



AALBORG UNIVERSITET

**WOMEN IN VOLUNTEERING AND
SOCIAL WORK**

The case of Mareena organization
MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to observe the tendencies and inclinations of women for volunteering and social work. As the research question implies, we are focusing on the case study of a pro-migrant organization Mareena located in Slovakia. Even though Slovakia does not struggle with great amounts of refugees coming to the country, there is a migrant community that requires tolerant and respectful approach, help and guidance. This is the main reason why Mareena was established in 2015 after the migration crisis outburst. The organization led exclusively by women seeks to assist the refugees on their way to integration and assimilation to the new country and its culture. Activities similar to these are crucial, especially in the countries like Slovakia where the fear of the unknown is significant. Slovakia is considered a religious and traditional country, therefore, the perception of refugees is not positive. The goals of Mareena are met with the help of discussions, various projects, cultural events and other activities where local people have the opportunity to meet with foreigners and observe what the similarities between them are. This way, the organization is trying to minimize the gaps between them and build “bridges” that connect everyone. We initiate this thesis with a hypothesis assuming that women indeed have a bigger tendency to work in the social work sector. This thesis offers a theoretical background of the NGOs, volunteering, social work, the functioning of organizations helping the refugees but most importantly it investigates the role and the importance of women and their engagement in the third sector. After the literature review of the themes mentioned above, the research will be extended by the practical part consisting of interviews with employees and volunteers of Mareena. Those interviews allow us to acquire an insight into the organization, its work environment and the realities of the women employed in the third sector. Afterwards, the thesis continues with an analysis of the given interviews where we take a closer look at the opinions and perceptions of their activities and position within the non- governmental sector. The thesis attempts to discover whether there are unequal ratios of women and men in this sector, whether one of the genders is more prone to this kind of career and if so, what are the influences and reasons for it. At the end of the research, the reader should be acquainted with the background information about the NGO sector, the engagement of women in the third sector and the results of our research based on the combination of the primary and secondary sources. This data collection should aim to answer the initial research question.

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Research question:

“What are the inclinations of women for volunteering and social work?” (in analysis of pro-migrant organization in Slovakia- Mareena)

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations create a vital part of today's society. Civil associations, such as NGOs, are found especially in cultures where social or civilizational changes are taking place. One of its roles is to be active where the state lacks enough participation. It is precisely the gap between the state and the market that allows for the establishments of NGOs. In the case of NGOs, the main aim is to improve the quality of life of citizens and society as a whole. The issue arises when it comes to finances and salaries in the third sector and social work environment. It is believed that it requires a certain amount of empathy, social awareness and motivation. However, it is well known that participation of young adults in volunteer activities has a positive impact on their sense of active citizenship. People with volunteering experiences showcase more empathy and sensitivity towards the needs of others and of the society as a whole which benefits greatly from their engagement. It is especially the resolution of social issues when volunteering proves to be effective and beneficial. When it comes to the activities of NGOs, their main occupations mostly consist of the development and protection of cultural values, humanitarian help, protection of the environment, complementary education for children and young adults and providing of social services.

As it is obvious and commonly presented, women are considered significantly important participants of the third sector and its operations. This might be caused by biological predispositions, social expectations, upbringing and many other factors. In any case, women are known to be active and dedicated social workers and volunteers in various areas. However, these are assumptions that we will be trying to support, prove or falsify by the end of the thesis. Our final objective is to discover whether there is a gender more prone to volunteer activity and social work and what are the influences.

In this thesis, firstly we will be focusing on the general definition of NGOs, volunteering, social work and their role in society, the legal conditions of such organizations and their overall impact throughout the years. Later, we will be looking at the reaction of organizations around the events of the 2015 migration crisis. The main theoretical part will belong to the topic of women working and volunteering in the third sector and their motivations and predispositions for this kind of work. As a case study, we will be using the example of the non-governmental organization Mareena operating in Slovakia, specifically in three cities- Bratislava, Košice and Nitra. The organization was established in 2017 and consisted of women employees since the beginning. Even the volunteers of Mareena are mainly women. Their main focus is the integration of migrants in the Slovak territory with the help from individual and community volunteers. Their activity consists of help with Slovak and English language, assistance with integration process including visits of labour offices, police stations and various administration offices that lack services offered in English language, therefore making it difficult for migrants to communicate their needs with them. Mareena also attempts to present migrants and their cultures to the Slovak nation and make them more open to different cultures by organizing various events such as concerts, food festivals, discussions, summer camps and many more. The main goal is to make the integration process easier and to create common paths for migrants and locals.

In order to understand why women are commonly prone to volunteering and social work, we will have to observe their motives and personal attitudes. After presenting Mareena in the theoretical part, for the empirical one, we decided to collect a small number of semi-structured interviews where we ask my colleagues from the organization about their background, motivations and other opinions on whether there is an inequality in ratio of women to men in this sector. The analysis of the responses will be focusing on their stances, the achievements and the impact their job position has on society in their opinions and other insights. We will be collecting the data from secondary sources such as articles and research for the theoretical part alongside with collecting information from interviews with chosen female employees and volunteers of the organization. We will be offered responses from official employees but also volunteers who participate in the activities of Mareena only in their free time and for free. This way, we will be able to compare the outcomes from two points of view.

The reason behind this particular choice of interest for my thesis is my personal experience with the organization. At the moment, I am an active member of a volunteer programme in Mareena. So far it has been an extremely enlightening experience. It has shown me a new perspective on migration processes and the importance of diversity and community. I consider the activity of such organizations essential for our society. It spreads awareness and knowledge while mitigating the fear of the unknown that is commonly present in Slovakia and among its nation. I had the opportunity to meet many interesting and inspirational people, to obtain knowledge on cultures and customs that I was not familiar with before. This way, I am becoming more open, respectful and understanding towards foreign cultures and people coming from unfamiliar environments. Moreover, I have been able to observe the dynamics and relations among inspirational women working for Mareena and how much time and effort is put in this type of career. Since my studies on AAU have been focused on migration and gender studies, Mareena fits the requirements for the relevancy of the topic. The organization is founded and led solely by women while their target group consists of migrants. The topic enables me to observe two of my main academic interests at the same time and therefore is creating the perfect combination for my studies. For that reason, I have chosen to answer the following research question: *“What are the inclinations of women for volunteering and social work?” (in analysis of pro-migrant organization in Slovakia- Mareena)*

Our hypothesis for this master thesis assumes that there are certain trends and habits in volunteer practice. The hypothesis expects the secondary sources such as researches and statistics alongside with the results of our own smaller research to show that women have the tendency to volunteer more and are more prone to a career in social work. At the end of the thesis, when we reveal our results and findings, we will be able to say whether the hypothesis was relevant and what are the directions of the issue.

Theory

Theoretical part of this master thesis will present fundamental information about non-governmental organizations, social work and volunteering. We believe that in order to understand the connections between women and volunteering and social work, it is inevitable and important to provide definitions and attributes of those activities. After exploring the characteristics of NGO's, volunteering and social work, the thesis will discuss gender based volunteering and the role and importance of women participating in in the third sector as well as the reaction of organizations to the 2015 migration crisis. This part will give us an idea of the connections and circumstances needed to introduce our case study later on.

NGOs

Civil society is a crucial pillar of democracy. It represents the third sector coexisting with the government and the market. Non-governmental organizations consist of civil society organizations, foundations, non-capital funds and non-governmental organizations. Those associations are active in the spheres of education, charity work, social work, children and youth activities, health care, environment, culture, sport, recreation, human rights, minorities or local communities.

The term NGO started being used alongside with the formation of the UN. It is relatively difficult to precisely define NGOs since the term carries various connotations. However, the closest we can get to defining NGOs is characterising their main features. In order to make it as understandable as possible, it is important to state that NGOs consist of a group of people working together on the regular basis towards the same goal without an aim of earning money, obtaining a position in government or practising illegal actions. NGOs are generally not linked to the government, they are non-profit, non-violent and they cannot show signs of political party. If the organization meets those requirements, it is accepted by the United Nations. There are different types of non-governmental organizations with different attributes (Kütting, 2002).

Non-governmental sector is characterized by a higher level of effectiveness in comparison with the public sector. This is caused by greater flexibility, less

bureaucracy, engagement of volunteers and an ability to combine various sources of financing. The main idea of the non-governmental sector is based on the involvement in areas which are not attractive enough for entrepreneurs while providing ideal conditions for non-governmental activities.

Social work

According to the book “What is Professional Social Work?” by Malcolm Payne, social work is “a service and practice using social and psychological sciences in interpersonal interactions with people, especially from deprived social groups and experiencing practical and emotional difficulties in social relationships.” (Payne, 2006, p.5) The author also mentions that social work focuses on three main targets: keeping everything within social structures under control and offering social welfare effectively, helping individuals achieve fulfilment and control over their lives and supporting change in the society (Payne, 2006).

It is important for any social worker or a social work organization to find the equilibrium between those practices notably because social work activities hold a significant responsibility in the process of development and social progress and finding its place within the work market (Pawar & Cox, 2005).

Social work is performed by social workers. Those people can obtain a regular salary for their job or perform for free as a result of volunteering. Apart from social workers, social work can be also offered by family members or people employed in a different welfare area (Banks, 2020).

Charity Organization Society and Settlement House Movement from the 19th century are considered to be the direct forerunners of social work in the USA and Europe. The settlement houses were mainly focused on art, theatre or drama but the main idea is very similar to social work we know nowadays. The shift forward of social work started happening because of the increase of social issues caused by the immigration and industrialization at the end of the 19th century. Labour market also needed to expand and fight poverty influenced by the war so the new work opportunities within social

work were welcomed. The first official social work schools started emerging around the same time (Giamocucci, 2021).

It is obvious from various written records that the history of social work comes from charity work. This charity work has always been targeted at groups of people in need or disadvantaged people. Majority of charitable activities were provided by women for free. Theoretically speaking, social work is linked to social systems, social justice and injustice, human behaviour and traditions. Since social work connects both professional employment and natural human values including compassion and empathy, people have always found it complicated to draw the line and set the exact rules and definitions of social work. It can therefore be difficult to proceed in professionalizing social work. However, certain experts claim that it is exactly the imprecision that allows social work to expand and grow. Despite its development in the West, social work as a profession has soon spread to the other corners of the world and acquired a specific form adjusted to each culture (Dahle, 2021).

Qualities of a social worker

Social worker is anyone who practices the activities characterized as social work, however, on the contrary from a volunteer, social workers are either getting paid or are at least bound by a contract. Job positions in social work are considered professional. Those workers should have an adequate education that makes them suitable for the job. Social workers stand against social issues such as poverty, trauma, lack of education, unemployment etc. and help people facing those problems solve them. There are different areas in which workers intervene and therefore many different types of social workers. Based on the occupation they can be helping with family and school issues, mental health and addiction issues, medical issues in general, community problems or even traumas after serving in the military (Banks, 2020).

