

# VOLUNTEER MANUAL



MARENA

# Content

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# Welcome!

Dear volunteer,

I would like to warmly welcome you to our team! Mareena arose from a volunteer initiative aiming to provide support to people who were forced to flee their homes due to persecution or war. Volunteering is therefore a cornerstone of our organization. With your decision to join our volunteer community, you become an important Mareena collaborator.

To date, we have had the opportunity to meet and cooperate with more than 200 people who have dedicated their time and skills to us in Bratislava, Košice and Nitra. As you plan, they assisted refugees, helped the community team in organizing events, or used their expertise to professionalize our organization. All of them contributed to Mareena's capacity to be a useful and sustainable organization in the field of integration of refugees and other foreigners into Slovak society.

I believe that the time you spend in our organization will be meaningful and educational for you. This manual, along with additional support activities, has been prepared so that you can better understand the people we care for and be able to deal with any challenges. We want volunteering to be an opportunity for you to grow personally and professionally and a place for new friendships.

I wish you an open mind, patience and perseverance, and I look forward to working with you.



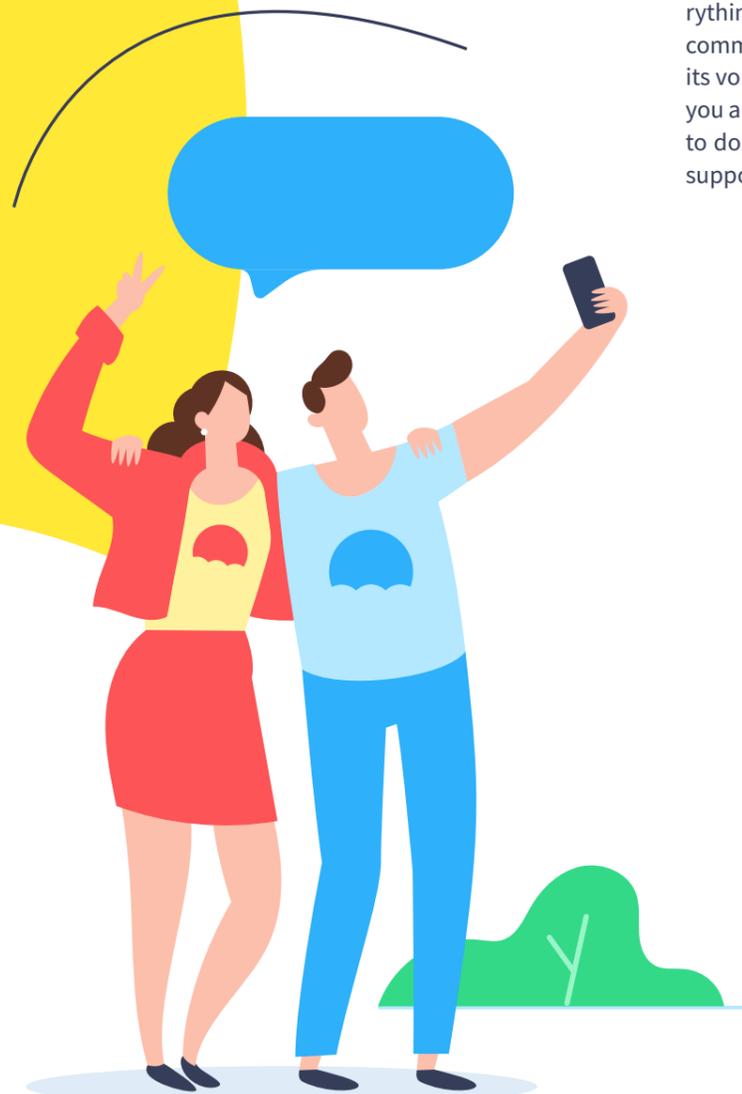
**Michaela Pobudová**  
Director and Chairwoman of the association

## How to Use this Manual

In Mareena we have several types of volunteering - individual, community and expert volunteering. You probably have already agreed with the coordinating person which type you will be involved in. In this case, in addition to the common parts, read the one that relates to your type of volunteering. If you are still making decisions, this manual can be just as useful for you. Read more about the types of volunteers you decide on, and it is quite likely that the new information will help you make an easier decision.

This manual it serves you in particular to prepare you for situations that may arise and to advise you on how to behave in them. It provides insights that can help you think about what is expected of you and what your real options to help are.

We want to remind you that no one expects you to know everything - neither the beneficiary, nor the people who attend community events, nor the people working in Mareena, nor its volunteer team. Always ask when you feel insecure, when you are interested in something, or you just don't know what to do. It is our job to help you and we will be very happy to support you throughout your volunteering.



# Who is Our Target Group



## Who is Our Target Group

*The target group of volunteering activities in Mareena consists of primary refugees - people who were forced to leave their country either due to war or the threat of persecution and obtained international protection in Slovakia - asylum or so-called subsidiary protection. The causes of persecution tend to be different - traditionally disagreement with political establishment (usually totalitarian or authoritarian), religion, in some countries conversion from other religions or demands for respect for human rights (e.g., women in some societies). But it happens that people are persecuted for their appearance (the case of albinos in some African communities) or for making a conscientious objection (for example, the refusal of compulsory military service in Eritrea, which sometimes lasts 10-15 years).*

*It often happens that the term „refugee“ is confused with the term „immigrant“ or „foreigner“. The main characteristic of people on the run compared to other social groups is the fact that they have left their country due to threats to their personal safety. In rare cases, asylum seekers or non-asylum seekers may also be beneficiaries of voluntary activities (hereinafter referred to as „beneficiary“) in Mareena, but they are linked to refugees by the fact that they come from outside the European Union and need integration assistance. You can find out more about migration-related terminology in our „Glossary of Basic Terms“ at p. 46.*

## What Do They Have Behind?

All people on the run, without exception, underwent a complete detachment from their environment to which they were accustomed, lost everything, including the roof over their heads, and often faced an existential danger caused by someone else from whom they had to flee. Therefore, it is good for you to get acquainted with what many have behind them and what they are currently living with, especially if you are involved in an individual type of volunteering.

## Before Coming to Slovakia

Some people had to take a lot of risks to get to safety. They had to flee secretly or in times of chaos and often did not even have the opportunity to say goodbye to their families and loved ones. They didn't have time to pack enough things or lost them along the way. Many families split during the escape; their members lost each other. Before they came to us, some may have spent a lot of time (sometimes years) in refugee camps, where living conditions are diverse – from simply unpleasant to extremely inhuman, where lives are at stake and your water ration needs to be fought or bought. Many camps are characterized by poor or inadequate health care, overcrowding, lack of food, educational opportunities, and sometimes elementary security. The situation is particularly bad in the old African camps built in the 20th century, which are obsolete, half-forgotten and have been in the third generation, which knows nothing else.

Read how a particular beneficiary told their story in [this interview](#).

## After Coming to Slovakia

In order for a refugee to be granted asylum or subsidiary protection upon arrival in Slovakia, this person must first submit an application for asylum to the relevant police department, which will then send it to the migration office, which will decide on the application. Anyone who runs away from persecution or serious injustice in their country of origin can apply for asylum.

According to the laws of the Slovak Republic (Act No. 480/2002 Coll. On Asylum), an asylum seeker must arrive at the detention camp in Humenné, where he will spend approximately the first three weeks, within 24 hours of submitting the application. During this period, she undergoes a medical examination to detect infectious diseases and her fingerprints are taken, her reasons for applying for asylum are checked, whether she has a criminal history, etc. Subsequently, during the asylum process, she is placed in a residential camp either in Opatovská Nová Ves (for vulnerable people – single mothers with children, seniors, students, people with disabilities and families) or in Rohovce (for men – individuals). Unaccompanied minors are placed in an orphanage in Medzilaborce during this period.

The asylum process takes about 6 months and in some cases this period may be extended. Subsequently, the application is either granted and one of the possible forms of international protection (asylum or subsidiary protection) is granted or the application is rejected. There is also a difference between asylum and subsidiary protection in the length of stay. While granting asylum means obtaining permanent residence in Slovakia, subsidiary protection means granting temporary residence for 1 year. The purpose is to allow a person to wait in the safety of Slovakia for one year until the threat in its

country disappears. If it does not disappear, the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic may consider extending the subsidiary protection for another two years.

Following the granting of international protection, non-governmental organizations contracted by the state to provide integration services will start cooperating with this person. Although the integration of people with international protection in Slovakia falls under the Migration Office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, direct integration services are provided by selected organizations in cities with a higher concentration of these people (especially Bratislava and Košice). The integration of people with international protection into society is currently being addressed mainly by non-governmental organizations, which are financed from European Union funds and to a lesser extent from the state budget.

These integration organizations provide almost comprehensive services - social, psychological, legal and employment counselling, material and financial assistance and other support services, such as Slovak language courses. If a person with international protection has another education and has a document about it, the persons from the organization will help him/her with its recognition at the Ministry of Education.

For a period of time (usually 3-6 months) after being granted asylum or subsidiary protection, an individual receives financial support, the amount and duration of which are more precisely defined by the means available and the organizations that provide integration services. The amount of the contribution in 2021 was approximately 300 euros/month. If this person has not found a job after 6 months, he or she can apply for benefits in material need and for a housing allowance like any resident of Slovakia. For example, in 2022, the amount of benefit in material need for an individual without children is 68.80 euros/month and the housing allowance for one person is 59.40 euros/month. If it is a parent with a child or a family with children, this support is slightly higher - depending on the size of the family. You can see the exact [details here](#). For families and vulnerable groups, the standard assistance lasts for 1 year.

According to the data of the Ministry of the Interior in Slovakia, several hundred people currently apply for asylum every year, but Slovakia grants only a very small number of asylums from this number. In addition, asylum applications have been steadily declining in recent years. More asylums were granted only during the war in Yugoslavia or Chechnya - in the hundreds. The last case of granting a larger number of asylums took place in 2016, when the Slovak Republic agreed to the resettlement of 149 Iraqi Assyrians (an ethnolinguistic minority professing Christianity) from Iraq and granted them humanitarian asylum due to their persecution by the Islamic State. The Institute of Complementary Protection in Slovakia has been granted since 2007, while Slovakia only grants them in tens of years. You can see the numbers of international protection for specific years in these [statistics from the](#)

#### [Ministry of the Interior.](#)

People with granted international protection have almost the same rights and obligations in Slovakia as ordinary citizens. Within the Slovak Republic, they cannot vote and be elected in parliamentary and presidential elections, but they can vote and be elected in self-governing elections if they have a permanent residence in the territory of the given self-government (especially those who have a long-term residence there). [You can find more information here.](#) People with granted asylum can apply for citizenship after up to 4 years of continuous residence, people with granted subsidiary protection after 8 years of continuous residence.

#### **For more information, visit:**

- [KapaCITY](#)
- [League for Human Rights](#)
- [IOM](#)
- [European Migration Network](#)
- [Migration Office](#)
- [Fjúžn](#)
- [CVEK](#)

## Potential Challenges for People with International Protection in their Integration

*People with international protection face various challenges in integration - some we know ourselves; others are specific. Lack of funds is something we have a lot in common. Unlike us refugees after arriving in Slovakia, they often do not even have the background, friends or family to help them. Difficulties in finding a job, suitable housing, education, learning the local language, understanding or learning about a new culture are just some of the ones encountered during the first months of trying to get used to and start working normally again. They can face discrimination and racism, which are all the more difficult if they do not have any supportive contacts from the local environment in which they experience that they are not perceived as such by society as a whole. Therefore, it is important to involve them in the local community as soon as possible.*

Some people are tense, not so much for their own situation, but because they do not know what happened to their loved ones. They can often control social networks, but

also, for example, react passively to your efforts, which can potentially be irritating. Try to put yourself in their situation. More than one parent is afraid if the child does not come home in time in the evening and panics if he loses sight of him on the playground. Now imagine that your part of the family would be lost abroad during the war or on a march through the mountains, and you can't call them for weeks. Even with such terrible experiences, it may take a while for them to be able to trust and open up to someone else, albeit kind and helpful.

It often helps to make contact between people from the same country, especially if they have lived here for a long time. In this way, they can tolerate integration better, they will have someone who can better „translate“ our culture, as they already have experience with it. However, there are also potential risks - it is important that contact with compatriots does not fall out of the rhythm of integration and interaction with local people or that segregated communities do not emerge that naturally prevent less active members from integrating.

Connecting with compatriots can also lead to another potential problem - the transfer of old wrongs and conflicts from the country of origin. To illustrate - you probably won't meet people from Croatia on Balkan evenings in Bratislava, because there are a lot of people from Serbia. Old wrongs are often alive and proud nations have a long memory.

People who go through refugee camps, escape from death in difficult conditions or a difficult journey to Europe can experience various traumas. They are malnourished, suffering from anxiety and depression, which may result in an inability to plan or be interested in the future at all. They experience stress and related problems (such as psychosexual problems), grief at home, irritability, loss of social status, loss of family, loved ones, and loss of rhythm and sometimes feelings of aggression. Severely traumatized people may feel misunderstood, accused of concealing information, unwillingness to cooperate, lies, giving inconsistent stories or unreliability.

