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CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING: STRATEGY, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

ABSTRACT

In recent years, corporate volunteering has gone from a simple act of goodwill to a strategic pillar for many companies. By encouraging professionals to contribute their skills and expertise to social causes, organisations are not only supporting communities but also improving their own corporate social responsibility (CSR) profiles. This dual-purpose approach helps companies foster a positive public image, attract and retain top talent, and build a goal-oriented work culture. The object of this research is corporate volunteering within the CSR strategies of business organizations. The role, benefits, and measurable impacts of corporate volunteering on both organizational performance and community development are the subject of the study. The main tasks of the study include identifying and systematizing the strategic benefits of corporate volunteering, analyzing the leading practices of corporate volunteering in Bulgaria, formulating recommendations for improving the quality and effectiveness of corporate volunteering programs. The methodological approach combines literature review, qualitative synthesis of best practices and comparative analysis of corporate volunteering initiatives implemented by leading companies in Bulgaria.

In this article, we explore how corporate volunteering serves as a bridge between professional development and community contribution, and how it has become an essential element of modern corporate strategies.

KEYWORDS: corporate volunteering, corporate social responsibility (CSR), employee engagement, community development, impact measurement

JEL: M14, O35, L31

INTRODUCTION

Our society is becoming increasingly committed to social causes. Many companies are realising the benefits of offering volunteering programmes in the workplace. These programs allow employees to use their skills and time to help causes that are important to our society while being encouraged by their employers. In the most general case, corporate volunteering is seen as employees of a company volunteering their time in support of community significant causes with employer support.

Corporate volunteering not only reinforces corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies but also generates measurable benefits for employees and organizations alike. A growing body of literature highlights that volunteering contributes significantly to employees' professional development, enhances engagement, and strengthens interorganizational partnerships.

In the contemporary business landscape, corporate engagement in societal issues is no longer a peripheral activity but a central component of organizational strategy. One of the most

prominent manifestations of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the facilitation of employee involvement in volunteering activities. To accurately frame this phenomenon, it is essential to distinguish between several closely related concepts: corporate volunteering, business volunteering, and employee volunteering.

Corporate volunteering typically refers to employer-supported initiatives where employees donate their time and skills to external nonprofit or community organizations. Business volunteering, often used interchangeably, reflects broader corporate-supported engagement aimed at societal development. In contrast, employee volunteering emphasizes the individual's contribution of time and expertise, with or without direct corporate support, and increasingly includes occupation-related volunteering - activities closely aligned with employees' professional competencies.

The table below summarizes the key definitions of these terms for conceptual clarity:

Table 1. The key definitions

Term	Definition
Corporate Volunteering	Planned, employer-supported volunteering where employees donate time to third-sector organizations; integral to CSR strategies; also seen as a formalized aspect of corporate philanthropy aimed at community betterment through structured programs.
Business Volunteering	Often used interchangeably with corporate volunteering; it generally refers to employee volunteering initiatives supported by businesses, aligning with CSR strategies to engage communities and enhance brand value.
Employee Volunteering	Volunteering, where employees contribute time, skills, and effort without pay, often within employer-supported initiatives, can include occupation-related volunteering, where employees use their professional expertise to benefit nonprofits or community projects

Source: Own

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Business volunteering, as a component of corporate social responsibility (CSR), has emerged as **an increasingly significant strategic tool for organizations**. It serves dual purposes: contributing to community development and reinforcing organizational goals such as employee engagement, brand enhancement, and talent attraction (Barkay, 2012; Brzustewicz et al., 2024).

The evolution of corporate volunteering has witnessed a shift from philanthropic gestures to structured, **skill-based interventions** aligned with business objectives (Kuznetsova, 2020). Companies today integrate volunteering into broader CSR strategies **to differentiate themselves** in competitive labor markets, leveraging it for employer branding and stakeholder engagement (Naumova & Kopyl, 2024). Research emphasizes that employees participating in corporate volunteering initiatives often experience a deeper sense of work meaningfulness, driven by the interpersonal connections they form through volunteering (Hatami, Glińska-Noweś, & Hermes, 2024).

