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Self-Enhancement and Helping Behavior: Motivations of Volunteers in Registration and Reception Centers for Refugees in Bulgaria

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Abstract Helping behavior can be triggered by complex motivators, a number of them self-related. Investigation of this issue can foster a better understanding of such current social phenomena as volunteerism within the context of intensive migration in Europe. The research presented here focuses on individuals who applied for volunteer positions in the Registration and Reception Centers for Refugees in Bulgaria. Document analysis was conducted concerning 128 applications for participation in an ongoing volunteer project during the period 2013-2016. The explicit motivations of candidates indicate that groups of motives related to self-enhancement are among the key triggers for volunteers. These include a desire to foster social change and the effort to develop a positive self-image, both of which are associated with the role of volunteer.

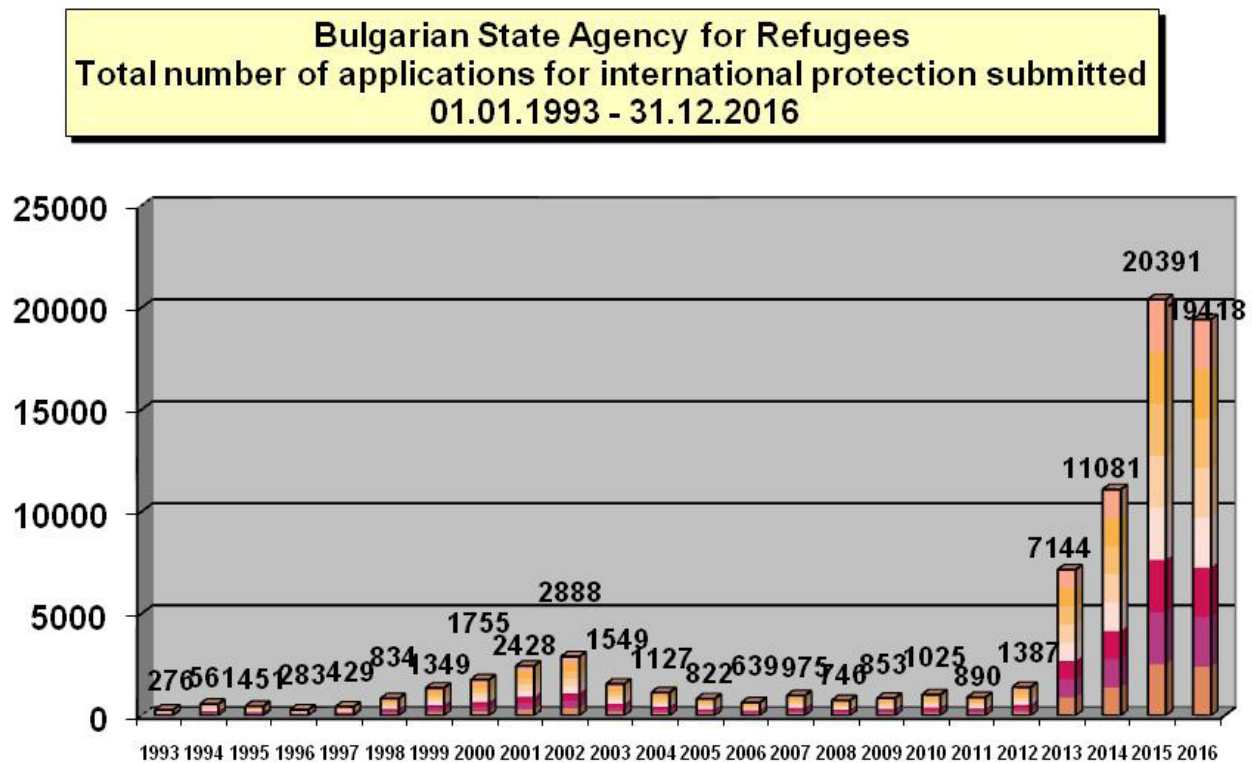
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The topic of helping behavior directed towards asylum seekers and refugees is becoming more important in Europe. The fact that the so-called Balkan route has emerged as one of the main migrant roads on the continent affects almost all countries in the region, including Bulgaria. For example, statistics from the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees reveal a significant increase in recent years in applications for asylum (see: graphic 1), with the highest total numbers recorded for the period 01.01.2015-31.12.2016. In 2016, the main reported countries of origin were Afghanistan (8,827), Iraq (5,348), Syria (2,639), Pakistan (1,790), and Iran (451).