Adequate and sufficient education is one of the primary and most important qualities of a good social worker. Education provides them with knowledge, ethics and principles on how to respect, help and improve. Academic background and materials offer students improvement of their competences and self-development. However, it is important to have the natural attributes and predispositions to become a social worker.

In this type of work, the majority of knowledge can be offered through personal experience and work practice while being guided towards their potential. When hiring new employees, organizations seek to find people willing to learn and sacrifice, people with motivation, morals, adequate persona and professional views. Those might be even more important than actual facts about social work practice. That is why personal interviews are important. They reveal the potential and personal qualities of a social worker that knows how to deal with vulnerable people requiring special care and attitude (Kam, 2019).

Volunteering

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2018) defines volunteering as any kind of activity that includes putting time and effort without any financial compensation. This unpaid activity should be provided from one's free will and somehow benefit the society, environment or an individual. There are two main types of volunteering: formal and informal. Formal volunteering is arranged through official organization. Other forms of volunteering are for example any social action or community work.

Volunteering has a long history in the areas of organization, economy and sociology. It is a symbol of community togetherness provided by different mediators in various ways. In the past, people used to sacrifice and commit their free time into issues that they found concerning and helped people in need therefore, modern volunteering does not differ from this concept in many ways (Wemlinger & Berlan, 2015).

The Guidance Note by the UN Volunteers from 2009 introduces a typology for volunteering dividing it into the following four categories:

- Philanthropy and service to others: This type of volunteering is the most expanded and is usually arranged with the help of organizations and associations. Its main aim is to target a specific problem or a specific marginalized group of people and offer them help.
- Advocacy and campaigning: This includes advocacy groups and the main focus is to assure or to restrain change in various forms.

- Mutual aid/self-help: This represents the informal grouping of individuals with similar interests with the aim of approaching a certain issue that everyone from the group is facing, therefore they are able to help each other.
- Civic participation: This kind of volunteering associates people with skills useful for political activities or activities including various decision-making processes. (UN Volunteers, 2009).

According to Safrit and Merrill (2002), volunteering disposes of four defining principles that distinguishes it from other social activities:

1. Volunteering requires active participation, involvement and certain amount of time and effort dedicated to the activity. The volunteer is never perceived as a sponsor.
2. None of the volunteering activities are enforced. Every volunteer has their personal motives for the work and chooses to do so willingly.
3. Volunteer activity is not conditioned by financial gain. The volunteer can obtain certain remunerations but those serve for alimentation or accommodation, not as a salary. Financial gain should never be the main motivation for volunteering.
4. The main objective of volunteering is common wellbeing or common good. The ideal combination is common good and a certain amount of self-profit. However, the outcomes should exceed the profit of an individual.

The overall estimation of global volunteering activity is worth 2.4% of global GDP. The majority of volunteer work is performed locally and without supervision from an organization which makes up for approximately 70%. This type of work is slightly difficult to study since most of it is not as visible as official volunteering in organizations (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

Eurostat statistics from 2015 show that numerous member states of the European Union have proven to have a relatively high interest in both formal and informal volunteering. Those countries included Finland with 74.2% of informal volunteering, Netherlands with 40.3% of formal volunteering and Sweden that demonstrated 70.4% of informal and 35.5% of formal volunteering participation. While in these countries, the volunteering activity is gaining more and more popularity, in countries such as Cyprus, Malta and Romania, the interest is very low. The reasons behind those

contrasts might be caused by the culture, mentality or social rules of the given country. The interest in volunteer work also comes from education. Statistics show that 28.4% of volunteers reached tertiary education while 11.5% of them obtained primary or lower secondary education. Eurostat also claims that the most active volunteer group are elderly people, especially those from 65 to 74 years. This group is engaging in both formal and informal volunteering activities. The category of young people from 16 to 28 years comes right behind them while being followed by people in the active age of 25 to 64 (Eurostat, 2017).

What makes volunteering different from the past and also more accessible is the presence of technologies. According to UN Volunteers, around 12,000 internet users from 187 countries all around the world volunteer online every year. This type of volunteering is provided by the UN online volunteering platform. Volunteering facilitated through the internet offers opportunities like graphic design, creating websites or writing different articles and papers. This type of volunteering brings experiences and opportunities to people who are in some kind of disadvantage and could not actively volunteer because of it (Millora, 2020).

Gender based volunteering and social work

In this part of the thesis, we will observe the role and importance of women in volunteering, social work and the third sector in general. As we already mentioned earlier, volunteering is significantly popular among women. In this section, we will take a closer look at the reasons behind this tendency as well as the official statistics stated in various researches.

According to the UNV's official volunteerism reports from 2015 and 2018, there are visible inequalities in the volunteering spheres. It states that volunteerism is one of the most important tools for dealing with crises, especially those including economic and social issues. However, the distribution of this type of work is not even in many aspects. We will be focusing on the aspect of gender inequality within volunteerism. If we look at volunteer work from a global point of view, we can generally assume that women provide a majority of services. Many researches show that women take up 57% of overall volunteer work globally. While that is important information, it is essential to

differentiate between formal and informal volunteer work. Informal volunteering receives less financial support and less protection and therefore is not too common. The percentage of women participating in volunteer work tends to be higher within informal volunteering which includes local communities and their own families. On the other hand, the difference between men and women offering formal volunteer work through the official organizations is less significant. As an example, we can use the informal volunteer activity of the Caribbean and Latin America where women provide more than 70% of those services (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

If we take a look at the graph below published on the official UN Volunteers website, we can observe that the ratio between men and women in the volunteering sector varies from region to region around the world. As we already mentioned, Latin America has a higher percentage of female volunteers in contrast to West and Central Africa where the percentage of male volunteers rises up to 59%. The natural difference in volunteering occurs in the way women and men perform their volunteer activities, how much time they are willing to sacrifice or how much energy they put in the work (Borromeo, 2021).

Distribution of women and men UN volunteers across regions

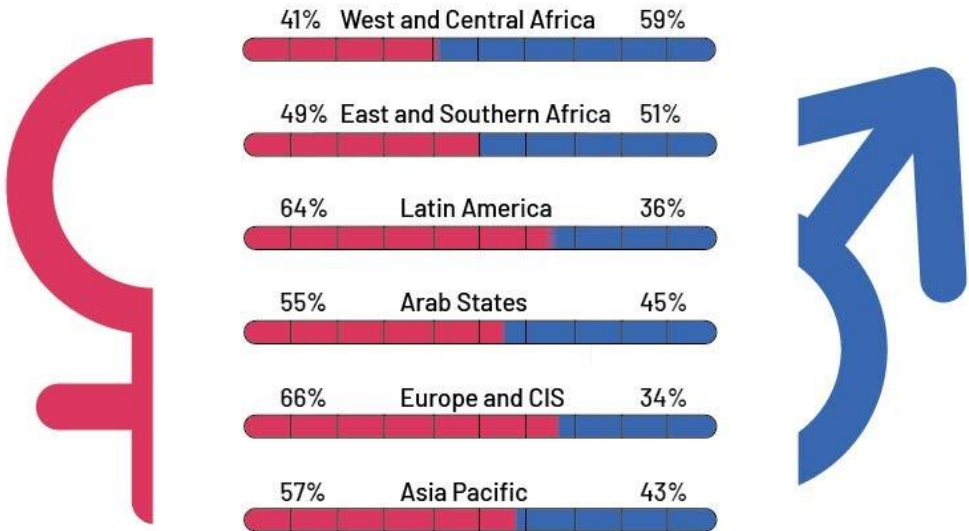


Figure 1

As we would expect, just like every other sphere, the volunteering sphere also experiences segregation based on gender. There are certain roles in volunteering that can be directly associated with gender or other social categories such as class or age. While there can be exceptions, it is common for women to engage and volunteer in social and health issues which are usually unpaid while men prefer to participate in spheres such as technologies, economy and science (Borromeo, 2021).

These tendencies for segregation are linked to traditional gender roles of our society which vary from country to country. Since those gender roles are embedded in our minds from a very early age, women are naturally driven towards certain volunteering habits, roles and positions and the organizations they choose to work for may be different than those chosen by men.

If we look at the many researches that have been worked on in order to find out what the difference between men and women in volunteering, we can observe mixed results. One thing that the findings agree on is that there is a difference in the attitude of men and women towards volunteering, social work and the responsibilities linked to it. Other influences for these differences such as professional careers and the responsibilities put upon both gender within the family and household are also often mentioned (Wemlinger & Berlan, 2015).

One of the most important influences is the impact volunteer work has on women's social life. When it comes to this argument, it is important to look at the history. In the past, volunteering did not represent professionalism but it offered women a getaway from their household responsibilities and allowed them to show society that they are able to handle both their family lives and other activities while being beneficial for the society. While family was still a priority for these women, they chose to offer their potential in a different way as well. Those were women's attempts to find their role on the labour market without being judged for abandoning their families. Depending on the point of view, we could argue that this attitude deepened the differences and inequalities between men and women in times when minimizing them was more important than ever. However, the counterargument is that volunteerism in the past provided women with useful skill sets and background for future work opportunities. It was a great opportunity for inexperienced women to acquire knowledge that would one

day help them integrate into the labour market with paid positions. Moreover, it was proven that educated women with volunteering activities focused more on the new skills such as management instead of white-collar job positions that were typical for women. Either way, volunteering was an act of compromise for women. For wives and mothers who were expected and forced to sacrifice their dream careers for family and lead a stay-at-home life, it was the only chance to gain skills and contacts. Women have always been put in a position where nothing was promised or guaranteed and especially in the past, when they were forced to count on their husbands, volunteering presented an alternative in case they become widowed or divorced. It offered them value (Kaminer, 1984).

Continuing to compare the volunteering and social work habits of women and men, we will take a closer look at Taniguchi and his work. Taniguchi (2006) presents employment and possible unemployment as the main influence on volunteering. In case of women, unemployment or part-time work increases the chances of them starting a volunteering activity and putting more energy and time into it, however when it comes to men, their professional work situation does not seem to make a difference. Many researchers claim that volunteerism can represent a natural instinct for women. Being told to be good mothers, wives and care-takers from an early age makes them more prone to being interested in such work. As we already mentioned, this idea is rooted in history and is difficult to let go of. While women are expected to take care of family and household, men are traditionally taught to secure the family financially therefore they prefer to look for professional and highly paid job positions instead of volunteering for the benefit of society. In general, women have proven to spend more time on offering informal support as for example taking care of the elderly members of the family which is also considered a type of volunteer work even though it can feel like a natural thing to do and is commonly taken for granted (Taniguchi, 2006).

