

Community Guide for volunteering

CROATIA





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Community guide

for volunteering

Introduction – why do we volunteer?

As mentioned in our first guide for volunteers¹, when representing the Centre for Peace Studies and talking about the founding of the organization itself, we often say that it arose from the circle of individuals gathered around the Volunteering project Pakrac. In the 1990s, Pakrac was one of several divided cities in the region whose inhabitants lost their lives or suffered in armed conflicts occurring in Croatia at the time. Residents from both sides of the line that was dividing the city into the Serbian and the Croatian part received help from international and domestic volunteers who came to live in Pakrac and stay with the people divided by the war. Apart from the Pakrac project, some of these individuals were also involved in the Anti-War campaign.

The idea of gathering volunteers to work with refugees was created in 2003, when activists from the Centre for Peace Studies first visited the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Šašna Greda. The reception center was installed within prefabricated houses originally accommodating refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, and later persons from Kosovo, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries. These people found themselves in a society still suffering from wounds caused by war and lacking experience in asylum and international protection policies. They did not speak Croatian; they did not know how long they would have to wait for their status resolution; they experienced difficult situations in the countries they fled and now their lives were put on hold. The first group of volunteers came to Šašna Greda in 2004. They were all young people with no experience in direct work with refugees, but full of empathy and eager to help people. At that time, volunteers used to write the so-called "Work

¹ Volunteers and Intercultural Practice, Centre for Peace Studies, 2014, p. 5-6.

log from Šašna Greda". Writing work logs is a practice that we kept as one of our work methods, so today our volunteers still compile clips and impressions of volunteering:

"The first meeting with the people who came for language lessons. The room is rather small, but everything went well. After the welcome speeches, we mutually introduced ourselves and started analysing the situation. Only S. is a complete beginner, while others have higher or lower level of prior knowledge. I worked with S. and my colleague worked with the others. We have covered the verb 'being' in affirmative and negative forms and I assigned him homework".

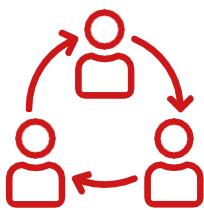
Year after year, we invite citizens to join our volunteering project and dedicate a part of their free time to supporting refugees. From 2004 until today, around 250 individuals participated in the volunteering project. Although some were engaged for a longer time than others, everyone's contribution was very important and valuable.

It is also important to emphasize that the effort invested by the Centre for Peace Studies in creation and influencing public policies in the field of asylum and migration



wouldn't be possible without the volunteers and their engagement. In order to understand social processes, it is important to gain insight into what is happening in the society, on the field - what kind of life people are living and what problems they are facing. This is exactly what the volunteers are helping us with. Working with individuals coming from cultures other than the one we are familiar with and that is close to us is rather challenging, but so is working with volunteers. Every new group brought new challenges, raised new questions, created new ideas and frameworks and had its own way of dealing with specific situations and refugee stories.

What is volunteering?



The term volunteering itself derives from two Latin words: *volo*, *velle*, *volui* = to want, to desire and *voluntas*, *atis*, *f.* = will, desire, intention, free will. Therefore, volunteer work implies a desire and an intention to invest personal free time in achieving a certain goal. In Croatia, the Act on Volunteering first entered into force in 2007 and was amended in 2013. The Act defines volunteering as "as a willing investment of personal time, effort, knowledge and skills with which services and activities are executed for the well-being of another person or the wider public, in the manner envisaged by this Act, without any conditions that would entail a financial reward and without seeking any other material compensation for the accomplished volunteering, unless otherwise defined in this Act."²

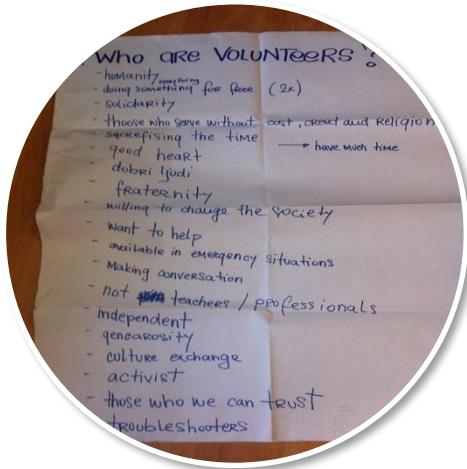
² Act on Volunteering OG 22/13, Article 3, paragraph 1.



1. VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering in CPS

Volunteering organized by the Centre for Peace Studies involves direct work with refugees and other migrants. We try to avoid the humanitarian form of assistance to refugees as well as approaching them as passive victims. Indeed, the people we work with have gone through and are going through unimaginable horrors of war, political oppression, difficult journeys in search of security, post-traumatic stress, and difficulties in adapting to new surroundings, but their refugee experience is not the only thing that defines them as humans. Our criticism of humanitarianism derives from an already elaborated criticism of various humanitarian organizations around the world that often fail to recognize or actively ignore the needs of the population and the individuals they work with - assuming they know better what those people really need. The second issue lies in humanitarianism as an approach - it puts us in the role of saviours of others, those who are victims of their own destinies and do not have the ability or agency to solve their own problems.



The approach we nurture in our work with refugees is based on the approach of solidarity - an approach that rejects the ideas of domination over each other and is instead based on the principles of mutual assistance, support and sharing between equally valuable and equally capable individuals and groups. As volunteers, when working with people we try to raise awareness of certain power relations that are already present when we establish

relationships with people: our skin colour and our position in the Croatian society - due to the fact that most volunteers were born in Croatia, have citizenship, know the language and so on – put us in a certain position of privilege over those we work with. It is important to recognize this and to be aware of it, but at the same time deconstruct the importance and significance of these privileges through our volunteer activist work, to change social relationships that contribute to such hierarchies, and to break down structural barriers that prevent some from equally participating in society.

The long-term approach that we nurture³ when working with refugees is based on empowering refugees and supporting them at the beginning of the new life they are creating in the Croatian society, with the aim of assisting them in becoming independent. We do not ask volunteers to share the responsibility for people and do certain tasks for them - although sometimes specific situations and contexts will demand us to do so - but to stand by them when they need to visit institutions and claim the rights they are guaranteed by the international protection status. With this approach, we want to avoid victimizing refugees, which often dehumanizes them, and give them the feeling that they are also members of this society who, with our support, can show it on their own.