There are also people with fake passports or fraudsters, but the Slovak asylum process is one of the strictest in Europe, so it is not expected that people who receive asylum in our country would belong to this group. Should you feel that you have encountered such a case, contact the coordinating person in Mareena, who is in contact with the relevant bodies of the Migration Office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic and can check your suspicions. Well, it's almost completely out of the question.

It happens that such traumatized people can resort to alcoholism, smoking, gambling, self-medication, risky behaviour or other negative reactions. Fortunately, this is not common. If necessary, it is possible to contact a person coordinating the volunteer team, who will turn to experts with experience in these cases.

## Successful Integration

Despite the challenges that people with granted protection and other foreigners face, they often successfully integrate into Slovak society and at the same time are an enrichment for it.

#### **Read some examples of successful integration:**

- [KAMIL YILMAZ: Ever since I was granted asylum, I feel that this country has accepted me](#)
- [Female medic from Iran: Your people are my people. I can't sit at home and watch them die](#)
- [Mareena: New heroes](#)
- [Sawkat Choudhury: I love this country; I try to help it both with work and volunteering](#)
- [Khadra Abdile: It helped me, when I found out, that people are on my side](#)

# Intercultural Communication



## Intercultural Communication

*You don't have to be a cultural expert to be able to communicate with people with international protection and other foreigners. You can safely ask them what their expectations are and how they would deal with a specific situation in their home country. It is very important to be aware of and respect the differences, for example, between your religion, values or way of thinking. It is the communication about these differences that can enable a person coming to Slovakia to know and understand the cultural specifics of life in a new country.*

Especially if you are involved in individual volunteering, it will be helpful if you show interest in a country and culture from which people with protection or foreigners with whom you come into contact come and get acquainted with at least basic information. It does not hurt to read something about their country of origin – even a basic overview, which offers e.g., English Wikipedia is a good start. Further information can be found on [the Internet](#) or in encyclopaedias. People on the run, but also foreigners in general, often simplify information and stories about themselves because they often find that people from other countries do not understand them and cannot understand the details, as they lack the necessary context.

If you show that you have an idea of what they are talking about, you will learn much more and thus show an interest in the person himself/herself, which may eventually bring you closer to each other. At the same time, it can help the beneficiaries in their willingness and effort to adapt to the new conditions and to integrate into Slovak society.

It is also necessary to realize that what unites us and what we have in common are the same values, such as mutual respect, responsibility, trust, security, family, etc. However, we may differ in how we perceive certain aspects of life and the extent to which perceptions of these values affect our daily lives and behaviour in certain specific situations. In an interview with a foreigner, it is better to check mutual understanding. When he/she tells you something, try to sum it up in your own words and ask if you understand it correctly. Use open-ended questions to learn more and let the other party speak at their own pace.

Avoid slang and unwritten expressions and articulate clearly – foreigners have learned standard Slovak, non-standard expressions or mumbling under their noses make it very difficult for them to understand.

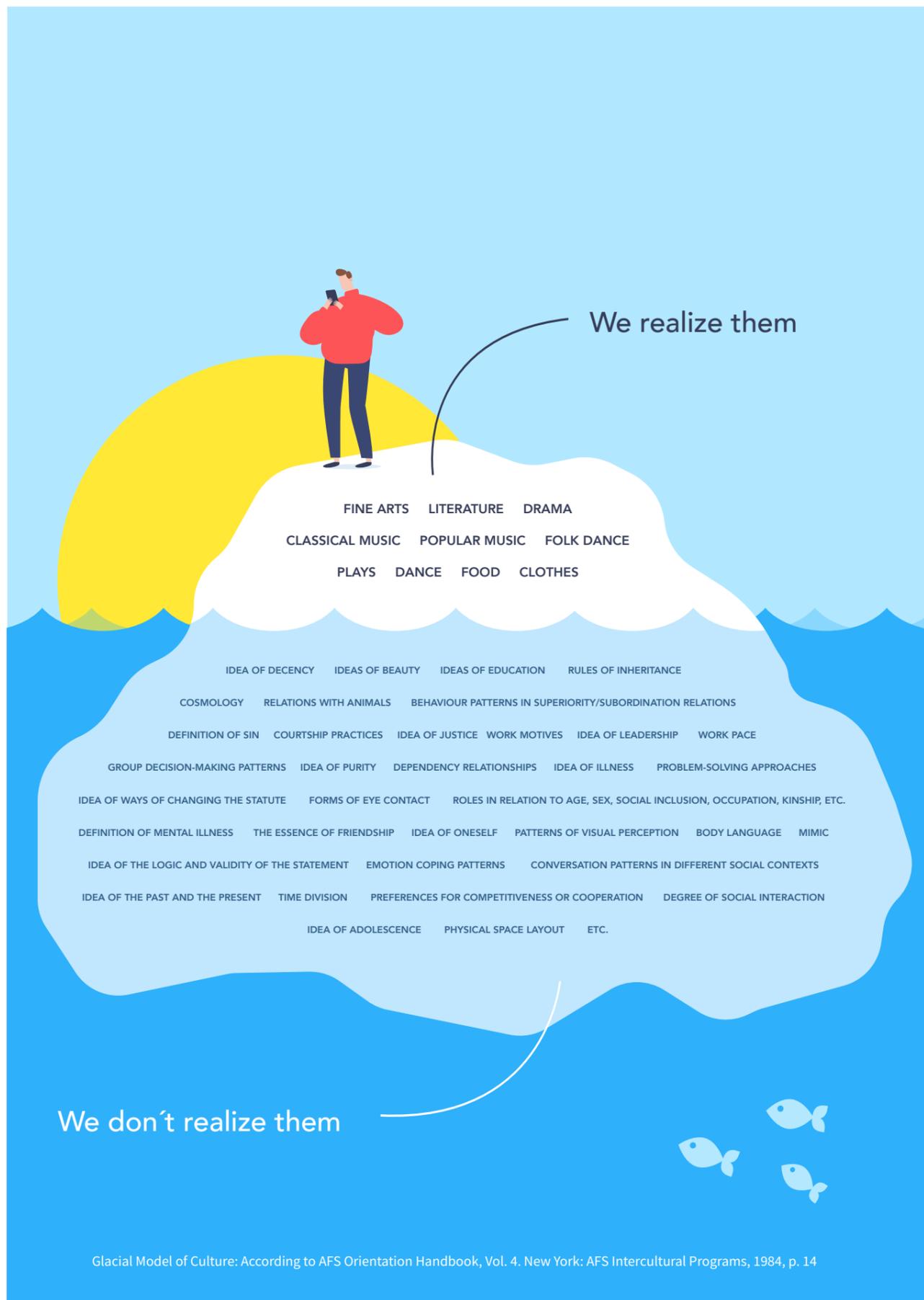
## Cultural Differences

When a person enters a cultural environment other than the one, he/she knows and in which he/she grew up, his/her personality manifestations and expectations may encounter barriers or limits, which are given by different habits, value system or philosophy of life. We change the cultural environment most often by traveling, and it is very important to know and be aware of what the new environment we come to expect from us and what we can expect from that environment. We take cultural differences seriously precisely because they can be a source of various barriers, challenges or complications.

The main cultural difference is not whether someone prefers potatoes and someone else rice, or sitting on a chair as opposed to sitting on a pillow. The fundamental difference is the one that bothers us or even irritates us in some way. A common reason is that we cannot understand its meaning and deeper context. It happens that even if we sometimes understand and understand a difference in behaviour, we can still consider someone else's behaviour or actions to be inappropriate or even negative.

An example from the Slovak cultural environment can be e.g., pourer and whip. From our point of view, these may be interesting customs that, symbolically, are intended to ensure health, strength and prosperity for women and girls. These customs are often understood in our environment as a celebration of the arrival of spring, some of them are associated exclusively with the Christian holidays of Easter. From the outside, however, these customs can appear as violent or barbaric behaviour of men towards girls or women - men (often under the influence of alcohol) gather in groups, enter people's homes, pour and beat girls and women, some even throw in a creek or pour cold water from the bucket on them. If we try to explain it to people in Austria, England or France, they will probably understand it, but many will not agree anyway. Therefore, it is appropriate to respect the customs and traditions of other cultures, even if they seem unacceptable. Unless it hinders anyone, who participates in this custom and the proceedings do not violate the laws of the Slovak Republic, trying to do something about it could do more harm than good.

Human is shaped by the cultural and social environment from which he/she comes, and therefore it is of great importance to each person „where he/she came from and where he/she belongs“. Rules that work in one family or wider community can often differ from other families or communities. It is the values, norms and rules of the functioning of our own culture that we always carry with us and that are important to us. Awareness of belonging to a certain group is a very important part of our whole self-awareness, our identity and self-identification. Some cultural differences are visible on the outside, some are not.



This phenomenon is aptly illustrated by the following picture – the so-called glacial model of culture. The cultural glacier is a common metaphor for explaining the complex concept of culture (Kačmárová, 2011). The upper part of the glacier above the surface (one eighth) contains those issues and aspects of culture and identity that may be the result of conscious behaviour, may be visible, and which we may „touch.“ The hidden part of the glacier below the water surface (seven eighths) contains those elements and aspects of culture and identity that relate to our subconscious behaviour, our views and attitudes. These are the norms and values that manifest themselves in everyday life. We can simply say that this is a way of behaving in which we operate as if in the „autopilot“ mode. Intuitively, we know how close we can stand to a person when we talk to him/her and understand what he/she is telling us, even if he/she is speaking figuratively, using metaphors or just gestures. We know that it is „rude“ to ask about a woman’s weight or someone’s salary. However, in Indian or Chinese culture, the issue of pay is a common communication topic, and in the Middle East, it is not inappropriate or offensive to tell anyone that he is obese. It is largely a question of cultural specifics and education.

Different norms and values can lead to different decisions and behaviours, and these can lead to certain misunderstandings, barriers or negative emotions. However, it is necessary to realize that culture is not constant, continuous and unchanging. Even 100 years ago, it was unacceptable for women to wear trousers, nowadays it is commonplace. Cultures are very diverse within and each individual experiences his/her culture differently, subjectively. We can never say that all people from Germany are „accurate and consistent like clockwork“ or that all Roma people „have music in their blood“. Many people may even actively limit themselves to certain characteristics that are considered typical of their culture and thus cause stereotyping. Therefore, there is no need to rush to evaluate people from different cultures, no matter what we hear about their culture. It is very important to avoid stereotyping, as it gives a false or at least incomplete understanding of the other culture and can be a source of multiple misunderstandings.

Mostly refugees from the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and occasionally from North Africa come to Slovakia. Many are culturally and religiously conservative - whether they are Muslim, Christian or otherwise. In many cases, their cultural and religious identity is much more important than for the average European, mainly for two reasons. Religious-cultural identity is a source of historical memory and a sense of cohesion within the group and is not only an expression of religious belief, but also cultural specifics such as way of life, language, values and norms. For example, in 2015, a 149-member group of so-called Assyrian Christians ([Syrian Christians or also Oriental Catholics](#)) from Iraq. It is common experience that if you ask a Middle Eastern Christian about ethnicity - e.g., whether he is an Arab or a Kurd - he/she will respond on the basis of his/her religion to a religion or church. This does not mean that he/she did not understand the

question, but that he/she does not consider ethnicity to be something that defines him/her, and to say „Arab“ practically means to convert to Islam (this is, of course, academically inaccurate) and to say „Kurd“ means to subscribe to some from Kurdish tribes and Kurdish nationalism (for the same reason, for example, some Yazidis refuse to call themselves Kurds - they profess a different religion and have a different system of loyalty, although strictly speaking they speak one of the dialects of Kurdish and ethnically most likely Kurdish) . It is therefore appropriate to respect their self-identification and not to dwell on their „religious zeal“ - strong self-identification often „helps to survive“, it is a common psychological-sociological phenomenon. At the same time, some refugees may dwell on the low religious zeal of volunteers and do not understand how a non-practicing Christian or even an atheist can be. But maybe they don't show it out of decency.

It follows that, like culture, the identity of each person is constantly changing and evolving, and one can also identify with several groups at once - we are talking about the so-called multiple identities. A Slovak female resident can identify as a Ruthenian, a citizen of the Slovak Republic, a Prešov woman, a woman, a student, a sister, a daughter and many others. Individual identities take on different meanings depending on different situations and contexts. It is therefore very important to learn to respect these models, whatever they may be, and to try to judge them as little as possible according to how we experience ours. Expressing respect for the unique and specific identity or identities of each individual can be a way to support the creation of positive emotions associated with membership in a given social group, which also has a significant positive impact on the overall perception of oneself and one's value as an individual. This process can also be a great basis for the integration process of refugees and foreigners in Slovakia.

**Let us return to the cultural differences and look together at the most frequently identified examples that you may encounter in your performance, especially individual volunteering with refugees:**

**Diet.** Families may differ to some extent, but most of all, especially in the Middle East and Africa, people are accustomed to a higher fruit and vegetable diet. Some e.g. do not consume sourdough and consuming larger amounts of sourdough bread or pasta can cause them health complications. However, it is definitely necessary for the beneficiaries to switch to a diet that is more practical for their life in Slovakia. They are certainly aware of this, but a certain balance in favour of the food they are used to from their home country can help them alleviate homesickness and help them get used to the new environment more easily. In addition, their eating habits can be relatively healthier than ours, so there is no reason to change what can be maintained. It would be a nice gesture to invite them and cook them meals common in Slovakia and, on the contrary, to ask them, for example, to cook their dishes for you. Many will certainly appreciate if someone familiar with our food

Resource: Kultúra ako emócia. Multikultúrna zberka esejí, nielen „o nás“ (Culture as Emotion, A Multicultural Collection of Essays, not Just “about Us”). Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečka (Foundation of Milan Šimečka), 2016. ISBN 80-89008-22-4. p. 131 – 146.

guides them through the world of gastronomy and shows them what can be prepared from food commonly available in Slovakia. Alternatively, you can show them where there is a shop with oriental and other foreign goods in your city or part of the town, where they can buy food, spices or ingredients that they know from home, and thus diversify their diet with their favourite homemade traditional dishes.