Importance of women in volunteering and social work

As we have observed in the previous part, women create an essential part of volunteering work with their abilities and predispositions. In the following paragraph, we will focus on the reasons women should be encouraged and engaged in volunteer and social work and what exactly is their contribution.

Women's presence in volunteering brings them newly obtained skills and offers them a sense of empowerment, especially for those coming from cultures where women are not welcomed to work professionally. Women volunteers are significantly important in the areas of developing countries where they are able to help their communities and improve the living conditions of local people. This way, volunteering contributes to the increase of gender equality since it enables female volunteers to showcase their potential. Giving women opportunities and visibility also helps to decrease violence against them (UN Volunteers, 2021).

If we look at the example of female volunteers in Nepal focusing on community improvement, we can observe the proof of positive impact on the status of women within their society. They are given the opportunity to help each other by educating others from disadvantaged environments about female reproductive health and other overlooked topics. Another example of women's participation in volunteering comes from Iran. Establishment of Volunteer Health Workers provided women with a newly acquired role in the society while enabling both genders to apply their rights. However, gender inequality is present here as well because of traditions and social habits that guide women to prioritise community issues over those concerning health and reproductive rights (UN Volunteers, 2021).

Numerous humanitarian organizations including Finnish Red Cross claim that the active involvement of women in social work and the actual process of program planning is essential in order to target and acknowledge the problems that would be otherwise overlooked by men. Women play an essential role when tackling and solving issues such as sexual health, reproductive and menstrual health and least but not last, sexual violence and violence against women. It is inevitable to reach women affected by those issues without involving female workers in the process.

This is partially caused by religious and social rules in certain countries and cultures. As an example, we can use Muslim countries where women are not always allowed to receive help from male humanitarian workers and therefore their options become limited to only women workers and their assistance. It is especially in countries where women experience oppression that their involvement in volunteering activities enables them to find their stance and voice (Saarikoski, 2019).

It is well known that social workers possess qualities like good listening, being exceptional communicators, being able to find consensus and look at things from different perspectives. They do not avoid conflicts and are good team workers. For this reason, women are naturally good social workers. Women in general demonstrate qualities for leadership which are beneficial for social work and volunteering. Those qualities include soft skills, listening and communication skills, effectiveness and compassion toward others. They also tend to apply a fair attitude and are more prone to competitiveness which leads to positive outcomes. Some of the main priorities for women are usually equality and justice (Lipkin, 2019).

Organizations during and after the migration crisis of 2015

In 2015, Europe was hit with a migration crisis. Great amount of refugees were fleeing their countries due to hostile environments, bad living conditions, wars and conflicts. They were trying to cross the borders and enter Europe with the vision of a better life. This situation required the assistance of humanitarian workers and organizations. In those times, their activities were more important than ever before. The circumstances caused the establishment of many new pro-migrant organizations but also it fuelled the activism of those already existing. Since the topic of our case study is Mareena, the pro-migrant organization operating in Slovakia, it is relevant to take a closer look at how the migration crisis of 2015 influenced the humanitarian organizations and associations and their engagement. After all, Mareena also started its activities as a reaction to the migration crisis.

The 2015 migration crisis in Europe caused a humanitarian disaster after more than 911,000 refugees escaped Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan due to political conflicts and around 3,550 people lost their lives on the run. The main journeys chosen by the refugees went through the Mediterranean Sea to Italy or through Turkey to the shores of Greece. The influx of migrants became the number one issue of the European Union (Spindler, 2015).

Pro-migration associations and organizations generally face insufficient support and financial aid. Even though the damages that the migration crisis of 2015 brought were

catastrophic, the increase of the financial support did not grow significantly. However, the actions were undertaken to mitigate the consequences of the situation.

One of the main interventions was implemented by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in July of 2015. The Council agreed to the measures concerning relocating the refugees located in Italy and Greece and offer them international protection within the next two years (European Commission, 2015).

Between the years 2017 and 2018, the pro-migration sector monitored an increased financial aid from foundations and various grants. The support grew by 40%. Even though concerning the critical situation, the third sector would need more, it was a positive improvement (National Committee For Responsive Philanthropy, 2020).

It is important to mention the actors that were able to intervene the most during the crisis. Those were the international organizations that were able to participate in helping all around Europe. There are two types of international organizations: governmental and non-governmental. Their engagement is employed within more countries and can be happening at micro or macro levels. Another ability of organizations is to intervene in the process of adjusting meanings, norms and data collection that can be crucial while helping during the humanitarian crisis (Kentikelenis & Shriwise, 2016).

Now that the role and power of organizations is clarified, it is important to mention some of the international organizations that played a crucial part during the helping process of the migration crisis in 2015.

Red Cross

The Red Cross has been active in Greece, Italy, Macedonia and Serbia. The volunteers provided by the Red Cross made sure that the refugees were offered essential supplies such as water and alimentation. Apart from helping within Europe, The Red Cross and its branches from all around the world travelled voluntarily into the affected regions (Syria, Iraq...) and provided health services and items used in the households alongside with water and food to those that were displaced within their own country (Red Cross Canada, 2015).

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The International Organization for Migration adopted a leading role during the migration crisis of 2015. They were focusing mainly on policies and collection of data on the number of refugees and what geographical routes they were choosing. Moreover, the head office of IOM implemented the process of keeping the data on numbers of deceased or lost individuals during their migration route. This would give the organization the opportunity to develop an effective policy that could prevent more deaths. OMI's contribution in the migration crisis also included sending teams of professional humanitarian workers to the affected areas to provide health services. The financial budget for those humanitarian operations in 2015 was 856.9 million dollars which was 14% more than in 2014 (Kentikelenis & Shriwise, 2016).

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization also known as WHO started a Migration and Health Task Force as a reaction to the migration crisis in Europe. Their assistance consisted of services and support towards the need of refugees, offering medical assistance, training the humanitarian and medical workers, coming up with aid campaigns, providing equipment and spreading useful information among refugees. The European branch of WHO organized a special gathering to discuss migration in Europe and the health of refugees. The outcome of this meeting was a framework that promised collaboration and participation of European countries that would secure refugee health (Kentikelenis & Shriwise, 2016).

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

This French organization claims that its main aim is to avoid deaths of people in all spheres of social issues and they do so by helping individuals in need of health care. The MSF provides migrants with mental and physical health assistance and works internationally. After going through the distressful journey, refugees are usually faced with trauma and they are physically exhausted, therefore the immediate medical assistance is crucial. The assistance during the biggest crisis was offered throughout the whole migrant journey especially in the receiving countries such as Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Greece, Serbia and France where the help was required the most. Their priority is the coordination of help and assistance in cooperation with local authorities

of a given country. Migration crisis of 2015 led MSF to initiate rescue operations located in the Mediterranean in an attempt to find lost refugees. Their operations were successful as by the end of 2015, they managed to rescue more than 18.000 people. In order to make these rescues even more efficacious, the organization decided to offer local fishermen trainings and taught them how to react in such situations as they are often exposed to refugees trying to cross the borders (Kentikelenis & Shriwise, 2016).

Open Society Foundations (OSF)

The primary contribution of the Open Society Foundations in the area of migration is advocacy and proposal of grants. It offers the collection of medical records, sponsorship of medical NGOs around Europe. As an example, we can mention that OSF funded an Italian organization called Doctors for Human Rights that provided asylum seekers and migrants with mental health assistance. Another type of intervention provided by OSF is development of policies concerning medical conditions, protection of sex workers. Lastly, the organization focuses on advocacy of disadvantaged people and provides them with medical help (Kentikelenis & Shriwise, 2016).

Case study

Mareena

Mareena is a Slovak non-governmental organization led by women with its headquarters in the capital of Slovakia - Bratislava, operating in 2 other cities - Nitra and Košice. The organization was officially established in 2017 but the activities started in 2015 as a reaction to the migration crisis of the same year. The original objective of the initiative was to accumulate a large group of people willing to help one hundred refugees from Syria and Iraq that would be potentially accepted by the Slovak government. However, that would later adjust to the situation and Mareena started gathering various volunteers (Bán, 2021).

According to Mareena, their main vision is making Slovakia a safe and respectful home for people of all nationalities, religions and ethnicities. The official website claims that their primary motives are to support and improve the relations between Slovak and foreign communities, to spread awareness about the topic of diversity and integration and to provide opportunities for migrants to be actively participating in Slovak society. The official statement explains that their target group is society in general. Mareena facilitates the integration process and creates an amicable environment through educational activities, assistance, volunteering program and community activities.

They are actively cooperating with other Slovak and international non-governmental organizations as well as with partner organizations from countries belonging to V4. One of the main tools utilized in Mareena is the knowledge obtained from observing other countries and their way of handling migration policies and integration processes. The employees and volunteers of Mareena make sure their activities are effective, helpful and adequate (Mareena, 2021).

The organization officially runs three main types of programs: community program, volunteering program and lastly education and professional growth program.

Volunteering program

This program connects various people with passion for social and community work. As it is evident from its name, participation in this program is not financially evaluated. At

the moment, Mareena gathers 55 volunteers of which 48 are women and only 7 are men. There are two types of volunteers- individual and community volunteers and their activities vary according to the needs of the refugees.

According to the official report from 2019, the interest in volunteering program has grown in recent years. The volunteers are willing to provide refugees with necessary support and to offer their time and energy into activities such as development of language skills, acquisition of new contacts, assistance during official processes, tutoring of children and other individual needs. Community volunteers actively participated in the organization of community events (Mareena, 2019).

Community program

The aim of community activities is to connect individuals as well as organizations that are interested in migration issues. Mareena established the first community centre in Bratislava in 2017 that serves as a venue for community gatherings of foreigners but also locals. Those take place multiple times a month and offer activities such as community dinners, thematic parties, movie screenings or public debates. The community centre is considered a safe place for people who are in need of help, direction and guidance after arriving in a new country.

One of the most popular community activities for both volunteers and clients are summer camps for children. The camp is designated for both foreign and Slovak children where the social barriers are overcome since they are offered various activities and therefore can improve their language skills in a friendly, fun and non-formal way. Slovak children are given a chance to explore foreign cultures of their friends while recognizing the similarities and differences between them. One of the biggest events of the year organized by Mareena is the multicultural Mareena Festival held in autumn. It promises to bring the whole world under one roof and presents foreign artists, cuisine, debates and therefore allows the organization to open up the topics of migration, cultures, languages and climate crisis (Mareena, 2019).