Graphic 1.



Source: Self-elaboration.

This process comprises an unfamiliar situation for the Balkan countries in general and Bulgaria in particular—the country is now accepting groups of potential immigrants and refugees that are substantially different in both numbers and characteristics from those observed previously. At the same time, public attention concerning this issue has been intensified by the extensive media coverage it has received both locally and internationally. The new situation that has thus developed has challenged Bulgarians to define a coherent position concerning newcomers. Surveys reveal both ambivalence and rapid changes in social attitudes towards asylum seekers, with reactions varying from violence to various forms of proactive helping behavior.

Studies in Bulgaria concerning attitudes towards immigrants and refugees reveal an interesting picture of how the general topic of volunteerism and helping behavior is perceived within the new context that has emerged. For example, a national representative study entitled *Attitudes towards Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Bulgaria*, which was conducted in November 2013 for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Regional Representation for Central Europe, concludes that

Volunteering is a major factor that influences people's attitudes toward refugees and their integration in particular. Nevertheless, the majority of people (77%) have not taken part in any voluntary work in the last 12 months. [Alpha Research 2013:17]

The national representative opinion poll from February 2016 clearly demonstrates the ambivalence of attitudes towards refugees in Bulgaria. Published results drew the conclusion that

Bulgarian society is charged with a number of fears with respect to the refugees but for the vast majority of the Bulgarian population (with the exception of 5%) these fears have not transformed into hatred against foreigners and are free from the ideological burden of xenophobia. The majority of the population believes that refugees represent a threat to the national security of Bulgaria by virtue of difficulties with integration, fear of foreign religion, ethnicity, and culture, but above all due to the concern that our state is in dire straits economically. [Kyuchukov 2016]

An earlier report that explored such attitudes utilizing focus groups states that

Refugee integration is perceived mostly as a one-side process—either the responsibility of the government or of refugees themselves. Very few participants see their personal role in this process. [Alpha Research 2012:23]

Some respondents in this 2013 survey recalled examples of helping behavior directed towards refugees, but these involved individual acts that were more accidental than intentional, with personal involvement limited to opportunities to donate food and clothing. The study also found that

People are not very keen on helping in refugee integration. The most the majority would do would be giving away clothes/food. Further engagements seem

unrealistic for most of the respondents in the discussions. Ways to attract and persuade people to participate in volunteering activities should be sought. But, first people need to be acquainted with the way refugees and asylum-seekers live in order to surmount their distrust to them. [Alpha Research 2012:23]

However, surveys of social attitudes can only partially explain the behavior towards asylum seekers and refugees that we observe in society. Certain reports also appear to be focused more on analyzing various forms of fear, aggression, and discrimination rather than seeking to present a detailed picture of the motives underlying helping behavior. But, they do provide a good perspective on how volunteerism in general is perceived in Bulgaria, particularly in regard to the integration of immigrants and refugees (Alpha Research 2012; 2013; Hristova et al. 2016; Kyuchukov 2016).

The aim of this article is to examine motivations associated with the self that drives individuals to demonstrate proactive helping behavior towards asylum seekers. In order to avoid questions connected with the psychological gaps between attitudes, intentions, and behavior, the present analysis addresses only those individuals who actually demonstrated proactive behavior by applying for a volunteer position in the Registration and Reception Centers for Refugees in Bulgaria. Within this context, the question under consideration is how people who are not professionally obligated or encouraged by the official authorities relate the idea of “self” to their helping behavior. The main goal in this respect is to explore motives for volunteerism and helping behavior towards people or groups who are perceived as very different in their

culture, social norms, and habits from the self of the volunteer.

