



# Community Guide

for volunteering

SLOVENIA



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# Community guide

## for volunteering

### Introduction

Migrants<sup>1</sup> lose their social and human capital when they immigrate and settle in a new country where the language and culture are quite different from their own. Volunteering helps migrants to regain their social and human capital and acquire other manifold benefits.

Human capital includes the skills and knowledge we gather in formal and informal learning.

Migrants often face difficulties in transferring their skills into the labour market of the host country<sup>2</sup>.

Volunteering helps to build human capital by enabling migrants to informally learn new skills and to get acquainted with the work culture of the host country.

Volunteer work is a work that an individual does on average 2 to 4 hours per month, without benefits or payment for himself, for the benefit of others or for the common good. Voluntary work can be performed in an informal way, which includes all unorganized forms of assistance, and in an organized manner, within the framework of voluntary organizations and organizations with a voluntary program.

Social capital, built through meaningful interactions between people, facilitates the learning and use of these skills and knowledge. It therefore promotes active and sustainable learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).

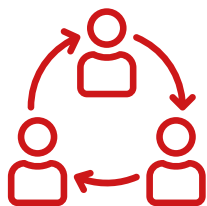
<sup>2</sup> Human capital transferability depends on the similarities in education and labour market standards between the host and source countries (Basilo & Bauer, 2010).

The networks, trust and shared values of social capital bring to life our human values, skills, expertise and knowledge. Social capital results from effective communication. It also provides the social infrastructure support for our lives in a web of flexible networks related to home, work, learning, leisure and public life. It constructs the meaning around the outward image we present to the world. It tells the world who we are and what we are like<sup>3</sup>.

Volunteering and civic engagement, participation in social life and associations among and for migrants play a crucial role in the integration of immigrants in the host country because these are exercises in citizenship<sup>4</sup>.

There is much evidence pointing at the importance of volunteers building their skills and competences through volunteer placements. This is an important step towards sustainable employment.

Personal development involves strengthening of the skills considered essential, such as communication, organisational and team-working skills, and many other so-called soft skills, many of which are not developed through formal education.



The guide focuses on communities, as we believe that we can build a society in which people can benefit from mutual exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences. Volunteering, within this framework, offers an opportunity to take part in local civil society, to work and socialise with local people from a wide range of backgrounds, to learn about the systems and culture of the host society, to put existing skills into good use and to learn new skills that may facilitate active participation in the labour market.

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<sup>3</sup> Falk, I. (2000). Human Capital and Social Capital: What's the difference? *Adult Learning Commentary*, (28). <https://ala.asn.au/public/commentaries/Falk1810.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Marelli, P. (2017). Solidarietà e impegno civico. Quando fare volontariato è un esercizio di cittadinanza. *Vdossier*, (2). <https://www.csvlombardia.it/milano/post/solidarieta-e-impegno-civicoquando-fare-volontariato-e-un-esercizio-di-cittadinanza/>

## Target group and content

The target groups are:

- people working in organisations focused on research, recruitment, training, support and evaluation of volunteers, and
- potential volunteers who want to engage in volunteering.

The guide is divided into three sections:

### 1. Volunteering

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The focus of the first section is on volunteers: it points out most of the challenges and goals awaiting the volunteer and describes different types of existing volunteering activities and volunteer opportunities for migrants. In addition, it offers practical information about voluntary work and working hours and provides some tips about performing as a volunteer.

### 2. Organisations

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The second section focuses on the NGOs and associations willing to host volunteers. It lists things the organisation needs to consider before hosting migrants in the volunteering role during their participation and once the volunteer experience is over.

Diversity Management focused on managing diversity in order to avoid misunderstandings and foster communication and engagement ensuring an inclusive environment.

### 3. Communication

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Finally, the guide includes a Communication section with examples for good and effective communication and solutions to challenges that may arise.