**The cultural phenomenon of tea drinking.** Many refugees in Slovakia come from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and therefore it is impossible not to mention the tea and the culture of drinking this drink. Strong black (typical of Middle Eastern countries) or green mint tea (typical of North African countries) are not just drinks - their drinking, in which usually meets the whole family and the wider community, is the equivalent of e.g., our Sunday lunch, which represents (in addition to the dining aspect) a certain social event. In the Middle East and North Africa, tea is drunk every day. It is a basic food that is available in every family, and even if a person loses a family or a house, they take it with them. It is drunk in the most luxurious restaurants and in the trenches on the front. It is ubiquitous. Black tea is

traditionally offered to any guest and the inability to offer it for many causes stress, shame and discomfort.

**Hospitality.** In general, hospitality in the Middle East and North Africa is of great importance. Any guest gets the best available in the house and is almost automatically invited for breakfast, lunch or dinner (whichever comes first). This is an automatic invitation, not accepting it is not an insult, but it is advisable to accept at least a tea invitation. One peculiarity that sometimes occurs (not always) is thank you for the food. In many countries or cultures, food is offered automatically, it is considered normal, natural and is a standard response. Thus, no thanks are expected for offering or donating food, and on the contrary, if the food is donated to them, it is possible that they do not thank for it. However, this is not a sign of disrespect, but rather of trust.

**Change of the standard of living.** Some families who came to Slovakia are often from the middle social class and had a relatively good life in their country of origin before they left. By coming to Slovakia, their standard of living will drop almost without exception, which they may find harder to get

used to. They did not come to Slovakia for economic reasons, but mainly for security and stability. It's good to think about it if you happen to talk about it, but even in cases where they don't look enthusiastic when someone gets them a new job or otherwise helps. This may not be a sign of a lack of gratitude, but an awareness of the contrast between how they lived before and how they live now.

**Women's chastity and sexual ethics.** Beneficiaries are usually very mild, grateful and adaptable. At least that is the predominant experience. Basically, the only area in which a more serious complication or misunderstanding could arise is the area of women's and men's perceptions, their position in society, gender roles and differences, or sexual ethics. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the issue of chastity and conservative sexual ethics is taken very seriously and strictly among some beneficiary families. Long staying up late of the couple alone or even living together before marriage is almost impossible. Should any sexual behaviour, demands, or just any inappropriate inconvenience occur on the part of the volunteer (or another person), such behaviour can quickly and easily destroy the good relationships they build and, given the requirements of the Code of Ethics for Volunteering, compliance with which every Mareena volunteer undertakes, to cause disciplinary consequences. It is therefore essential to treat every beneficiary, especially girls and women, with respect, to follow the rules of good conduct, to avoid inappropriate jokes or sexual innuendos, and to respect their conservative approach. The opposite extreme is also possible. Many refugees and foreigners draw information about Western culture e.g., from Western popular cinema and can often have distorted ideas about the way of life in the „West“. Western culture is often portrayed as immoral and very liberal (which often is in comparison with theirs), and so, especially young men, sometimes tend to assume that women and girls „from the West“ are „open to an intimate relationship without obligations“ and they may behave inappropriately. In such situations and cases, they need to be clearly told and explained what they can and cannot dare to do, and thus avoid potential complications as quickly as possible. The above example also points out that the stereotypical perception of the surrounding world, resp. stereotypical evaluation of another culture is also present on the other side - refugees or foreigners are subject to stereotypes just like anyone else.

**Family Cohesion.** It is often very important - many Middle Eastern communities are intertwined and families even more so. Individualism is less important than in Western cultures - everything is decided collectively. It is therefore necessary to realize that even certain issues that we are used to dealing with in our own way, the beneficiaries will consult with their families and other family members, especially the elderly, may have an influence on the decision.

## Interesting Resources, Links and Tips:

- [What do you know about the world religions? Test yourself in an interactive quiz!](#)
- Slovak academic Eva Al-Absiová: to the topic of [connecting European and Arab-Islamic culture](#) and to the [issues of the position of women in the Arab world](#).
- [10 cultural differences between Slovaks and the British](#).
- [Cultural phenomenon of tea drinking in different parts of the world](#)
- [What are prejudices](#) and [tips on how to contribute to a world without prejudice, in which we understand each other](#)
- A tip for a book on the culture and specifics of the diet in the four Arab regions: [Arabia of flavours](#)
- ["Other region - other manners" - customs and social etiquette in different countries of the world](#)
- [Family in the Islamic tradition](#)



# Individual Volunteering



## Individual Volunteering

### What Awaits You during Your Volunteering

#### Preparatory Training

Before participating in volunteering, you complete educational training with other new volunteers - personally all-day or shortened online. The training will be led by a professional and experienced lecturer. Through various informal and interactive activities, you will focus on the topic of migration and integration, you will learn in more detail the situation of refugees in Slovakia.

You will learn more about Mareena's place in the integration system and the various areas of the Engagement Program, in particular the relationship between volunteers and beneficiaries, the boundaries and rules of this relationship. In intercultural communication, you will focus on the specifics of working in a multicultural environment, so that you learn to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts during volunteering. An important part of the training is the discussion and space to express all expectations, concerns and ambiguities.

#### Administration before the start of volunteering

The Volunteer Agreement is signed for 6 months. If after this time our mutual cooperation is generally satisfactory and you are interested in continuing, we will be happy to extend the cooperation with you for another 6 months by signing the amendment. In the agreement, we specify the content of your volunteering, as well as the amount of time we agree on. We usually sign the agreement on the date of volunteering i.e., your first meeting with the beneficiary. The purpose of the agreement is to protect all parties involved - you, by informing you about the conditions of volunteering, your rights and obligations and our requirements; the beneficiary, as we work with a vulnerable target group and, finally, Mareena and its mission, so that it can sustainably help people with international protection and other foreigners.

The agreement also includes an Affidavit of Physical and Mental Ability to Volunteer and a Code of Ethics for Volunteering. Proceedings in violation of this Code may result in early termination of cooperation. Together with other volunteers, you have a duty to read the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and to sign the Binding Declaration of Consent to this policy. It is important to provide us with your Criminal Record not older than three months. You can get an extract from the criminal record to wait at the post office, which has an IOMO (Integrated Service Point), it costs EUR 3.90 and we will be happy to reimburse you. Don't forget to put the receipt aside ;).

#### Connection with the Beneficiary

Involvement in volunteering takes place gradually and depends on several factors, but in particular on mapping the current needs of the beneficiaries and their time possibilities, and can therefore take from a week to a month, sometimes longer. We want to ask you for patience, believe that we have not forgotten about you and a coordinating person will contact you soon; he/she will introduce you to the potential beneficiary, their need and an idea of your cooperation. If you are in favour, you will agree on a common so-called "Engagement meeting". The meeting will take place in the presence of the coordinating person and, exceptionally, the social worker of the organization that is currently providing the integration project.

#### Involvement Meeting with the Beneficiary

Plan your arrival in 5 to 10 minutes earlier, so that you can meet the coordinating person just before the meeting begins. One of the goals of the introductory meeting is to get to know the beneficiary together. Tell e.g., something about yourself - what is your name, what are your hobbies, what is your position and what can you do for the beneficiary. It will be nice if you also show your interest by asking the beneficiary some conversational questions, towards their profession or interests. You can also ask if he/she has friends or acquaintances who speak Slovak and they could help if you need to translate something.

The aim is also to clarify the expectations and needs of the beneficiary - if it is e.g., learning Slovak, what he/she has already done (courses, what materials he/she learned from, what helps the most, etc.), what would he/she like to do - are they basics or grammar, or conversation? In what situations does he/she feel he/she wants or needs to improve? If you have comments, questions or suggestions, be sure to share them at the meeting. The meeting is also an opportunity for the coordinator to summarize the process, the basic rules of the program and make sure that everything is clear to both parties. **Volunteering is a partnership**, so it requires regard and mutual respect between you and the beneficiary.

#### In practice, it is a matter of following simple principles:

- you and the beneficiary adhere to the agreed dates and times of the meeting and do not delay the meeting;
- in case you or the beneficiary have to cancel the agreed meeting, you will contact the other party as soon as possible, at least 24 hours before the meeting;
- you avoid contacting each other in the late evening and on weekends (unless otherwise agreed in advance in cooperation with the coordinating person);
- if the situation changes for you or the beneficiary and you no longer want/are able to cooperate, contact the coordinating person as soon as possible;
- you and the beneficiary are in regular contact with the coordinating person in order to find out how your mutual cooperation is developing and to provide feedback.

It is important that there is a common agreement at the meeting - what is the goal of your cooperation, the content and frequency of the meetings, the specific days (or at least the next one), the time and place. The meeting most often takes place in the household of the beneficiary, but sometimes also in public spaces (park, library, cafe) or online (various platforms). In Bratislava, it is also possible to use the premises of the Mareena community centre for meetings. At the end of the meeting, you will exchange mutual contacts, if the meetings will take place at home, as well as the address (or name on the doorbell).

**Before the meeting think over:**

- which days and times suit you for the meetings;
- which way of meeting the beneficiary suits you - only certain times of the week or flexibly;
- which days/times you do not want the beneficiary to contact you;
- what frequency of meeting you prefer - once a week for 2 hours or twice for a shorter time;
- what contact you want to provide the beneficiary with;
- what meeting place do you prefer? Do you want to go to places where you pay? How many weeks is it okay for you to spend? (Mareena does not reimburse expenses of this type and at the same time spending money is not a requirement of volunteering);
- what would help you in cooperation.

**First Meeting with the Beneficiary without the Coordinator**

At the beginning of the meeting, give yourself more space by talking and getting to know each other. It is important for your cooperation to maintain a relaxed atmosphere and build trust.

**You can ask the beneficiary:**

- what are his/her expectations from your cooperation and how he/she perceives the goal of your cooperation;
- if your joint activity is language learning – what he/she wants to work on and learn the most; what available materials he/she has;
- if your joint activity is spending free time together – where he/she likes to go; whether he/she has a place he/she would like to know or, conversely, a place he/she would like to show you;
- if your joint activity is to help prepare for school – in which subjects he/she needs help; what they are taking over; what he/she enjoys at school and how he/she goes with your joint activity is help with preparation for school – in which subjects he/she needs help; what they are taking over; what she enjoys at school and does;
- if your joint activity is job search - whether he/she has an updated CV; where he/she has looked for job offers so far; what type of work he/she is interested in and what he/she already has experience with.

**Make an appointment for the next meeting. It is good if you mark it for yourself, but also for him/her (on the calendar or on paper), to avoid possible misunderstandings.**

**Other Meetings with the Beneficiary**

**What to Do during Your Cooperation:**

- strive for punctuality and reliability;
- get to know the beneficiary – try to understand the context he/she comes from;
- try to learn about his/her culture and origin;
- leave the beneficiary with a sense of responsibility and do not do things for them that they can handle on their own;
- if the beneficiary makes a mistake, emphasize that the mistakes are important in learning, encourage him/her to try it further;
- let her know that his/her learning and development are important to you;
- help him/her identify her talents and strengths.

**What not to Do during Your Cooperation:**

- avoid evaluations towards the beneficiary or their family;
- do not take on a parental, therapeutic or other profession;
- do not teach or proclaim your personal values as universal truths;
- do not lend money or valuables to the beneficiary;
- don't make promises you can't keep;
- do not expect immediate results and improvements from the beneficiary;
- don't be overly formal.

All the important principles of your joint contact are summarized in the Code of Ethics for Individual Volunteering and in the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy. More information and tips for the next meeting can be found in the section "Contact with the Beneficiary" on p. 21.

**Regular Contact with the Volunteers' Coordinator**

In each city there is a volunteers' coordinator, who is the first and main point of your contact and is responsible for providing you with any necessary support. You will meet him/her in the initial communication, at the interview, and he/she will also be present at the preparatory training. After your involvement, he/she will call you regularly once a month, maybe more often at first. Please do not see this communication as a check, but, on the contrary, its aim is to support you, find out how you are going through volunteering and, if necessary, help you deal with possible complications or misunderstandings. In this way, we also collect suggestions and ideas for improving the program itself.

Thanks to them, we can improve cooperation with you or provide a more effective service to the person you help.

**What will be of interest to the coordinating person in the call:**

- how you manage to meet the beneficiary;
- how regular your contact is;
- how you perceive your communication in meetings organizing;
- whether you let each other know in time if the meeting is cancelled or moved;
- whether you connect at times that are agreed in advance or at other times;
- whether you have noticed any improvement or deterioration in the beneficiary in the recent period;
- what you have experienced in the last month during your volunteering;
- what do you enjoy more about volunteering and what less;
- how many hours in the past month the volunteering took you;
- what Mareena can be more supportive of, with.