More specifically, I focus on actions that are aimed at delivering social, educational, or emotional support to newcomers rather than physical comfort, such as the provision of clothing, food, money, and so forth. Such demonstrations of support and helping behavior encounter many challenges, including language barriers along with cultural and religious differences. The cultural contexts of the current asylum seekers' countries of origin differ significantly from that of the local Bulgarian population in all these parameters.

Defining Volunteerism

There are differing views concerning the range of behavior, including motives, that are associated with the concept of volunteerism. In the present discussion I adopt Penner's (2002:448) brief definition of the issue, namely, "Volunteerism can be defined as long-term, planned, prosocial behaviors that benefit strangers and occur within an organizational setting." Since my interest here is directed towards self-enhancement motives, it is important that I draw a distinction between *spontaneous helping behavior* and volunteering, the latter understood as a

rather different kind of helping, a kind that is prototypic of planned helping...Thus, volunteers (a) often actively seek out opportunities to help others; (b) may deliberate for considerable amounts of time about whether to volunteer, the extent of their involvement, and the degree to which particular activities fit with their own personal needs; and (c) may make a com-

mitment to an ongoing helping relationship that may extend over a considerable period of time and that may entail considerable personal costs of time, energy, and opportunity. [Clary et al. 1998:1517]

Motives for Volunteerism

Studies have shown that multiple and complex motivators frequently underlie volunteer behavior. For example, Prouteau and Wolff (2008: 321) state that

In many cases volunteers give several reasons for giving time. Only one fifth of the involvements of all volunteers are motivated by only one goal...Indeed, 20% of the involvements in both samples are motivated by at least five reasons. Among all volunteers, the desire to be helpful to society and to others is the most frequent motivation reported. It concerns about two thirds of volunteer involvements. The second most important reason is the relational one, which fosters the involvement in six cases out of ten.

Researchers who use more in-depth methods, such as the analysis of autobiographical interviews presented in Melkmanet and colleagues (2015), have found that although the motivation for volunteerism often centers upon the question of helping, it is very complex and may contain a number of different elements connected with the self, such as "gaining a sense of normality." Volunteerism can thus be regarded as a multidimensional construct that consists of distinct components.

Wang (2004) applies five-factor dimensionality in his discussion of sports volunteerism. This comprises 1) altruistic value, 2) personal development, 3)

community concern, 4) ego enhancement, and 5) social adjustment. This classification may be viewed in a certain sense as a version of Clary's (Clary et al. 1998) classic framework, which continues to be used in more recent studies (see: Finkelstien 2009; see also Guiddi et al. 2015). Clary and colleagues (1998) base their Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) on the idea of complex motivational foundations, and they identify six motivational functions served by volunteerism, one being enhancement. Briefly stated, these are:

- Values—through volunteerism individuals express values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others;
- Understanding—volunteerism as a learning experience;
- Social—volunteerism as building relationships with others;
- Career—volunteerism as a source of career-related benefits;
- Protective—volunteerism as an ego-protective mechanism, serving to reduce guilt, shame, and so forth;
- Enhancement—volunteerism as a motivational process that centers on a person's growth and development and involves positive strivings of the ego, in contrast to a protective function aimed at eliminating negative elements surrounding the ego.

Clary argues on the basis of his research concerning subjective mood and helping that people use helping as a means to maintain or enhance a positive affect. In addition, certain respondents in studies of volunteerism report that they volunteer either for

reasons of personal development, or to obtain satisfaction related to personal growth and self-esteem (Clary et al. 1998:1518).

Self-Enhancement and Volunteerism

Self-enhancement is a term often used in relation to specific psychological biases or even personal traits (e.g., White and Plous 1995). I use the term in the present analysis in a more general sense to indicate a tendency to cultivate and maintain positive feelings, ideas, and expectations that are connected to the self or decrease the negativity of one's self-concept. Sedikides and Strube (1995:1330) argue that

To date, three major self-evaluation motives have dominated work in this area: self-enhancement, self-verification, and self-assessment. The self-enhancement motive refers to people's desire to enhance the positivity or decrease the negativity of the self-concept. The self-verification motive refers to people's desire to confirm and maintain the self-concept, be it positive or negative. The self-assessment motive refers to people's desire to reduce uncertainty about the self-concept regardless of whether the uncertainty reduction process is likely to result in favorable or unfavorable implications for the self.