When we volunteer, we do not approach from the position of the stronger helping the weaker or the position of the one with knowledge versus the one without it. For us, volunteering represents a space for mutual exchange of knowledge, skills and experiences. That way, both sides become providers and recipients of knowledge. Our purpose as volunteers is to offer useful knowledge and skills - such as language skills, maneuvering through the Croatian bureaucracy - but we are also recipients of knowledge of others. The people we work with may also teach us their languages or present us the countries they come from. Together we will develop different skills that we both have: creating works of art, dancing, singing. We will learn about different literature, music, histories, political systems. The space of volunteering becomes a space of dialogue, mutual exchange of knowledge, attitudes and experiences.

Volunteers of the Centre for Peace Studies engaged in direct work with refugees have so far prepared and participated in a number of activities, some of which are: teaching Croatian, English and German, providing legal information, visiting institutions where refugees exercise their rights, helping children with schoolwork, assisting refugees in the preparation process for the Croatian citizenship exams, co-organizing lectures/presentations about the refugees' countries of origin, visiting political and cultural institutions in Croatia, teaching about the history, the society and the regional cultural characteristics, organizing various cultural, sports and culinary activities, organizing workshops for acquiring new skills, employment assistance and all sorts of other activities.

³ Volunteers and Intercultural Practice, Centre for Peace Studies, 2014, p. 11.

Do you want to volunteer?

Before engaging in this type of volunteering, we would like you to keep a few guidelines in mind:



Volunteers are engaged in the project based on their own **willingness and clear motivation**

Volunteers are obliged to approach every refugee **equally**



Volunteers do not enter into **intimate relationships** with refugees (if this happens, CPS does not take responsibility for the consequences nor problems that may arise from it)



Volunteers are obliged to contact the team of the Centre for Peace Studies in case of any **uncomfortable situation** arising from the work with refugees

Volunteers are **supervised by the Centre for Peace Studies** in cooperation with experts and you can turn to them for help at any time.



The Centre for Peace Studies encourages volunteers to **self-educate** on subjects related to refugees

Don't hesitate or postpone talking about difficult situations and problems

The Centre for Peace Studies expects **feedback and evaluation** of the volunteering project from the volunteers engaged in it



You will encounter **cultural differences** in working with refugees

There will be **language barriers** in working with refugees

Volunteers engaged in this project are **a team** and are expected to behave accordingly - discuss problems and issues that bother you, and cooperate with each other

Where to look for volunteer opportunities



Word of mouth

Exchange of information among people who already have carried out voluntary experiences



Social media

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



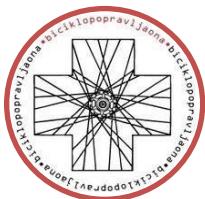
Centres / organisations

If you have already identified the right centre or organisation in which you want to carry out your voluntary experience, you can join them in order to receive updates regarding new opportunities for volunteering. Moreover, thanks to them, volunteers can be updated on all the opportunities other organisations can offer.

Where can you do volunteer work?

Speaking about intercultural practices in Croatia, refugees and migrants, as well as Croatian volunteers and citizens, have initiated and continue to initiate various actions and models of intercultural exchange over the last ten years. These models can serve as life examples of establishing space for intercultural processes between people who approach each other as equally valuable, holding equal rights. In spaces established that way, there is freedom and openness to recognize mutual similarities, as well as to communicate about mutual differences. In fact, these are the spaces to explain and celebrate differences, to start conversations on different topics - sometimes difficult and complicated, and sometimes cheerful and simple ones. Often such collectives and spaces were created with the help of some sort of cultural exchange - whether cooking and preparing food from different parts of the world or playing, singing, dancing, telling stories. Sometimes the activities are of a more practical nature - such as sports and exercise or repairing bicycles. What they have in common is a space without judging the other and reducing the other to a mere cultural stereotype; a space of curiosity and desire to learn to and get to know the other that is equally human. What all these collectives and initiatives have in common is that they include both locals and new members of society who work together to create new, common spaces for creation, socializing and mutual understanding. We will name and briefly describe some of these examples, and it is important to know that you can contact and join all the listed initiatives as volunteers!

Experiences & examples of volunteering initiatives in Croatia



Bicycle repair shop is a volunteer collective under the auspices of **Zelena akcija / Friends of the Earth Croatia**, which provides space, knowledge and tools for bicycle repair. The main idea behind the collective and joint bicycle repair action is to strengthen social solidarity through the free exchange of knowledge and services, and to promote sustainable transport. A few years ago, they launched the initiative 'Bicycles for refugees' through which they repair bicycles with refugees and for refugees. As a volunteer service, they donated over 200 bicycles to refugees and asylum seekers. This practice of joint work combines the practical work of repairing bicycles with the creation of space to spend quality, relaxed time with other people.

Contact: <https://biciklopravljona.zelena-akcija.hr/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Biciklopravljona/>



Living Atelier DK is an interdisciplinary organization founded in 2015, focused on supporting the arts. The **Women to Women Collective** was launched in the spring of 2016 as part of the No Borders program to connect women for whom Croatia is home with women who want Croatia to become their home. Meetings that take place once a week and special events (excursions, parties, workshops, joint cooking) have so far attracted and connected over 200 women. Through these activities and meetings, women share and gain skills, knowledge and empowerment, and at the same time build a network of support as well as shared values of common understanding, tolerance and acceptance of diversity in a dynamic inclusive society.

Contact: <https://ziviatelje.dk/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/ziviateljedk/>



Homeguests Choir, **Zbor Domaćigosti**, brings together singing enthusiasts who have decided to contribute to the musical diversity of the Croatian society by singing songs from various parts of the world. The choir was founded in 2016 at the initiative of CPS with the objectives of opening a space for mutual acquaintance and bonding, as well as reducing xenophobia, prejudice and intolerance towards others and those who are different, via cultural exchange. Each member of the choir contributes to the musical expression of the choir and the songs repertoire. Some of them are professional musicians and some are amateurs, but that is not important in this choir. The only thing that matters is the will and energy to create together and to bring that creation closer to others.