# 1. VOLUNTEERING

## Why volunteer?

- **Helping others:** Everyone can dedicate some of their free time to help those in need. You surely poses knowledge, experience and skills that you can contribute to improve the life of others and the community.
- **Opening new horizons:** volunteering can be a great experience for sharing cultures and traditions, learning the language, developing new skills and meeting people from the local community and improve your role in it.
- **Volunteering allows you to acquire new skills:** You will get a chance to learn new skills and to understand what you are good at, who you are, what you want and what you are capable of. Whether it's a new language, a new work environment or a new skill, you're sure to learn a lot. The skills you will acquire will enrich you and will be useful in your life, work and relationships with others.
- **Volunteering as a job opportunity:** Volunteering can turn into a great opportunity for work and study. Getting to know other people and becoming part of such a cohesive social network creates very strong human connections. While you are helping others, you enhance your career.
- **Volunteering is being part of a community:** When you help others, you're not alone. You belong to a community and that enables you to integrate and find your social identity.
- **Useful use of free time:** when you do not know what to do in your free time and you are bored, you can use it very usefully by volunteering. This will give you a sense of meaning and usefulness.

# Do you want to volunteer?

Here you can find some helpful information and useful steps to figure out *“How to find the right opportunity for you.”*



## Identifying your purpose

A certain affinity between the volunteer and the “spirit” of the association offering a volunteer programme is crucial in terms of values, working style, and aims. Without this affinity of interests and values it is not easy to achieve good results for the organisation nor for the volunteer. First step: examine of your skills - both practical and professional - before starting your volunteering experience.



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## What kind of volunteer work are you looking for?

You can choose among different areas, depending on your preferences: ecological, artistic, archaeological, social, emergency response & disaster relief, human rights, sport and recreation, vulnerable groups, tourism, nature and animals, education, health, children and young people, the elderly, translations, administration, etc.



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## What amount of time to dedicate for volunteering?

Most volunteering programs require volunteers to stay on a certain amount of time to ensure a positive impact on projects. General conditions such as working hours, coverage of expenses and duration of projects vary from organisation to organisation.



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## Volunteering abroad?

You can also volunteer abroad, within the EU, if you are between 18 and 30 years old. There is a programme called European Solidarity Unit, which will help you with the arrangements and will cover the costs of your volunteering experience abroad. More information at [www.esu.si](http://www.esu.si) and [www.voluntariat.si](http://www.voluntariat.si).



## Where to look for volunteer opportunities



### Word of mouth

Exchange of information among people who already have the volunteering experience. Ask NGOs you already know if you can join them as a volunteer.



### Social media

Finding the right opportunity for you using social media platforms (e.g. Facebook groups dedicated to volunteers).

There is also an online platform for volunteers and voluntary organisations named Prostovoljstvo.org ([www.prostovoljstvo.org](http://www.prostovoljstvo.org)) to help you find your next volunteering experience and find NGO's of your interest.



### Centres / organisations

If you already identified the centre or organisation you find suitable for your volunteering aims, you can join them in order to receive updates regarding new opportunities for volunteering. Moreover, they inform volunteers about all the opportunities offered by other organisations.

## Where can you do volunteer work?

- **Slovene Philanthropy**, Cesta Dolomitskega odreda 11, 1000 Ljubljana, Tel: 01 430 12 88, E-mail: [info@filantropija.org](mailto:info@filantropija.org)  
Partizanska cesta 29a, 2000 Maribor, Tel: 051 730 492,  
Web page: <https://www.filantropija.org/>
- **Association Odnos**, Einspielerjeva ulica 6, 1000 Ljubljana, Tel: 041 552 628, E-mail: [drustvoodnos@gmail.com](mailto:drustvoodnos@gmail.com)  
Glavni trg 17b, 2000 Maribor, 3rd Floor, Tel: 031 773 227,  
Web page: <https://www.odnos.si/>

Slovene Philanthropy is the manager of online platform Prostovoljstvo.org. When looking for a volunteering opportunity, a good first step is to search the platform [prostovoljstvo.org](http://prostovoljstvo.org). It offers relevant information on volunteering in Slovenia for volunteers and for voluntary organisations. It provides information on kinds of organisations you can volunteer with and types of voluntary work. In the Database of current volunteering opportunities <https://www.prostovoljstvo.org/za-prostovoljce/posredovalnica-prostovoljskih-del> you can look for voluntary work based on field, target group or organisation you want to work with. Volunteering opportunities suitable for foreigners (mainly because of the language barrier) are flagged.