Brzustewicz et al. (2024) investigated the moderating role of employee participation in business volunteering, finding it strengthens the link between workplace relationships, perceived work meaningfulness, and affective organizational commitment. This underscores the notion that corporate volunteering not only benefits external communities but also enhances **internal organizational culture and employee retention**. The organizational benefits of structured employee volunteer programs are confirmed by Veleva et al. (2012) who measure the impact of volunteer programs on businesses. Their findings suggest positive correlations between

volunteering and key human resources outcomes such as **job satisfaction, morale, organizational pride, and employee engagement**.

Pevnaya and Kuzminchuk (2018) highlight that in the Russian context, corporate volunteering serves not only as a CSR practice but also as **a driver for personnel development**, noting that employees involved in volunteering report higher satisfaction levels and a stronger commitment to their organizations.

The corporate perspective often blends ethical responsibility with strategic self-interest, as exemplified by Barkay's (2012) ethnographic study on Coca-Cola Israel, which revealed how the company designed its corporate volunteering programs to simultaneously **address community needs and reinforce brand loyalty and employee morale**.

Additionally, volunteering programs are increasingly seen as **forms of social innovation**. Kuznetsova (2020) frames corporate volunteering as a distinct business process and a social innovation, facilitating solutions to societal issues while enhancing corporate stability in volatile environments.

Liszt-Rohlf et al. (2021) emphasize that voluntary activities facilitate **the acquisition of valuable competencies** such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving. They argue for integrating volunteering into business education to foster experiential learning and to enhance employability, underscoring that volunteers often overlook the professional skills developed through their engagements. Their study demonstrates the necessity of formal validation processes to recognize these competencies, particularly in labor market contexts that value practical experience alongside academic qualifications.

Similarly, Biermann, Breitsohl, and Meijs (2024) propose the concept of **occupation-related volunteering**, which bridges professional expertise and volunteer activities. They underline that volunteers not only contribute their skills to nonprofit causes but also reinforce their occupational identity and social capital, extending the traditional understanding of skills-based volunteering beyond pro bono engagements to a broader spectrum of professional contributions.

Lough et al. (2016) highlight **the importance of institutional factors** in encouraging employee participation in volunteer programs. Their research identifies community engagement training as a critical driver of participation, over and above the effect of traditional benefits such as rewards or paid time off. These findings highlight the role of internal motivation and the value of well-designed volunteer engagement policies.

From **a nonprofit perspective**, Liang et al. (2024) examine how corporate volunteering is perceived within nonprofit organizations, particularly within the emerging concept of retail corporate volunteerism. They distinguish between nonprofits that commodify corporate volunteer programs for financial sustainability and those that prefer relational, mission-aligned collaborations. This nuanced view of corporate–nonprofit partnerships highlights potential tensions but also opportunities for strategic CSR alignments.

Finally, Brzustewicz et al. (2021) focus **on the collaborative dynamics between companies and NGOs** in the context of corporate volunteering. They argue that mutual value creation is achievable when partnerships are built on shared goals, trust, and co-created initiatives, which facilitate not only societal benefits but also enhance companies' CSR impact and NGOs' operational capacities.

From **a broader societal perspective**, the Time Well Spent survey by NCVO (2019) indicates that volunteering is predominantly local, reflects diverse participation patterns, and provides significant personal and professional benefits. However, demographic disparities remain, suggesting that more inclusive strategies are necessary to broaden participation across different

socio-economic groups. Organizations also recognize the importance of structured incentive programs to maximize participation. According to Leveraging Corporate Volunteer Incentives (2024), initiatives such as paid volunteer time off and skill-based volunteering are instrumental in boosting engagement and corporate citizenship behaviors.

From a **stakeholder perspective**, corporate volunteering enhances loyalty and trust. Naumova and Kopyl (2024) argue that corporate volunteering effectively manages stakeholder loyalty, including that of employees, customers, and the broader community, thus contributing to achieving strategic business goals.