A rather different but also very interesting line of research investigates the so-called other-oriented and self-oriented motives in volunteerism (e.g., Briggs, Peterson, and Gregory 2010; Stukas et al. 2016). I do not employ this classification in the present discussion insofar as the debate in social psychology about whether helping is primarily altruistic or egoistic remains open. In my view, classifying social mo-

tivation as other-oriented rather than self-oriented can be problematic, particularly in cases where volunteer work has both evident and serious social and political implications.

Current Research and Applied Methodology

My research is based on an ongoing volunteer program in Bulgaria, the Refugee Project, which has been designed and implemented by two non-government organizations. The aim of the project is to facilitate the social inclusion and integration of asylum seekers and refugees—both children and adults—through daily, individualized educational assistance and extracurricular activities in the Registration and Reception Centers in Sofia. Volunteers spend a number of hours in the centers every week in direct face-to-face contact with asylum seekers, conducting regular lessons in the Bulgarian and English languages, as well as in arts and sports. Workshops and events are also held, such as excursions and visits to museums. Volunteers face a complex environment in this project because of the differing cultures, educational levels, and language competences of the asylum seekers.

The present study focuses on those who applied to volunteer in the program, with an emphasis on how they perceived the role of the volunteer and whether their explicit motivations contained elements related to self-enhancement. A total of 128 online applications for volunteer positions were examined, which included applications submitted during the recruitment campaigns in January and June 2016, as well as those in 2013, 2014, and 2015. The explic-

it motivations of candidates were analyzed on the basis of their actual statements in their application forms. Names and identification markers were removed, and the author signed the mandatory declarations with the Project Coordinators concerning how data would be analyzed and stored. The author's own personal documents were not included among those that were analyzed. All documents and data records for the study were analyzed in accordance with the Bulgarian legislation concerning the protection of personal data.

In addition to the document analysis, the author spent three months in 2015 within the Project team. Participation in and observation of the application procedure, field work, and the training of volunteers in one of the Reception Centers for Refugees in Sofia helped in gaining a more detailed knowledge and understanding of the volunteer community.

The recruitment procedure in the Refugee Project included the completion of an online application form and the submission of a CV. All recruitment campaigns were announced in both English and Bulgarian, and the majority of the applicants (84) filed their documents in English. All statements from the applications discussed below are presented precisely as they were written in English by the candidates, the only exceptions being those noted as translated from Bulgarian.

Volunteerism as defined here is a particular type of helping behavior—it is an interaction with others that is a product of deliberate planning and personal choice. This poses the following questions:

- How is this behavior related to the idea of the self?
- What is the content of the self-related motives and expectations reflected in the subjective representations of volunteering?

The following indicators were coded and analyzed, respectively:

- Content related to personal history and/or past, current, and future self-identity; content related to the role of the volunteer; content connected with self-other interaction in the course of volunteer work.
- Content related to positive ideas and attributes associated with the self; content connected with positive emotions and/or expectations of positive emotions.

Characteristics of the Applicants

The applications indicated that the majority of candidates were female. They ranged in age from 16 to 60, but most were between 25 and 35 years of age. All the candidates were highly educated—university students or graduates—with the exception of three individuals, two of whom were still in high school (under age 18) and another who indicated no age. The majority were employed, reflecting a variety of professions and educational profiles. Most applicants stated that they had been engaged previously in volunteer positions/activities and had experience in multicultural surroundings, but nearly half had no previous experience with asylum seekers and refugees. The data also revealed that not all applicants actually came from Bulgar-

ia, particularly in the 2016 campaigns, when there were many foreign candidates. This was evident both from such indicators as native language—it was not Bulgarian in almost half of the cases—and also from statements concerning motivation and experience.