**Of course, you can also contact the coordinating person at any time and communicate them suggestions and challenges you encounter. You will also provide feedback to the coordinator on a regular basis by completing evaluation questionnaires, namely:**

- after completing the preparatory training;
- after 3 months of engagement;
- after 6 months of engagement;
- at the end of volunteering.

**Supervision**

Supervision is a method of continuous education that increases the professionalism of helping workers and at the same time protects the other party from their possible incompetent and harmful interventions. As you will be in regular contact with the beneficiary, you have group supervision at your disposal and at the same time it **is your duty to participate in it regularly**. During the supervision, you will talk with other volunteers about your volunteering experiences, dilemmas, challenges, but also about positive moments. It is a way to help you overcome the difficult experiences, emotions and misunderstandings associated with volunteering. Supervision can help you with mismatching your expectations and reality, while increasing your motivation and inspiring you!

Thanks to it, you will better maintain your professional boundaries and it is also a good prevention of burnout syndrome. Supervision is not therapy. Perceive it as a safe place where you can share your experiences and feelings with each other without any worries. It is carried out by an external supervisor and does not involve persons employed by Mareena. All present are bound by secrecy. It is important for us to emphasize that supervision is not a control or evaluation of your work, but rather a space for self-reflection and providing oversight that has the potential to fill a knowledge gap. It is also an opportunity for your personal growth.

**Supervisions take place once every 3 months in person or online and last 90 minutes.**



## Volunteer Meetings

We at Mareena love the community, so we want you to have the opportunity to get to know each other, build relationships and support each other within the volunteer team.

Volunteer meetings take place **once every 3 months for 90 minutes, in person or online, participation is not mandatory**, but we highly recommend regular participation, as it can greatly strengthen your motivation. Meetings in cities with a larger volunteer community are divided into individual volunteer meetings and community volunteer meetings (to which expert volunteers are also invited). We also organize special meetings where you can get to know the entire volunteer community in the city. The meeting is also attended by the coordinating and sometimes the manager of the program. At the meetings we want to get to know each other better, share common experiences, challenges, dilemmas, but also joys. You will find out what is currently happening in Mareena, what we are planning and what you can get involved in. Since we like interactive activities, expect us to prepare something for you in this spirit. Your feedback on the program and communication with Mareena is also important to us, all ideas and suggestions for improvement are welcome. Come calmly with an empty belly, we will definitely prepare something to eat.

## Education and Development

It is important to us that during your volunteering in Mareena, we provide you with opportunities for personal and professional development on topics that interest you and are close to us. We organized e.g., a lecture on extremism and radicalization, a discussion on the Arab-Islamic world and the position of women in Arab culture, or a series of #I am remarkable workshops aimed at increasing self-confidence and improving women's self-presentation.

If you have a specific idea on the topic of the workshop or guests, let us know! We will be happy to organize a meeting for the entire volunteer team.

## Teambuilding Activities

Volunteering is a huge service to another person, so from time to time we try to prepare joint activities for the voluntary team - a trip, picnic or other form of reward. We also like to enjoy the superpowers of this team - we have already cooked with Dan, danced with Ivetka or travelled around Ukraine with Andri and Daria. Let us also know about your idea or special skill, we will definitely come up with something together!

## Termination of Volunteering

Your volunteering can end with the expiration of the Volunteer Agreement, i.e. after 6 or 12 months, or before its expiration by signing the Agreement on the Termination of Volunteering. This may happen if your work, family or personal situation changes or if you do not comply with the Volunteer Agreement, the Code of Volunteering and the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy.

At the standard termination, the coordinating person organizes the final meeting between you and the beneficiary, where you will have the opportunity to look back on cooperation, appreciate each other and thank each other. Furthermore, Mareena does not take over the auspices of your joint contact and has no expectations for the maintenance or quality of the relationship between you and the beneficiary after your relationship is officially terminated. Whether your cooperation grows into friendship, occasional contact, or nothing at all, is a natural matter and all options are fine.

## Alumni

After the volunteering termination, you automatically become a kind of graduate of the Engagement Program, i.e., its alumni. Volunteering in Mareena is limited in time so that the organization is open to new people and new people have the opportunity to try volunteering, gain direct experience with people granted international protection and other foreigners, thus expanding the positive social impact of organization activities.

However, becoming an alumni brings many more opportunities to get involved! You can help spread Mareena's campaigns, lead workshops, fundraise, talk about your volunteer experience in schools or among new volunteers, and much more! We will be happy to keep in touch with you.

# Responsibilities Arising from Individual Volunteering

## Your Responsibilities

**Being part of a volunteer team means investing your time, energy and talent. In order for your volunteering to be beneficial, please:**

- take part in training and education on migration and integration;
- submit any documentation requested by Mareena in time;
- regularly participate in group supervision;
- ask regularly, give feedback and express your concerns to Mareena, especially if you are not clear in an unusual or sensitive situation;
- don't stop communicating with Mareena – if things don't go according to plan, we will definitely find a better solution together,
- be a consistent support in the beneficiary's life – try to devote your two hours a week regularly for 6 months;
- pay attention and humour to the beneficiary rather than material things;
- set and maintain borders – be a friendly support and not a source of dependence;
- support the beneficiary's self-sufficiency and independence;
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of information from the beneficiary, but also within the volunteer team;
- support the beneficiary in Slovak, be an ear that listens and provide safe space for conversation;
- respect the beneficiary's time by keeping to your agreed meetings and inform them well in advance if you need to change or cancel something.

## Responsibilities of the Beneficiary

- attend all agreed meetings in time and inform you sufficiently in advance in case of cancellation or change;
- respect the agreed times at which you make contact;
- respect Mareena's staff and volunteers and mutual agreements;
- provide feedback to the organization on a regular basis.

## Responsibilities of the Organization

- map the needs of beneficiaries on a regular basis;
- be in contact with the organization ensuring the integration process;
- provide you with preparatory training, additional training and supervision;
- provide you with opportunities for a volunteer team to meet together;
- contact you and the beneficiary regularly to get your feedback;
- help you solve possible misunderstandings or problematic situations;
- ensure that professionalism is maintained at all levels of cooperation.

# Contact with the Beneficiary

## Communication Tips

Language is the most important tool the beneficiary needs to successfully integrate into society. First and foremost, for work that is closely linked to self-esteem, the ability to cope with the psychological burden associated with settling in a new country and getting used to a new environment, building new social ties and friendships, and ultimately making it useful for society. He/she will not move without the language – he/she will not be able to act independently, he/she will have a limited income, over time he/she will be a burden on his/her surroundings and he/she will feel it. Helping the beneficiary learn the local language is an important part of your collaboration, as it speeds up their integration into the community. It is common for the beneficiary to have a low or no level of Slovak language. In this case, nonverbal communication plays as important a role as verbal one.

Here are some tips that may be helpful to you:

1. **Use gestures** – be aware of your expressions and if it is not possible in words, try to radiate a positive mood differently. Gestures are just another way we can convey important information.
2. **Draw pictures, bring photos or clippings from magazines** – this may be your initial way of communicating. Draw a map with the route of the neighbourhood or individual foods as you study vocabulary. Bring photos and show them to each other, use pictures in books and magazines.

3. **Maintain direct eye contact** – try to listen actively and show that you are interested, even if you do not understand everything. However, don't be offended if the beneficiary does not return your eye contact – in some cultures it is not common to maintain it.
4. **Use open body language** – you will reassure the beneficiary that you value what he/she shares with you and what he/she is trying to tell you.
5. **Respect physical space and touch** – a good rule is not to touch the other person unless he/she touches you first. Touches have their limits and should only be on a friendly (reassuring or emphasizing) level.
6. **Avoid interruptions** – this assures the beneficiary that you are listening to him/her and respecting their narration.
7. **Minimize distraction** – during your meetings, try to look at your phone as little as possible, of course, unless you use it as a work tool.
8. **Understand that “on time” can have different meanings** – We teach beneficiaries that in our culture it is important to come to meetings at an agreed time. However, being “on time” in some cultures also means completing one activity before starting another. Try not to be offended if the beneficiary is not punctual at first. You can suggest to him/her that you plan together when he/she should leave home and set a reminder for him/her on the phone.

9. **Think before you speak** – try to talk as easily as you can. For example, in the phrase “Do you think we could go for a walk together tomorrow?” can be difficult to separate the important words of the sentence. Rather, ask, “Are we going for a walk tomorrow? Together?” – you can point at yourself and the beneficiary and indicate “together”.
10. **Be patient** – always give the beneficiary sufficient time to comment.
11. **Paraphrase** – before answering the beneficiary's question or comment, make sure your understanding is correct, e.g.: “If I understand correctly, you want to tell me that...” This technique facilitates mutual understanding and leaves little room for misinterpretation.
12. **Request verification** – it is important for the beneficiary to understand what you are saying. To do this, ask the beneficiary to repeat some of your comments. E.g., you can say, “I want to make sure I made myself clear. Can you tell me how you understood that?” It usually doesn't help to ask “Do you understand?” Because many people say “yes” even though they don't always understand.
13. **Be open and take an interest** – if you want to have a better experience of the new culture, it is important to open up to new habits and ideas. Show your curiosity and interest. The more you explore, the more you will experience.
14. **Use your sense of humour** – maintain a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere when interacting with the beneficiary.

- Practice writing and sending letters - you can go to the post office together.
- Ask him/her to teach you a few words or phrases in his/her language.

### Orientation in the surroundings and spending free time with the beneficiary

- Practice using public transport.
- Practice naming and counting money (you don't have to use real money).
- Go together to the park, library, shop. After you've been there several times, let him/her guide you.
- Play your favourite music with each other.
- Tell her about how we celebrate some holidays in our country and be interested in traditional holidays in his/her country. It's nice to remember when they are and symbolically celebrate them with him/her.
- Play board games together.
- Recommend each other's favourite movies, books, or their authors.

Find more training tips at [unhcr.sk](http://unhcr.sk). You will find the manual to help educate the children of foreigners [online here](#).



## Practical and educational tips

### Helping children with homework

- When you work with children, it is important to involve their parents as well. Show them how children can learn the alphabet, numbers or how to write their name. Many parents who do not speak the local language will still know the alphabet. You will remind parents that they are still the most important teachers of their children.
- Show how parents can help their children with homework.

### Help the beneficiary learn the language

- Study the names of famous areas and streets in the area.
- Help him/her read the emails.
- Repeat together what he/she took over in the language lessons.
- Practice naming objects in the area (you can also use labels with signs).
- Practice writing names, addresses and telephone numbers.

## Challenges in Relationship with the Beneficiary

*The most important thing is to realize that it is not your job to save the beneficiary from all the difficulties of life. The help must be limited to the scope defined in the agreement. This will prevent you from burnout, unintentional damage to the beneficiary or possible border crossing on his/her part. If you find that he/she needs help that is not defined in your Volunteer Agreement, contact the coordinating person.*

### Finances

This is especially true in the financial field. An invitation to a coffee or home cooking is fine, but it is good to avoid more expensive gifts of any type. The reason for this measure is the extensive experience of humanitarian practice, when the beneficiary may feel bad that he/she is in the role of a victim for help and cannot afford it on his/her own. He/she may feel debt and look for inappropriate ways to “repay” you. He/she will become dependent on you, or other problematic misunderstandings may occur. If you have the impression that the beneficiary needs something and you can provide him/her with it, contact the coordinating person and help can be provided through the organization. Accepting a gift from an organization usually does not have negative consequences.

### Apparent Ingratitude

If the beneficiary does not show you enough respect or does not react according to your ideas, there is no reason to be angry. First of all, it can also be an interesting stimulus to think about your own expectations. Other people’s gratitude should not be a motivation to volunteer. Secondly, we often do not know what other people have gone through or whether it is a cultural misunderstanding (for example, most Slavic countries seem very rude to Americans because no one normally smiles when interacting). The key word above all is consideration. It is good to realize that the tension that has accumulated during the hardships of months or years (for some even longer), will gradually begin to surface only after they get used to our country over time, relax and get better. Some may suffer from post-traumatic stress and various other traumas that come to the surface when they are safe. So, if they seem to be in a bad mood or behave inappropriately, it’s not necessarily disrespect, but they may be starting to come to terms with what they’ve been through because they haven’t had time to think about it so far. A completely new environment can also cause anxiety or panic to re-emerge for those affected by environmental change with great fright, loss of home, property and fear. They may feel remorse for leaving their original home – again, there is no lack of gratitude for those who have given them a new

home – the way the people of the Middle East, the Balkans or Africa are often tied to a country where they can trace their family tree to the first millennium we can’t even imagine. This loss is really hard to bear and regret and nostalgia are natural. You can always contact the coordinator in case of any difficulty.

### Exhaustion by Boredom

Prepare for the phenomenon of “exhaustion from boredom”. This is a strange situation where one would like to work, but there is nothing to do. This applies to refugees who have spent months to years in a refugee camp where there is no job, but a person receives his or her daily ration, so he or she does not have to and cannot make the effort to procure basic necessities. Sometimes he/she is also forbidden to leave the camp and work. It is therefore good that both men and women start working at least a little as soon as possible - half or at least partial earnings will not only improve their financial situation, but also help them with self-esteem, especially damaged in family fathers (who moreover suffered by not being able to protect their families at first and then feed them no matter how they tried). The sooner they start working, the faster they will get used to it, meet local people and their status will return to normal. There is a very wide range of skills among refugees (from programmers, builders to bakers, barbers and hairdressers), so it should not be such a problem for them to do something at least occasionally, and, of course, as soon as possible to find a full-time job.