Apart from the community activities, the organization adds to the formation of an open discussion about problems and complications concerning migration and integration of foreigners in the new environment. Mareena helps migrants find their voice and place in Slovakia, however there are still obstacles to overcome and issues that foreigners

are faced with that could be mitigated with tolerance and understanding. In order to create more tolerance between foreigners and locals, Mareena offers various workshops for companies or schools that teach them how to be open to the unknown. The main aspect of Mareena is that it provides foreigners with the feeling of belonging and community in which people are willing to help each other. The organization spreads the idea of mutual respect, multiculturalism and diversity (EduEra, 2019).

Education and professional growth program

This type of program is focused on activities offering language courses for both foreigners and Slovaks. It also provides help with career development and employment. As a part of the program, Mareena brought courses of English and Slovak language alongside an Arabic language course for beginners that was taught by foreigners. These took place in Bratislava and Nitra (Mareena, 2019).

In the year 2019, Mareena focused on eight new projects that were financed by local and European funds. Thanks to those funds, the organization was able to present and implement a crowdfunding campaign concentrated on the support of the many activities Mareena is currently doing but also plans to do in the future. Those key projects are oriented towards the support of social inclusion and integration of the small community of migrants living in Slovakia. Four of the projects are financed by Erasmus+ and by the “Right, equality and citizenship of European Union programme”. The rest of the projects gain finances from the Slovak Ministry of Justice, the city of Bratislava, EEA and Norway Grants and the European Students’ Union (Mareena, 2019).

Methodology

In the following part, we will be explaining the methods and methodological process used in the thesis. We will take a closer look at the data collection, research method and theories that were useful throughout the process of conducting the study.

Paradigms

At the beginning of the thesis, we decided to work with deductive theory. This theory stands for the basic relation between theory and social research. Based on the information that is already known, the author of the study assigns one or more hypotheses. This assumption is then followed throughout the whole process and is observed in order to finding out its relevancy. This relevancy can be proven by the adequate data collection and the analysis of the data which is a responsibility of the researcher. The use of empirical inquiry leads to the researcher using deduction to decide on the following steps and methods (Bryman, 2016).

We initiated the thesis by creating a hypothesis about women and their tendency to work as volunteers and social workers. With the help of pre-existing secondary sources such as studies and statistics alongside with the results of our interviews, we will be able to assess the verity of the given hypothesis.

Another important aspect of the thesis formation is assigning the ontological and epistemological approach. We decided to follow constructivism and interpretivism.

Constructivism is an ontological approach claiming that social phenomena are influenced by social actors. This means that the phenomena and their meanings are constantly in the state of change according to the social actors, their interactions and actions. The meanings of phenomena are also influenced by the author's perception of reality. The main idea is that we all create our own realities of the social world and social objects. This theory claims that knowledge is not perceived as definitive but rather open to alternations based on the individual and their stance (Bryman, 2016). The application of constructivism to our thesis is following. We are conducting interviews with a small sample of people that have a direct connection to volunteer activity and social work. We are focusing on their opinions and perceptions of the women's role and presence in the third sector. This way, we are looking at the social

realities created by them. These perceptions are usually influenced and created by certain experiences and social backgrounds. Later on, we are analysing those views on social realities and phenomena in order to obtain a better understanding of the topic.

The other paradigm we decided to apply in our thesis is interpretivism. This epistemological position serves as an opposite to positivism.

An epistemological position offers an idea of describing, predicting and analysing worldviews and opinions of the society. It helps us improve the general knowledge and the reasoning behind qualitative researching (Merriam, 2009)

The use of interpretivism allows the researcher to look at the statements of the individuals as conscious decisions and realities that are not influenced only by external effects but also by their own minds. Interpretivism sees people as complex creatures and respects the fact that they all perceive things differently. The alternative views are tolerated in this paradigm. Scientists using this approach focus on the subjective meanings of social realities (Bryman, 2016).

It is advised to use interpretivism in the qualitative research due to its focus on the close interactions with the respondents rather than on the reliability. Since our goal is to gain valuable, in-depth data about their decisions and motivations, we had to choose the approach that would enable us to see the influences behind their actions.

Data and methods

As it is in case of every research, we started by assigning the topic of the thesis and therefore the research question. This question allows the researcher to set an explanation of their aim and objective within the project. It is easier for the researcher to express the explicit points and goals of the research, if they use a question instead of just a statement. Hypothesis can be perceived as a part of the research question, however its task is to outline what the research might bring (Bryman, 2016).

Our research question is *“What are the inclinations of women for volunteering and social work?” (in analysis of pro-migrant organization in Slovakia- Mareena)*. The research question implies that our main focus group consists of women working in the social work sphere.

In this thesis, we have two main sources of data. The first source provides us with secondary data from different researches, official statistics, articles and books. The other source offers primary data collected from the semi-structured interviews. For the collection of the secondary data, we have used the narrative review of the offered literature.

The importance of the literature review lies in the provided insight into the topic that we are interested in. It is a recapitulation of a certain amount of relevant published researches, studies and surveys. After picking those sources, it is important to objectively explore them. According to the analysis that the researches is going for, the review can be historical, systematic, narrative, theoretical or argumentative (Jahan, Naveed, Zeshan & Tahir, 2016).

The characteristics of a narrative review are more open and less formal approaches. It consists of less strict steps and the process is flexible. The author is able to focus solely on the sources and information that are useful and beneficial for the given research. Narrative review of the literature provides the reader with a discussion of the relevant themes and their theoretical background (Jahan, Naveed, Zeshan & Tahir, 2016).

After finding and reviewing the literature, we moved to the practical part of the research. This part consists of the interviews and the follow-up analysis providing us with more information about the topic. As a research tool, we chose qualitative type of research.

Qualitative research is used to achieve the knowledge based on the experiences of the people. The focus of the research is on the quality and depth of the interviews rather than the quantity. It has become a valued research tool in the last years and for that reason, it is essential to conduct it in a meaningful way in order to gain relevant results. In case of qualitative research, the main tool of the analysis is the researcher. The author uses codes, themes, analysis of the context of the data and is responsible for the quality of the results. The exact method of conducting depends on the type of qualitative research. In the process of qualitative research, it is useful to carefully explain all of the steps in details to make sure the results are considered as trustworthy as possible. The advantages of this type of research are well known. Qualitative researching offers more space for experimentation, flexibility and focuses on the opinions and attitudes of individuals. There is an opportunity to elaborate on the

answers which is not possible in case of quantitative research. It is especially useful when the research is targeted at one specific social group, however the data collection requires more time and effort (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

Our target group consisted of the employees and volunteers of a certain pro-migrant organization hence the qualitative research. It enabled us to focus on the processes of one organization from different points of view with the help from the employees.

Interviews

Interviews make up for an inevitable part of qualitative research. In our thesis, we decided to use semi-structured interviews.

The method of semi-structured interviews have gained a significant popularity within the field of social sciences. They are characterized by predetermined examples of questions that can be enriched with other relevant questions throughout the interview based on the flow of the conversation. The questions should be open-ended and the interview should be similar to a regular conversation. The advantage of those interviews is in the value they offer due to their subjectivity and individuality. The interview schedule provides the researcher with a certain level of support, however, the respondents are able to answer the questions in their own manner. The reason behind the positive recognition of this type of interviews among social science researchers is their separation from the various theoretical approaches used in the research field. The biggest advantage of the semi-structure qualitative interviews is that they can be used for both identifying the realities and meaning as well as how those realities are influenced by the outside world (SAGE Publications, 2018).

Down below, we can see the predetermined schedule for our semi-structure interview. The first part consists of identification questions that help us gain an overall idea of who we are working with. The following open-ended questions are prepared to help construct an image of the organization and women's realities within the organization. If the opportunity occurs, other complementary questions can be added to create a fulfilling idea and to bring us closer to answering the research question.

Examples of the questions used for the semi-structured interviews

1. Age:
2. Nationality:
3. Education:
4. Job position:
5. How would you describe your role in Mareena?
6. How long have you been working for Mareena?
7. Do you have any previous history of activity in a non-governmental organization?
8. What was your motivation for this volunteering job?
9. How do you perceive the role of women within volunteering community?
10. Who do you think is more prone to volunteering and social work, men or women?
11. What do you think is the reason behind it? What are the influences behind those decisions? (For example background, social status, upbringing,...)
12. What would you say are pros and cons of your activity as a volunteer?
13. In your opinion, what kind of impact does your work activity have on Slovak society/local community?

Respondents

The direct connection to the organization has enabled us to choose four interviewees that would contribute to the process of elaborating the research. We were able to talk to three of them, two employees of the organization and one of the volunteers. Because of obvious reasons and the focus of our study, all of the chosen respondents were women. This close connection to the organization made the interviews more comfortable, open and friendly. Since the organization is led by women only, it was important to us to observe how an environment of this kind works. We were able to investigate the perception of women in social work from the point of view of those women. The interviews were conducted with the help of virtual devices in respect of the pandemic situation and the official measures. The respondents wished to stay

anonymous and for that reason, they will be referred to as respondent A, B, C later on in the analysis of the interviews.

The next step following the thorough collection of the interviews is the analysis of the acquired responses. For this part, we are using the method of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is another commonly used tool of the qualitative research. Apparently, it is more of a helping tool rather than a separate analysing method. However, its advantages show the opposite and caused the researchers to argue whether it should be considered a method. Its usefulness can be observed in many studies using organization, description, analysis and identification of the themes that occurred in the data collection. The thematic analysis has been named a common ground, a language of both qualitative and quantitative analysis users (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

In order to define thematic analysis, it is important to mention that it consists of assigning and underlying themes and codes within the data conducted through the interviews. The thematic analysis is considered to be the base for all the other types of analyses. Just like in case of semi-structured interviews, this type of analysis is also not linked to a specific epistemological paradigm which makes it easier to use and apply (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The main objective of the thematic analysis is to establish the themes and the codes that are repeated and mentioned multiple times in the entirety of the interviews. Collecting those codes enable the researcher to assess the results of the given research based on the frequency and common usage of the similar/ same expressions or statements. This way, it is easier for the researcher to identify and summarize the collected data because of it being well organised. The process of analysing consists of using the main questions of the interviews as themes, reading the responses thoroughly and determining the most used answers as codes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Thematic analysis offers two levels of themes, one of them being semantic and the other is latent. Those two levels vary in the way the researcher looks at the themes and codes. The analysis of semantic themes incorporates an investigation of the straightforward meaning of the responses while the latent one extends beyond the

exact meaning and examines the responses on a deeper level ending in the interpretation of the words (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Our thesis exhibits the signs of semantic level of theme analysis. We are focusing on the expressions and the exact statements of the participants with the aim of discovering what were their motives, inspirations, influences and reasons for working in social work sphere. To make the analysis more organized and well arranged, we decided to work out a table with the majority of the codes and themes that play a relevant role in our research. The table makes the process of analysing easier since it puts all the crucial data in one place.

