifics of their activities and status. School and family are loaded with the biggest expectations to educate the voluntary spirit in adolescents. In a much smaller extent those expectations are directed to the media and religious institutions. It is necessary to analyze the reasons for the lack of interest to participate involuntary initiatives. We must work harder to attract and involve students in such kind of activities.

*by the Bulgarian project team*





**COLEGIUL NATIONAL "ZINCA GOLESCU",  
PITESTI, ARGES, ROMANIA**

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Colegiul National "Zinca Golescu" is situated in the town Pitesti, Arges county. The town has around 200,000 inhabitants and is located in the south of Romania approximately 100 km away from the capital city Bucharest. Pitesti is one of the most important economic centers in Romania and one of the most significant urban areas in the region Muntenia.

On the other hand many factories and other socio-economic units have closed down in the last twenty years. As a result the town as well as the whole region is confronted with unemployment amongst the young generation and not only.

Our college has around 1400 students aged between 12 and 19 years old and over 70 teachers. The college offers many profiles for high school students such as: mathematics-informatics, natural sciences, philology and social sciences.

The students may also study in the English bilingual programme, and some of them choose to continue the university studies in other European countries.

Our students are ambitious and highly motivated, as are the teachers, with very good results in national competitions and school examinations. Our school has always had the best results at county level in the Bacalaureate exam, which is taken at the end of the secondary education in our country.

The majority of our students (50%) come from Pitesti, but the rest of them come from the nearby towns and small villages. Generally, these students have to commute to school, as the school does not have accommodation facilities.

The students come from a variety of social backgrounds. We have students from very rich families, but also ones that come from very poor families who have one, or even both parents unemployed or whose parents went abroad to find a job and left their children cared for by their relatives. All our students are Romanian and most of them of Orthodox religion and have few opportunities to interact with people from other cultures with a different ethnic and religious background.

We hope that through this project our students will learn more about tolerance, empathy and ethnical diversity in a multi-cultural Europe. We are sure that the activities of the project will expose our students to other cultures' realities, and in this way we expect them to be able to cope with such situations in real life. We are also certain that this project will make all of us get to know our countries and cultures better in order to promote tolerance and mutual respect among young people.

*By Andreea Panait & Andreea Fulga, RO*



# SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

## LIFE STORIES

### “SFÂNTA ELENA” SPECIAL KINDERGARTEN, PITEȘTI

The Special Kindergarten is located in Trivale neighbourhood, Pitesti and it began its activity in 1995, when the therapy and hydrotherapy rooms were added to the old construction of the school.

The kindergarten set a plan and a mission in order to make progresses with all the children. The motto of the school is: “providing equal opportunities in education for all children, creating a friendly and stimulating environment in order to achieve the potential of the psychophysical stimulation”.

At present, 23 qualified teachers help children with special educational needs aged between 3 and 9 years old and their parents. All the teachers give their best to make the children feel respected, to help them integrate and socialize with the groups, but also to get more confident and hopeful.

The children benefit from the educational services offered: the differentiated approach to learning, promoting the values of inclusive education, information and dissemination of information on Inclusive Education, compensation and rehabilitation therapies. Also, children attending “Sfânta Elena” Special Kindergarten benefit from other services as well: transport, social work, medical services, extracurricular activities and daily meals.

These are the curriculum areas they are interested in:

- Speech disorders therapy
- Language and Communication
- Sensory Education
- Education psychomotor
- Physical Therapy
- Cognitive Therapy
- Empowerment Manual
- Activities expression
- Socio-therapy
- Ludotherapy

All the children made huge progress, thanks to their teachers. Some of them could not speak at all when they first came to the special kindergarten and now they can even recite poems and sing. They found the warmth and the compassion they could not find in a normal school and the tutors try to make them feel welcomed.

In the special kindergarten, the children are educated in a friendly way in order to integrate in the daily life, to express their feelings in words, but helped by their own body as well, to get handier by participating in plastic expression or music classes and to understand the world learning about the environment and Mathematics.

The school should be open to all citizens to provide equal rights and opportunities for personal and professional development.

The Special Kindergarten "Saint Helena" represents the opportunity to a better life for many amazing and lovely children who suffer from different disabilities and it can open the door to a new world for them.

The children learn in a friendly and welcoming classroom equipped with educational materials appropriated for their needs and activities: musical expression, adapting to the daily life, personal autonomy, manual abilities, body language, mathematics and environmental knowledge. They also have many toys in the classroom because the children should feel comfortable and they could learn while playing. The teachers can only work with 5 to 7 children at the same time because they must give them all their attention. The professors encourage the kids continually and treat them with respect and love so they could develop properly. The classrooms have all the facilities suitable for those special children who are very affectionate, energetic and sociable irrespective of their problems.

*By Adina Mesteacăn & Ioan Deaconu, RO*



## V. N.

When I went to a kindergarten for children with special needs, I had the chance to meet a spirited boy who was able to make everyone around him cheerful. This child is V. N. who was 5 years old, an energetic kid that needed attention from everyone around him, who saw beauty and smiled at everything he was doing, no matter if it was bad or good. He enjoyed each and every new experience! He always wanted to be held in arms- he was a little "clinging". He wanted to touch and reach everything he couldn't study by himself. I noticed his interest when I was holding him in my arms, because he used to get closer to different things that were not within reach.

