



**COUNTRY REPORT SLOVENIA**  
**“SITUATION AND NEEDS OF THE VOLUNTEERS WORKING WITH REFUGEES**  
**AND ASYLUM SEEKERS”**

**Contribution to Intellectual Output 1**  
**INTEGRA INŠTITUT, Inštitut za razvoj človekovih potencialov Velenje**

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# 1 Context and background of migration

## 1.1 Main characteristics of the migrants presence: an overview – numbers, evolution and trends

### Migration

In 2016, 16,623 inhabitants migrated to Slovenia, while 15,572 moved out of the country. Compared to the year 2015, the number of immigrations had increased by 8% and the number of emigration by 4%. The net migration in 2016 was the highest after 2011.

The net migration of Slovenian citizens of has been negative for the seventeenth year in a row. The net migration of foreign citizens, on the other hand, has been positive for the eighth consecutive year.

Slovenian citizens come mostly from Germany, while foreign citizens mostly come from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The most common country of previous residence for immigrated Slovene citizens in 2016 was Germany and Austria, followed by Croatia and Italy.

In 2016, the highest number of foreigners moved to our country from Bosnia and Herzegovina (35% of all immigrated foreign citizens), while for the rest of them the most frequent countries of former residence were Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia and Macedonia. Slovenian citizens from Slovenia emigrated mostly to Austria, whereas foreign citizens moved mostly to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### Refugees

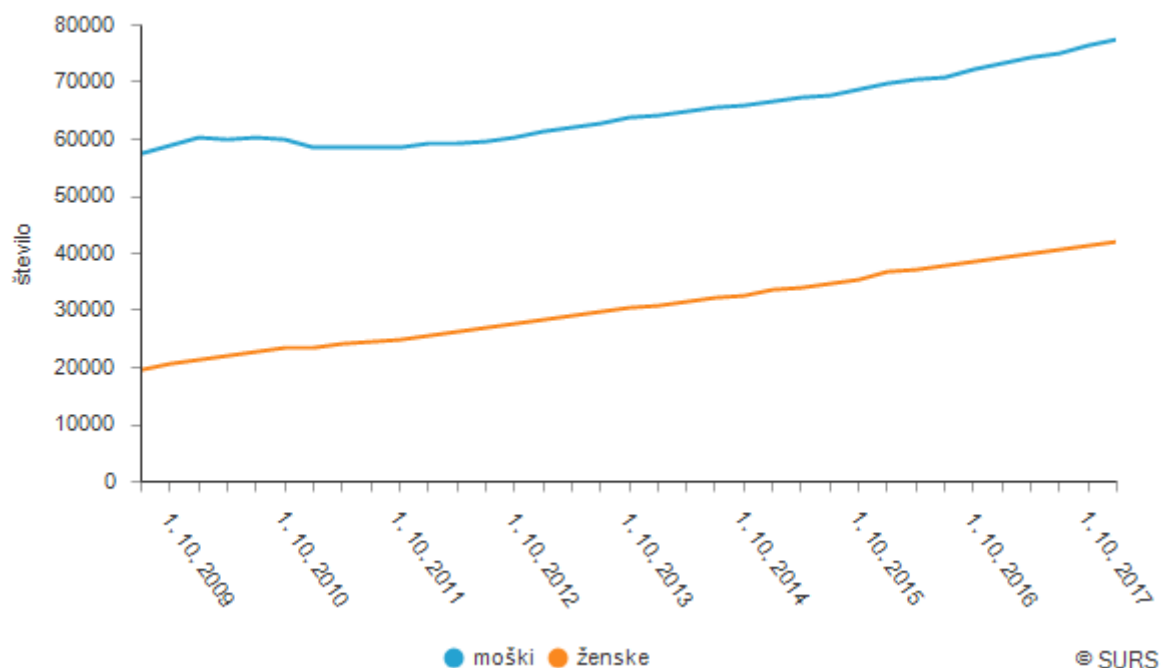
Apart from the “old” situation that is connected with the Yugoslavian war, Slovenia has also been hit to some extent by the “refugee wave” that swept over Europe in the years 2015 and 2016. The following paragraphs deal with this situation.

In the period between 17 October 2015 and 25 January 2016 422,724 migrants crossed Slovenia. Till March 2016 that number grew to 477,791 migrants, most of whom were continuing their journey to Austria and other Northern and Western European countries.