Analysis

This part of the thesis is focused on the analysis of collected information from our semi-structured interviews with two employees of Mareena and one volunteer. The respondents were asked various questions about their background motives for social work, opinions on women working in the third sector and other questions.

We will start the analysis by determining the themes and codes that were repeatedly mentioned in the responses. This allows us to gather the most common aspects and look at the interviews from a more objective point of view. Below, we can see the displayed table (Table 1) with the themes and the codes. The table offers us a recapitulation of the interviews.

<p>Theme: previous experience Codes: volunteering, community work, social work, vulnerable groups</p>	<p>Theme: bigger tendency for volunteering (men or women) Codes: equal tendencies, men, women</p>
<p>Theme: motivation for the work Codes: like-minded people, helping others, being part of the change, improvement of society, community goals, further education, personal growth</p>	<p>Theme: influences behind volunteering tendencies Codes: social background, cultural background, life experiences, education, gender roles, social bubble, surroundings, preparation for professional career</p>
<p>Theme: perception of the role of women in volunteering community Codes: giving, powerful, inspirational, care-taking sphere, educational sphere, empathetic</p>	<p>Theme: pros of social work and volunteering Codes: different cultures, safe environment, laughter, connection, act of giving, informal environment, good relations, helping the society, satisfaction with results, diversity and challenges, flexibility</p>
<p>Theme: impact of social work activity on community Codes: awareness, making refugees feel safer and more welcomed, changing the perception of migrants in Slovakia, falsifying disinformation, bringing up important topics</p>	<p>Theme: cons of social work and volunteering Codes: difficult time management, finances, perceived as inferior, difficult to set boundaries, misconceptions</p>

Table 1: Themes and codes

We continue by presenting a thematic map (Figure 2) of the main areas and interests of our interviews and the connections between them. The arrows indicate which questions are closely interconnected. We can observe that previous experiences have an impact on future motivations for volunteering and social work. Positive experience create more motivation. Same applies to advantages of social work. On the other hand, the disadvantages of working in the third sector might be discouraging for some people. The perception of women within third sector is overall positive which leads to bigger tendency for volunteering and social work. If the results and impact of the work we do is visible and tangible, we understandably tend to be more inclined to volunteering and social work.

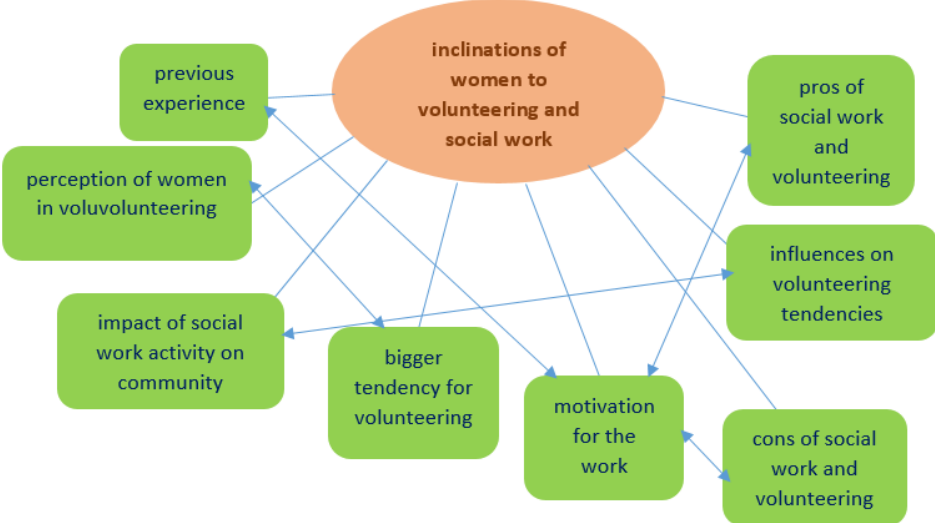


Figure 2: Thematic map

Identification questions

The introductory questions of the interviews are focused on elementary information about our respondents such as age, work position, education and nationality. These three women are closely connected to Mareena organization and are part of a dynamic and successful female team. As we can observe from the responses, they all have a university degree and obtained a certain level of education. Only one of the respondents has a degree from social work, while the two others majored at faculties

of art. We will find out later on in the analysis that the level of education is one of the factors influencing the extent of social responsibility and consciousness of an individual. The age is also a determining piece of information. It determines the amount of experiences the respondent might have in the field. Even though it does not always grows exponentially with age, it is more probable that women with a degree and already existing work experiences will be able to offer more useful skills in the area of social work. We decided to ask about the nationality of the participants in order to distinguish whether they come from Slovak or different culture. We believe that the cultural background would have an impact on their answers and attitudes towards the questions. The last introductory question concerns the official work position of the participants. In two cases, we were expecting the respondents to describe their job position within Mareena alongside with their responsibilities and tasks. In case of respondent A – a volunteer, we were curious to know whether her professional job is connected to the activities performed by Mareena.

First question that we will be closely focusing on is the question number 7. In this question, we wanted to know whether the respondent had any previous experience with volunteering or social work. The replies show us whether the previous experience had influenced the decisions of respondents to dedicate their time and effort to this profession. The respondent A mentions her experience with volunteering in a community kitchen in Canada for people in need. The respondent B has multiple experiences with both short-term volunteering and social work in an organization that provided her with useful skills for the future work in the third sector. She had the opportunity to work in an organization that provides hospitals with animators visiting sick children. She also worked in an organization as a tutor with children from a disadvantaged neighbourhood. The respondent C is also significantly experienced in the sphere of social work and worked with numerous groups of people that are considered fragile and in need. Those marginalized groups included people with mental health issues, refugees and others. All those experiences and opportunities definitely influenced and motivated our respondents to dive deeper into this area of social issues and start working for Mareena. It is apparent that all three of our respondents have tendencies towards work with vulnerable groups and are willing to participate in the process of creating more prosperous community and society in Slovakia. This can serve as a proof that once the respondents had positive experiences

with this type of work and felt comfortable participating in social spheres, it gave them the courage to continue doing so.

The next question number 8 is closely linked to the previous one. It asks directly about the motivation of the respondents for this job. We can observe that the experiences the women had in the past while volunteering or working with marginalized social groups added to the future motivation to remain in the third sector. The replies consisted of certain points that were repeated by all of the respondents such as personal growth, friendly work environment, cooperation with like-minded people with the same goals and interests, further education within the sphere, community and society improvement and help. The respondent A claims that her initial motivation for volunteering started during her studies when she was given the opportunity to participate in numerous projects in NGOs which forced her to gain a certain level of social consciousness and her responsibility towards the society. She was also part of various short-term volunteering jobs focusing on education of marginalized people, social issues, migration and so on. Another reason behind her decision to work for Mareena is the overall attitude of Slovak nation towards refugees and social issues in general. It is known that Slovaks tend to be afraid of the unknown, therefore it is common for some people to feel the need to change the perspective and contribute to the positive improvement. Our respondent also set her goal to contribute to the creation of more inclusive and welcoming society during her professional career. She found the activities of Mareena appealing and wanted to become a part of such vivid and active organization engaged in the issues that are close to her heart. The respondent C stated that she chose Mareena based on her previous experiences. She was interested in a combination of management and community potential. The opportunity to learn something new and to be in contact with people from various backgrounds and cultures was the appealing aspect for our respondent. What we can analyse from this question is that the main motivation forces are the community potential that social work sphere offers and the space for improvement and social change that can be achieved by an active engagement. All of our respondents saw the potential and decided to help shape a better functioning society.

In the following question number 9, we were asking about the perception of women's role within the volunteering community. Since one of our respondents is a volunteer in Mareena and the other two are closely working with them on daily basis, it is more

than relevant to ask them this question and find out what they think is the role of women in their community. The respondent A simply explained that she thinks that women in volunteering are inspirational, powerful, strong, brave and giving. These are all ideal traits of a good volunteer. The respondent B explained that in her opinion, women are more often employed and well-suited for care-taking job positions or for work with children and vulnerable people in need. She claims that volunteering serves as a great tool for women to obtain work experiences that would be normally difficult for them to gain in a professional environment. The last respondent admits that there is a difference in the perception of men and women within the volunteering community. Considering the fact that most of her class-mates and colleagues throughout the years were women, it is obvious that the ratio is not equal. Without unnecessary generalization, we agreed that women are more inclined to certain types of volunteering however, there are exceptions. She also claims that she does not observe any performance differences between male and female volunteers in Mareena. To sum this up, the main difference is in the type of volunteering work chosen by men and women. The answers imply that women have a strong base when it comes to third sector and our respondents agreed that women in general seem to be more interested in volunteering. Both genders are suitable for volunteering and social work, however, their qualities can differ and be useful and beneficial in various areas.

The question number 10 asks directly whether the respondents think that one gender is more prone to volunteering and social work than the other. Surprisingly, the answers varied. The respondent A claims that both genders are equally prone to working as volunteers or social workers. The respondent B thinks that women have more tendencies towards social work in general, however, as we already mentioned, there are certain volunteering positions and spheres that men prefer over the ones that are preferred mostly by women. The respondent C says that if we look at the numbers of people employed NGO sector, it is obvious that women create a bigger part.

Since the question number 10 connects to the question 11, we will continue with the analysis of the next question which investigates the reasons and influences of the tendencies men and women have for social work and volunteering. According to respondent A, those tendencies are influenced by social and cultural backgrounds of an individual. She states that we are shaped by experiences from childhood, adult life and most importantly by the community that surrounds us throughout the life. Based

on the answer from the respondent B, the inclinations of women towards care-taking jobs and volunteering are caused by gender roles and norms taught by society. It also comes from the education and values of a person. The respondent mentions that women might struggle applying for professional jobs right after university/high school, therefore they choose to start with volunteering to gain more experiences and skills without the great pressure. Men, on the other hand, feel more comfortable entering labour market. Also, in case of Mareena, women are motivated by the fact that they are often mothers and are used to being surrounded by children and for that reason they want to offer their free time for a good cause. In Mareena, men usually volunteer to gain experiences and deepen their expertise. The respondent C answered by saying that there are many factors such as upbringing and the extent of gender norms importance in one's culture. There are expectations that are passed on to children from an early age which create an idea of what women and men should be interested in. It also depends on the family background and the intellect of the parents. All these factors determine whether the individual is prone to active engagement in volunteer activities or some kind of social work. While all the respondents tried to avoid generalizations, their statements implied the same results. In general, women tend to have more empathy and are more suited for care-taking and educational roles while men might prefer manual or economic spheres. The overall common ground based on the interviews is that surroundings, family influences, upbringing and social environments all have an impact on the level of interest towards social issues and volunteer work in the future life. This means that the ratio of men and women and their engagement in the third sector vary from culture to culture.