# How to act when you volunteer?

It's important for the volunteer to have some tips before starting their volunteering in order to have a positive experience:



## Communication

First talk to the organisation you already know and ask questions about working hours and other elements of voluntary work. Be clear about any expectations you have and be transparent and honest from the start. It is important to ask for relevant policies (for example safeguarding or policies regarding data protection) and regulations of the organisation. While volunteering, it's also very important to talk about any problems that may arise or anything you're unhappy with. Keep in touch with the coordinator regularly.



## Commitment

Pay attention to your work schedule, be on time and complete your assigned tasks in the most productive way possible. Being proactive during your work exchange is fundamental. Each organisation has its own rules that every volunteer needs to follow; do only what you agreed to do. Stick to the agreed time schedule because people and the organisation will count on you. Treat everyone respectfully and correctly, regardless of his or her situation and position.



## Focus

Cultural diversity is what makes the world so special. While volunteering remember that you are in a place with a different culture that needs to be treated with respect. When it comes to culture, there is no right or wrong, just differences. Live the experience: volunteering can be a great experience for sharing cultures and traditions, learning the language, developing new skills and meeting people from all over the world.

## Work activity allowance


In Slovenia volunteers can receive a special benefit if they collect financial social assistance. They are entitled to a supplement – work activity allowance that increases basic financial social assistance by 26 %.

The work activity allowance is a supplement to financial social assistance and is intended to encourage people to work or to keep their employment. Work activity allowance therefore forms only part of the financial social assistance and is not a stand-alone benefit.

The allowance is granted if the following conditions are met:

- The organisation which concluded an agreement with the volunteer must be listed in a special register – check with the organisation;
- Volunteer work must be performed monthly.

When submitting the application for financial social assistance at the respective Centre for Social Work (CSD), the volunteer submits a copy of the volunteering agreement. Volunteers who are already receiving financial social assistance must notify the CSD about the change. They must fill in the notification form and submit a copy of the volunteering agreement to the CSD.

 **IMPORTANT:** Since January 2020, the Centres for Social Work have been gradually introducing mandatory monthly reporting on the number of volunteer hours. The volunteer must bring a certificate of completed hours in the previous month, issued by the organisation, on a specially prescribed form by the 8th of the month.

Understand that any abuse is punishable by withdrawal of the allowance and suspension of the right to financial social assistance.

## Experiences & examples of volunteering initiatives by migrants in Slovenia

The Slovene Philanthropy within the project **Let's get to know each other** assisted the refugees with integration into Slovenian community. The project aided a group of young Eritreans living in Slovenia actively help their community (other Eritrean and refugees) build bridges between the refugees and local people living in Slovenia.

The young Eritrean volunteers organised nine trips around Slovenia and a traditional celebration of the Eritrean New Year.

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The project had the most impact on asylum seekers and refugees, because it enabled them to familiarize themselves with Slovenian diversity and cultural and natural heritage. The many treasures of Slovenia were a surprise to them, helping them identify with and take responsibility for their new environment (one of the deported asylum seekers said that he is leaving "the most beautiful and kind" country in the world and that he will return as soon as his papers are in order).

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The impression was so strong because the young volunteers themselves organized the events and presented their stories to the local people. Slovenians got a clear message that refugees are willing to take steps towards them and that the local people should reciprocate.

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Their learning experience was exceptional as well. With every activity they required less and less assistance.

Another very good example of volunteering is the **Bicycling network of Maribor**, an association organizing events - Friday workshops of bicycles repairs in which everyone can repair their bike. It offers migrants the possibility to turn an old bike to a working one. More importantly, it gives them the opportunity to interact with local people and spent their time doing something useful, as well as repair a bike that they can use and be mobile in the local environment.

The regular events and active participation fostered the decision of many migrants to become volunteers. They gained the skills in repairing bikes and are helping others, mainly local people, to repair theirs.

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**Many volunteering examples come from migrants themselves.** To avoid being passive they join organisations on their own initiative and offer their much needed skills - translating from their native languages which are mostly uncommon in Slovenia. They are helping in various ways: in schools when migrant children start classes, at the doctor's, in organisations with their activities etc.