Finally, volunteering resonates with broader sustainability and **social impact goals**. Rahman (2024) posits that CSR, including volunteering activities, underpins sustainable development by balancing economic growth with social equity and environmental stewardship.

In sum, corporate volunteering has transcended its traditional charitable role to become a **multi-faceted instrument** that addresses social needs, enhances employee experiences, strengthens organizational culture, and supports sustainable development. Organizations that strategically leverage corporate volunteering initiatives position themselves not only as socially responsible entities but also as employers of choice in increasingly purpose-driven labor markets.

The role of corporate volunteering is undeniably significant across various dimensions of organizational and societal development. Based on a synthesis of recent literature, five key benefits can be identified:

- **Strategic CSR practice** - Corporate volunteering enhances employer branding and nurtures a purpose-driven organizational culture. It strengthens employee loyalty and organizational cohesion while contributing to greater corporate resilience and adaptability in times of uncertainty.
- **Talent attraction and competitiveness** - Corporate volunteering programs significantly enhance a company's ability to attract and retain employees who share its values and commitment to social responsibility. By aligning organizational missions with employees' personal values, companies foster deeper engagement, loyalty, and purpose-driven performance, thereby gaining a competitive advantage in increasingly value-oriented labor markets.
- **Individual and organisational advantages** - On an individual level, volunteering fosters the development of critical skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving. It improves job satisfaction and morale, builds social and cultural capital, and reinforces occupational identity, contributing to both personal fulfilment and professional growth.
- **Cooperation between corporations and non-profit organizations** - Volunteering initiatives facilitate the creation of trust-based partnerships between companies and nonprofit organizations. These collaborations not only amplify the social impact of corporate responsibility programs but also enhance the operational capacities of the nonprofit sector.
- **Dynamic civic engagement and increased social capital** - Employee internal motivators, initiation and management of projects related to personal causes, combined with strategies and organized engagement are more effective. In addition, bridging demographic gaps is essential to ensure more inclusive and diverse participation in corporate volunteering initiatives.
- **Contribution to sustainable development** - Corporate volunteering aligns closely with global sustainability objectives. It promotes social equity, strengthens community

resilience, and supports the balance between economic growth and societal well-being, thus playing a vital role in achieving the broader goals of sustainable development.

In essence, corporate volunteering goes beyond traditional charitable giving and becomes a strategic tool that benefits organizations internally and externally, enhancing their role as agents of social change and sustainable development.

2. TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES IN CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING: EVIDENCE FROM BULGARIA

A review of leading companies operating in Bulgaria reveals a variety of innovative approaches to corporate volunteering. These practices can be categorized into several thematic clusters, highlighting different strategic objectives - from supporting employee-driven initiatives and educational programs to promoting environmental preservation and social entrepreneurship. Table 2 presents a summary of selected companies and their key volunteering initiatives.

