

## What University Students Think a Volunteer is vs. What a Volunteer Really Is: University Students' Volunteer Perceptions

**Taysir, Eyüp Aygün**

Associate Professor, Marmara University, Turkey, eataysir@marmara.edu.tr

Obviously, NGOs undertake important responsibilities for sustainability and sustainable development. Their primary scarce resources are financial/nonfinancial materials and volunteers. According to 2014 World Giving Index, Turkey is in the 132nd place among 135 countries. This result let us think about potential reasons of this unsatisfactory situation. One of our basic assumptions was that there might be a relationship between the volunteer perception of a person and his/her never being a volunteer in an NGO. In this study, we conducted 9 focus groups with 52 university students (29 female, 23 male) from Istanbul who have never experienced a volunteer activity in an NGO. First, we asked them to imagine a volunteer and we gave them a questionnaire form that would be helpful for describing the volunteer they have imagined. By using a questionnaire form we tried to get detailed information about how a university student, who has no experience as a volunteer, has imagined a volunteer. We asked students to describe the volunteer they have imagined considering his/her gender, age, education, occupation, income, marital status, religious view, country, family the imagined volunteer grew up, personality, relationship with his/her family and friends, hobbies and finally the volunteer activity that the imagined volunteer is attached. After each student explained what they have imagined we also made them discuss about their feelings and ideas about being a volunteer. Results revealed some unexpected and interesting outcomes which would be helpful to understand what university students feel about volunteer activities and for being a volunteer in an NGO. For example, 81% of all participants imagined a female volunteer. Additionally, respondents also mostly thought that their imagined volunteer was focused on a childcare related volunteer activity. Detailed results will be shared and discussed in full text.

Here we confront with a critical question: how and to what extend does this imagined volunteer represent a real volunteer from the field? We will discuss this by considering both the relevant literature and the previous research findings on volunteer demographics and volunteer activities from Turkey and from the rest of the world. We believe that our findings can be useful both for policy makers and NGOs.