Contact: <https://www.facebook.com/zbordomacigosti/>



The Society of Africans in Croatia (now with a new name - **Diaspora of Africans in Croatia**) is the first migrant organization in Croatia, initiated by Prince Wale Soniyiki who came to Croatia at the end of 2011 and claimed the right to refugee protection here. Since its founding, SAC has organized a number of activities - such as intercultural dialogues held in more than 50 schools, art and music workshops in kindergartens, musical instruments workshops, organizing round tables on topics such as refugees, poetry readings, organizing various evenings of musical and culinary exchange and more. Although SAC primarily brings together African migrants in Croatia - whether they are refugees, students, workers - they are open and welcome (and have) Croatian members and volunteers - who together participate in the preparation and implementation of the organization's activities.

Contact: <http://dah.hr/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/www.dah.hr>



Afro Badinya, which means African family in the Mandinka language, is a cultural association consisting of foreigners and locals, and its guiding idea is the promotion of African cultural heritage through creative music and art projects. The association emphasizes that its objective is intercultural exchange. This young and growing association promotes equality among people and combating racial and other discrimination through creative music, stage, art and other projects. The dominant areas of activity of the association Afro Badinya are movement, rhythm and sound, and there are African dance and song lessons, as well as a course of playing djembe drums for the members of the association. Members of the association often visit schools, offering educational and other workshops, such as telling African stories, making masks and the like.

Contact: <https://africkiples.wixsite.com/mysite/samanski-bubanj-seruba> , <https://www.facebook.com/AfroBadinya/>



Football Club Zagreb 041 is a football club founded in 2015 with the objective to fight all types of corruption and clientelism, as well as all types of discrimination and racism, with the message of returning to football as a sport of solidarity, healthy competition, respect for opponents, and a sport loved for its simplicity and beauty. From the very beginning, the club held practices with international protection seekers who were located in the nearby Reception centre, so many boys participated in them, or just came to watch matches and socialize. As the population of the Reception centre changed over the years, today the Club mainly works with refugee children in their junior team, and indirectly also cooperates a lot with parents. The club also has its own men's and women's senior teams.

Contact: <http://www.nkzagreb041.hr/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/nkzagreb041/>



Taste of Home is a cooperative for intercultural cooperation that established a catering business in 2016, which operated until mid-2018 and employed refugees, migrants and Croatian volunteers. In addition to catering, for a while the cooperative organized language courses, such as the Arabic course. The cooperative arose from a volunteer culinary project of the Centre for Peace Studies whose volunteers over the years have collected recipes from the people they worked with, cooked those dishes together and presented them to local communities. Through culinary workshops and public presentations of culinary specialties, as well as through the cookbook "Taste of Home" and the shooting of the documentary of the same name, refugees had the opportunity to discuss the reasons for leaving home through gastronomy - how to build a home in a foreign land, how to integrate and not lose identity, what to give up, what to accept from others.

Contact: <https://www.okus-doma.hr/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/okusdoma/>



In 2011, the Centre for Peace Studies established the **Coordination for Integration** that brings together civil society organizations that have the capacity to provide various social services to applicants for international protection, those who have received it, and other foreigners. Each member of the Coordination deals with some other area or topic, and we overlap in some of them. The aim of the Coordination is to establish a network of providers of various psycho-social services for the people listed above, to connect and inform about the situation on the field, to come forward to institutions and the public about particularly important topics. Every year, the Coordination for Integration jointly organizes the **Refugee Week**. The Coordination for Integration brings together over 25 organizations and some of the more active organizations and associations are listed in the following table.

**Meet the most active members of the Coordination for integration
(in alphabetical order):**

- **Autonomous Cultural Centre ATTACK !:** Pierottijeva 11, 10 000 Zagreb, 016197223, akc.attack@gmail.com, <https://attack.hr/>
- **Centre for Peace Studies (CPS):** Selska cesta 112a, 10000 Zagreb, +385 1 482 00 94, cms@cms.hr, <https://www.cms.hr>
- **Croatian Baptist Aid (CBA):** Radićeva 30, 10 000, Zagreb, +385 1 4813168, info@cbaid.org, <http://cbaid.org>
- **Society for Psychological Aid (DPP),** Ulica kneza Mislava 11¹ 10000, Zagreb, +385 (0)1 4826 111, spa@dpp.hr, <https://dpp.hr>
- **Croatian Red Cross (HCK),** Department of Protection of Migrants, Head of department: Selma Ilić, Phone: +385 (0)1 4655 814 / (ext. 280) E – mail: selma.ilic@hck.hr, [https://www.hck.hr/](https://www.hck.hr)
- **Croatian Law Centre (HPC):** Andrije Hebranga 21, 10000 Zagreb, +385 (0)1 4854-934, hpc@hpc.hr, <https://www.hpc.hr>
- **Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS):** Maksimirска Cesta 286, 10 000 Zagreb, info@jrs.hr, <http://www.jrs.hr>
- **Médecins du Monde Belgique:** Pavla Hatza 11 (MDM), 10000 Zagreb, fieldco.croatia@medecinsdumonde.be, <http://www.medecinsdumonde.be>
- **International Organization for Migration (IOM):** Račkoga 3, 10000 Zagreb, + 385 (0)1 4816 884, iomzagreb@iom.int, <https://croatia.iom.int/>
- **Civil Rights Project Sisak (PGP Sisak):** Stjepana i Antuna Radića 6/5, 44000 Sisak, +385 44 571 752, pgp-sisak@crpsisak.hr, <https://www.crpsisak.hr/>
- **Rehabilitation centre for stress and trauma Zagreb (RCT):** Kvaternikov trg 12, 10000 Zagreb, +385 1 4641 342, mediji@rctzg.hr, <http://www.rctzg.hr>
- **Association “MI”:** Sinjska 7, 21 000 Split, 021/329-130, info@udruga-mi.hr, <https://www.udruga-mi.hr>
- **Udruga Zemljani - Are You Syrious? (AYS):** Brune Bušića 42, 10000 Zagreb, +385996600688, areyousyrious@gmail.com, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/areyousyrious/>
- **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** Vjekoslava Heinzelja 44 /II 10000 Zagreb, +385 (0)1 3713 555, hrvza@unhcr.org, <https://www.unhcr.org/hr>
- **Friends of the Earth Croatia:** Frankopanska 1, 10 000 Zagreb, + 385 (0)1 4813-096, za@zelena-akcija.hr, <https://zelena-akcija.hr/hr>
- **Living Atelier DK:** Ilica 110, 10000 Zagreb, projekti@ziviatelje.dk, <https://ziviatelje.dk>