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Migrant volunteering resulted in some useful and much needed tools, such as Slovenian-Arabic dictionary, a small booklet to ease attending the classes for children and for their teachers who most often are not adequately prepared to work with migrant child not knowing the local language.

Volunteering also resulted in job offering for the migrants.

## Testimonials

*"When I help someone, I feel good, so I help people. This is volunteering and it means committing to other people. Volunteering is relaxing for me. It's not just for the people I help, it's also for me... To feel good. I receive respect from everyone. I feel good when I see that I have helped someone."*

Refugee from Eritrea, 24 years, volunteering with the elderly

*"I decided to volunteer because I like to help others. The experience I get from this is also very important to me. I translate from Arabic. It gives me great pleasure to be able to help Arabic speakers understand the new situation."*

Young refugee from Iraq, 19 years, volunteering as a translator of Arabic

*I am a volunteer so I can help improve my language skills. I volunteer at Philanthropy because I like it here and because I feel good here.*

*As a volunteer, I help in the office, with childcare, escorting, translating (smaller scope, orally), I also helped with moving.*

Volunteer from Syria, 20 years old, various volunteering works



## 2. ORGANISATION

Offering the opportunity to volunteer within an organisation can be crucial to help migrants to become part of a new reality, to feel fulfilled on a personal level and get the opportunity to help others, thus creating a “circle of solidarity” in which those who have been helped in turn help others while helping themselves.

This section consists of three parts, each addressing a certain period in the volunteering experience: 1) before, 2) during, and 3) after. It offers advice for the volunteer manager.

In order to fully exploit the contribution of volunteers and professional staff to improve the quality and social impact of organisations while making volunteering a real experience of growth, it becomes crucial to adopt strategies and tools for the management of volunteers. This makes it possible to:


- meet the aspirations of volunteers and the needs of the association;
- clearly identify the personal attributes required of a volunteer for a certain task;
- understand the motivations behind the choices the volunteers make and how to bring them back in case of disaffection;
- promote a sense of responsibility and involvement of volunteers in the organisation;
- improve the overall work of the organisation.

In fact, in order to create the most positive experience possible for a volunteer, the organisation should designate a person responsible for the volunteer’s journey. This includes support during the orientation process, overseeing the volunteers’ tasks and helping them overcome any problems or challenges they face. The mentor will be the key person for the volunteer. She or he is responsible for providing personal support. This person should be a good listener, reliable, attentive, understanding, etc.

# Before

## Assessment:

- identify volunteer work that migrants can do
- identify volunteer's existing skills and knowledge required for the role
- establish goals for guidance
- identify abilities and accomplishments
- define goals and objectives specifying new knowledge or abilities of volunteers as a result of a learning activity
- prepare inclusion plan for volunteers (training, mentorship etc.)
- develop a timetable
- prepare materials
- specify the location and transportation details

 NB: Make sure that there is a designated person providing help for volunteers on their path. Migrant volunteers should have a contact person with which to raise any issues relating to their voluntary work.

# During

## Welcoming environment

During volunteering the organisation should offer volunteers the opportunity to exchange experiences with other volunteers.

## Set Rules

It's important to set the rules at the beginning of the volunteering to avoid misunderstandings between participants and the hosting organisation (e.g. working hours, location). Moreover, it is important to give volunteers clear and comprehensive role descriptions and to explain the regulations, policies, and complaints mechanisms.

## Mission and objective of the organisation

Clearly explain the mission and objectives of your organisation to make volunteers aware of their tasks and roles.



### Being precise about the role and tasks

It is important to offer all volunteers the same training opportunities as paid staff, especially where both operate in the same environment or carry out similar activities.

### Supporting and mentoring volunteers

Volunteering can be hard and challenging. It is necessary to support volunteers with their voluntary work. Make sure you meet regularly and have mentorship meetings to offer support to volunteers during their volunteering experience.

## After

### EVALUATION



After volunteering a feedback session with the volunteer manager of the organisation and the volunteer should be held in order to exchange views and personal impressions of the whole process.