V. was born on the 12th of June, 2010. As he was growing, he proved to have problems with expressing himself and speaking, so his final diagnostic was autism. The first time he was brought to this kindergarten for children with special needs, I heard that V. was unable to speak ; now , he can use sentences. He was raised by a maternal assistant until he was 3 and then, he entered the orphanage which was hosted on the same premises as the kindergarten. His mother, a gipsy woman, visits him only once a year and does not want to take him with her, claiming that her financial situation is to blame, as well as social condition. V. participates in all sorts of activities in the morning and afternoon.

Due to the fact that he is a little bit proud and stubborn, V. finds it is difficult to say sorry when he makes a mistake, but if you take your time and explain him that this is not a valuable thing, he finally understands your point and does not repeat it again.

To sum up, V. is a charming, lively boy who enjoys everything about his childhood despite his obstacles.

*By Ioan Curea & Robert Călinescu, RO*



## M. B. M.

My outlook on life has changed in a day of December, the eleventh day of the last month of the year when I met B. -a fine name for a child full of optimism and innocence. A pink blouse matching the frame of her glasses reveals her hopeful eyes. Her name is M. B. M.

The little girl was born on 29th September 2009 in Spain, a country where both parents worked for some time. Once they changed their workplace, her parents decided to return to their native country and enrolled Brianna to the Special Kindergarten "Saint Helena"- because she suffered from Down Syndrome.

On her arrival in this kindergarten, B. had great speech deficiencies. But at the age of 7 years old, the little girl manages to show a very strong will, making remarkable progress, even if she needs speech therapy intervention.

The girl loves listening to music and is very friendly. She is always present at classes, being active, attentive, curious and interested in everything going around her. I was amazed by the fact that even if she communicates with difficulty, she was cooperative and able to recite poetry on request.

She is a special girl and she has the support of a close-knit family, the love of her brothers and of course my respect, admiration and friendship.

*By Cristina Ilinca, RO*



**A. B.**

We all have a story, moments to describe, memories... But, let's focus a bit on the little A., a girl with brown eyes, brown hair, with a pale complexion who has a warm, pure and beautiful heart.

This sensitive kid comes to this world on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 in the zodiac sign of Gemini. Unlike the other kids of her kindergarten group, she suffers from infantile encephalopathy with left spastic paresis and that was the reason why her speaking was late. Her parents divorced soon after her birth, thus each of them lives in a different city nowadays, having no contact with their sibling. A. is taken care of by her maternal parents who live in Pitesti, far away from her biological mother and father.

A. attends Kinetotherapy meeting in the Recovery Center at Gura Ocnitei every year. When she joined the group, at the age 4, she could not talk, but throughout the years she spent besides her mates and kindergarten teachers in a favourable environment, she started talking with a crystalline angel-like voice and now she brought her speaking abilities to a medium level of communication. Even if little A. is very close to her grandfather, she is also friendly, outgoing and communicative whenever she is among new people. We can describe her as a balanced and a pretty active kid- a special one, who shares good vibes with her pure optimistic and vivid look. A. proves that the obstacles of life can be overcome with a positive attitude.

*By Andreea Puică, RO*



# FOSTER HOME

## GAVANA FOSTER HOME

Gavana Foster Home promotes the family concept aiming at including the child in a substitute-family that offers a normal and closer to a natural family's environment. Thus, it tries to ensure as much as possible the parents' presence as they play an important part in their future evolution.

The beneficiaries of Gavana Foster Home:

- children who are temporary or permanently separated from their families
- 18 year-old people that benefit from special protection according to the law



The Foster Home offers shelter to disadvantaged children who are either orphans, homeless or members of large families without financial resources. They are provided with care, education, development of many independent life skills for a limited time lapse as well as with activities meant to prepare them for social and

professional inclusion. If these teenagers turn 18, but they are still studying, it is the social workers that are in charge of looking for jobs in order to help them.

Every flat is well-equipped and decorated by the teenagers themselves. Each flat has got a large living room called Children's Club, where they spend most of their free time watching TV, listening to the radio or doing their homework. The flat also has a kitchen with a refrigerator, freezer, microwave oven, cooker, washing machine, reproducing the conditions which exist in an ordinary family. The Centre also has a surgery where well-trained staff works.

The Foster Home was built with the Sera Romania Foundation's and S.C. Bricostore Romania's support. With Sera Foundation's help, four flats were bought and equipped while Bricostore's donations, which consist in construction materials, manage to contribute to redecorating the houses of the teenagers and then to reintegrate them in their natural families.

*By Bianca Nanu & Erika Drăgoi, RO*



## LIFE STORIES OF ORPHANS

### S.R.

S.R., a little ten-year-old boy with big green eyes and an angelic face, is already institutionalized for 6 years in a foster home in Gavana neighborhood in Pitesti.

He is a pupil in the fifth grade at Matei Basarab School, near his new home. His original family is a big and poor one, including 5 children and 2 unmarried adults. His father doesn't have a job and, moreover, he likes drinking a lot of alcohol and frequently becomes quite violent. As a result of their unsatisfactory and immature behaviour, his parents lost their parental rights over their 5 minor offspring, who are now under the local authorities' protection in Gavana Foster Home.

At present, S.R. lives in this special center for disadvantaged children with all his brothers, where he has a definitely better life. He is passionate about computer games and it is due to the facilities of this family center that he is able to play and practice. In addition, his new family, that is, the director of this center, the teachers and the nurses, have taught them interactive games which help them to develop their creativity and imagination and even their social skills. Still, there is room for improving S.R.'s interest for education and self-development.

To sum up, this little boy was saved from his irresponsible family and brought in a place where he can grow up properly as well as any other child of his age.

*By Andrei Stan, RO*