Volunteers' experiences



Sadou Diagne, Senegal

When I first came to Croatia, I had a difficult time. I was facing language barriers and lack of understanding, cultural differences, differences in rules, behaviours and those kind of things... It made me feel lost and uncomfortable at times, so I was living quite secluded and did not have too much contact with the outside world. In a way, I was avoiding contact because I had no knowledge of the society and I didn't have a clue about the functioning of the society I became part of, the way that people live here... I was often stressed out because of that. The volunteers I have met and worked with in Porin, mostly in a language course, were very helpful and served as a link between me and the society. They brought hope, comfort, motivation, knowledge and encouraged us to face the new environment in which we found ourselves and in which we now live, so working with them was a good preparation for living in Croatia.

While working with volunteers, I started volunteering myself - first in the culinary collective Taste of Home, where I worked as a chef for a year and participated in a number of culinary events, holding workshops and sharing recipes. In addition to Taste of Home, where I was later employed, I also volunteered for the African Society in Croatia (ASC), played football with the football club Zagreb 041, and currently I am volunteering at the association Afro Badinya. At ASC, I often participated in workshops held at schools, as well as cultural events - djembe workshops and so on. Currently, in Afro Badinya, I cook for different events we organize, I explain the African storytelling tradition to people, I play djembe...

For me, volunteering and working in all these collectives is important because it gave me the opportunity to meet numerous participants of different segments of society in which I live, and I gained new knowledge by connecting with them. I also used this connection to share the knowledge I possess - for me, volunteering is a way to share my experience, my culture, civilization and the norms of the society I come from. I think that it is normal that the society I live in now has an idea of who I am and where I come from. Ultimately, that creates a better and healthier coexistence, because we now live in the same place and share the same space, even though we come from different backgrounds. These are the things that motivated me to invest my time and knowledge in volunteering for those organizations.



Natalija Fabić, Croatia

For a while, I was reading all sorts of texts in daily newspapers, as well as accompanying comments (which is rarely a good idea), regarding refugees. The way people perceived refugees often evoked a mixture of feelings in me, none of which were positive. Surely you have noticed it in your near or far surroundings, perhaps while sitting somewhere over coffee “eaves dropping” on a conversation at the next table: “If there is a war in their countries, they should fight as we fought. How is it that only young people come, clearly, they want to conquer Europe. They are Muslims, they should go to Muslim countries.” These are, of course, very mitigated versions of what I used to read and hear, either within my own family, from neighbours and acquaintances or from complete strangers.

Imagine for a moment the timeline they used to show us in history lessons in the fifth grade of primary school, and remember the calculation of time in terms of periods before and after Christ or, alternatively, periods of the old and new era. It would take us to a zero point situation that occurred in my head, a kind of a turning point (more precisely, in my case, it was a cumulation of many “tiny” moments in which refugees were portrayed as if they weren’t human) in which I have chosen to move from theory to practice - from unconstructive discussion and relatively constructive thinking to actions which I will take to change what I consider bad, to the extent that I can.

How to act when you volunteer?

It's important for the volunteer to know some tips before starting his/her volunteering in order to have a positive experience. **Communication**, **Commitment** and **Focus** are important elements. *Let's read together how Natalija copes with them...*

"There are many ways for volunteers to contribute to the work of organizations primarily focused on the rights and needs of refugees - it is possible to participate in the organization of workshops, gatherings, providing legal assistance, etc. Anyone who is willing can find an existing or create a new "niche" and feel that he/she can use his/her potential in an appropriate manner.

Communication

My volunteering started as volunteering with children who needed help with mastering elementary school assignments. Being a pretty introverted person, I was surprised that I didn't feel the amount of stress I had been expecting when I first went to the apartment

of people I didn't know and whose language I didn't speak. I have later attributed this to the fact that I had no doubts as to whether what I was doing was right or not.

This family had three children attending primary school, placed in classes not according to their age, but to the level of knowledge of the Croatian language. I met their parents, who immediately, as a sign of hospitality, offered me coffee, tea and cakes. As some of them also spoke English rather good, communicating was much easier than I had expected. I didn't ask them where they were from. I didn't ask them why they are in Croatia now. I didn't ask them if they were Christian or Muslim. It was just as irrelevant as where I came from and whether I was religious or not.



Commitment

What was important was equally clear to them and me - the children need help and I have the will to try to help them, so it is better to start as soon as possible. After establishing which grade each of the three children was in and which subjects pose a smaller or bigger problem to them, we created a learning schedule.

I asked them to write the names of their head teachers so that I could contact them, and we also got a notebook for teachers so that I could more easily communicate with those willing to do so, all with the intention of optimizing the process of mastering the school material. After realizing that the eighth-grade math schoolwork is beyond my abilities, another volunteer joined me. He was very patient with the children and easily explained what made

me want to pull the little hair I had on my head. Explicitly, we were learning what they covered at school, but implicitly, we were learning about the differences between our customs, languages and experiences that shaped us; we celebrated every mark they earned at school, every birthday and Nowruz (New Year). For the first time in my life I ate sitting on a carpet, while all the food was on a tablecloth, surrounded by people



I had already met and their friends, whom I then saw for the first time in my life. And I was not uncomfortable, even when they got carried away by the atmosphere and started talking in their own language, forgetting I was there. On the contrary, it made me happy because I realized that we were close enough to skip the courtesies and feel relaxed in the same space, knowing that benevolence is what connected us.

After a while, that family left Croatia. I'm still in contact with its youngest member who still remembers how much I teased him because he liked to play a certain game on his cell phone for an infinitely long time and I still remember the moment when I tried to explain to him what menstruation is by using chocolates that I was offered for completely different purposes. I also remember how I never managed to coherently explain to them, for whom drinking coffee was also a sign of hospitality, that I don't drink black coffee in the evening, so I mastered pretending to drink coffee and going to the kitchen for a glass of water (with the intention of spilling the coffee).