Table 2. Best practices

No	Company	Key volunteering practices	Specific initiatives (Examples)	Awards and recognitions
1.	A1 Bulgaria	Internal volunteering portal; Paid volunteer leave; Employee-driven initiatives (#HelpFOR1)	Environmental clean-ups; Tree planting; Shelter renovations; Food drives	Winner at 'The Heroes' Awards by TimeHeroes for inspiring employees to volunteer
2.	ABB Bulgaria	Community engagement in education, diversity & inclusion, and environmental care	Supported children's football tournaments; "Caps for the Future" plastic recycling initiative; "Martenitzas with a Cause" campaign	Silver Annual Sign "Responsible Company - Responsible Employees" by BCause Foundation
3.	Accenture Bulgaria	Season of Impact program; Employee-led initiatives; Support for social entrepreneurship (Dar Pazar, Let's GO)	Over 25 volunteer activities annually; Support for BCNL social entrepreneurship; Community renovation projects; outdoor space of the Svetlina Crisis Center, which provides shelter for children affected by violence	Best Volunteering Program Award by Bulgarian Donors Forum (2023)
4.	Coca-Cola HBC Bulgaria	Employee volunteering and regular donation programs	Developed a workplace donation program; Participated in environmental clean-ups and social support initiatives	Honorary Donation Badge "Responsible Company - Responsible Employees" by BCause Foundation
5.	IBM Bulgaria	Volunteer Committee; Environmental initiatives (tree planting); UNICEF platform development	New Forest of Sofia tree planting; Blood donation platform; UNICEF digital safety campaign (#GrowCyberSurvivor)	Second place at the Socially Responsible Strategic Management Awards by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
6.	Paysafe Bulgaria	Four paid volunteer days; Community engagement month; Support for vulnerable groups	Donations to Plusheno Meche and Project Northwest; Elderly home support; Breast cancer awareness race	Award for Largest Corporate Contributor to Employee Volunteering by Bulgarian Donors Forum
7.	SAP Labs Bulgaria	Education programs (ITversity, Robotics for Bulgaria); University collaborations	Snap! workshops for students; University IT courses; Robotics clubs in schools	Award for Best Corporate Volunteering Program by Bulgarian Donors Forum
8.	TELUS International Bulgaria	TELUS Days of Giving; Community Board Foundation;	Bee preservation programs; Environmental and sustainability	Silver Award for "Responsible Company -

Nº	Company	Key volunteering practices	Specific initiatives (Examples)	Awards and recognitions
		Internal cause-based initiatives (#Stand4ACause)	education; Charity markets for social causes	Responsible Employees” by BCause Foundation
9.	UniCredit Bulbank	Team-based volunteering; Paid volunteer leave; Foundation grants	"Team with a Cause" Initiative (2024) - employee volunteering teams supporting NGOs; Paid day off for volunteering; Community Board funded projects UniCredit Foundation's endowment program	Internal CSR awards; Recognized for strong employee engagement initiatives
10.	Vivacom	VIVACOM Cares Volunteer Club; Disaster relief (Mizia); Support for children without parental care	Orphanage support; Green space cleanups; Assisting animal rescue centers; Partnering with Step for Bulgaria for educational programs	Multiple first prizes for Volunteering Program by Bulgarian Donors Forum

Source: Own (Adapted from the official websites of the companies.)

Corporate volunteering has evolved into a key pillar of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies in Bulgaria. A critical review of leading companies reveals diverse approaches to structuring and encouraging employee engagement in community service. To better understand these practices, they can be clustered into thematic categories that reflect their strategic priorities and societal impact (Table 3).

Table 3. Thematic clusters of corporate volunteering practices

Thematic clusters	Characteristics	Examples:
Organizational support for volunteering	Companies provide structural and institutional backing for employee volunteering, offering paid volunteering leave, establishing internal platforms for participation, and incentivizing engagement through additional benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Al Bulgaria</i> launched an internal volunteering portal and grants additional paid leave for volunteering. • <i>UniCredit Bulbank</i> supports team-based volunteerism with an extra day off. • <i>Paysafe Bulgaria</i> offers four paid volunteer days annually.
Employee-driven initiatives	Encouraging a bottom-up approach, some companies empower employees to propose and lead volunteering initiatives, fostering ownership and intrinsic motivation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Accenture Bulgaria</i>’s “Season of Impact” program — 70% of initiatives are employee-led. • <i>IBM Bulgaria</i>’s Volunteer Committee enables employees to design and execute community projects.
Focus on education and youth development	Investments in education and mentoring form a significant part of corporate volunteering, aimed at cultivating future talent and promoting lifelong learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>SAP Labs Bulgaria</i> with programs like “ITversity” and “Robotics for Bulgaria.” • <i>Vivacom</i>'s partnership with “Step for Bulgaria,” supporting children without parental care.
Support for social entrepreneurship and vulnerable groups	Some companies extend their impact by supporting social enterprises and vulnerable populations through mentoring, fundraising, and hands-on activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Accenture Bulgaria</i> supports Dar Pazar, a platform for social enterprises, and backs the Let’s GO initiative for social entrepreneurs. • <i>Vivacom</i>’s disaster relief efforts in Mizia and long-term support for youth education.