Motivations for Volunteerism

The application forms for the Project include a section dedicated to the applicant's motivations. These were explored by two questions in the 2013 and 2014 campaigns—"Why did you choose this position?" and "What would you like to contribute to the project?"—which were reformulated for the 2015 and 2016 campaigns as "Why are you interested in this position?" The applicants could describe their motivations in a freely written statement of up to approximately 2,000 words in length in line with the parameters of the online application form used in the recruitment campaigns.

The applicants' actual statements were analyzed to investigate how they perceived the role of volunteer and also explore whether there were elements related to self-enhancement in their motivational spectrum.

Self-Image and Personal History

The basic elements of the applicants' motivations, in their own words, included content devoted to personal history or self-image—103 of the applications contained such statements. The relationship between cause or position and self was established through several different strategies:

1. The relationship was built upon characteristics/behavior that the candidates regarded as stable identifiers (existing for a “long time,” even “always”) of who they were. For example, a 32-year-old¹ Bulgarian candidate described his motivation as follows:

As a Journalist I have always had strong interest in topics related to human rights and treatment of vulnerable society groups. I use every opportunity to engage more with all kinds of anti-discrimination initiatives – mostly in sports (because I am a sports writer), but also in society in general.

Other candidates used a similar strategy, attributing their motivation to personality-based explanations:

I am always looking for a way to improve things, provide for others, and make things happen. Being involved in social causes is part of my culture. [age 32, resource development and communications coordinator, native language Bulgarian]

2. Motivation was explained in other cases as a natural stage in personal development. A 48-year-old Montessori teacher (native language French) thus wrote that

I am reaching a point in my life where I would like to do something meaningful for others. I love teaching and I think I can share something of what I have learnt with others.

A 26-year-old freelance editor and writer (native language Bulgarian) remarked in a similar vein that

And although refugee-related issues have largely defined my professional and academic experiences in the last two years, I feel that it is high time for me to become involved on a more personal level. I can dedicate myself to the cause, as I have completed my education and am currently working independently, on a flexible schedule. I also feel equipped with the necessary skills, experience, and motivation to quickly learn from your practice.

A 38-year-old freelancer (native language Greek) writes of his general personal transformation that

I want to stop being passive with everything that is happening and start acting. I now have the time to do it as I really made a turn in my career and life in order to be more able to make my “wants” come true. I would like to put my efforts into something that is really having a meaning and will help people.

3. The relationship could also be built upon a desired self-image (intended or future state of the self). This strategy was evident in many cases from elements of the written statements and was part of a more complex motivation.

When I think about what I want to make of myself, I always imagine a person who is useful, who helps those less fortunate. [age 21, university student, native language Bulgarian]

I have always imagined myself working with kids and my ultimate ambition is to establish my own private kindergarten. [age 23, university student, native language Bulgarian]

¹ The age of candidates indicates their age at the time of application.

A 25-year-old unemployed Bulgarian candidate stated that

I have always dreamed of being engaged with humanitarian work and for me helping others is the main purpose of life. Being a translator, my job is not only to make people understand the words, but the cultural meaning behind them as well – I have always considered myself a translator of cultures. What better way to make a difference in the world than teaching people skills that they need to make their life better in a foreign place and take this foreign place closer to their hearts? Being a teacher, especially to children, is something I would prefer doing until the rest of my life to make the world a better place.

The idea of taking a volunteer position was described in this instance as part of the candidate's personal history, and it was based on a desired self-image in both the present and the future.

4. The relationship could also be built upon or reinforced by past experiences associated with the candidate's personal history:

I choose this position because I want to be in need for people which have difficulties. This topic is close to me. My mother was a migrant many years, so I know what the man in this position needs. And what is more humanity than that to be helpful for someone else? [age 28, student, native language Bulgarian]

In the spring of 2013 I participated in a leadership conference in Jordan, and the organizers had planned a visit to a refugee camp on the border with Syria. The humanitarian crisis in Jordan at that

time resembled the current one in Bulgaria, but on a much more dramatic scale. We finally didn't visit the camp because the situation was out of control, and it wasn't unusual for there to be firefights along the border. When I returned to Bulgaria, my mind was already set on the idea of going back to Jordan or Lebanon to help in the refugee camps. But then the war grew to monstrous proportions and I couldn't do what I wanted to.² [age 24, marketing assistant, native language Bulgarian]