If the volunteer is involved with the organisation for a longer period of time it is advisable to have regular mentorship meetings to evaluate volunteer's work and provide support.

### FOLLOW-UP (next steps)



Individual coaching in order to plan future voluntary work of the volunteer. It is advisable to hold a meeting at the end of the volunteering period for the volunteers and the organisation staff to share their experiences, thoughts and information in order to find good job opportunities or to plan the future of volunteers.

### CERTIFICATION



After volunteering the head of the organisation should issue a certification attesting that the volunteering experience was successfully concluded.

## Obstacles to volunteering

Lack of participation of migrants in voluntary work may result from the following factors:

- Language: Because migrants don't speak the local language (well), they are often too unsure of themselves to engage in the community or volunteer. It is true that at least basic knowledge of Slovenian language is needed for most voluntary work.
- Migrants are oftentimes not aware of the possibilities to do voluntary work, because they lack information on the activities they could participate in.
- Migrants often don't know how volunteer associations work (i.e. selection procedures, working hours, education possibilities, and responsibilities) and may therefore be hesitant to join.
- The misconception among migrants is that being involved in voluntary work usually requires great effort, both in time and energy. Some migrants are simply not in the position, economically or socially (e.g. difficulties in arranging child-care), to engage in voluntary work. But many organisations reimburse the travel costs and the average time volunteers spend helping others is 2 to 4 hours per week.
- Some organisations require specific knowledge and personal attributes and may not be appropriate for all migrants.
- Migrants can, similar to local volunteers, have prejudices about working with people from different cultures and have difficulties in overcoming barriers.
- Some voluntary organisations in Slovenia insure their volunteers in case of accident. This insurance does not cover the whole health insurance but only costs occurring if the volunteer gets hurt during voluntary work.
- Migrants regardless the status can volunteer.
- Lack of consideration and sometimes belief – by officials, voluntary organisations and agencies that promote volunteering – that migrants could be potential volunteers<sup>5</sup>.
- Lack of effort on the side of NGO's with regard to diversification of their recruitment process giving more opportunities to migrants to actively participate in all aspects of NGO work.
- Lack of financial stability of voluntary organisations, which cannot afford experienced and trained staff that would manage the voluntary work and volunteers.
- Migrant organisations, local and national government, volunteer-involving organisations and organisations that promote volunteerism should make every effort to increase the demand for and supply of volunteering opportunities for migrants to promote the social and economic inclusion of migrants.

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<sup>5</sup> Münz, 2006; Schugurensky, 2005; Wilson & Lewis, 2006

## Diversity management

**Managing diversity** can enable an organisation to achieve unexpected efficiency and goals, simply thanks to some daily attention and actions. Diversity is a very broad concept and also very delicate to deal with. Each individual has a different perception of things and a different view of the world. In human relations there is no universal approach, because human beings differ in their attitudes and behaviours.

### Why diversity matters?



Diversity fuels innovation and creativity, improving all problem-solving processes, making new ideas emerge more quickly.

Diversity reduces conflicts between groups and improves collaboration in the workplace. Moreover, working together also reduces stereotypes and prejudices towards people from different cultures.

The aim of Diversity Management is to give every worker the opportunity to bring out their full potential and skills that reflect the gender, race, and nationality; managing cultural diversity<sup>6</sup> is at the heart of Diversity Management. A worker/volunteer worker free to express herself/himself in the workplace will have a different conception of the work and the environment, being more efficient and more productive. An important step in the process of introducing diversity in an organisation is changing its working culture. This process of diversity management should result in a situation in which every member of an organisation is able to perform to the best of his or her abilities while maintaining his cultural values.

The aim of this process should therefore not be to assimilate different cultures into a dominant one, but to create a dominant diverse culture.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO (2001, November). Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID%3D13179%26URL\\_DO%3DDO\\_TOPIC%26URL\\_SECTION%3D201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID%3D13179%26URL_DO%3DDO_TOPIC%26URL_SECTION%3D201.html)

# Checklist

**1.**

Introduce a policy explicitly stating your commitment to diverse human resources and explaining how you intend to improve representation of migrants at all levels.