In Slovenia, 1,239 asylum applications by refugees were received in 2016 according to UNHCR. Most of them came from Afghanistan, Syria and from Iraq. A total of 451 decisions have been made on initial applications, an around 30 percent were answered positively. 70 percent of asylum applications have been rejected in the first instance. The most successful have been applications of refugees from Eritrea and from Kazakhstan.

In 2017, the number of foreigners accounted for 5.8% of the total population of Slovenia. Also, the number of women among foreign citizens is increasing.

### Foreign citizens of Slovenia



Source: SURS Moški = men ženske = women

### Population by group and sex, Slovenia

	1. 10. 2016	1. 1. 2017	1. 4. 2017	1. 7. 2017	1. 10. 2017
<b>Inhabitants</b>	<b>2.065.879</b>	<b>2.065.895</b>	<b>2.064.836</b>	<b>2.066.161</b>	<b>2.065.890</b>
Foreign citizens	112.767	114.438	115.841	117.636	119.633
Men	73.353	74.314	75.222	76.329	77.448
Women	39.414	40.124	40.619	41.307	42.185

Source: SURS

International protection in the Republic of Slovenia stands for the **refugee status** and the status of subsidiary protection.

**Refugee status** is granted to a person who can justify and authenticate that they are in danger in their home country due to belonging to a particular race or ethnic group, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The recognition of refugee status is valid as a permanent residence permit in the Republic of Slovenia.

**Subsidiary protection** is granted to a person who does not fulfil the conditions for the refugee status, but displays substantiated and credible reasons that imply serious damage (death penalty or execution, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment) upon return to their country of origin. We also grant subsidiary protection in case of a serious and individual threat against the life or freedom of the applicant due to arbitrary violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict in the country of origin. The recognition of subsidiary protection is valid as a temporary residence permit in the Republic of Slovenia for as long as this protection lasts.

People with recognized international protection have guaranteed accommodation in their own integration houses or other appropriate institutions. The recognition of refugee status is valid as a permanent residence permit in the Republic of Slovenia, while the recognition of subsidiary protection is valid as a temporary residence permit in the Republic of Slovenia.

**Third-country citizens** stand for third-country citizens (all countries, except the EEA member states, which include the member states of the European Union, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein), who want to enter and reside in the Republic of Slovenia for tourist, business, personal or other visit. Before entering the Republic of Slovenia, they must acquire a visa.

When a person intends to work or get a job in Slovenia, they must obtain a **unified residence and work permit**, which allows them to enter, reside and work or get a job in the country.

**Daily migrant workers** are people who work in Slovenia as a daily migrant. They receive a single permit for a daily working migrant.

Another single permit can be issued due to highly qualified employment - **the EU Blue Card**. It is intended for persons living in Slovenia because of highly qualified employment. The EU Blue Card is issued for three months longer than the validity of the employment contract, but for a maximum of two years.

A person may acquire a **residence permit for Slovenia, if they are admitted for studies** or other forms of education.

**Family reunion** is a concept that allows a person or persons to reside in Slovenia. If a person has been residing in Slovenia for a sufficient time and has a temporary residence permit issued that is valid for one year or has a valid permanent residence permit, they can reunite their family.

## 1.2 Recent situation of the “refugee crisis” in Slovenia – numbers, evolution and trends of asylum seekers and refugees

The 20th century is known as the century of refugees. It is estimated that more than 250 million refugees have had to leave their homeland since 1900. By the end of the Second World War the refugee flows were mostly concentrated on Europe. Refugees were leaving their homes because of war, oppression due to belonging to a particular race, religious, ethnic, political or social group, as well as hunger and various natural disasters. In the 1990s, they were joined by around 3 million refugees from the former Yugoslavia. As much as half of the world's refugee population are children and adolescents, who may never see their homeland again.

In the case of Slovenia, specifically in the period of former Yugoslavia, there was mostly internal migration, as the migrants came mostly from the countries of former Yugoslavia. The refugee wave from the Balkan wars after the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991 hit Slovenia shortly after the end of the war of independence in the summer of 1991, because at that time a real war had begun in Croatia. Around 600,000 people had to leave the country and a part of them decided to run to Slovenia already in the first few months of conflict. While there were around 2,500 Croatian refugees registered in Slovenia at the beginning of September 1991, there were already 20,000 one month later, and the most, 23,000, in December 1991.

In order to receive the first war wave from the collapsed Yugoslavia, our country established **eleven processing centres**. As the number of refugees began to decline in the first half of 1992, the centres were gradually closed.