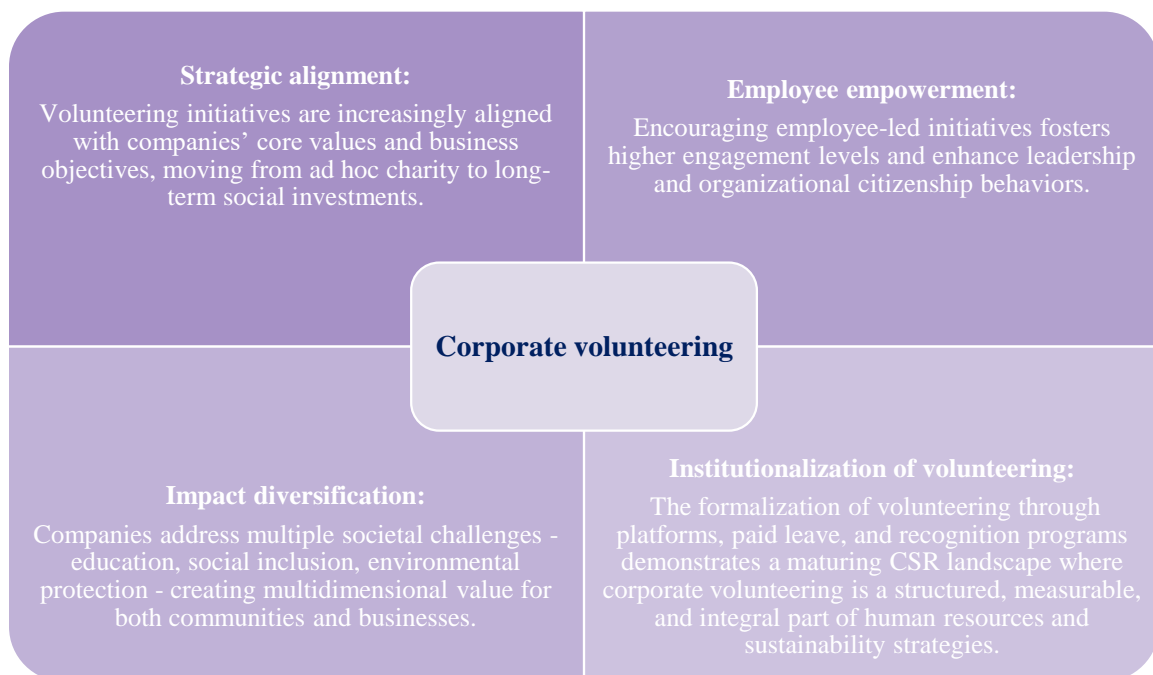
Thematic clusters	Characteristics	Examples:
Environmental and nature conservation initiatives	Environmental stewardship is reflected in activities like afforestation, environmental education, and clean-up campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>IBM Bulgaria</i> participated in Sofia's "New Forest" planting project. • <i>A1 Bulgaria</i> organizes environmental clean-up events. • <i>bTV Media Group</i> mobilizes volunteers for the annual "Let's clean Bulgaria together" campaign (all companies participate)

Source: Own (Adapted from the information of official websites of the companies.)

These practices reflect broader global trends where corporate volunteering is not just an act of goodwill, but a strategic component of workforce engagement and sustainability. Most companies are multinational and transfer good practices, but it cannot be overlooked that there are traditions of corporate volunteering in small and medium-sized enterprises with wholly Bulgarian ownership. Often, these initiatives enter steadily into training, team building activities and gradually separate as an important component of corporate social responsibility, representing a transition to more mature and impactful models that position companies as key actors in societal transformation and community impact.