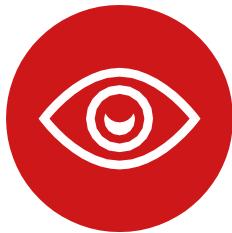
I later worked with some other children, as well as with the adult members of their families. As you meet new people, you also meet their friends, and most of them would like to learn to speak Croatian at a level that is higher than their current one. Each of these new people, or more specifically learning with and from them, posed a new challenge for me. Equally, their every success, no matter how small it was for someone on the outside, meant that I was moving in the right direction and encouraged me to continue volunteering.

Over time, as you get to know each other, you get some answers (even without asking questions) that make people who were completely unknown to you until recently even closer to your heart. You find out, perhaps, that they left a remote country (that would remain unknown to you if you hadn't met them) which they called home for their entire lives, after their house was destroyed in a bomb explosion. You learn, perhaps, that many members of their extended family had died. You learn, perhaps, that the life they have planned is what each of us wishes for, yet it comes down to good health of the loved ones and a job that allows a decent human life - the life in which we don't have to worry about being able to pay utilities and feed all family members, and children can go to school not thinking about whether they should start working as soon as possible and contribute financially to the family.



Focus

Over time, as you get to know yourself, you begin to ask some questions to which no one, no matter how knowledgeable they are about the situation and how hard they tried, can give you a satisfactory answer: did it really have to be that way? Did people from the other side of the world really have to go through everything that had happened to them and come to a country they knew nothing about, and where they were rarely welcomed, in order to try to build a life that each of us has an equal right to? And you'll start noticing situations you probably wouldn't have noticed earlier at a conscious level - such as when you meet their neighbours who give them scornful looks instead of greeting them, and you hope that they didn't notice it or, if they had, that they didn't interpret it the way it was meant. You will begin, perhaps, to realize the extent of the injustice of these situations, and to take on a part of the responsibility in an attempt to influence a change in a positive direction.



No, I don't have a magic wand that would end the war. Nor do I have the one that would make people respect each other and realize that people cannot be divided into more or less valuable based on their place of birth, skin colour, religion and so on. If I have a certain amount of time and ability at my disposal, and if to that "equation" I add my willingness take action, I will change something. At a micro level, sure, but we need to begin somewhere. And if your, his, her or my beginning grows into our beginning over time, it may eventually cause significantly more smiles on the faces of the people around us.

What is certain is that volunteering is an experience that changes our view of the world to the extent that we allow it and that we are ready for. I have started from a very narrow position, thinking I would do something useful by helping children learn. I did not know then that I would also learn in the extent that I did in practice, that I would change my attitudes, reactions and expectations accordingly and realize that adaptability to new circumstances is a prerequisite for progress. At that time, I also did not know that by volunteering I would gain insights that I would not have gained otherwise, or at least not then, and that I would meet people (volunteers and refugees) that I can call friends in the full sense of the word. And, as partings

are as inevitable as encounters, I have learned to appreciate more the moments when you recognize that someone - speaking the same language or not – who shares that same sincerity of intent of being there for each other, in the moment whose importance is not measured by its duration, but something that permanently complements us by realizing that every season is indeed an opportunity for growth and change.





2. ASYLUM SYSTEM AROUND THE WORLD AND IN CROATIA

Seeking refuge and security from endangerment in country other than the country of origin is a practice that dates way back before the modern age. The term asylum itself comes from the Greek word asylos which means shelter, refuge, hideout. At that time, the practice of granting asylum was related to the Greek and Roman laws and had political importance, while in the Middle Ages it became related to the ecclesiastical law. The 19th century brought a large number of asylum seekers to the West, mainly due to the political activity within their own countries. Asylum gained the importance it carries today during the First and Second World Wars, with the creation of the League of Nations in 1920, whose aim was to encourage collaboration, as well as maintenance of peace and safety, between states. In 1945, the League of Nations was replaced by the United Nations, and the UN General Assembly has founded the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees whose mandate is protecting refugees and regulating their status. The UN General Assembly has adopted Universal Declaration of Human Rights which, in Article 14, states that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries.

The basis of the modern-day international refugee law are: the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees adopted in Geneva in 1951 and its accompanying Protocol from 1967. The Convention defines a refugee as a person who is outside the country of his/her nationality due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for the reasons related to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and who is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country. It is also important to mention the Convention for the

Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the European Council in 1950, as it is the most important legal document protecting asylum seekers and refugees in Europe.

With the growing number of migrations into the European Union countries, there was a need to harmonize the asylum systems of different member states, so in 1990 the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement was adopted at the EU level. The Dublin Convention was adopted that same year, specifying that the responsibility for resolving asylum applications lies with the member state in whose territory the applicant first sought protection, that is, in the country where he or she first resided within the European Union. Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was established in 1997 with the Treaty of Amsterdam, and within it, the EU institutions adopted several important directives and regulations establishing mandatory minimum standards applicable to all Member States. The most important ones amongst them are the Temporary Protection Directive, the Family Reunification Directive, the Reception Conditions Directive, the Dublin Regulation, the Qualification Directive, the Procedures Directive, and the Eurodac Regulation.

By entering the European Union, Croatia undertook the obligation of harmonizing the European and Croatian legislations; transposing the CEAS directives and regulations through enacting the Asylum Act (the first version entered into force in 2004), which was amended several times and is now called the International and Temporary Protection Act; as well as several amendments to the Foreigners Act and various additional protocols and regulations. Croatia has also adopted two Migration Policies - 2007/2008 and 2013, primarily in order to meet the standards of accession to the European Union. As part of the new Migration Policy, a Standing Committee for the Implementation of the Integration of Foreigners into Croatian Society was established, chaired by the director of the Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities. They adopted an Action Plan for the removal of barriers to the realization of individual rights in the field of integration of foreigners for the period from 2013 to 2015, as well as an Action Plan for the integration of persons granted international protection for the period from 2017 to 2019.