The problems of refugees have troubled me for quite a long time. My interest was intensified after my work in the refugee camp near Hebron, where I led a short training program for the doctors in the hospital serving the camp. After I returned to Bulgaria – having in mind the difficult situation in the country with the reception and integration of refugees – I wanted to put my efforts into something that would be useful in this regard. A foundation for access to rights gave me this opportunity. But given my experience and my desire to contribute something more, I think that this [volunteer] position is the perfect option.³ [age 28, NGO intern, native language Bulgarian]

The Role of the Volunteer as an Element of Self-Identity

In nearly half of the cases, applicants included how they viewed the role of volunteer in their motivation. Such descriptions incorporated ideas about the mission, values, and activities of a volunteer, as well as their expected consequences.

² Original text in Bulgarian.

³ Original text in Bulgarian.

Often the major characteristic of the role is described as contributing to the betterment of society. Of particular importance in this respect appears to be the fact that being a volunteer is regarded as providing an opportunity to set a personal example, whereby internalizing the role makes it possible for the self to become an agent of social change.

Well, in Bulgaria people are very biased towards the refugees. They view them as some kind of savages who came here only to bring harm. I live near a refugee center, and I see that most of these people are normal folks who came here to protect themselves and their families, and I see that they want to settle themselves either here or somewhere else, and just live normal happy lives. They aren't as what they are described to be. It's difficult for them to adapt here because of the language barrier, culture shock and the hostility they feel. By participating in this project I want to help out with what I can, and also show the people around me that they shouldn't fear the refugees. If the people around the volunteers change their view on them, they will change other people's view and this way, step by step, the whole situation for these people will take a turn for the better. [age 19, student, native language Bulgarian]

Last but not least, I believe that through my volunteer work I will be able to give a good example to others and help fight stereotypes in the Bulgarian society. [age 26, unemployed, native language Bulgarian]

I chose to apply for this project because freedom and the right to happiness, security, and a good life are values that I never questioned. I want to be part of the fight to preserve them and to help people whose

home country is not Bulgaria to feel more comfortable here, to understand our language, to relax. Furthermore, I do not like the image of the refugees that is being created among Europeans. I think that this image is distorted and I want to contribute to its rejection.

Last but not least, I feel genuinely curious and interested in the cultures that refugees bear. I would like to know the games they play and words that they use to describe the world because learning is always a two-way process.⁴ [age 22, student, native language Bulgarian]

On the other hand, it seems to me that this refugee wave has the potential to become one of the decisive factors in the future development of Europe. What we do today will have serious consequences tomorrow. In a sense, the history of the continent and our country is being written at the moment and I would like to take a direct part in it, namely, helping migrants to gain an orientation and fit in here.⁵ [age 28, student, native language Bulgarian]

In some cases, applicants make a clear distinction between having a positive attitude or intention to help and the real act of helping. They also view volunteering as proactive helping behavior.

When I visited your website and found out about the opportunity to participate in this project I didn't hesitate a second. I want to help these children, I am not indifferent to their fate. We tend to spend hours every day speaking how we should help, change something

⁴ Original text in Bulgarian.

⁵ Original text in Bulgarian.

in the system – this is a great way to become this change, to show these people that they are not alone, that many others feel involved in what is occurring and would like show support and become something like a pillar, something they could rely on. I deem it a cause worth fighting for. [age 22, legal assistant, native language Bulgarian]

I would like very much to contribute a little to a better world, and so far have not been doing much. I would like to change that. I believe age and being now a mother of a toddler, added to current situation with refugees is forcing me to take action. [age 38, graphic designer, native language Portuguese]

Many candidates report that they were deliberately seeking a position that would allow them to fulfill their aspirations to help. In a significantly smaller number of cases, people came upon information about the project by chance and recognized that being a volunteer would provide an opportunity to turn their own thoughts and ideas into actions.