It is interesting that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) did not even consider the people who had fled from the war in Croatia refugees. At the time of their arrival and the peak of the wave, Slovenia and Croatia were not yet internationally recognized countries, therefore these people were seen as internally displaced, meaning as people who left their homes because of war or some other reason but stayed in their own country.

A much higher number of refugees came to Slovenia from Bosnia and Herzegovina. As many as 2.2 million people, which is half of the population, left their homes during the war. They started to arrive in Slovenia after the start of the Bosnian bloodshed in the spring of 1992. The most came in 1993. At that time, there were 45,000 refugees from BiH registered at the Red Cross. In addition to that, there were approximately 25,000 unregistered refugees living with relatives or friends in Slovenia.

In addition to approximately two million citizens, Slovenia hosted around 70,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. They represented about three percent of the total population.

Most, more than seven tenths, were Muslims, as they were called in Yugoslavia, or Bosnians, as they are called now.

Among them were almost only women and children. Less than one tenth of the BiH refugees were from the category that is usually assessed as men (and boys) capable of combat, that is, aged 16 to 60 years. This probably means that the great majority of men fought in the war.

Shortly after the start of the third Balkan war, one could sense that sooner or later, BiH would be the site of the bloodiest bursts, which is why Slovenia had already been preparing for the refugees before the arrival of the first in April 1992. They established 64 processing centres.

### 1.3 Asylum system: overview of the asylum procedure and reception centers/system

As a signatory to the Geneva Convention and a member of the EU, the Republic of Slovenia is obliged to offer international protection to those individuals who do not receive protection in the country of their nationality or permanent residence (the country of origin).

**International protection or asylum** can be applied for by a foreigner or a person without citizenship, who considers that they are systematically prosecuted in their country of origin, because of their political beliefs or because of their religious, racial, national or ethnic affiliation.

A foreigner must apply for international protection in the shortest possible time after entering the Republic of Slovenia. This is followed by a procedure in which the police check their identity, the path they used to come to the Republic of Slovenia and hand them over to **those competent in an asylum home** where a foreigner submits an application for international protection.

Applicants for international protection have the right to residency in the Republic of Slovenia. This right allows the applicant to move freely throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Slovenia.

In procedures under the International Protection Act at the Administrative and Supreme Court, the applicants are entitled to free legal aid. In the event that the applicant is granted international protection, they acquire the right to assistance in joining the Slovenian society, which is provided by the Government Office for the support and integration of migrants.

For the accommodation of applicants for international protection, the state (Government office for the support and integration of migrants) organizes and implements health care and preventive medical examinations before they are placed in an asylum centre. They are also provided with psychosocial care.

In Slovenia there are the following centres:

- the first unit of the Ljubljana asylum centre
- the second unit of the Ljubljana asylum centre
- the Logatec asylum centre

The asylum centre consists of six departments: for families, for single men, for unaccompanied minors, for single women, for people with special needs and a restricted movement section that is currently not in use. In total it can accommodate 203 people.

There are also two **integration houses**, in Ljubljana and Maribor, which have been operating since 2006 and can offer accommodation to approximately 60 people with recognized international protection.

The asylum centre hosts various daily activities, such as: Slovenian and English language courses, sports activities, creative workshops for children and adults, excursions and visits to interesting places around Slovenia, computer courses, photographic courses, editing of the internal newspaper The Voice of Asylum. They are conducted by the psychosocial service of the asylum centre and various nongovernmental organizations.

Overview of accommodation on 19.3.2018

Applicants for international protection

ASYLUM CENTRE	95
BRANCH OF THE ASYLUM HOUSE ON KOTNIKOVA STREET IN LJUBLJANA	58
BRANCH OF THE ASYLUM CENTRE IN LOGATEC	23
YOUTH CRISIS CENTRE RADOVLJICA	1
STUDENT HOME POSTOJNA	13
PRISON, HOUSE ARREST	7
IMMIGRATION CENTRE VELIKI OTOK	19
DISPLACED	51
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>

Persons with recognized international protection

INTEGRATION HOUSE LJUBLJANA	14
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INTEGRATION HOUSE MARIBOR	21
BRANCH ON KOTNIKOVA STREET IN LJUBLJANA	1
STUDENT HOMES	10
FOSTER CARE	0
PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION	511
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>557</b>

Accommodated applicants for international protection in the Republic of Slovenia

Applicants for international protection in the Republic of Slovenia that were provided for, by year:

<b>until 2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
246	357	304	272	385	277	1308	1453

The most frequent origin countries of the applicants for international protection are:

Afghanistan	Syria	Iraq	Pakistan	Iran	Turkey
419	281	120	104	78	60



## 2 The state of art of volunteers' work with asylum seekers and refugees

### 2.1 Main characteristics of volunteering "phenomenon" in Slovenia

The survey "The size, scope and role of the private non-profit sector in Slovenia" (2006) notes that in 2004, there were between 280,000 and 350,000 active volunteers in Slovenia, which amounted to 1,179,756 hours of work, representing a workload of 7,125 full-time workers. On average, volunteers performed 149 hours a month in each organization, which is roughly 84% of an employed full-time worker.