Regarding the very topic of integration, the International and Temporary Protection Act guarantees a number of rights to persons under international protection: residence and freedom of movement in the Republic of Croatia, provision of basic living and accommodation conditions, health care, primary and secondary education, financial assistance, free legal aid, freedom of religion and religious education of children, work, social welfare, family reunification and the right to assistance for integration into society. Although both migration policies and both action plans mention integration, to this day Croatia has not established a comprehensive approach to the integration of not only refugees, but other foreigners as well; quality measures to remove barriers to the realization of the above mentioned rights; nor the direction or the vision of our, increasingly in practice, multicultural and diverse society. Perhaps this is an opportunity

to remind ourselves that integration can also be approached bottom-up; the examples of intercultural practices that we create with refugees and volunteers can inspire those in power to create public policies that would support them.

Institutions

Ministry of the Interior is the main competent institution for matters related to international protection seekers and other foreigners. In addition to deciding on granting international protection, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for managing reception centres for international protection seekers in Zagreb and Kutina, transit reception centres in Trilj and Tovarnik, and the reception centre for foreigners in Ježevica, which is in fact a detention centre. It is also important to point out that the Administrative Court is competent to resolve appeals against first-instance decisions of the Ministry of the Interior on obtaining international protection.

In Croatia, integration is approached in a multi-sectoral manner at the institutional level, which means that different ministries are responsible for their areas of activity - so the Ministry of Education is responsible for organizing Croatian language courses, the Ministry of Health for accessing health services and so on.

The responsible institutions are listed in the following table.

- **Ministry of the Interior (MUP):** Ulica grada Vukovara 33, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: + 385 1 6122 111, www.mup.hr, pitanja@mup.hr
- **Ministry of Science and Education (MZO):** Donje Svetice 38, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4569 000, <https://mzo.gov.hr/>, ministrica@mzo.hr
- **Ministry of Health (MIZ):** Ksaver 200a, 10 000 Zagreb Phone: +385 (0)1 4607 555, www.zdravlje.hr, pitajtenas@miz.hr
- **Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy (MDOMSP):** Trg Nevenke Topalušić 1, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 555 7111, www.mdomsp.gov.hr, ministarstvo@mdomsp.hr
- **Ministry of Labour and Pension System (MRMS):** Ulica grada Vukovara 78, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 610 6111, www.mingo.hr, info@mingo.hr
- **Ministry of Culture (MIN-KULTURE):** Runjaninova 2, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4866 666 www.min-kulture.hr, kabinet@min-kulture.hr
- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MVEP):** Trg N.Š. Zrinskog 7-8, 10000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4569 964, <http://www.mvep.hr>, ministarstvo@mvep.hr
- **Ministry of Construction and Physical Planning (MGIPU):** Ulica Republike Austrije 20, 10000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 3782 444, <https://mgipu.gov.hr>, pitanja@mgipu.hr
- **Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing (SDUOSZ):** Savska cesta 28 10000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 6172 524, <https://sduosz.gov.hr/>, sduosz@sduosz.hr
- **Croatian Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (ULJPPNM):** Mesnička 23, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4569 358, www.uljppnm.vlada.hr, ured@uljppnm.vlada.hr, Office director Alen Tahiri, univ.spec.pol. - national contact person for integration
- **Administrative Court of the Republic of Croatia:** Frankopanska 16, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4807 800, <http://vusrh.hr>, kontakt@vusrh.pravosudje.hr
- **Croatian Employment Service:** Radnička cesta 1, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 612 6000, www.hzz.hr, hzz@hzz.hr
- **Croatian Institute for Health Insurance:** Margaretska 3, 10 000 Zagreb, 0800 7979, <https://www.hzzo.hr>, glasnogovornik@hzzo.hr
- **Office of the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia:** Trg hrvatskih velikana 6, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4851 855 +385 (0)1 4851 853, www.ombudsman.hr, info@ombudsman.hr
- **Ombudsperson for Children:** Teslina 10, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4929 669 +385 (0)1 4921 278, www.dijete.hr, info@dijete.hr
- **Gender Equality Ombudsperson:** Preobraženska 4/1, 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 4848 100, www.prs.hr, ravnopravnost@prs.hr
- **Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities:** Savska cesta 41/3 10 000 Zagreb, Phone: +385 (0)1 6102 170, www.posi.hr, ured@posi.hr



3. INTEGRATION AND INTERCULTURALITY

Nowadays, we are perhaps focused more than ever on the topic of migration in the world and the question of who exactly decides who has the right to mobility and under what conditions. In the words of the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe⁴, the very purpose of borders is to cross them - as proven by the centuries of trade and movement tradition of world populations. According to him, circulation is fundamental for the production of cultural, political, economic, social and religious forms. Mbembe points out that mobility is the most important driver of social, economic, political transformations and changes. Migration of people is as constant as the changes in public and individual definition of migration, and concepts of society, culture and coexistence. Apart from the very issue of mobility and the question of who has the right to be mobile, the second focus of our time is how to fit those who migrate and come, and are seemingly different from us, into what we perceive as our societies and our culture.

Modern Western societies, although increasingly multicultural in practice - in the sense that more and more migrants and migrant communities constitute their population, are progressively distrustful of the idea of a foreigner, as well as their presence in their lives⁵. Thus, foreigners, migrants and refugees remain or become a threat to our way of life, our culture and



4 Achille Mbembe, The Idea of a Borderless World, Africa is a Country: <https://africasacountry.com/2018/11/the-idea-of-a-borderless-world>

5 Fearing foreigner vs. Welcoming foreigner, Panel on Interculturalism, CPS, 2016, p.3.

values - and are often labelled as regressive, primitive, too traditional and unwilling to change.

People who migrate are often seen primarily as carriers of their own cultures, whatever that means. In fact, we perceive cultures, which are becoming static, ahistorical and essentialist, as things that people carry from one place to another. Such perception of culture also carries the assumption that all members of a particular cultural group are equally committed to that culture and that they understand and practice it in the same way, which leads to a very homogeneous understanding of a society. People who come should first be viewed as people like us, with whom we actually share a lot of similarities and who approach the norms, cultures and practices of their own societies in an individualistic and critical way, and only then as members of certain cultures and groups, which also shouldn't be understood as given and unchangeable.