The Self and Others: Expected Interactions

One of the leading attractions of volunteer positions is that they allow for interaction with other people. The motivational statements of 96 applicants explicitly relate to some sort of social interaction, and they place a special value on interaction from two perspectives:

- Expectations for interaction with representatives of different cultures
- Expectations of interaction with children, particularly refugee children

While in the first case the outcome is regarded as “enriching” for the volunteer, in the second, people find value mainly in the positive emotions they expect to gain in the process itself and in the fact that work with children is viewed as something “meaningful.” The following two statements comprise pertinent examples.

I am interested in this position because I am inspired to work with children, to meet new people and to have the opportunity to learn about new cultures and traditions. I will be happy to support children in their everyday activities, to be part of their development and to look at their smiling faces during the whole process. I believe that every child has his/her own individuality and resources which can be activated and used, so to speak, the child to be a partner during the educational activities. This is very important because empowering children to contribute in the process of learning and to voice their opinions can help them to be active citizens who have their own points of view and participate not only at school activities but also in their personal lives. [age 26, economist, native language Bulgarian]

Being/working with people from different cultures is always refreshing and enriching. [age 30, student, native language Bulgarian]

Although the application forms contained no specific questions exploring the applicants’ expectations about the origin and status of the people they anticipated meeting at the Reception Centers, their actual texts and the wording of their motivation statements provide an opportunity to identify certain tendencies in that direction. Two issues stand out in this regard:

- First, applicants described how they expected to interact with refugees, particularly child refugees. The phrase “asylum seeker” was used only in isolated cases. This can be explained in part by the fact that the name of the project contains the word “refugee,” which is also used extensively by the public and in social media. Use of the term “migrant” was also relatively rare. There are only ten cases in total, with six appearing in the 2016 recruiting campaigns, in which applicants mention “refugees, foreigners, and migrants” or “refugees and migrants.”
- Second, almost all of the cases in which a country of origin was mentioned indicated that applicants expected to interact with people from Syria. The only two exceptions mentioned “people from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan” and “Syrians and Iranians.” Three applicants, all from the 2016 campaigns, stated that they expected to contact “people from the Middle East.”

An example of these two tendencies is provided by a statement from a 22-year-old Bulgarian student:

Syria’s civil war has been one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies in recent memory and many of the refugees are particularly vulnerable – namely children. I chose this position because it is a chance to get involved somehow and perhaps help children who have gone through civil war feel like children once again. I would like to help with whatever I can to make this difficult time, for children and young people who have lived through such horrible violence, more bearable. Providing the best possible support to young refugees is not only a worthy cause but something every country must do as a response to the Syr-

ian conflict and I would like to volunteer my time in order to help my country achieve this.

Content Related to Positive Ideas and Attributes Connected to the Self

The majority of motivations contain ideas and attributes related to the current self-image—or the self-image expected on the basis of undertaking volunteer activities—that the applicants consider to be positive. Such examples were coded in 116 of the cases.

As noted above, being “helpful” was considered to be particularly valuable:

I’ve always found meaning in helping other people and contributing to society...I want to help the vulnerable group of refugees, especially children, by doing something good for them – help them with their homework and teach them English and Bulgarian, as well as make them feel a little bit more at home and more confident about the future. [age 23, digital marketing executive, native language Bulgarian]

Variations of this motivation can be also found in such semantically close formulations as “contribute,” “assist,” and “support,” and in the associated behavior regarded as essential to the role of the volunteer.

Another commonly mentioned motive is related to the idea of being “useful”:

I want to be useful to somebody and I think this will bring me satisfaction. [age 37, cultural events coordinator, native language Bulgarian]

I'm looking for opportunities to be useful. I know I can help. [age 34, psychologist, native language Bulgarian]

I have free time and need to feel helpful and useful for people. [age 37, artist, native language Bulgarian]

The current research provides no indication of potential sources of explanation for this motive, such as the lack of a given role-identity. However, it appears that the role of volunteer could be linked to various existential ideas of giving meaning to the self.

A large group of ideas and attributes connected with enhancing one's self-image are presented through descriptions of skills and characteristics that applicants expect will be displayed or acquired in the process of volunteering. These include becoming a "leader," "mentor," or "source of happiness," demonstrating "solidarity and compassion," and so forth.