The clustering of corporate volunteering initiatives reveals several key trends, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Key trends in corporate volunteering



Source: Own

Despite the notable activity of individual companies and organizations, the absence of centralized statistics makes it difficult to assess the overall impact of corporate volunteering in Bulgaria. It is not possible to track how many participants there are, how many hours of voluntary work they put in or what the contribution is, but there is some data provided by the companies themselves. TELUS International Bulgaria shares that in 2025, nearly 500 employees from nine countries, including Bulgaria, participated in synchronized events focused on environmental conservation and social support. Accenture Bulgaria declares that in 2023, more than 300 employees engaged in over 25 volunteer initiatives as part of the "Season of

Impact" special program. A1 Bulgaria launched in 2023 an internal volunteering platform offering over 20 initiatives across more than 10 regions in the country. Since 2010, Vivacom through its "VIVACOM Cares" program, employees have been involved in monthly volunteering activities, including the cleaning of green spaces and supporting children's homes.

As is evident from this data, the information is insufficient, difficult to compare and no conclusions can be drawn from it, but nevertheless it can be summarized that corporate volunteering has its place and meaning, it is used as a powerful tool for social responsibility and employee engagement.

While outlining promising developments, the current landscape of corporate volunteering in Bulgaria is characterised by fragmented data and a lack of standardised frameworks for measuring impact. The absence of centralized statistics on the number of volunteers, hours contributed, and the tangible outcomes of volunteering programs poses challenges for both academic research and corporate accountability. While individual companies report impressive participation figures and community initiatives, the broader societal impact remains difficult to quantify and compare.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the above, this study highlights the need to develop comprehensive frameworks for assessing the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of corporate volunteering, and several recommendations can be made for both practitioners and researchers:

- Development of standardised indicators for measuring the qualitative and quantitative impact of corporate volunteering. Metrics should capture not only the number of volunteer hours and participants but also the social outcomes achieved, such as improved community well-being, skill development, and employee satisfaction.
- Implementation of impact assessment frameworks to facilitate better reporting, benchmarking, and strategic planning. Due to the wide variety of activities that are meaningful, and relevant, it would also be useful to apply them to align corporate volunteering initiatives with broader CSR and sustainability goals.
- Integration of qualitative research to explore the depth of employee experience and community change as a result of corporate volunteering. Again, there are examples of in-depth interviews and beneficiary comments available, but these are not sufficient to study the big picture.
- Exploring the knowledge, skills and competencies that employees acquire and how they transfer to job tasks and whether they are related to better performance, motivation, and sense of belonging. In addition, it is important to track how these skills affect career development. A study of internal and external motivations for participation in corporate volunteering will give a good understanding of employees and will be reflected in the design of the programme.
- Comparative studies in different sectors and regions would enrich the understanding of sector-specific volunteering models and their effectiveness by providing information on best practices and areas for improvement. Corporate volunteering practices can be mapped, best practices can be derived and adapted for other companies, regions or sectors according to the requirements and needs of the environment.
- The data availability - it is imperative to collect information and track corporate volunteering over time to assess its sustainable impact on both employees and

communities. Based on the data, trends can be tracked and policies, measures and initiatives can be adjusted.

CONCLUSION

Corporate volunteering initiatives align with broader CSR strategies, offering employees structured opportunities to engage in meaningful projects. These activities, ranging from pro bono consulting to educational mentorship and environmental conservation, enable professionals to apply their knowledge in new contexts, ultimately benefiting both society and the company. Moreover, research shows that employees value employers who are committed to social causes. Corporate volunteering programs have become a key differentiator in competitive labor markets, providing companies with a tool to boost employee satisfaction, loyalty, and brand reputation. Through active community engagement, companies not only fulfill their ethical obligations but also gain strategic advantages in talent acquisition and corporate branding.

The findings reveal that corporate volunteering generates multidimensional benefits - enhancing employee competencies, fostering organizational cohesion, advancing social innovation, and contributing to the community. However, the lack of centralized data and standardized metrics poses challenges for impact measurement and comparative assessment.

This study highlights the need to develop comprehensive frameworks for assessing the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of corporate volunteering. Further avenues of research could include the development of standardised impact evaluation models, studies of volunteering outcomes, and exploration of strategies for wider participation.

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