Also, nowadays we are much more focused on the individuals or groups that come then on the very societies that they come to. Academic discourses, let alone public policies, political discourse or public opinion, rarely question the idea of integration as a theoretical concept, a model of coexistence or an idea behind public policy making. Instead, we accept an already existing framework which actually observes and emphasizes how different those who come are from those who are already there. Thus, the concept of integration is moulded into the imagined concept of our society - in which someone integrates, and into the concepts of already existing parameters of identity and difference, i.e. what makes someone different from us. But the main question is whether our society and culture are static concepts, the reality of our world moulded within state borders, or whether both societies and cultures have a fluid and evolving nature.



Finally, focusing too much on cultural differences puts the issue of structural barriers and challenges that migrants face upon arrival in new societies in the background. We have to ask ourselves, if integration is a two-way process, what exactly is changing in receiving societies - is it a mere opening to tolerance and passive coexistence, or is it about changing ourselves - our attitudes and social norms, as well as in the wider context - eliminating systemic inequalities, institutional racism and any other structural oppression.

Reflecting on models of integration of foreigners, which can be seen as different

political and philosophical discourses, state models and practices of different integration public policies, but also as a bottom-up practice created by local communities and new members of society, the Centre for Peace studies found that the model of interculturalism and the process of shared learning is the fairest model of including new members in the very act of re-building the society which they join. Interculturality is thus a never-ending process, in which new and old members of the society critically approach different aspects of the cultures of the new and old members of society, re-examining certain social norms and jointly creating new ones.

Interculturalism can be seen as a model based on the process of intercultural dialogue that involves an open exchange of views between individuals and groups of different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, based on mutual understanding and respect. It strives for the ethic of maximum tolerance of individual choice and zero tolerance of totalitarian systems. This model requires constant dialogue and critical questioning of integration and social cohesion based on common values, equality of dignity, but also on the perception of trust, loyalty and commitment. It starts from the fact that cultures change under different influences and requires an interdisciplinary approach. It is based on multi-layered relations and approaches, as well as on the understanding that immigration is no longer perceived as a complete break with the previous ways and place of life or a mere takeover of new patterns, customs and norms. People who move into new spaces keep relations with the spaces they left - whether it's an occasional return home, contact with family, sending money, diaspora organization and the like - and thus live transcultural lives.

As Bužinkić writes⁶: An intercultural story recognizes historical identity but sees it as evolutionarily in a process in which all citizens of any identity have a voice and no one has a privileged status. This concept is aware of the current context and current events, but also predicts what will happen in society. The degree of acceptance of an intercultural story depends on the balance between hopes and fears, and the public debate focused on them. The Achilles heel lies in the fear that others might change us. The idea that they can be equal in creating a new common culture causes cultural anxiety. It seems safer and more reasonable for these others to adjust to the basics and norms before they become co-decision makers. This approach can very easily slip into assimilation as a condition of integration in which 'they' have to become the same as 'us'. When these demands arise from fear and distrust, and are supported by already constructed and unstructured fears, 'they' are required to constantly rebuild trust, although there is a strong doubt that they will be able to do so, before they become equal members. This, of course, deeply compromises democracy in its foundations (Taylor, 2012).

6 A step beyond multiculturalism, Panel on Interculturalism, CMS, 2016, p.5.

Glossary

Refugee is a person outside the country of his/her nationality or habitual residence. He/she is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country or is unable or unwilling to return to it due to a well-founded fear for reasons of:

- race
- religion
- nationality
- membership of a particular social group or
- political opinion

Outside the legal framework, a refugee is any person who has been forced to leave their habitual place of residence.

Foreigner is a person of another citizenship; from the perspective of Croatian citizens - a person who does not have the Croatian citizenship.

Migrant is a person who migrates for the purpose of a more permanent settlement. This term is perceived more negatively than the term refugee among the public. We use it mainly if it is necessary to make a legal difference between migrants and refugees. The term migrant is also an umbrella term for all persons who migrate, whether they do it voluntarily or are forced to. Therefore, all refugees are migrants, but not all migrants are refugees.

Internally displaced person / exile is a person forced to leave his / her home and place of residence due to war or in order to avoid the consequences of armed conflicts, general violence, human rights violations, natural or man-made disasters, and who has not crossed internationally recognized national borders.

Unaccompanied minor is a person under the age of 18 who is in a new country unaccompanied by a parent / legal representative or has been unaccompanied after entering the country.

Vulnerable groups are: incapacitated persons, minors, elderly and infirm persons, seriously ill persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, single parents with children who are minors and victims of trafficking, torture, rape or other psychological, physical and sexual violence.

Asylum seeker is a foreigner who submits an application for asylum upon entering the Republic of Croatia and resides in the country during the processing of the application. Persons who seek asylum are mainly accommodated in Reception centres for applicants of international protection - facilities serving as collective accommodation for asylum seekers. There are two such facilities in Croatia: in Kutina and Zagreb. If an asylum

seeker has their own funds to finance the accommodation or has family members or friends who are willing to accommodate them - then he / she can stay there, with prior notification to the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for the asylum procedure. Asylum seekers do not have restrictions on their freedom of movement and can be accommodated anywhere in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

Asylee is a refugee who has been granted international protection (asylum) on the basis of the regulations of the Act on International and Temporary Protection. In Croatia, there is a legal distinction between the terms refugee and asylum seeker although they are equivalent terms. Persons who fled our territory in the 1990s are considered refugees, while foreigners who have refugee status in Croatia are considered asylum seekers. Given the fact that the asylum system was introduced in the Republic of Croatia in 2003, there was a need to distinguish war refugees from the former Yugoslavia from the "new" refugees.

Asylum is the provision of protection and refuge of a certain state on its territory to a person who has left his/her country due to a well-founded fear of persecution, i.e. because his/her basic human rights have been compromised. According to Act on International and Temporary Protection (Art.) 20.) "Asylum shall be granted to applicants who are outside the country of their nationality or habitual residence and have a well-founded fear of persecution owing to their race, religion, nationality, affiliation to a certain social group or political opinion, as a result of which they are not able or do not wish to accept the protection of that country." Asylum will not and cannot be granted on economic grounds, but only on the political ones.