As an addition to the question number 11, we have asked the respondent C what kind of family and social support she had in her life and how it affected her career path. According to the respondent C, her family did not express a particular attitude towards her decision to study social work, they simply accepted it even though they probably thought that studying something different would be more useful for her future. However, she mentions a specific person- a drama club teacher from high school that was influential for her and supported her decision. Since this teacher was an important figure in our respondent's young adult life, it motivated her even more to follow the path of studying social work. This example shows that anyone can serve as a role model

and support the initial interest in volunteering and social service that can be potentially put in use effectively in the adult life.

The following question was concerned with the traits that are looked for when interviewing the applicants for volunteering work in Mareena. Since both the respondent B and C are responsible for the selection process and interview the potential volunteers, we wanted to know what the conditions and rules are in the organization. According to the answers, the most important traits of volunteers are responsibility, politeness and a selfless motivation for work. The motivation to volunteer should not be pathological and the values of the volunteers should meet the values of the organization. The refugees are vulnerable and require sensitive treatment. However, the applicants should not feel pity towards the migrants, the relationships between the migrant and the volunteer should be friendly and beneficial for both sides. Tendencies for saviour complexes and selfishness are also not welcomed. The first impression is usually the most decisive factor according to both respondents especially because there are not many official conditions.

We continue with the question focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of social work and volunteering. The respondent A consider volunteering work an opportunity to become engaged with various cultures, create a safe environment and build new connections and get to know ourselves better. The only disadvantage mentioned by our first respondent is the struggle of finding balance and time for both professional paid work and the volunteering activity. The respondent B offers pros and cons from the point of view of an official NGO employee. She states that the work environment in Mareena is friendly, informal and offers a personal growth. Working in the third sector means helping the society, pushing one's personal limits, being part of a community, seeing the outcomes of the hard work and being surrounded by like-minded people with similar aims. On the other hand, the main disadvantages of social work sphere are finances and salaries. Working in social sphere requires a certain level of privilege. This type of work is more suitable for someone without children or other liabilities. The finances for supporting various projects have to be looked for and obtained through grants or funds. Another disadvantage mentioned by the respondent B is the general perception of non-governmental sector and the job positions within the sector. Social work is often looked down on and perceived as inferior. It can be difficult for social workers to set the boundaries between personal and work life, especially when working

for a cause that is important and personal for them. The last respondent (C) claims that she is well aware of both pros and cons that her job position includes. Based on her answer, the advantages include feeling content about the work that is being done, being able to work in a healthy work environment with supportive and mature women working towards the same goals. The work activities are often challenging and diverse but also fun and enriching most of the time. In Mareena, the time management and work activities are flexible. However, there are certain disadvantages. Most of the disadvantages mentioned by the respondent C were already discussed above such as struggle with boundaries, work-life balance, extreme efforts required in order to achieve outcomes, lack of finances. This proves that there are certain common patterns and codes within the answers. Lastly, she mentions the inadequate financial assessments even though the work in social sphere demands a great deal of education, expertise and dedication. As a bonus question, we have asked the respondent C what would have to happen for social work and non-governmental sector to become more appraised and financially evaluated. In this case, we agreed that it would require a significant structural change and a complete new value system of our society, especially in Slovakia. Those would have to take place on the elementary levels which will hopefully be the case in the future as the new generations take over.

Our last question discussed the impact the activities of our respondents and Mareena organization have on Slovak society and the local community. The common aspects of the answers were spreading awareness, finding similarities and breaking the stigma in our society. The respondent A claims that she perceives her volunteering activities as beneficial and impactful for the society she lives in. She believes that sharing the information about various organizations and their activities with the people from and also outside of the community is the essential positive impact of volunteering. The answer of the respondent B agrees with the statement above while adding that Mareena tries to show people that there are often more similarities than differences between locals and migrants in Slovakia. She believes that it is the repeated effort to bring up important topics and initiate the discussion that leads to better understanding and more tolerance. According to the respondent C, the direct experience and the contact between locals and migrants create the biggest positive impact on our society. It allows locals to change their perspective and the misconceptions about foreign cultures as well as to make the foreigners feel more welcome and safer in the new

country. It is obvious from the answers that all three respondents are proud and passionate about their work activities and believe that Mareena is on the right path to bringing more tolerance and making Slovakia a safer place for everyone no matter what their country of origin is.

Discussion

During the process of conceiving this master thesis, we were given the opportunity to study the inclinations and motivations of women for volunteering and social work activities. We were able to observe their tendencies and discuss the experiences from their private and professional lives. Mareena, as our case study pro-migrant organization, allowed us to infiltrate among female employees and volunteers and take a closer look at the functioning of the given work environment. The reasoning behind this particular choice of case study was a direct experience with the volunteering activity in the organization. Being familiar with the processes and goals of the NGO enabled us to collect the results and lead the interviews in a friendly and informal manner. Thanks to this, the respondents were comfortable enough to share the attitudes and opinions about their work.

Throughout the interviews, we were focusing on various questions that would lead us to the results of the research. The main objective of the research was to support either relevancy or irrelevancy of our initial hypothesis. The hypothesis assumed that women are in general more inclined to volunteering and social work while taking into consideration that there are certain influences and predispositions causing the greater tendency of women. For this reason, our interview questions were concentrating on the educational and professional background of the participants, their initial motivation for the engagement in Mareena, their opinions on women and their role within the third sector, the advantages and disadvantages of their job and lastly the impact the activities of Mareena has on the society and local community.

The common answer for the question concerning previous experiences in the third sector was not surprising. All three of our participants have previous experiences whether it is with volunteering or with professional paid social work. The experiences include working with vulnerable and marginalized groups such as refugees, mentally

ill people, socially disadvantaged people or children living in poor conditions. This involvement and the familiarity with such social groups provided them with adequate skills required for the work in Mareena.

The motivations that influenced the decision of our participants to become a part of Mareena were also very similar in each case. The answers prove that working in a non-governmental sector can be diverse and enriching. The work environment is friendly, open-minded, the work is flexible and fulfilling especially if it is for a good cause. All of our respondents agreed that their previous positive experiences motivated them to pursue a career in a pro-migrant organization. They were attracted by the feeling of strong community, usefulness in the society and the potential for a positive change. The similar results were gained from the question about the advantages and disadvantages of working in a non-governmental organization. The potential of the work, like-minded colleagues and good cause are considered the most positive attributes of social work. However, the work-life balance, boundaries and lack of finances can be demotivational.

Our research's main area of interest was the role of women in volunteering and social work. After finding out that our participants shared similar motivations and previous experiences, we will move on to the perception of women from their point of view as well as their explanation for the active engagement of women in social work sector.

The results of the interviews show that the overall opinion supports our hypothesis. Two out of the three participants expressed that they perceive women as the gender that is more prone to volunteering and social work, especially in the case of their work environment. However, as both the interviews and the statistics prove, the ratio of men and women depends on the area of interest. Since women are taught to be empathetic and caring from an early childhood, it is natural for them to engage in such activities both personally and professionally. Men, on the other hand, follow the stereotypes of less emotions and more strength, therefore, their interest in care-taking activities and volunteering work tends to be lower. In summary, the predispositions for certain work positions are a consequence of gender roles and social norms of a given culture.

Even though our research consisted of a small sample of participants, we were able to create an image of women and the importance of their role within the volunteering community. Their relevancy and the need for female contribution is undeniable and

can be proven to be essential when observing Mareena and its positive outcomes. It was made clear that those women represent strong, motivated, dedicated social workers who believe that their engagement will improve our society and help migrants on their way to integration. As it was mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, the presence of women in social work is necessary, they offer a different point of view, their own attitudes, open up discussions on topics that might be ignored by male social workers and provide the society with understanding and kindness that is much needed in the process of working with vulnerable and sensitive groups of people.

Limitations and future research

As we can observe based on the results of the discussion, our research has brought certain facts and points worth focusing on even more in the future. Even though we have collected answers directly from the female employees of the organization that served us as a case study, it cannot be considered an official statistics because of the small amount of participants and the environment in which the answers were collected. The results can be used to initiate and support the discussion on women in social work as well as their abilities, qualities and where exactly they come from, however, it is important to state that our sample does not represent female volunteers and social workers all around the world. As we already mentioned earlier, the tendencies and motivations of women for social work vary from country to country and are strongly influenced by cultural heritage, therefore if we were to collect the same interviews in more than one country, ideally in countries with completely different cultures, it is possible that the answers would offer different results.

If the opportunity occurred in the future to elaborate a study or a research on this topic, it would be beneficial to try to collaborate with multiple organizations with different interests and various target groups. This would enable the research to cover the question of women in volunteering and social work from different point of view and made it more valuable in terms of extent and the information offered to the reader. Since we have agreed that men have a tendency to participate in different volunteering areas such as economy, manual work, technologies or engineering, it would be interesting to take a closer look at the percentage of female engagement in those spheres and compare them. It would be also enriching for the research to incorporate organizations from more than one country, therefore more than one culture. This would

allow the researchers to observe in which ways and to what extent are volunteering tendencies influenced by cultures, customs and cultural values. Another interesting addition to the research would be to investigate the amount of pro-migrant non-governmental organizations and work closely with their employees and volunteers in order to find out whether women really make up for the majority of social workers in

Conclusion

The objective of the master's thesis with the title "Women in volunteering and social work" focuses on the inclinations and motivations of women for volunteering and social work. The aim was to discover whether there are greater tendencies for a career in a non-governmental sector focused on the social issues in case of women. It is a common perception that women find the social work sphere more comfortable and are more likely to pursue a career in this industry. The thesis starts with a theoretical base that attempts to define our themes of interest such as volunteering, social work, the role of NGOs and how much women engage in those spheres. The definitions are crucial for the further understanding of the research. Then we proceeded to investigate the active involvement of women and men in the non-governmental sector and the reasoning behind those tendencies. In order to make the research more valuable, we incorporated Slovak pro-migrant organization Mareena that operates in Slovakia. We presented the organization and took a closer look at the activities and aims of Mareena. What makes this organization special and suitable for our research is that its employees consist solely of women. Therefore, the nature of Mareena fits the image of a case study presenting both migration and gender lenses.

The statistics and the theoretical background do not reveal such big differences of the interest in social work and volunteering between men and women. More than gender, it is the age that creates bigger differences. The literature review revealed that elderly people are more prone to both formal and informal volunteering. This phenomena is caused by the fact that retired people can sacrifice more time into volunteering activities. It also helps them to feel included and active in an age when they are not perceived as the actively working group contributing to the economy. The level of engagement also depends on the geographical position because the interest in volunteer work and social sphere is highly influenced by cultural and social norms. Because the results of the literature review did not provide us with the resolute decision, we decided to conduct three semi-structured interviews with two employees of the organization and one volunteer. This way we were able to observe the motivations and attitudes of both types of women participating in the activities of the given organization. The interviews were created in a friendly environment since it was obvious that all of the participants are passionate about their work and career choices.

