Cultural Diversity in your Organisation

Guidance for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on Volunteering in Social Welfare Work
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This document is produced in accordance with the terms of reference of PERCO and is intended as a set of guidelines for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and others working with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in a European context. The opinions contained are those of the members of PERCO and not necessarily the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a whole. These guidelines are, in any event, non-binding.
Fundamental Principles

Humanity
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality
It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality
In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence
The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary Service
It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity
There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.
The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
Foreword

Very many devoted volunteers of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are working, every day, with people living in their countries who come from another country. This frequently involves supporting the needs of people in situations of acute vulnerability, unable to access social welfare and the other systems available in those countries.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and its member societies recognise these priorities, and work worldwide for mutual understanding, non-discrimination and respect for diversity. Most recently, at the 28th International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference (Geneva 2003) entitled ‘Protecting Human Dignity’ the International Federation and its member societies recognised the challenge ahead to eliminate intolerance, violence, discrimination and lack of respect for diversity. The International Federation pledged to ‘[e]nsure openness and diversity within the Federation Secretariat and National Societies by promoting action to increase diversity among staff and volunteers and specifically to monitor progress’.

This pledge builds on the commitment of all components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to work at local, national and international levels for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants across religious, ethnic and political divides. It is a message backed in Europe by a commitment put forward with strength in April 2002 by the region’s Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The European Societies, through their “Berlin Charter”, have emphasised the many positives which migration provides: “migration gives all countries an opportunity for enhancing cultural diversity, establishing ties among peoples and contributing to peace”. The ‘Platform for European Red Cross Cooperation on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migration’ (PERCO 1) took this call forward and the result is this publication entitled ‘Cultural Diversity in Your Organisation – Guidance for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on Volunteering in Social Welfare Work’:

The objective is to provide a framework and further guidance to National Societies to realise their ambitions in creating a culturally diverse volunteer base for their social welfare work.

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1 PERCO members include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Serbia-Montenegro, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
The International Federation is grateful to the European Red Cross Societies for the work they have done in drawing up this document on cultural diversity. The leadership of the Netherlands Red Cross was a particular asset, as was the contribution of the German Red Cross in printing the guidance document. Their work, combined with the energy of all others who contributed to the production has developed guidance with a positive message which should be of relevance to Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world, as well as to partner organisations and governments.

Markku Niskala
Secretary General

Geneva, 19 November 2004
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1. Introduction

Although migration is of all ages, political and socio-economic developments in and outside of Europe over the last six decades, in combination with the ongoing globalisation process, have contributed greatly in transforming the European countries from uniform to multicultural societies. Nowadays, cultures from all over the world come to Europe in search for safety and a better future, fleeing from persecution, war or economic malaise.

Growing multiculturalism in European societies gives a new dimension to the social welfare work of humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross. In order to be able to reach out to all communities of vulnerable people within a society, (as the Red Cross national societies have committed themselves to, through subscribing the Federation’s mission in Strategy 2010¹), social welfare activities, as well as the people who carry them out, should reflect the multiculturalism of the respective country. This aim is further underlined by the Red Cross Social Welfare Policy², which states that: “Social welfare must be seen and treated as a continuous and dynamic process, subject to variation in time and place. It should be accordingly continuously adapted to the changes in the socio-political, cultural and economic characteristics of a particular society at any given time”.³

Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants should therefore be looked upon as potential customers of all Red Cross social welfare activities. In addition, consideration should be given to the development – where needed – of social welfare activities that are especially geared towards newcomers. And most importantly, Red Cross national societies should make a great effort to include refugees, asylum seekers and migrants both as volunteers and professional workers within their organisation.

Being the largest humanitarian organisation in the world, the Red Cross can set an example in this matter. Since volunteers are the driving force behind Red Cross national societies and “the champions of Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian values”⁴, as pledged by the International Federation at its 27th International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent in November 1999, they play a key role in getting the multicultural message across.

This guidance document provides National Red Cross Societies that want to take the interculturalisation process further within their organisation with some useful working tools. Even though the document is primarily designed for Red Cross volunteers and professionals active in the field of social welfare work, it can be used by other volunteer organisations as well, because of the general nature of the recommendations.

Since every National Society works in different circumstances and is confronted with different kinds of problems, the guidance document should not be seen as a set of fixed rules but as general recommendations, that can be adjusted to local characteristics.

A final remark: PERCO’s remit is refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, hence it has fo-cused on these groups in the document. However, National Societies should be aware that the recommendations on cultural diversity should be applied more widely, beyond these groups.