Subsidiary protection is protection granted to a foreigner who does not meet the conditions for granting asylum, and for whom there are justified reasons indicating that by returning to the country of origin he/she would face a real risk of suffering severe injustice. Due to such risk, the foreigner is not placed under the protection of the country of origin but is granted this form of protection for a period of 3 years.

Temporary protection is protection granted to foreigners who come in large numbers from a country where human rights have been violated due to a war (or similar events), general violence or internal conflicts. Temporary protection is the protection of urgent and temporary nature granted in an emergency procedure in cases of mass influx or impending mass influx of displaced persons from third countries who cannot return to their country of origin, especially if there is a risk that due to this inflow it is not possible to effectively carry out the procedure for granting international protection, in order to protect the interests of displaced persons and other persons seeking protection.

Principle of non-refoulement is a fundamental principle defined by the 1951 Convention related to the Status of Refugees, which protects refugees who find themselves in an area outside their country of origin from being forcibly returned to the area where they are likely to be persecuted, tortured or killed. Article 33 of the Convention states as follows: "No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refoul') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his or her life or

freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

Dublin regulation is a regulation of the European Council that defines the competence of an EU Member State on the asylum procedure in an EU Member State. The Dublin Regulation introduces the term "burden-sharing" in the EU's common asylum system, which means that the person who applies for asylum in one member state cannot do the same in any other member state. The whole process is supported by the EURODAC SYSTEM - the EU database containing fingerprints of asylum seekers. When someone applies for asylum, no matter where in the EU, their fingerprints are entered into the central Eurodac system that shows in which country the person first applied for asylum.

A safe third country is a country in which a foreigner resided before coming to the Republic of Croatia, provided that there he/she was safe from persecution or human rights violations due to his/her race, religion, nationality, belonging to a certain social group or political opinion, and that the country adheres to the international principles regarding the protection of refugees, and that a foreigner may legally return to that country and seek asylum without fear of deportation to a country where his/her life, security or liberty would be endangered.

Resettlement is a process of selecting and relocating from a country where a person has sought international protection to a country that has decided to accept that person as a refugee. It is a process of seeking protection in which the proceedings are conducted in one country and the person who applied for protection resides in another country. When and if the country conducting the asylum procedure grants that asylum - the person (potentially his/her immediate family) resettles from the country in which he/she resided during the asylum procedure.

Relocation is a process of the EU Common Asylum System created in 2015, that involves a transfer of asylum seekers from one EU Member State to another EU Member State, making the second Member State responsible for the asylum procedure.



FAQ about the asylum system for volunteers

Can one person lose the asylum status?

Asylum and subsidiary protection statuses can be revoked and terminated. International protection will not be granted, and will be revoked if it has already been granted, to persons who are seriously suspected of having committed, instigated or were otherwise involved in crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity, certain crimes prior to coming to Croatia or have committed acts that are contrary to the goals and principles of the United Nations, or they pose a danger to the legal order and national security of the Republic of Croatia. In addition, status can be revoked if it is acquired on the basis of misrepresented or omitted facts, by falsely presenting essential facts and circumstances, by using forged identifications and other documents. The status of international protection generally terminates when the circumstances under which a person received international protection terminate, when that person places himself/herself under the protection of the country which he/she fled or otherwise enjoys protection, for example by acquiring the citizenship of the country whose protection he/she may enjoy. In any case, the status can be revoked or terminated after the competent authority informs the person of the reasons and allows him/her to make a statement.

What is the first instance of asylum seeking and what is the second instance?

In the Republic of Croatia, two state bodies are responsible for determining the circumstances that make someone a refugee: in the first instance of asylum seeking - the Ministry of the Interior, i.e. lawyers employed by the Ministry in the position of decision makers in asylum cases. In the second instance of asylum seeking - the Administrative Court, i.e. judges employed by the Administrative Court. There are four Administrative Courts in the Republic of Croatia: in Osijek, Rijeka, Split and Zagreb. The first and second instances of asylum seeking are two different procedures that are not connected and do not follow each other. The procedure is as follows: if the Ministry of the Interior makes a negative decision in the asylum procedure, i.e. rejects the asylum application, then the applicant has the possibility to appeal to this decision

at the Administrative Court. Before the Administrative Court, the asylum seeker and the representative of the Ministry of the Interior (decision-maker) are opposing parties. In the second instance of asylum seeking, the asylum seeker is entitled to a free legal aid provided by lawyers from the free legal aid list.

What are the rights of asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers have the right to reside and to move freely in the Republic of Croatia, as well as the right to adequate material living and accommodation conditions. During the procedure, an asylum seeker may reside in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers or at any address in the Republic of Croatia at his own expense, with the approval of the Ministry of the Interior. Asylum seekers have the right to emergency medical care, which includes diagnostic and therapeutic procedures necessary to eliminate immediate dangers to life and health. Underage asylum seekers have the right to education under the same conditions as Croatian citizens. In the second instance procedure, asylum seekers have the right to free legal assistance in drafting a lawsuit, as well as representation before the Administrative Court. Furthermore, asylum seekers have the right to financial assistance, the right to receive humanitarian aid and the right to religious freedom and religious education of children. One year from the day of submitting the application, asylum seekers have the right to work without residence and work permit.

How does one person seek asylum?

Intention to seek asylum can be expressed at the border crossing during border control or, if the person is already in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, at any police station. In practice, this means that one has to find a police officer and tell him/her "I want to apply for asylum" or write it on a piece of paper. After expressing the intention, it is necessary to submit an asylum application, and this takes place in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Zagreb before the decision-maker. This is followed by a series of interviews in which, with the help of an interpreter, the decision-makers thoroughly interrogate the person about the reasons for seeking asylum.

How will I communicate with people if we don't speak the same language?

Although it can be challenging, communication is more than the language itself and there are many ways to communicate with the people you will be working with, even if you don't speak the same language. Try using drawings, songs, gestures - don't be afraid to use and explore new ways of communication. Engaging people who speak multiple languages can sometimes be helpful - they become links between you and the people you work with.



Sudwind
(Austria)



PATRIR
(Romania)



Development Perspectives - DP
(Ireland)



CPS – Center for Peace Studies
(Croatia)



Rehabilitation centre for
stress and trauma - RCT
(Croatia)



Slovene Philanthropy – SP
(Slovenia)



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