**2.**

Emphasise the benefits of diverse human resources and encourage everyone to be committed to make it work.

**3.**

Be critical towards traditional practices and procedures. Stay open for diversity and new opportunities.

**4.**

Communicate with staff and volunteers, develop a more open exchange of good practices within the organisation, give migrants the opportunity to contribute.



**5.**

Provide training for working in a multi-cultural setting to the staff at all levels, including the board level.

**6.**

Promote migrants to managerial positions and give them access to personal support.

**7.**

Offer proper working conditions and equal benefits to all employees and volunteers.

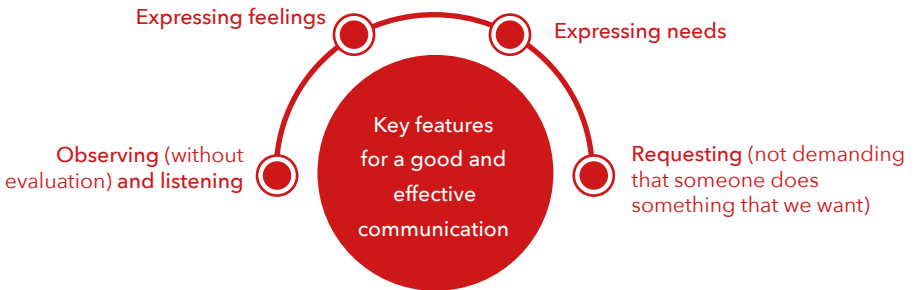
**8.**

Migrant organisations, local and national government, volunteer-involving organisations and organisations that promote volunteerism should make every effort to increase the demand for and supply of volunteering opportunities for migrants to promote the social and economic inclusion of migrants.

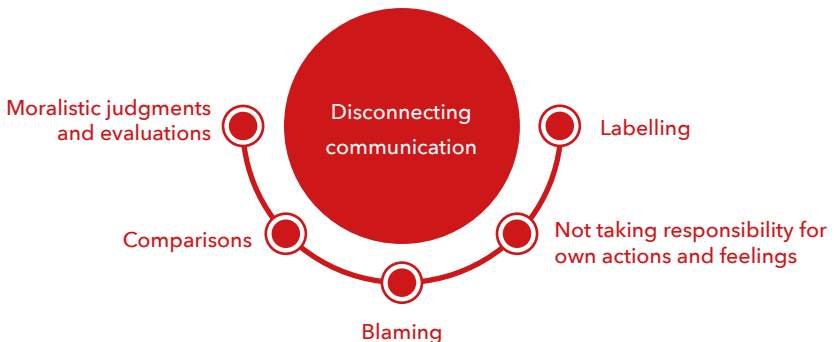


## 3. COMMUNICATION

Communication between the volunteer and the hosting organisation is crucial. It is important to establish a safe and accepting environment in which a person can open and express himself/herself honestly. When two different cultures meet, misunderstandings can arise.



On the other hand, disconnecting communication that can create conflicts, is characterised by:



It is important to keep some points in mind when communicating with people from different backgrounds. In many cases, language and other aspects of communication can differ greatly between cultures making communication more challenging.

Other challenges may arise during volunteering, for instance around the recognition of the institutional role of the volunteer manager or the expression of real expectations of the volunteers.

The issue of recognizing the institutional role of the volunteer manager, especially if the manager is female, is often based on people's cultural background, but it can usually be resolved with time and with the consolidation of trust and deeper appreciation of one another. Regarding the expression of real expectations, motivations, and doubts it is crucial to clearly express the purpose of the activities. For example, taking part in a training course can be a different experience for trainers and for participants; for the trainers the aim is to prepare people for a future job, while the participants sometimes expect trainers to take action to find a job vacancy after the training is concluded. Migrants often experience fears and feelings of inadequacy and are reluctant to make their real expectations, availability, and interests known.



Volunteer managers must also be able to convey their respect for the family's culture and religion without making the family feel inferior or judged. The trust is crucial; without it, family members will be reluctant to share their true feelings. The role of the mediator is very important, as the primary purpose of mediation is to foster contacts, exchanges and interactions between different cultures, while respecting diversity.



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