### Trust

It is a good idea to avoid topics and things in the conversations that may remind the beneficiary of bad experiences until he or she is ready to do so. Maybe he/she’ll trust you on his/her own when he/she gets used to you, but maybe he/she won’t, and that’s okay. Don’t ask. These things should be discussed with professionals. Plus, it may seem like you’re interrogating him/her. Instead, try to create a friendly atmosphere and ask about neutral things. Respect their privacy. Some refugee families may be more sensitive to their privacy than usual. Privacy is very valuable to them - many of them have had very limited one in recent months (perhaps even years) and in some cases virtually none. In refugee camps and detention camps, people live squeezed to each other, sometimes separated by a screen from hundreds of others. A good procedure is e.g., commenting on what works or is happening in Slovakia and asking how it works in its country or what he/she thinks about it. It’s also good to clarify at the beginning that you’re trying to help him/her, that you’re here for him/her, and that he/she can trust you. Under no circumstances should you abuse what he/she tells you so as not to lose his/her trust or complicate his/her life - if he/she opens to you, it is often a difficult story for him/her. Talking about it later with friends over a beer, writing about it on social networks or even passing it on to the media is a strong breach of trust that can greatly damage your relationship and also has disciplinary consequences.

### Different Opinions

Flatly avoid any pressure. Integration is in the interest of the beneficiary himself/herself; your only task is to help him/her in it. Occasionally it is appropriate to give good advice and recommendations, but don’t exaggerate. If a beneficiary’s habit or opinion seems strange or even misguided to you, feel free to talk about it if you are sure that you already know each other well enough that he/she accepts it. If you really think his/her attitude to something needs to be changed, try to lead by example rather than persuade him/her, or even go into common conflict. Psychological data is clear in this area – people are much more likely to change their minds (especially in things that matter to them) based on the example of someone they respect and admire, and based on life experience, not on dispute or logical analysis of arguments.

### Exaggerated Expectations

Don’t expect you change the beneficiary’s and their situation will change radically. It can happen, but it often doesn’t have to. The experience is that change comes only very slowly and is also associated with other circumstances that may be very important to it, but sometimes they are completely out of your reach, e.g., situation in the homeland, in the family or if her lost relatives were found, etc. This can greatly affect his/her ability to focus on work or to find a stable income, or to establish successful relationships with his/her surroundings. Some refugees may decide to go to another country even after you have been caring for them for a long time. You don’t have to feel hurt or touched. You may become good friends, but the beneficiary must decide their future based on a number of factors – it is not fair to blame them for not doing what we imagine would be best for them. So, you don’t have to have too high expectations, it’s better to enjoy small forward moves. We help as much as we can, but we are not a key element in his/her life. He/she must decide for himself/herself.

### Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

Boundaries are necessary in your relationship. The beneficiary may have unrealistic ideas about what you can and are able to do for them. Therefore, the coordinating person informs both parties about them at the “involvement meeting”. If this is necessary to remind you later, explain to the beneficiary what kind of help you can give them. It can help you to describe your own emotions and time limits.

### Clarify the Boundaries In Time and Keep them Consistent

This will help prevent problems in the future. Every relationship between a volunteer and a beneficiary is different and it is important that there is a clear understanding from the very beginning. The beneficiary may have difficulty distinguishing between people working in Mareena, volunteers or people working in other organizations and may expect the same from them. The coordinator will be happy to help you facilitate the conversation about boundaries if needed.

### Don’t Be Afraid to Say “No”

It can be very difficult at first, but it is necessary. Is the beneficiary asking you to arrange a call for him/her, even though their language level is enough? Does he/she ask you for material things or money to borrow? You have a right, even an obligation, to say no. If this happens again, contact the coordinator.

### Boundaries Help Prevent Burnout

Working with people with international protection can be challenging for you. It is an area of helping professions with a high risk of burnout. You not only invest time and energy in volunteering, but you also give your emotions and attention. When talking to the beneficiary, you may be exposed to their life story and opinions. Listening to stories of suffering, trauma and frustration can provoke strong reactions such as anger, sadness or embarrassment. This is quite normal and it is not about personal imperfections or unpreparedness. Those who will help for many years can experience the so-called “Fatigue from compassion” when one becomes numb to stories full of sadness and suffering. This is becoming commonplace for humanitarian workers. The opposite extreme may be living with the beneficiary, experiencing too much suffering with him/her, which can lead to poor sleep or nightmares. Be aware of your own reactions and try to keep an eye on the situation. The primary way to avoid burnout is to take care of yourself. You don’t have to feel bad if you need to take a week off for yourself - just don’t forget to let the beneficiary know. The people who help best are the ones who know how to balance their needs with the needs of others. If you start to experience symptoms of burnout, please contact us.

### Healthy Distance

Try to enter the situation of the beneficiary so that you can help him/her sustainably. While it’s important to build a relationship with the beneficiary, keep in mind that taking on their problems as your own can hurt you both.

## Practical Advice

What to do:

- **when the beneficiary turns to you for help with his or her health or mental condition?** Here we must proceed in the same way as we would with anyone else. A person who is granted asylum or subsidiary protection has access to public health care and, if necessary, is treated by a general practitioner. In the case of psychiatric and psychological problems, the situation may be more complicated - in this case, it is advisable to contact a coordinating person who can mediate contact with an expert experienced in working with this target group.
- **when the beneficiary treats you in disbelief and ungratefulness?** You need to understand this and remember that you don't do it for his/her gratitude, but because it's a good thing. It usually passes over time. If the behaviour does not change during the first months, contact the coordinator.
- **if the beneficiary asks you for money?** Explain him/her that you are forbidden to give any funds directly from Mareena. If he/she has a financial emergency, talk to him/her about it and connect with us.
- **if you are approached by the media for a comment or interview?** If you have the time and feel like doing it, the contact with the media may be beneficial, but only with great sensitivity and in coordination with the Mareena team. Always ask for the authorization of the article so that you can see in advance how your contribution is interpreted – the coordinating person will be happy to advise you on these matters. It is important to remember that any private information entrusted to you by the beneficiary is a complete taboo.
- **if the beneficiary starts crying during the story?** Usually, in our words, we cannot improve anything, although we often need to say something appropriate or wise. It is important to react calmly and not discuss the topic that caused the state of upset unless he/she continues on his/her own. Silent participation or a few words of consolation are usually the best response.
- **if the beneficiary does not want to learn the language?** Try to explain him/her that it is mainly in his/her own interest. If he/she does not respond, contact the coordinator. Although language is key to any effort to integrate and become independent, learning a language may not be a priority for a person experiencing a specific situation.
- **if the beneficiary practices a habit that you do not like?** Nothing. Unless he/she violates the laws of the Slovak Republic or is otherwise grossly problematic (consult with the coordinating person), it is not our job to change his/her habits.
- **when the beneficiary begins to have a problem with alcohol, smoking, gambling or other adverse reactions?** In such a situation, conversation can help, but it can also be the result of a traumatic experience where any coercion or remorse would be rather counterproductive. Contact a coordinating person who can contact an expert with similar experience.
- **if the receiving person commits an offense or crime?** Should he/she ever commit an offense or a crime, it is advisable to proceed as with any other citizen, but also to let Mareena know, as we can give context to the police and be of various help to them.

## Code of Ethics of Individual Volunteering

Dear Volunteer, with this Code of Ethics, you are committed to the following:

1. Strive to fulfil Mareena's **mission** and to act in accordance with its goals.
2. Take care to increase your professionalism and protect people who are receiving volunteering, so before you start volunteering, you complete an introductory **training**, provide us with **Criminal records**, sign the **Volunteer Agreement** and the **Binding Declaration of Agreement with the Policy for the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy**.
3. Take care of the sustainability of help and a responsible approach, therefore, if **you can no longer continue** to volunteer, **at least one month** before the official termination of your activities you shall notify of it the coordinating person concerned.
4. Participate in regular **supervisions** (mandatory participation every 3 months) and **meetings of the volunteer team** in order to improve the quality of your volunteer work and increase awareness of current events in Mareena.
5. **Provide** the coordinator **with feedback** on your volunteering if he or she so requests or in case of your own need.
6. Have a **professional approach** to volunteers as outlined in the Volunteer Manual and ensure that your relationship does not exceed the **boundaries** of the professional relationship.
7. Be aware of the possibility of occurrence of a **feeling of superiority** to people receiving volunteering and avoid it.
8. Approach people receiving volunteering and their cultural practices with **respect**.
9. Approach **discussion of cultural and religious differences**, as well as **political opinions**, carefully.
10. Always **respect** the human dignity of those who receive volunteering, listen to them and strive for understanding.
11. In your volunteering, strive to create a **secure space** full of trust and understanding.
12. Take an interest in the lives of people receiving volunteering, but **not to force them to tell** their story if they do not want to.
13. Remember that those who receive volunteering, especially those with international protection, may have experienced **extreme and traumatic experiences**. Likewise, the situation in Slovakia may not be easy for foreigners.
14. Maintain the **confidentiality of information** entrusted to you by people receiving volunteering.
15. Not to try to **solve all the problems** of people who receive volunteering. Many solutions require patience, time or professional help.
16. If legal, **psychological or other professional counselling** is required for persons receiving voluntary activities, the coordinating person must be notified.
17. Be **wary of your expectations** about the results of volunteering. Realize that volunteering depends on the real and current needs and capacities of those who receive volunteering, not on our idea of what they need.
18. Protect your **financial independence** from people who receive volunteering and do not give them any financial or material donations. Please inform the coordinating person of any poor financial/material situation or possible sources of assistance.
19. Be aware that my relationship with the people receiving volunteering develops naturally **after the formal termination of volunteering (termination or expiration of the Volunteer Agreement)** – it may end completely, but also grow into a friendly informal relationship. Mareena is not bound by any expectations to the nature of this relationship after the end of volunteering, nor does it continue to formally cover it.
20. Provide the **media with information** about Mareena and your volunteering with great sensitivity and exclusively in coordination with the Mareena team.

# Community Volunteering



## Community Volunteering

### What Awaits You during Your Volunteering

#### Preparatory Training

Before participating in volunteering, you complete educational training with other new volunteers – personally all-day or abbreviated online. The training will be led by a professional and experienced lecturer. Through various informal and interactive activities, you will address the topic of migration and integration, you will learn in more detail the situation of refugees in Slovakia. You will learn more about Mareena's place in the integration system and the individual areas of the Engagement Program. In intercultural communication, you will focus on the specifics of working in a multicultural environment, so that you learn to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts during volunteering. An important part of the training is the discussion and space to express all expectations, concerns and ambiguities.

#### Administration before the Start of Volunteering

The Volunteer Agreement is signed for 6 months. If after this time our mutual cooperation is generally satisfactory and you are interested in continuing, we will be happy to extend the cooperation with you for other 6 months by signing the amendment. In the agreement, we specify the content of your volunteering, as well as the amount of time we agree on. We usually sign the agreement on the date you get involved in volunteering, your first community event in which you take an active part. The purpose of the agreement is to protect all parties involved – you, by informing you about the conditions of volunteering, your rights and obligations and our requirements; people attending our community events, Mareena and its mission to be able to sustainably help people with international protection and other foreigners. The agreement also includes an Affidavit of Physical and Mental Ability to Volunteer and a Code of Ethics of Volunteering. Conduct contrary to this Code may result in early termination of cooperation. Together with other volunteers, you have a duty to read the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and to sign the Binding Declaration of Consent to this policy.

#### Involvement in Volunteering

Involvement in volunteering means your first active participation in the preparation and/or implementation of one of our community events. Involvement in volunteering is gradual and depends on the current situation and the Mareena community program. Usually in Mareena we hold

2 to 4 events per month. However, their frequency may be affected by the time of year (e.g., in January and February there are significantly fewer of them than in the summer months), but also by the pandemic situation. Likewise, different community events require different levels of assistance from the volunteer team (e.g., online events often require no further help, the language café requires 2 to 4 people, and more than 20 people from the volunteer team will take part in the Mareena Festival). If it takes a while, we want to ask you for patience. Believe that we have not forgotten about you and a coordinating person (or a person managing or coordinating a community program) will contact you soon and offer the volunteer team a specific event where we will appreciate your help.

#### Regular Contact with the Person Coordinating Volunteers

There is a volunteer coordinator in each city, who is the first and foremost point of your joint contact and is responsible for providing you with any necessary support. You will meet him/her in the initial communication, at the interview, and he/she will also be present at the preparatory training. After your involvement, he/she will stay in touch with you – expect him/her to contact you once every 2-3 months. Please do not see this communication as a check, but, on the contrary, its aim is to support you, find out how you are volunteering and, if necessary, help you deal with possible complications or misunderstandings. He/she will also be interested in the number of volunteer hours you have worked, so it is nice if you remember or mark them.

**You will also provide the coordinator with feedback on a regular basis by completing evaluation questionnaires, namely:**

- after training;
- after each community event in which you actively participate;
- at the end of volunteering.