Further on, the thesis focused on the analysis of the responses collected from the interviews. In order to retrieve a sufficient amount of relevant data, we used a thematic analysis based on the assignment of codes and themes that are present in most of the responses. This type of analysis allowed us to underline the most significant points and results of our research. The findings revealed that having previous experiences has a positive impact on the decisions regarding one's involvement in volunteering and social work. Each of our participants shared that they were previously engaged in various volunteering jobs. It was also made clear by the respondents that they believe in the potential their work has and they are convinced there is a positive impact brought by the activities of Mareena that can be seen in the local community but also in Slovak society in general. As our interviews were conducted in a friendly manner and they showcased numerous signs of a regular conversation, the participants agreed that women, in fact, tend to be more empathetic and sensitive which is one of the most important qualities of a person employed in the social work sector. This type of work often involves close contact with vulnerable social groups that require special treatment. The respondents also agreed that there are many factors influencing the inclinations and motivations towards volunteering such as family background, social surroundings, cultural beliefs and norms and many more. This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to generalize women's tendencies for volunteering. They can vary from case to case.

To summarize the outcomes of our research, it is important to mention that the sample of participants was not excessive, hence, a more thorough study of the topic would be required. However, we were able to approach the answer to our initial research question. Women are more prone to be active in volunteering and social work areas such as care-taking, education and work with children while men prefer to be involved in more technical, economic and manual activities.

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Appendices

Distribution of women and men UN volunteers across regions

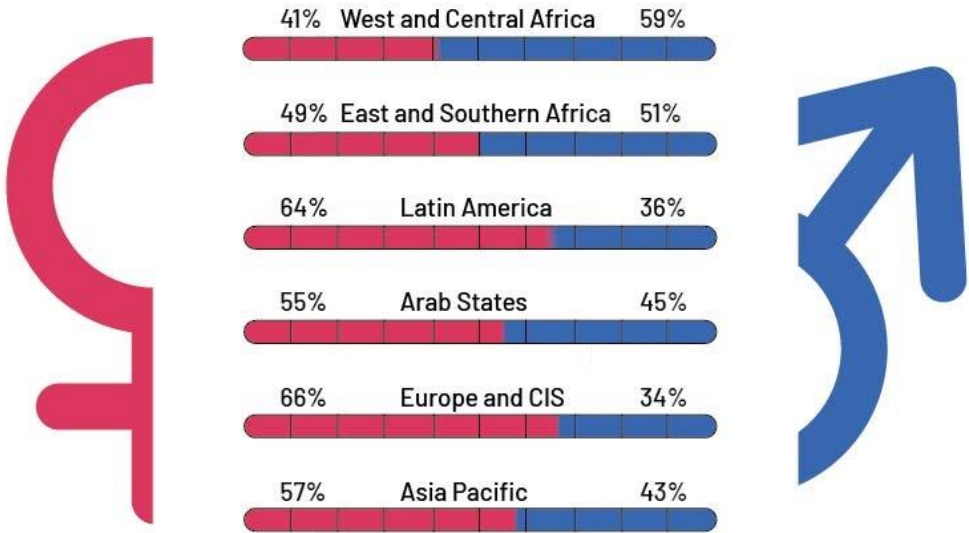
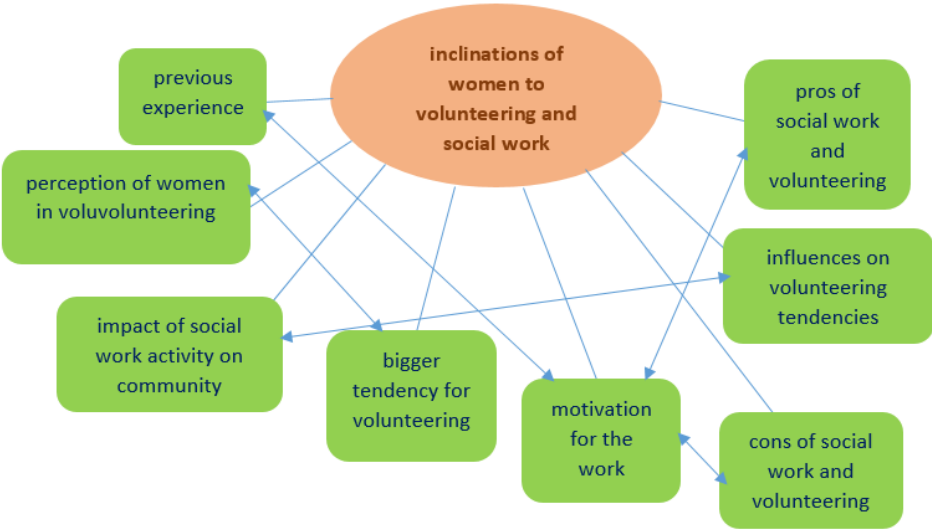


Figure 1 retrieved from <https://www.unv.org/Success-stories/beyond-averages-do-gender-disparities-exist-volunteering>

Table 1: Table of themes and codes

<p>Theme: previous experience Codes: volunteering, community work, social work, vulnerable groups</p>	<p>Theme: bigger tendency for volunteering (men or women) Codes: equal tendencies, men, women</p>
<p>Theme: motivation for the work Codes: like-minded people, helping others, being part of the change, improvement of society, community goals, further education, personal growth</p>	<p>Theme: influences behind volunteering tendencies Codes: social background, cultural background, life experiences, education, gender roles, social bubble, surroundings, preparation for professional career</p>
<p>Theme: perception of the role of women in volunteering community Codes: giving, powerful, inspirational, care-taking sphere, educational sphere, empathetic</p>	<p>Theme: pros of social work and volunteering Codes: different cultures, safe environment, laughter, connection, act of giving, informal environment, good relations, helping the society, satisfaction with results, diversity and challenges, flexibility</p>
<p>Theme: impact of social work activity on community Codes: awareness, making refugees feel safer and more welcomed, changing the perception of migrants in Slovakia, falsifying disinformation, bringing up important topics</p>	<p>Theme: cons of social work and volunteering Codes: difficult time management, finances, perceived as inferior, difficult to set boundaries, misconceptions</p>

Figure 2: Thematic map



Interview n. 1

Respondent A

1. **Age:** 28
2. **Nationality:** Slovak
3. **Education:** University
4. **Job position:** Project and Event Manager
5. **How would you describe your role in Mareena?**

A community volunteer where I help with organising various types of community events, also a personal volunteer where I teach Slovak and English one-on-one.

6. **How long have you been working for Mareena?**

Two years

7. **Do you have any previous history of activity in a non-governmental organization?**

Yes. Volunteering for an organisation in Montreal, Canada where I worked in a community kitchen which distributed lunches for 500 people in need spread across the city.

8. **What was your motivation for this volunteering job?**

Creating a community of like-minded individuals with the aim to help, to understand and to meet somewhere where we can start changing the world, one person at a time.

9. **How do you perceive the role of women within the volunteering community?**

Powerful, strong, supported, giving, inspirational.

10. **Who do you think is more prone to volunteering and social work, men or women?**

Equally the same.

11. **What do you think is the reason behind it? What are the influences behind those decisions?** (For example background, social status, upbringing,...)

The reason, I believe, depends on the social and cultural background of each individual regardless of gender. Different experiences growing up and living create different views on life in general. Once an individual is surrounded by a community which helps others restlessly, that person is more inclined to get educated on why it is a great idea and intention to give when we have enough to share.

12. What would you say are pros and cons of your activity as a volunteer?

Pros? So many I can't even count them! Getting engaged with different cultures, creating a safe environment for one another, getting to know ourselves through finding ourselves in new moments and experiences shared with people we volunteer with, the laughter, the connection, the simple act of giving and receiving even more.

Cons? Sometimes, dedicating time every week in between everything else the person does in life can be overwhelming. Nothing that cannot be dealt with, though.

13. In your opinion, what kind of impact does your work activity have on Slovak society/local community?

Spreading the word that in Slovakia, we do have many organisations which are here to help and support living, human beings in order to help them to get a better life. Talking to my circle of people about the options of giving and sharing if one has plenty of time and resources to offer. So, to sum it up, I believe my volunteering has a very positive impact on the society I live in. It makes for happier living where more and more people trust one another.

Interview n. 2

Respondent B

- 1. Age:** 28
- 2. Nationality:** Slovak
- 3. Education:** MA degree in Theory and History of Arts and Culture/Theory of Interactive Media, Masaryk University in Brno
- 4. Job position:** Volunteer coordinator in two non-governmental organizations
- 5. How would you describe your role in Mareena?**

I work as a coordinator of volunteers in Bratislava. I manage the participation of volunteers in our activities. They aspect is monthly supervision of individual volunteers and the communication with all the volunteers and the clients of the organization. I also participate in the improvement of the overall functioning of the organization.

- 6. How long have you been working for Mareena?**

5 months

7. Do you have any previous history of activity in a non-governmental organization?

I worked as a training certification coordinator in an organization -Clowndoctors for two years where I worked on coordination of educational activities for professional Clowndoctors (people working as trained animators for sick children in the hospitals) required to obtain an international certificate. Before that, I was employed by the organization Ulita where I worked as a tutor. I was helping with the creation of safe and welcoming space for children and youth from the disadvantaged neighbourhood Kopčany.

8. What was your motivation for this job?

During my university studies, while studying art studies, I had the opportunity to participate in various projects and internships in cultural institutions and non-governmental institutions. I started to think more about my social responsibility therefore, while working in the private sector, I started investing my time into one-time and short-term volunteering focusing on the topic of migration, inclusive education, education of marginalized groups and organization of events concerning social issues. I had the opportunity to visit Serbian-Hungarian border in 2016 right after the outburst of migration crisis when the atmosphere even in Slovakia was really bad. This experiences inspired me to become more interested in these issues. I felt the need to come back to Slovakia from Czech Republic and make a contribution to creating an inclusive and respectful society through my work in third sector. I have decided to employ my education and experiences and got a job at Clowndoctors where I work up to this day, however I still felt like I could do more to help and improve the society and community that I live in. I have been following the activities of Mareena since its beginnings and I have always found their visions and aims very likeable. I wanted to become a part of an organization that is actively engaged in topics and issues that are close to me and I also wanted to work in an organization that offers me the space and tools to further education in the spheres of migration, refugee issues as well as project management, fundraising and communication. These factors were my motivation but also a natural next step of my career within the third sector.