Volunteers are often involved in the work of non-governmental organizations, such as societies, institutions and various foundations. As many as 80.6% of NGOs do not have a single employee and operate exclusively as volunteer organizations. Volunteers in non-governmental organizations in Slovenia complement or replace the work of regular employees and represent the driving force of the non-governmental sector in Slovenia. More and more volunteers are also involved in the activities of public institutions.

In regards to the number of volunteers, both the European Union and Slovenia have seen an increase in the number of active volunteers.

Different results were presented by the Study on Volunteering in the European Union (2011), which states that Slovenia has a relatively low level of involvement in volunteering, since only 10-19% of adults are involved in volunteer activities. Countries with 40% of adults that participate in volunteer activities includes Austria, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom,

The main actors of volunteering in Slovenia

- Ministry of Public Administration in cooperation with NGOs - systematically monitors volunteering.
- Movit Institute educates and awards accreditations in the field of European Voluntary Service.
- Voluntariat Institute promotes and implements projects in the field of volunteering.
- Slovenian Philantropy -main actor in volunteering and education of volunteering among the NGO's, providing psy-social support for immigrants and refugees
- Youth Council Slovenia promotes volunteering among young people.

The National Committee of RS for state awards annual state prizes in the area of volunteering.

### 2.2 The role of volunteers in organizations hosting/working with refugees and asylum seekers

The response of the non-governmental sector and volunteer actions has increased during the refugee crisis. The Slovenian government, which is not based on volunteering, also took action. In

June 2017, the Republic of Slovenia government office for the support and integration of migrants was established. The Office connects and coordinates work tasks of other state bodies, as well as non-governmental and international organizations in the field of care and integration of migrants. Otherwise, the non-governmental sector, with volunteer-oriented actions, was largely responsible for material, social, housing and mental care for refugees. Slovenia's non-governmental sector and volunteer work comprehensively cover the area of support and assistance to refugees and immigrants, with the following activities:

- humanitarian aid,
- activism,
- human rights monitoring,
- counselling, lobbying , pressure on authorities,
- legal aid,
- informing refugees,
- awareness,
- global education (awareness),
- psychosocial help,
- translation,
- religious care,
- cultural mediation.

A number of organizations in Slovenia give refugees and immigrants humanitarian aid: Humanitarian Charity Society UP Jesenice, Odnos society, Humanitarian Society ADRA Slovenia, Red Cross Slovenia, Slovene Philanthropy, Slovenian Caritas, and Association of Friends of Youth Slovenia. Volunteer work in the form of humanitarian aid through the distribution of food and various civil initiatives, the following organizations are very strong: Amnesty International Slovenia, Civil Initiative Staknimo glave, Humanitas Society, Association for the Development of Voluntary Work Novo mesto, Institute for African Studies, KROG Institute.

Many organizations help refugee issues with advocacy:

- Amnesty International Slovenia
- Association Odnos
- Institute for African Studies
- Peace Institute
- PIC
- Sloga
- Slovenian Philanthropy
- Slovene Karitas
- Unicef Slovenia
- Povod Institute
- Association of Friends of Youth of Slovenia.

Voluntary and free legal aid for refugees and immigrants is also helpful:

- Humanitarian Charity Society UP Jesenice
- Association for the Development of Volunteer Work Novo Mesto
- PIC, etc.

Information is also very important, and many organizations voluntarily take part in assisting and supporting refugees and immigrants with this. Many organizations are engaged in several activities at the same time. Some organizations have been active for a long time, among them Red Cross Slovenia, which has been acting as a humanitarian organization for 150 years and has been organizing many refugee assistance actions (eg collection of clothing and basic consumer goods). Amnesty International Slovenia has also been operating for a long time as an organization for human rights, as well as providing information, awareness, concrete assistance and care for vulnerable social groups, such as refugees and immigrants.