Positive Emotions and/or Expectations of Positive Emotions

Another component of the analysis was to monitor whether the applicants' texts contain any descriptions or expectations of emotions they associated with the experience of being a volunteer in a Reception Center. Such statements were presented in 51 cases, and almost all were unambiguously positive. Only three applications contained remarks that the work would probably be challenging and difficult.

The emotions expected were described as "joy," "having fun," "feeling good," "happiness," and

"pleasure." Applicants in many cases also spoke about satisfaction and delight. For example,

[I]t gives me satisfaction to help. I believe that this time will be well-spent. [age 20, student, native language Bulgarian]

Helping others brings me happiness. [age 27, logistics specialist, native language Turkish]

I have experience working with refugees and really enjoy it as I learn a lot from them. [age 38, Arabic desk manager, native language Bulgarian]

Searching for positive emotions as a component of motivation for volunteerism recalls the ego-enhancing function as Clary and his colleagues discuss it (see: Clary et al. 1998). In respect to self-image, it is likely more correct to view this element as accompanying the larger and more complex self-enhancing representations of being a volunteer.

Conclusion

Researchers have approached the role of volunteer in connection with self-identity from various angles, and they have also investigated the impact of demographic factors, religion, parental behavior, and social environment (e.g., Penner 2002; Voicu and Voicu 2009; Nacheva 2016). Henderson, Huang, and Chang (2012) have also examined the general attraction of prosocial activities in respect to a number of different examples. In the present study, I find that the role of volunteer is often regarded as presenting an opportunity to contribute to social change by means of one's personal ex-

ample, and the analysis I present here accords in many ways with McAllum's (see: 2014) approach. Employing such approaches in future research in the field can facilitate gaining a better understanding of how volunteering is used to construct a "preferred self" or "ideal self."

The subjective representations of volunteering that are embedded in the applicants' personal histories reflect several important strategies:

- The relationship is built upon certain characteristics/behavior that the applicant regards as stable identifiers of the self.
- The experience is explained as a natural stage in personal development.
- The relationship is built upon a desired self-image, that is, an intended future state of the self.
- The relationship is built upon or reinforced by actual events and facts, namely, past experiences derived from personal history.

Although a variety of positive ideas and attributes linked with self-image were found in the applicants' texts, being "helpful" and "useful" appear as key motivators for choosing the role of the volunteer. This role itself is often connected with expectations for positive emotions and experiences.

Participating in social interactions is one of the key drives for the applicants involved in the study, and analysis indicates that volunteerism is triggered in a sense by expectations of interaction with specific groups (Syrians, war refugees, children). As noted in the introduction above, the current situation in the Registration and Reception Centers for Refu-

gees in Bulgaria can only partly meet such expectations because the majority of people in the Centers are not necessarily representatives of these groups. Consequently, it is important to continue research concerning social attitudes towards refugees and immigrants (see Hristova et al. 2016) so that adequate psychological explanations can be formulated for the various emotions, cognitions, and behavior concerning the newcomers.

Another important issue concerns how media and public institutions present the image of refugees and immigrants in Bulgaria, with language and its relation to tolerance/intolerance comprising a subject that requires continuous monitoring (see: Dobrev 2009; Encheva 2014). It is evident from my analysis that these representations were important for volunteers—some individuals explicitly wrote that they did not agree with them, while others admitted that they wanted to check their validity through personal experience.

The analysis we have presented shows that the motivational structure for volunteering is complex and multidimensional, and that the leading group of self-related motives is associated with self-enhancement. There is also evidence of self-verification motives in the sense that Sedikides and Strube (1995:1330) use the term, but the major accent remains on enhancement.

Insofar as my analysis was based upon documents that were not specifically designed for research goals, certain points need to be addressed in future studies. For example, I cannot guarantee that the motivations noted by the applicants cover the

full spectrum of motivators for volunteers. There are also a variety of factors that can influence this process, including hidden motives, difficulties with identifying or expressing motives properly, and situational factors, such as the structure of the application form in my case. Further research may shed light on these questions.

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