In this way, we also collect suggestions and ideas for improving the program itself. Thanks to them, we can improve cooperation with you or make our activities more efficient. In addition to the person coordinating the volunteer team, you will also communicate with people who represent the community program. Of course, you can also address any of the persons mentioned at any time and communicate their suggestions and challenges that you encounter.

## Volunteer Meetings

We at Mareena love the community, so we want you to have the opportunity to get to know each other, build relationships and support each other within the volunteer team.

Volunteer meetings take place **once every 3 months for 90 minutes, in person or online, participation is not obligatory**, but we highly recommend regular participation, as it can greatly strengthen your motivation. Meetings in cities with a larger volunteer community are divided into individual volunteer meetings and community volunteer meetings (to which expert volunteers are also invited). We also organize special meetings where you can get to know the entire volunteer community in the city. The meeting is attended by a person coordinating the volunteer team and often a person representing the community program. At the meetings we want to get to know each other better, share common experiences, challenges, dilemmas, but also joys. You will find out what is currently happening in Mareena, what we are planning and what you can get involved in. Since we like interactive activities, expect us to prepare something for you in this spirit. Your feedback on the program and communication with Mareena is also important to us, all ideas and suggestions for improvement are welcome. Come calmly with an empty belly, we will definitely prepare something to eat.

## Education and Development

It is important to us that during your volunteering in Mareena, we provide you with opportunities for personal and professional development on topics that interest you and are close to us. We organized e.g., a lecture on extremism and radicalization, a discussion on the Arab-Islamic world and the position of women in Arab culture, or a series of #I am remarkable workshops aimed at increasing self-confidence and improving women's self-presentation. If you have a specific idea on the topic of the workshop or guests, let us know! We will be happy to organize a meeting for the entire volunteer team.

## Teambuilding Activities

We value volunteering in Mareena, which is why from time to time we try to prepare joint activities for the volunteer team – a trip, a picnic or another form of reward. We also like to enjoy the superpowers of this team - we have already cooked with Dan, danced with Ivetka, or travelled in Ukraine with Andri and Daria. Let us also know about your idea or special skill, we will definitely come up with something together!

## Termination of Volunteering

Your volunteering can end with the expiration of the Volunteer Agreement – i.e., after 6 or 12 months, or before its expiration by signing the Agreement on the Termination of Volunteering. This may happen if your work, family or personal situation changes or if you do not comply with the

Volunteering Agreement, the Code of Volunteering and the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy.

## Alumni

After termination of volunteering, you automatically become a kind of graduate of the Engagement Program, i.e., its alumni. Volunteering in Mareena is limited in time so that the organization is open to new people and new people have the opportunity to try volunteering, gain direct experience with people granted international protection and other foreigners, thus expanding the positive social impact of organization's activities. Becoming an alumni brings many more opportunities to get involved! You can help spread Mareena's campaigns, lead workshops, fundraise, talk about your volunteer experience in schools or among new volunteers, and much more! We will be happy to keep in touch with you.

## Responsibilities Arising from Community Volunteering

### Your Responsibilities

**Being part of a volunteer team means investing your time, energy and talent. In order for your volunteering to be beneficial, please:**

- take part in training and coaching on migration and integration;
- submit any documentation requested by Mareena in time;
- ask regularly, give feedback and express your concerns to Mareena, especially if you are not clear in an unusual or sensitive situation;
- don't stop communicating with Mareena – if things don't go according to plan, we will definitely find a better solution together.

### Responsibilities of the Organization

- provide you with preparatory training and additional training;
- contact you regularly to get your feedback;
- help you solve possible misunderstandings or problematic situations;
- provide opportunities for a volunteer team to meet together;
- ensure that professionalism is maintained at all levels of cooperation.

As part of our community program, we run various types of informal events on a regular basis. Their goal is to create a space for direct interaction between the local Slovak community and the community of foreign origin. Through events, we present the diverse communities that are part of our cities. The aim of the events is also to activate individual communities and help them create a self-realization space. Mutual knowledge and direct communication help to

eliminate prejudices and raise awareness on migration, integration and intercultural dialogue. Community program activities are open to the general public by default. A volunteer team, persons receiving voluntary activities and a wide range of people of foreign origin who are part of our community are involved in their implementation.

## Examples of Community Events in Mareena

- **Community dinner, brunch, picnic** – our favourite events, which are usually thematic according to the country of origin of the person preparing the food. The events bring a unique experience of tasting authentic food, getting to know the person who prepared it, as well as the community of which he/she is a part.
- **Café “World“** – a simple discussion concept, the topic of which is the selected city (Kabul, Mumbai, Nairobi...). The three discussants present it from different aspects – e.g., history, culture, gastronomy. Discussions on all topics take place simultaneously. Visitors have the opportunity to participate in individual parts of the discussions at all times or gradually change individual topics.
- **Cultural evening** – thematic evenings that are mostly country-specific (e.g., Iranian evening). The event is organized in cooperation with the community and usually combines the opportunity to taste traditional food, drinks with cultural or artistic activity (e.g., concert, exhibition, workshop, etc.). A community of foreign origin has the opportunity to present its customs, traditions, but also the activities they live in Slovakia.

- **Mareena Festival** – the festival is our largest event in Bratislava, which also requires the largest help from the volunteer team. It is a multi-genre half-day festival, which includes music performances, workshops, presentation stands of organizations and a rich gastronomy. Through this event, we try to create space to increase mutual understanding, get to know local and foreign communities and spread awareness of minorities, which are an integral part of Bratislava. The festival already has its fame in the city festivals, which is reflected in the relatively high participation. It brings you the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the program before the festival, manual support work in the preparation of the festival, as well as direct assistance during the festival in its various zones, but also the opportunity to interact with people who perform or participate in the festival.

**In addition to regular community events, the volunteer team is invited to help in other community activities. Mareena is developing the concept of the Mareena Café community café, where volunteers can be involved in barista and waitress positions or other auxiliary staff as needed.**



## Practical Advice

What to do:

- **when we organize a meeting of foreigners from different countries?** When organizing a meeting, be sure to consider possible cultural or religious conflicts. If you are unsure, the easiest way is to ask them directly. A large amount of information about the relationships of different groups is also available in encyclopaedias or on the Internet.
- **if you are approached by the media for a comment or interview?** If you have the time and feel like doing it, contact with the media can be beneficial, but only with great sensitivity and in coordination with our team. Always ask for the authorization of the article so that you can see in advance how your contribution is interpreted – the coordinating person will be happy to advise you on these matters. It is important to remember that any private information that foreigners entrust to you is a complete taboo.
- **if you notice alcohol consumption at Marina events?** Mareena community events are strictly alcohol-free. In this way, we show respect for the diverse composition of our wider community, and at the same time we do not want to encourage the emergence of potential conflict situations with alcohol at events. It is a good idea to notify people attending our events of this fact politely and to communicate our principles. In case of non-acceptance, ask the person representing the community program for intervention.
- **when a conflict situation arises at an event?** Occasionally, some events may interfere with residents of adjoining homes, or that someone disagrees in principle with the activities we carry out. It's mostly a verbal attack. It is always necessary to deal with the situation calmly and not engage in aggressive debate. If you come into contact with these people, please notify the persons representing the community program of it as soon as possible.
- **when visitors do not respect the rules of the event?** The pandemic in particular brings with it various measures that need to be observed at events. Well, of course, this also applies to rules of a different nature. Community events should be a place where visitors feel comfortable, relaxed and leave with a good feeling. If you notice a situation at the event that could jeopardize this goal (e.g., non-acceptance of security measures, unauthorized entry into Mareena's private areas, insults, harassment, etc.), the best thing to do is contact someone from the Mareena community team.

## Code of Ethics of the Community Volunteering

Dear Volunteer, with this Code of Ethics, you are committed to the following:

1. Strive to fulfil Mareena's **mission** and to act in accordance with its goals.
2. Take care to increase your professionalism, so before you start volunteering, you will complete an initial educational **training**, sign the **Volunteer Agreement and the Binding Declaration of Consent to the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy**.
3. Ensure **compliance with the agreements** and if, for any reason, you are unable to fulfil your obligations to the extent and within the time agreed, **communicate** this **openly** and **as far in advance as possible** to the person who assigned you the task.
4. Pay attention to the sustainability of aid and a responsible approach, therefore, if **you can't continue** in volunteering, **at least a month** before the official termination of your activity notify the relevant coordinating person of it.
5. Attend the **volunteer team meetings** to improve the quality of your volunteer work and raise awareness of current events in Mareena.
6. **Provide** the coordinator with **feedback** on your volunteering if he or she so requests or in case of your own need.
7. Have a **professional approach** to all participants at Mareena events.
8. Approach with **respect** all participants in Mareena events and their cultural practices.
9. Be cautious about **discussing cultural and religious differences** as well as **political views**.
10. Treat Mareena participants in a friendly manner, but **not to ask them** for potentially sensitive information, such as to their personal stories. Realize that foreigners, especially those with international protection, may have experienced **extreme and traumatic experiences**. Likewise, the situation in Slovakia may not be easy for them.
11. Maintain the **confidentiality of information and any sensitive data** with which they come into contact during your volunteering activities.
12. Provide the **media with information** about Mareena and your volunteering with great sensitivity and exclusively in coordination with the Mareena team.



# Expert Volunteering



## Expert Volunteering

### What Awaits You during Your Volunteering

#### Initial Guidance

Before joining the volunteering, you will have a joint meeting with the person coordinating the volunteer team (or other people who are currently involved in expert volunteering), who will provide you with basic information about Mareena, its activities and how your next collaboration will work. It's also a space for you and everything that interests you, so don't be afraid to ask a lot.

#### Administration before the Beginning of Volunteering

The Volunteer Agreement is signed for 6 months. If after this time our mutual cooperation is generally satisfactory and you are interested in continuing, we will be happy to extend the cooperation with you for another 6 months by signing the amendment. In the contract, we specify the content of your volunteering, as well as the amount of time we agree. We usually sign the agreement on the date of involvement in the volunteering activity, i.e., your first assigned task. The purpose of the agreement is to protect all parties involved – you, by informing you about the conditions of volunteering, your rights and obligations and our requirements; people with whom you potentially come into contact during your volunteering, Mareena and its mission, so that it can sustainably help people get granted international protection, and other foreigners. The agreement also includes the Affidavit of Physical and Mental Ability to Volunteer and the Code of Ethics of Volunteering. Conduct contrary to this Code may result in early termination of cooperation. Together with other volunteers, you have a duty to read the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and to sign the Binding Declaration of Consent to this policy.

#### Involvement in Volunteering

Involvement in volunteering means your first activity on a given task. The coordinating person will connect you to the person from Mareena who will give you the task. You will continue to communicate with this person during your performance of the agreed task. After its completion, the coordinating person can connect you with someone who has a task for you – he/she may or may not be the same person. Involvement in volunteering is happening gradually and depends on Mareena's current needs. If it takes a while, we want to ask you for patience. Believe that we have not forgotten about you and a coordinating person will contact you soon, who will assign you a task or connect you with someone from the Mareena team.

#### Regular Contact with Person Coordinating Volunteers

There is a volunteer coordinator in each city, who is the first and foremost point of your joint contact and is responsible for providing you with any necessary support. You will meet him/her in the initial communication, in the interview and he/she will give you a basic guidance. After your involvement, he/she will stay in touch with you – expect him/her to contact you once every 2 to 3 months. Please do not see this communication as a check, but, on the contrary, its aim is to support you, find out how you are volunteering and, if necessary, help you deal with possible complications or misunderstandings. He/she will also be interested in the number of volunteer hours you have worked, so it is nice if you remember or mark them.

**You will also provide the coordinator with feedback on a regular basis by completing evaluation questionnaires, namely:**

- after 3 months of involvement;
- at the end of volunteering.

In this way, we also collect suggestions and ideas for improving the program itself. Thanks to them, we can improve cooperation with you or make our activities more efficient. In addition to the person coordinating the volunteer team, you will also communicate with the people who give you the tasks. Of course, you can also address any of the persons mentioned at any time and communicate the suggestions and challenges that you encounter.

#### Volunteer Meetings

We at Mareena love the community, so we want you to have the opportunity to get to know each other, build relationships and support each other within the volunteer team. Volunteer meetings take place **once every 3 months for 90 minutes, in person or online, participation is not obligatory**, but we highly recommend regular participation, as it can greatly strengthen your motivation. Meetings in cities with a larger volunteer community are divided into individual volunteer meetings and community volunteer meetings (to which expert volunteers are also invited). We also organize special meetings where you can get to know the entire volunteer community in the city. The meeting is attended by a person coordinating the volunteer team and often a person representing the community program. At the meetings we want to get to know each other better, share common experiences, challenges, dilemmas, but also joys. You will find out what is currently happening in Mareena, what we are planning and what you can get involved in. Since we like interactive activities, expect us to prepare something for you in this spirit. Your feedback on the program and communication with Mareena is also important to us, all ideas and suggestions for improvement are welcome. Come calmly with an empty belly, we will definitely prepare something to eat.

## Education and Development

It is important to us that during your volunteering in Mareena, we provide you with opportunities for personal and professional development on topics that interest you and are close to us. We organized e.g., a lecture on extremism and radicalization, a discussion on the Arab-Islamic world and the position of women in Arab culture, or a series of #I am remarkable workshops aimed at increasing self-confidence and improving women's self-presentation. If you have a specific idea on the topic of the workshop or guests, let us know! We are happy to organize a meeting for the entire volunteer team.