Help and support is also offered to refugee and immigrant children. This is done in the form of psychosocial assistance, conducted by the Slovene philanthropy. **For this purpose, a Psychosocial Help Manual for Children Refugees was created.**

In summary, we can say that the most exposed and those with the greatest extent of assistance and support in the field of refugees and immigrants are the following organizations:

- Amnesty International Slovenije – Amnesty international Slovenia
- Človekoljubno dobredelno društvo UP Jesenice - Humanitarian Charity Society UP Jesenice
- Društvo Humanitas - Society Humanitas
- Društvo Odnos - Odnos Society
- Humanitarno društvo ADRA Slovenija - Humanitarian society ADRA Slovenia
- Inštitut za afriške študije - Institute for African Studies
- Mirovni inštitut - Peace Institute
- OVCA, Društvo za osveščanje in varstvo pred diskriminacijo - OVCA – society for awareness and safety against discrimination
- Pravno-informacijski center nevladnih organizacij – PIC - Legal-Informational Centre for NGOs
- Rdeči križ Slovenije - Red cross Slovenia
- Sezam - Sesame
- SLOGA – Platforma NVO za razvoj, globalno učenje in humanitarno pomoč, SLOGA – platform NGO for development, global education and humanitarian aid
- Slovenska filantropija -Slovenian Philanthropy
- Slovenska fundacija za UNICEF - Slovenian foundation for UNICEF
- Zavod GLOBAL – Global Institution

In the government sector, which is not based on volunteer work, the Republic of Slovenia Government Communication Office has set up a special website ([http://www.vlada.si/pomoc\\_beguncem/](http://www.vlada.si/pomoc_beguncem/)) with all the essential information on current government activities related to refugees. The Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief (URSZR) also cooperates with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which along with material assistance also provides translators and consultants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is the leading international intergovernmental organization in the field of migration, also operates in the area of humanitarian affairs.

## 3 Volunteers' needs

### 3.1 Who are they? Knowing and analysing volunteers' motivations, needs, attitudes, skills, expectations and beliefs

INTEGRA INSTITUTE organised various meetings in February and March 2018 to collect information from volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers. Although we followed the Volunteers Focus Groups Guidelines, due to organisational reasons most talks were held on individual basis or in groups with two volunteers, in total nine persons. Due to our invitation for project purpose collaboration in the IO1 information gaining there have been invited organizations as follows:

- Municipal department of justice and social affairs
- Regional Youth Institute
- Bosnian Youth Association
- LOTUS Association for Women's Issues and Migrations
- GEA Institute – social enterprise for people with disabilities
- Regional Library of Velenje Municipality
- Slovenian Philantropy
- Adult Education Institute – People's University
- University of Ljubljana – Faculty of Social Work

In summary that means: 4 public institutions, 4 NGO's, 1 social enterprise (non-profit).

Their answers and contribution to the project intellectual output outline, are as they follow:

#### 1) How would you define your role of volunteer in a general sense?

Volunteers said that their role is to support refugees and migrants. With the support they mean secular help (non-professional) which always complements professional assistance. Among their duties there are first humanitarian aid, reception, social assistance (if it is necessary), in some cases also communication (e.g. language as English, pashtun, Arabic). The main role as they understand is actually to serve with the time and human to human support.

#### 2) Thinking about your own experience, what are the areas where volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers are involved?

A majority is helping in daily activities, the rest tries to support during language training. They don't give any legal and professional advice or counselling. Although in Slovenia we also know the term of professional voluntary work (medical doctors, lawyers, social workers, etc.), volunteers from the organizations they have been involved in our research, have not been included.

#### 3) What do you do?

The majority is helping in daily activities, the rest tries to support during language training or social assistance to certain offices or institutions. They are also providing first humanitarian aid, delivering food, helping with transport, etc.

#### 4) How much time do you spend for these volunteering activities?

The answers varied between 2 and 3 hours per day in most of the cases (unemployed and seniors); most of the students are working in voluntary services 2 to 3 times per week for about 3-4 hours.

**5) What do you think are the characteristics someone volunteering with refugees/asylum seekers must have?**

All volunteers agreed that there is a need for personal competences. They see their role also as mentors for introducing the migrants into the Slovenian culture, because they believe that non-adaptation is one of the main sources for resentment in the Slovenian population against refugees and migrants. Of course there is the most important empathy, compassion, positive attitude and personality traits. Among them important place takes also emotional stability and acceptance.