9. How do you perceive the role of women within the volunteering community?

Women are usually employed in helping professions such as care-takers, work with children etc. Majority of volunteers in Mareena are women, all of the official employees of the organization are women. I am convinced that volunteering is a great opportunity for women

to gain experiences they would not be able to gain from entry level professional work positions.

10. Who do you think is more prone to volunteering and social work, men or women?

I would say women in general however there are attempts to increase gender equality even here in Mareena. I also comes from social settings and it depends on the type of volunteering or the sphere. There are certain attributes and skills that are assigned to genders and we unfortunately often choose our interests and activities based on this. Women are more prone to volunteering and working in care-taking spheres or education while men are inclined to political, economic or manual volunteering.

11. What do you think is the reason behind it? What are the influences behind those decisions?

I think that it comes from social norms and gender roles set up by society dividing them into male and female roles. It is also influenced by our values, education and interest. I would say that women find it difficult to enter environments/roles that they are not 100% confident in. On the other hand, men are more prone to start off their careers professionally right away. I think that the common motivations of female volunteers in Mareena are that they are often mothers, they feel confident and safe when working with children, they are often finishing their parental leave and do not feel ready to go back to work yet (they might not be forced to worked because their family is financially stable), they want to put their free time in use effectively. When it comes to men and their motivations for volunteer work in Mareena, it is usually to deepen their expertise so these reasons tend to be more pragmatic.

12. I would also like to ask what are the traits that you are looking for in a volunteer when interviewing the applicants?

In order to remain fair, the interviews are led by two people including me. Primarily, we assess the motivation which should not be selfish or pathological. Being humble and being able to address certain worries concerning volunteer work is very important. We focus on the overall first impression and basic manners/politeness. Previous experiences are not determinative but they are an advantage. Language skills are also a plus and determine the volunteering position within the organization.

13. Were you trained and prepared for the interviews with the applicants?

Mareena has an exact structure for those interviews that makes it easier to find the right people. We ask everyone the same questions. Since this was my first time doing interviews, I received a basic training and was told what to do and what not to do.

14. What would you say are pros and cons of your activity as a social worker?

Pros: The work environment is informal, tolerant, it offers a space for personal growth. Third sector offers work where we can see the outcomes, it gives us the feeling of usefulness. We are able to help individuals as well as the society as a whole. We are part of a community of like-minded people and we are given the opportunity to push our personal limits meaning everything is done by us and nothing comes for free.

Cons: The disadvantages of third sector are definitely finances. As a young woman without family responsibilities, I am privileged and able to do what I enjoy professionally even though the salary is not the best. We are forced to look for the finances, hunt for funds, grants, sponsors and projects. Another disadvantage is that the non-governmental sector is still commonly perceived as „inferior“. Since we are focusing on the topics and issues that are close to our hearts, it is often difficult to set the boundaries and distinguish the work life from our personal lives. Moreover, we are still facing the misunderstandings and misconceptions from the public.

15. In your opinion, what kind of impact does your work activity have on Slovak society/local community?

It is mostly the act of spreading the word, spreading the awareness. We, as an organization, are also mitigating the perception of differences between us (locals) and them (refugees). We are constantly opening up and bringing up the topics of migration and make them less taboo. We are trying to falsify disinformation. Lately, we have been also successful and helpful during the humanitarian crisis that occurred in Afghanistan. Thanks to this, we were also given recognition from authorities and people from Slovak government.

Interview n. 3

Respondent C

- 1. Age:** 33
- 2. Nationality:** Slovak
- 3. Education:** PhD. from Social work
- 4. Job position:** manager of the volunteering program
- 5. How would you describe your role in Mareena?**

I started as a coordinator of volunteers and the manager of the volunteering program all at once. Later, another colleague took the position of the coordinator which enabled me to focus on one job. Since Mareena has volunteer communities not only in Bratislava but also in Nitra and Košice, I manage the whole program for all these towns and I am responsible for programs to be functioning and successful on the same level. I make sure that the plans and the goals of the program are met and done on time. I am in close contact with the coordinator of each town and I am ready to solve any issue they might face. In general, I communicate with the coordinators and manage their work. Apart from managing the coordinators, I am responsible for the hiring process of the volunteers.

- 6. How long have you been working for Mareena?**

2 years

- 7. Do you have any previous history of activity in a non-governmental organization?**

Throughout the years, I have worked and volunteered in numerous organizations focused on work with various marginalized groups. Those included people with mental health issues, migrants and others. Those different job positions taught me to be respectful and empathetic towards vulnerable groups.

- 8. What was your motivation for this job?**

There were various aspects. I would say that it had to do with my life situation at the time. I knew about Mareena way before I started working there and I always liked their activities. Based on my previous experiences, I knew I wanted to do something with management. Mareena was also offering a huge community potential which made really interested in the job. For me, personally, the most important aspect of my job is to do something that makes sense to me and fulfils me. I find it interesting to move from different social groups and topics

to new ones and always learn something new. Since I have had previous experiences with volunteering, I liked the idea of working with volunteers in Mareena.

9. How do you perceive the role of women within the volunteering community?

This is a really difficult question. There is definitely a difference between men and women. When I think about my studies, my previous jobs in the social work sphere, it really is obvious that there is more women than men that are interested in social work. I would even say that it is statistically proven that those care-taking professions attract women more. However, I do not mean to generalize. There are exceptions or individual examples that break the stereotypes. Even here in Mareena, we are trying to include men and make the gender gap smaller but women are more interested and seem to meet the requirements more. This is in case of employees. When it comes to volunteering, we also have male volunteers and I could not say that there are visible differences in their attitudes towards work or that female volunteers tend to have more empathy. It also depends on the type of volunteering and the area. We could assume that men are more interested in more technological, engineering or manual type of spheres so in this case the ratio of women and men could be different.

10. Who do you think is more prone to volunteering and social work, men or women?

If we are talking numbers of people working in non-governmental sector, I think I have to say women.

11. What do you think is the reason behind it? What are the influences behind those decisions?

This is again a very broad question. There are so many factors. I think it varies from country to country but if we focus on Slovakia, I think it is rooted in the upbringing and the importance of gender roles within our culture. There are certain expectations from girls and boys and certain things that they should not be doing. Therefore, this is something that we unconsciously create and teach our children since day one. Another factor is how the parents perceive the society and what are their attitudes and opinions towards the engagement of citizens. I would also mention the emotional intelligence of the parents, their intellect which play an important role. Those factors have an impact on the future decisions and the level of interest and engagement the children will show towards the society.

But back to women. Maybe it really is caused by nature and we simply have it in us. Even though I do not like to use those generalizations in any way, I have to admit that women are more prone to empathy. From my personal experiences, I have to say that the most empathetic people in my surroundings are women.

12. And what about your experience? How did your parents react when you told them you wanted to study social work?

I do not even know if my parents had any kind of reaction. I was trying to find the right path for a while and social work was not my first choice. I was also interested in mass media, communication and journalism. In the end, I chose social work and I think that my parents simply accepted it. Maybe, they might have thought that studying something like mass media would ensure a better job position and a better career for me, no wonder, but they did not make me feel like I was making the wrong decision in any way.

13. Maybe that was also one of the reasons you were confident about your decision. I feel like it makes a big difference whether you get the support from your family or not.

Definitely. I would say that the people we have and keep around whether it is family or friends or just people we are surrounded with have a significant impact on us and our inclinations. That can be anyone as long as we perceive them as role models or examples. We all live in different „bubbles“ and we get exposed to different things. For example in my case, I remember looking up to and admiring my drama club teacher from childhood. She was very inspirational and innovative to me and she kind of „broke my bubble“. She used to have short hair, she was vegetarian...easily said, she was different than the rest at the time. I remember her supporting my idea of studying social work. She showed me that it could be useful in real life and in my future career. The fact that she showed support was really important to me.

14. I would also like to ask what are the attributes of a good volunteer when interviewing the applicants? What are the signs you are looking for in a volunteer?

Formally, they have to be older than 18. That is the only official condition. The first thing we notice is the personality of the person. The values of the person should meet the values of our organization. Future volunteers should support the idea of integration of the migrants. The applicant should not have pathological motivations for the volunteering such as „I came here to save the world.“ or any kind of saviour complex. The motivation is crucial since the refugees

are very vulnerable and the volunteers are the ones that are in close contact with them. The applicant should not want to volunteer out of pity for the refugees. Another negative sign is when someone is too invested meaning they yearn for drama and difficult life stories. Being mature, responsible and serious about the work is the key.

15. What would you say are pros and cons of your activity as a social worker?

This is actually really easy for me. I will start with pros. The biggest advantage is that I work for a cause that makes sense to me. I feel content about my job and I know why I do it. I love the feeling when something works out and the feeling of satisfaction. In Mareena, we have a very healthy work environment full of supportive, mature and respectful women. This enables me to grow not only professionally but also as a human. The work can be very diverse, full of challenges. It is often a combination of hard work and fun. I feel like I am part of something, a team and my voice is always being heard. The flexibility is also a big advantage. I have my responsibilities and it is up to me to manage them and my time.

The disadvantages...the work can be frustrating at times. In contrast to manual work, you cannot always see the results of your hard work immediately, it takes time. Another important aspect is that we have to be extremely active in order to gain things and create outcomes. This means there are many things happening at once and it can get chaotic. Time management and boundaries are important to mention. It can get really difficult to some people. Once you put your heart into something, it is easy to forget to take a break. The last thing I would mention is finances and salaries which is a typical problem of non-governmental sector. It requires experiences, education and dedication but the financial evaluation and the appraisal from the outside is not adequate. The non-governmental sector does not provide as much security as for example private sector.

16. What do you think would have to happen in order for social work to become more appraised and financially evaluated?

We are talking years here. We still have a long way to go here in Slovakia. Especially lately, the spread of disinformation has caused a lot of people to change their view on non-governmental organizations. I think it is a generational thing and we have to work with following generations and spread the word about social issues. It would require a change on the elementary level.

17. In your opinion, what kind of impact does your work activity have on Slovak society/local community?

Let's say that the impact is significant. We can divide it into two parts. Firstly, the impact on the migrants and the impact on the locals. What we are trying to do primarily is to provide locals with information and knowledge with the help of discussions, projects, presentations. What is even more important- we enable locals to have the real experience with migrants. Seeing that we all have something in common and we have our similarities and differences really changes their perspective on migrants. When it comes to volunteer program, it actively educates the volunteers and gives them a direct experience with refugees that they can share with other people such as their friends or family. This way, we are spreading the word about Mareena and about our cause. Lastly, the volunteers make the refugees feel safer and welcomed since they are here for them when they need help. This, in my opinion, pushes our Slovak society forward