## Teambuilding Activities

Volunteering is a huge service to another person, so from time to time we try to prepare a voluntary team for joint activities – a trip, picnic or other form of reward. We also like to enjoy the superpowers of this team – we have already cooked with Dan, danced with Ivetka or travelled around Ukraine with Andri and Daria. Let us also know about your idea or special skill, we will definitely come up with something together!

## Termination of Volunteering

Your volunteering can end with the expiration of the volunteer contract – i.e., after 6 or 12 months, or before its expiration by signing the Agreement on the Termination of Volunteering. This may happen if your work, family or personal situation changes or if you do not comply with the Volunteering Agreement, the Code of Volunteering and the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy.

## Alumni

After completing the volunteering, you automatically become a kind of graduate of the Engagement Program, i.e., its alumni. Volunteering in Mareena is limited in time so that the organization is open to new people and new people have the opportunity to try volunteering, gain direct experience with people granted international protection and other foreigners, thus expanding the positive social impact of organization's activities.

However, becoming an alumni brings many more opportunities to get involved! You can help spread Mareena's campaigns, lead workshops, fundraise, talk about your volunteer experience in schools, or among new volunteers, and much more! We will be happy to keep in touch with you.

## Responsibilities Arising from Expert Volunteering

### Your Responsibilities

**Being part of a volunteer team means investing your time, energy and talent. In order for your volunteering to be beneficial, please:**

- take part in an initial guidance towards volunteering;
- submit any documentation requested by Mareena in time;
- ask regularly, give feedback and express your concerns to Mareena, especially if you are not clear in an unusual or sensitive situation;
- don't stop communicating with Mareena - if things don't go according to plan, we will definitely find a solution together.

### Responsibilities of the Organization

- provide you with initial guidance and further training;
- contact you regularly to get your feedback;
- help you solve possible misunderstandings or problematic situations;
- provide opportunities for a volunteer team to meet together;
- ensure that professionalism is maintained at all levels of cooperation.

## Code of Ethics of Expert Volunteering

Dear Volunteer, with this Code of Ethics, you are committed to the following:

1. To strive to fulfil Mareena's **mission** and to act in accordance with its goals.
2. Sign the **Volunteer Agreement** and the **Binding Declaration of Consent to the Mareena Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy** before volunteering.
3. Ensure **compliance with the agreements** and if, for any reason, you are unable to fulfil your obligations to the extent and within the time agreed, communicate this **openly and as far in advance as possible** to the person who gave you the task.
4. Pay attention to the sustainability of the help and a responsible approach, therefore if **you are unable to continue** your volunteering, you will notify the relevant coordinator at least one month before the official end of your activity.
5. Attend the **volunteer team meeting** to improve the quality of your volunteer work and raise awareness of current events in Mareena.
6. **Provide** the coordinator with **feedback on your volunteering if he or she so requests or in case of your own need.**
7. Maintain the **confidentiality of information and any sensitive data** that you come in contact with during your volunteering activities.
8. Provide the **media** with **information** about Mareena and your volunteering with great sensitivity and exclusively in coordination with the Mareena team.



# You and Your Environment



## You and Your Environment

The successful integration of people with international protection and other foreigners coming to Slovakia is related not only to their personality, social or professional status, origin and general setting of Slovakia's integration policy. The integration process is also largely influenced by the way the public views on this issue, the views and attitudes of natives towards cultural diversity and cultural diversity in general, the perceptions of different categories of foreigners and the extent to which they support certain integration measures and policies. The IOM (International Organization for Migration) research from 2009 on public attitudes towards foreigners in Slovakia has already shown that public opinion has many limits in the foreign field, which have not only eased in more than ten years, but on the contrary (Vašečka, 2009). As the findings of the Centre for Research on Ethnicity and Culture from 2021 show, many opinions and attitudes of the Slovak public towards foreigners and foreign migration have deteriorated even more significantly (Kriglerová – Kadlečíková – Chudžíková – Píšová, 2021).

The topic of migration has dominated in Europe and in public opinion, especially since 2015, since the so-called migration crisis. But in comparison with other European countries, there are very few refugees living in Slovakia. Although the number of foreigners living in Slovakia has been gradually increasing since 2017, we continue to be among the EU Member States with the lowest percentage of their population – according to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic at the end of December 2020 they accounted for approximately 2.75% of Slovakia. The public has very little personal experience with people with refugee or foreign backgrounds and in the vast majority takes over information and knowledge, especially from the [media](#) and social networks, but within which various conspiracies, hoaxes or manifestations of intolerance or xenophobia are growing. The result is a stereotypical perception of different cultures and the public, which usually forms its views on migration and migrants on the basis of misconceptions or prejudices.

Thus, the majority of the public and public opinion is not positively inclined to people on the run or to foreigners in general. This attitude reflects the fact that Slovakia is still perceived by the public as the “Country of Slovaks” according to surveys by the Centre for Research on Ethnicity and Culture in 2021 and that “many do not feel well with people who are too different” (Kriglerová – Kadlečíková – Chudžíková – Píšová, 2021 p. 7). As we have already mentioned, the reasons for such attitudes are different, some partly based on real and verifiable information, some less so. It is ideal to avoid disputes or conflicts, but it is possible that for your volunteering you may have experience with more negative opinions or attitudes and it is not harmful to cultivate your surroundings through your own experience and provide

a more realistic view of people on the run, migrants or foreigners. Take a friendly approach to those who confront you – many do not mean it wrong and their concerns can be understood, because often their only source of information is impersonal and mediated sources such as the Internet, social networks or television, which often report on these topics biased and cause negative emotions.

### What to do if someone verbally or otherwise attacks you for helping a refugee?

It is ideal not to argue and ignore such behaviour unless it is your loved one or someone for whom an explanation of the situation may be really important. Otherwise, you can use some of the information in this manual or compile your own. In any situation, however, it is good to rely on proven facts and information, as well as on social moral value, that helping people in danger and in need is our duty, not a reason for shame. We need to treat all human beings with respect and dignity. But what if one of the situations escalates more significantly – what are the adequate responses in crisis situations? Recommendations and advice of conflict prevention experts.

### Tip for Individual Volunteers:

It would be good to explain sensitively to the beneficiary with whom you will be in contact at the appropriate time that not every person has a neutral or positive attitude towards migration and their actors. Anti-immigrant sentiments are currently common in Slovakia and there is a real risk that some people will treat them not very friendly, even hostile. Hostile behaviours are largely the result of fear of the unknown and feelings of danger, or the result of misinformation or outright false information in large media or social media. It is possible to assume that most complications or barriers will be resolved on their own when the environment gets used to them. When they start telling their life stories, they may even become local celebrities. The life stories of some of them are truly exceptional and engaging, and the public may be interested. However, they can fall victim to the so-called hate speech, i.e., hate behaviour, which most often manifests itself in the form of verbal pointing, but in the extreme case, for example, someone from the far right vandalizes their property or even physically attacks them. Report any threat to the volunteer coordinator immediately to help you resolve the situation. In the event of a more serious threat, it is necessary to assist the beneficiary in reporting the incident to the police on the telephone number 158. You can also contact the Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, which is responsible for hate crimes<sup>1</sup>.

**If there is violence in a public place with several people, it is good to contact the others to intervene together. You can also pretend that you actually want to help the attacker with good advice – explain him/her that he/she will cause unnecessary problems himself/herself. You can find such and other recommendations [in this article](#).**

<sup>1</sup> Contacts can be found on the website <https://www.minv.sk/?odbor-prevencie-kriminality>.

As mentioned above, according to several results of representative research on the attitudes of the Slovak public to foreign migration and migrants, our society has relatively little personal experience and lack of knowledge about migration, and if they have any, this is often distorted or false information from the media or social networks.

**So, what are the most common myths, stereotypes and hoaxes associated with foreign migration in our country? We will mention some of the most frequent that are spreading about people on the run.**

**“Their religion is dangerous.”**

This myth is currently associated mainly with Islam, but is regularly repeated in many other variants, such as those against Judaism. Religion, like culture, is not a homogeneous whole, contains a large number of interpretations, traditions and customs, and is influenced by various aspects, mainly social and political. This is true whether it is Islam, Christianity or another world religion. In the case of Islam, it is necessary to distinguish between Islam as a religion and tradition on the one hand, and radical to fanatical groups and individuals on the other. Islam, like Christianity, knows concepts such as universal justice, tolerance or love. Inhumane aspects of Islamic law are no longer widely used in modern countries, and most Muslims live in secular states. Only theocratic states and radical Islamist movements such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are massively implementing them. Slovakia's migration policy is one of the strictest in Europe and it is almost impossible that a person on the run, to whom the Migration Office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic grants one of the forms of international protection, would pose a security risk. In the asylum procedure, every person is checked very thoroughly, the Slovak Information Service creates a security assessment and if it is found that it is e.g., a person potentially inclined to terrorism will never be granted asylum or subsidiary international protection.

**“Refugees are dangerous, they are terrorists and adherents of the Islamic State. Take a look at the terrorist attacks in Paris.”**

As mentioned above, generalizations must again be avoided in this statement. “Refugees” is a term used to describe dozens of groups of people, many of whom have virtually nothing to do with them – a Muslim Syrian woman fleeing the radical Islamic State movement, an atheist Afghan fleeing the Taliban, a Christian Eritrean fleeing the dictatorial regime and an Orthodox Ukrainian fleeing the country. The issue of danger or threat, with specific exceptions, needs to be addressed and assessed at the individual level, as terrorism is not a matter of a national, religious or cultural nature, but of personal motivation. Therefore, it is better to leave the risk assessment of people and groups of people to people who specialize in safety. Terrorist attacks similar to those in Paris in



2015 have taken place in the past and are likely to recur in the future, with experience across all cultures and continents. It is a tragic and sad event, to which our instinctive reaction is primarily a feeling of fear and hatred. After all, the main goals of terrorism are to provoke fear, intimidate, attract attention or destabilize. However, after each such event, it is important and necessary that we as society do not look for shortcuts, do not apply the principle of collective guilt and do not blame a generalized group of innocent people.

Because this is what terrorist groups are all about – they can then take advantage of this generalized group of people, tell them, “Ah, they hate you all, we are your only option, join us!” This is a common strategy of terrorist organizations, identified by psychologists and people specializing in the media, which is widely used today by the radical Islamist movement Islamic State. People on the run – refugees who have gone through the Slovak asylum process and with whom we cooperate are innocent.

**“Why don't we help our people and help refugees instead? We have people in Slovakia who are worse off than they are.”**

The number of refugees in Slovakia is currently negligible – there are dozens of people a year – and our activities do not prevent people, charities, other organizations or the state from helping and caring for other people in need. Apart from their number, being angry at volunteers who help them for not helping, for example, socially excluded communities, homeless people or other people in need is like being angry, for example to a charity that helps children with cancer for not helping children with cerebral palsy, or to a doctor who also treats burns, even though there are more serious diseases in the world. One cannot engage in all activities at once, so one chooses one specific one that fills, entertains and sees meaning in it. In addition, refugees who have been granted asylum in our country are essentially “ours”. They have a permanent residence in Slovakia and many will stay here permanently. Some are even of ethnic Slovak origin – e.g., asylum seekers from Subcarpathian Russia or Vojvodina Serbs. So, we help ours.

**“Refugees are rich, they have expensive clothes and smartphones.”**

This claim is based on the assumption that people on the run do not need help and solidarity because they do not seem to need it – they have good, quality or branded clothing or the latest mobile phone. It is necessary to realize that different people become refugees, people from higher and lower social classes flee from the same city. Refugees from Asian or African countries before the war or other riots in many cases lived at a higher standard of living, which is common in Slovak conditions. People on the run do not necessarily have to be ragged and look neglected. Most of them have lived in

their home countries comparable lives to ours, unless war has entered them and so on. And a mobile phone is really a very useful tool and an important helper, thanks to which they are in contact with the family, they can search for the necessary information, current news, maps, use a translator, etc. It would seem strange if they didn't have them.

### “It is an organized wave that is to occupy Europe.”

This is a myth that is associated primarily with the so-called migration crisis in 2015-2016. Organizing such a huge group of people would be very difficult and essentially impossible, as refugees from various unrelated corners of the world are constantly coming to Europe. The Slovak or foreign security and intelligence services did not register any joint cooperation.

The increase in the number of people on the run is probably due to a combination of destabilization of Europe's neighbouring countries in the Middle East and North Africa, long, prolonged conflicts, unfavourable and unsatisfactory conditions in many refugee camps, but also massive expansion of social networks, unprecedented expansion of smuggling groups, level of control. Europe's borders and an open attitude to migration and migration policies on the part of European countries of destination.

### “They were supposed to stay home and fight. Instead, they ran away.”

Some people actually stayed home and fought, but sent at least part of their family to safety. Some wanted to fight, but for political reasons they were not allowed to do so – this is common practice in countries where the military is controlled by a particular ethnic, tribal or political component. However, some have no reason to fight because they do not feel any loyalty to the country from which they are fleeing. These are often artificially constructed and assembled units “drawn on the map” a few decades ago, and the people who lived in their territory had no opportunity to comment on these changes.