**6) What do you think is the identity that volunteers working in the sector “build” for themselves?**

Due to the strong roots of volunteer movement in Slovenia, they do not see their role as something “special”. Especially in the area of Velenje the tradition of working as volunteer, often after the paid work, has a long tradition. Voluntary work is understood as an important part of personal development and maturity, especially with the young people. Volunteers agreed that due to their engagements they are also building personal values and growing into a better person.

**7) What concrete critical issues you have faced in your work and what can their causes be?**

a. in relation to training: Inadequate preparation? Inconsistency between activities carried out and training received that create specific expectations? Lack of training? On what aspects? What skills do you need?

The biggest challenge is the language issue. Migrants from Bosnia, the Yugoslavian war or from Kosovo are not really taking up Slovene language and since their basic communication works also with a rudimentary mixture of Bosnian or Serbo-Croatian, they stay at this level. But in this area – especially with older people this barrier is lower, since many Slovenians speak and understand Serbo-Croatian language. Younger generation this skills don't have. Other training is regular, as well also the preparation for the voluntary work inside of every **legally registered voluntary organization (System of Voluntary work in Slovenia and Law on Volunteering)**.

b. in relation to work organization: Excessive workloads? Are you asked for things you should not do? There is not continuity in what they do. Etc.  
No major difficulties were reported.

c. in relation to beneficiaries: Conflicts with them? Lack of intercultural skills? Specific situations of vulnerability needs a specialized worker and cannot be delegated to a volunteer. Etc.

As we have mentioned above, the intercultural issues are the most striking. Some volunteers, especially two who are working for many years, have observed a growing influence of the Muslim religion.

Beside of that it was reported already, that volunteers are in the most of the cases perform secular work which not must be mixed with the professional work (e.g. social work).

d. in relation to relationship with different professional roles: Conflicts with other organization's staff? Are they supportive enough? Lack of understanding of different roles? Etc.

No conflicts have been reported; support from the administration is at a sufficient level.

e. in relation to emotionality: Being in contact with suffering, disadvantages that cannot be solved? Sense of powerlessness? Sense of loneliness? Etc.  
No problems have been reported.

f. in relation to motivations: What are the motivation for choosing this form of volunteering? Is it a vocation? What is more important, competence or vocation? Can they be conflicting? How? Etc.  
The tradition of voluntary work is certainly the leading factor. The question about competence or vocation was not so clear to the volunteers. In Slovenia there is a long tradition in volunteering, so children starts with it quite early. Somehow it is incorporated as part of social and anthropological background of the nation.

### **8) What are the possible solutions to the critical issues you have identified?**

a. in relation to training:

Additional training is always welcomed, but some of the volunteers are skeptical because this would might reduce the necessary time with their clients. They are satisfied with redistribution of the work and clear line between volunteering and professionalism. But nevertheless the important part of volunteering is also regular permanent supervision. Especially in the cases of emotional burnout.

b. in relation to work organization:

No need for changes has been expressed in one case there was mentioned again the importance of supervision.

c. in relation to beneficiaries:

The relation to growing religiosity was mentioned and how to deal with it. Otherwise the understanding of the difference and cultural diversity is a quality. Especially with enthusiasm of younger generation.

d. in relation to relationship with different professional roles:

No need for changes has been expressed.

e. in relation to emotionality:

Half of the volunteers are interested to receive also intervision (among the volunteers themselves) as more frequents emotional and personal support. At best, weekly.

f. in relation to motivations:

All volunteers are motivated. No need for changes has been expressed.

## **3.2 What are the key factors for successful integration? And what the critical points?**

The volunteers named the following key factors

- Willingness to integrate oneself into the new society
- Better command of the Slovenian language (friendly and effective courses in Slovene)

- Positive and encouraging feedback from the traditional Slovene population. If migrants feel welcomed and not rejected, they have a higher motivation to do some efforts.
- Less complicated procedures for asylum seekers.
- More flexible employment policy for refugees and migrants.
- Well-educated teachers (at least bilingual) – problem today is the lack of teachers who speak Albanian language for example.

## 4 Conclusion and considerations/suggestions

Overall, the findings from the interviews with volunteers and key actors show that Slovenia is in a relatively comfortable situation. This is mainly due to two factors:

- the long tradition and acceptance of voluntary work in Slovenia, which is a heritage from the Socialist system before 1991
- the relatively low numbers of refugees from the Syrian war. Most people who took the West Balkan route continued their way to Austria and Germany.

The interviews actors have also shown that although the majority of volunteers is content with their work, additional training and mental support, e.g. regular and permanent supervision, related to intervention (supervision among volunteers themselves), could help them to perform their tasks in an even better way.