These are often countries created by the disintegration of empires or colonial empires, and “new” state formations were formed on the site from former provinces that did not respect ethnic, religious, economic or tribal realities at all. It is therefore understandable that not everyone is willing to kill or die for such a “state entity” in disputes that they feel do not concern them. In any case, fighting for the homeland requires tremendous courage and determination. It would be reckless to judge those who have decided to save the lives of themselves and their loved ones by escaping if we do not know their reasons and deeper context.



### “They are young men only – where are the women and children?”

Reportage footage, photos, but also records of the police or other authorities show that there are usually women and children among the people on the run. Statistics show that even though men predominate in the long run, the number of women and children makes up a significant proportion of people on the run and e.g., in 2016, the number of migrant women and children exceeded the number of men. There are often groups of young men. It is common practice for the family to flee the war-torn area to a safer place, but then cannot afford to continue the journey. Therefore, they send the family member who has the best chance of overcoming an extremely risky journey, so he is most often a healthy young man. At the same time, the trip is very expensive and families often do not have the resources to send more than one of their members. Logically, therefore, they select young and strong men who are highly expected to make the journey, obtain asylum, find work, learn the language and build a background for their family. They can then exercise the right to family reunification or at least support it at a distance.

### “Why do we give money to refugees when we ourselves have little?”

In several important international documents, Slovakia has committed itself to helping people whose basic human rights are being violated and who have found themselves in danger of death. The obligation to take care of people on the run in Slovakia therefore follows from international treaties, which it has signed voluntarily, like most of the international community. In the past, tens of thousands of people living in Czechoslovakia, who fled the country mainly from the communist regime, but often also for economic reasons, have used the international protection of refugees.

This is a standard service provided across many countries. We have very few refugees in Slovakia, compared to other European countries, our country costs a minimum of funds. From the given amount, it would definitely not be possible to increase salaries or old-age pensions, or to improve public services and complete absent highways. In addition, the financial cost to people fleeing European countries often largely offsets resources at European Union level.

### “Refugees are stealing our jobs.”

It is possible that this argument makes sense in some countries where the number of people on the run is enormous, but this is not the case in Slovakia. The number of refugees in Slovakia is relatively low compared to other European countries. From 1993 to 2021, the number of asylum applications received by the Slovak Republic was 59,520. Since 2015 when we talk about so called Migration or Refugee Crisis, there were many fewer, about 150 – 330 per year. From 1993 to 2021, Slovakia granted 1,679 asylums

and subsidiary protections. This is less than 3 percent of all applications. However, it should be added that such a low number is also due to the fact that many asylum procedures have been suspended, but also reflects the strict asylum policy in Slovakia. It is often said in Slovakia that in general “foreigners take jobs from Slovaks”. According to several surveys of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the demographic development of foreigners in Slovakia, their education and placement in the labour market mean a benefit for Slovakia, not a loss.

Our experience with people with international protection and other foreigners is such that they often generate additional jobs that would not otherwise exist and therefore do not take them from anyone – for example, kebab stalls, Indian restaurants or Thai massage and manicure – or they work in places that locals are not interested in (social and care services, healthcare and the IT sector).

#### Interesting resources, links and tips:

- [It Depends on the Facts: We Dispel the Myths about Migration](#)
- [Myths about Migration VS Reality](#)
- [A Series of YouTube Videos from the League for Human Rights on Hoaxes and Migration Myths](#)

# About Mareena



## About Mareena

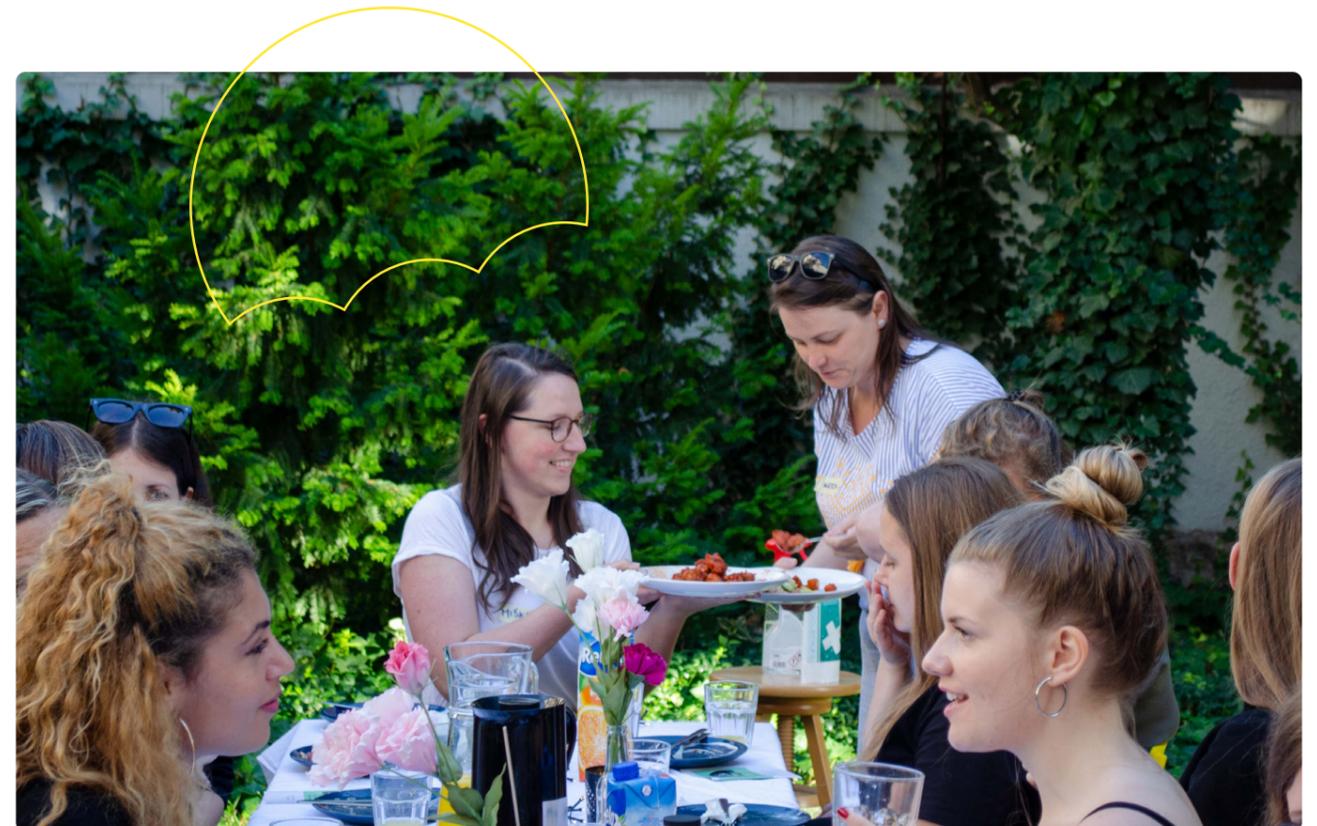
*The Mareena Civic Association arose from the “Who will help?” Initiative, which was launched in April 2015 as a campaign to accept families from the Middle East who were driven out of their homes for civil war or persecution. The campaign sought people who would be willing to help with their integration into Slovak society. At the beginning of this effort, there was no concrete idea of the extent to which the initiative could grow.*

*At that time, most of the society was rather reluctant and negative about the issue, so it was a surprise how much support and willingness the initiative met. Members of the Ladislav Hanus Community Organization stood at its forefront. Hundreds of people came forward who were willing to help. Therefore, in January 2016, the first phase of the volunteer program “Who will help?” was launched in four cities – Bratislava, Nitra, Žilina and Košice.*

Most of the people who were granted international protection were in the vicinity of these places. They are people not only from Syria, Iraq, but also from Libya, Cameroon, Afghanistan, Yemen, Ukraine and other countries. On March 3, 2017, the Mareena Civic Association was established on the initiative of “Who will help?” Mareena enriched its activities with other programs – educational program and career counselling, community program, awareness raising program. The volunteer program (later the engagement program), primarily intended for people granted international protection, has remained one of its basic pillars to this day. In 2022 Mareena works in Bratislava, Nitra and Košice.

**Through the Engagement Program, Mareena strives to fulfil its vision: Slovakia, which is a safe and dignified home for all, regardless of nationality, ethnicity and religion. At Mareena, we believe that we all build a cohesive and accepting society together, which is why we strive through the Engagement Program:**

- to provide opportunities for the active integration of foreigners into Slovak society,
- to support the local Slovak community and the foreign community in establishing relations,
- raise public awareness of diversity, migration and integration issues.



# Glossary of Basic Terms

**International protection** – asylum or subsidiary protection

**Asylum** – form of protection, which is granted to refugees in Slovakia.

**Subsidiary protection** – a form of protection granted to those asylum seekers who have serious grounds for believing that they would be exposed to a real threat of serious injustice if they return to their country of origin.

**Foreigner** – a person who is not a national of Slovakia.

**Migrant** – a person who, for any reason, has changed the country of his/her permanent, resp. habitual residence and moved from his/her home country to another country for a period of at least three months. However, the Slovak legal system does not use the term migrant, but a foreigner.

**EU citizen** – for the purposes of stays in the territory of the Slovak Republic, he/she is a person who is not a citizen of the Slovak Republic, but is a citizen of a Member State of the European Union, the European Economic Area or a citizen of Switzerland.

**Third country national** – a person who is not a citizen of the Slovak Republic or an EU citizen, including stateless persons.

**Refugee** – a person who, because of legitimate concerns about persecution on racial, national or religious grounds, because of certain political opinions or membership of a particular social group, is outside his/her country of origin and cannot or does not want to return to that country because of those concerns.

**Unaccompanied minor** – a person under the age of eighteen who comes to Slovakia without his/her parents or other legal guardians to whom he/she has been entrusted.

**Asylum applicant** – a person who has applied for asylum or subsidiary protection in Slovakia and is awaiting a decision.

**Asylum seeker** – a foreigner who has fulfilled the criteria of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, thereby being recognized as a refugee and granted international protection in the form of asylum. In the Slovak legal system, a foreigner who has fulfilled the conditions stipulated by the Asylum Act and to whom the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic has granted asylum.

**Beneficiary of volunteering (in short “beneficiary“)** – refugee, sporadically asylum applicant or other foreigner, who is also a third-country national and participates in the Engagement Program – is involved with an individual volunteer.

**Code of Ethics of Volunteering** – a set of binding rules and principles of conduct during volunteering, a collective title for the Code of Ethics for Individual, Community and Expert Volunteering.

**Hate speech** is any public written, verbal, graphic, audio or audiovisual expression which incites, expands or promotes or justifies hatred of individuals or groups of persons on the basis of their sex, nationality, language, religion, ethnicity, colour or origin, sexual orientation, physical disadvantage or other similar characteristic.

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**Mentoring refugees. Handbook for volunteers. EURITA.** Online: [https://www.ritaresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A4\\_MentorHandbook\\_Refugee\\_30Jun20w.pdf](https://www.ritaresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A4_MentorHandbook_Refugee_30Jun20w.pdf)

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## Recommended Resources

### Who Is Our Target Group

Sana Sadat: **I miss the Afghan spring, but my life is already in Slovakia:** <https://fjuzn.sk/chyba-mi-afganska-jar-no-moj-zivot-je-uz-na-slovensku/>

Kamil Yilmaz: **Ever since I was granted asylum, I feel that this country has accepted me:** <https://fjuzn.sk/kamil-yilmaz-odkedy-som-dostal-azyl-citim-ze-ma-tato-krajina-prijala/>

**Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic - asylum and migration - statistics:** <https://www.minv.sk/?statisticky-20>

**KapaCITY** – <https://www.kapacity.sk/>

**League for Human Rights:** <https://www.hrl.sk/sk>

**Centre for Ethnicity and Culture Research CVEK:** <http://cvek.sk/>

## Intercultural Communication

**149 Oriental Catholics:**

<https://dennikn.sk/blog/324669/149-orientalnych-katolikov/?ref=list>

**Juraj Vie: Why we have prejudices**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmEWplHTWLk>

**Marwan Al-Absi, Eva Al-Absi: Woman in Arabic Culture**

<https://kmkt.sk/kontexty/zena-v-arabskej-kulture-1/>

## Individual Volunteering

**UNHCR – refugee education:** <https://www.unhcr.org/sk/3043-vzdelavanie-o-utecencov.html>

**CVEK – Manual to help with the education of foreign children at the time of the corona:** <https://www.nadacia-milanasimecku.sk/files/galleries/kapacity/vzdelavanie%20deti%20cudzincov%20v%20case%20korony.pdf>

## You and Your Environment

**What can I do when I see a fight on the bus:**

<https://dennikn.sk/1485764/co-mozem-urobit-ked-vi-dim-bitku-v-autobuse/?ref=list>

**It Depends on the Facts. We Dispel the Myths about Migration:**

<https://op.europa.eu/sk/publication-detail/-/publication/ffde6848-5042-11e9-a8ed-01aa75ed71a1>

**Tips for books, podcasts, music playlists, movies, series and events that will broaden your horizons and bring you more diversity, you will find here:**

<https://mareena.sk/rozmanita-kniznica>.



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Current contacts for people working in Mareena can be found on the Mareena website in the section [Our Team](#).

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