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¹ IFRC, Strategy 2010 (Geneva, 1999), p. 11
² adopted at the 12th Session of the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in October 1999
³ IFRC, Social Welfare Policy
⁴ IFRC, Pledge on Volunteering
2. Some useful Definitions

**Volunteering**

Even though volunteering varies considerably according to different cultural, political and historical background, it is in most countries seen as unpaid, non obligatory work for the benefit of others or society as a whole.\(^5\) The Federation’s Volunteering Policy defines volunteering as “an activity that is motivated by the free will of the person volunteering, and not by a desire for material or financial gain or by external social, economic or political pressure”. Furthermore, volunteering is “intended to benefit vulnerable people or their communities”.\(^6\)

Although volunteers are acting from their personal motivation, it is important to emphasize that they are also acting on behalf of the Red Cross and therefore bound by its general principals. The Federation Volunteer Policy states that: “a Red Cross or a Red Crescent volunteer is expected to act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and promote their dissemination and to strive and work for the highest standards of quality”.\(^7\)

**Social Welfare**

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies defines social welfare as “a state of human well-being that exists when social problems are managed, human needs are met and when social opportunities are maximised”. The general objective of social welfare is to improve the physical, psychological and social well-being of the individual, his family and community.\(^8\)

**Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants**

Following the definition used in the 1951 Convention on the Protection of Refugees, a refugee is a person “who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”. In some European countries, persons who benefit from additional forms of protection\(^9\), are also referred to as ‘refugees’.

An asylum seeker is a person who has entered a country with the intention to seek asylum and is still in the asylum procedure.

A migrant is a person entering or returning from abroad with the intention to reside in the country of destination for a certain period of time.\(^10\) The term can be read either as a general term including all

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\(^5\) Govaart, M & van Daal, J.H, 2001, p. 12
\(^6\) IFRC, Volunteering Policy, p. 1
\(^7\) IFRC, Volunteering Policy, p. 3
\(^8\) IFRC, Social Welfare Policy, p. 3
\(^9\) for example temporary protection or protection on humanitarian grounds
\(^10\) Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, p. 13
non-indigenous members of the population regardless of legal status, or as a group that is legally distinct from refugees, but may be beneficiaries of the same integration activities.

Cultural diversity

Terminology with regard to cultural diversity differs according to country. In some countries the process is called interculturalisation whereas in others multiculturalisation is the common term. In this document the term cultural diversity is used. Bringing about cultural diversity within an institution is a process by which this institution aims to change into a multicultural institution where:

■ Attention is given to ethnic-cultural diversity in the service delivery, processes/practices, and in all facets of the institution’s policy, like the service user policy and human resource policy.

■ Cultural diversity is seen as a benefit.

■ One can speak of a stable diverse culture with multicultural values where a multi-ethnic staff is functioning, with immigrant employees at all levels.

Integration

Integration is a long-term, constantly ongoing and reciprocal process between the people and a society, that consists of several key players combating the social exclusion of minority groups in society. The process of integration should be recognised as a two-fold process requiring adjustments in a host society as well as adaptation by newcomers. Because of its complex characteristics, the integration process can involve varying factors depending on the country. 11

The definition of integration provided by ECRE 12 can be seen as useful for this document when it states that integration is “a process of change which from a refugee perspective, requires a preparedness to adapt to the life style of the host country without having to give up one’s cultural identity. From the point of view of the receiving country, integration requires a willingness to adapt public institutions to changes in the population profile and accept refugees as part of the national communities”.

RCOs/MCOs

There are a number of different ways of describing organisations that are set up by refugees or migrants and managed by themselves. The social and the legal status of these organisations varies in different countries. In this document the abbreviations RCO (for: Refugee Community Organisation) and MCO (for: Migrant Community Organisation) will be used.

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12 The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) is an umbrella organisation for co-operation between European non-governmental organisations concerned with refugees.
3. Voluntary Social Welfare Work as a Catalyst to successful Integration

“The member national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the Federation are committed to promoting volunteering as a significant and positive contribution to improving the lives of vulnerable people, and to strengthening communities and civil society.”

According to Strategy 2010, one of the core areas Red Cross National Societies will focus on in the coming decade is the promotion of the Movement’s Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values. This includes amongst others to support integration, increase tolerance and promote multicultural values in order to influence the behaviour in the community and thereby making it inclusive for all.

As most integration policies point out, successful integration is largely dependent on three important factors:

■ Full participation of ethnic minorities in all sectors of the host society

Equal opportunities and equal participation of all ethnic groups both in civil society structures and in the labour market can be seen as preconditions for the development of a tolerant inclusive society. Enabling asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to actively use their own resources and skills, be it in employment, education or voluntary work, as well as representing their interests is therefore important.

■ Mutual understanding, acceptance and respect

Living together peacefully requires tolerance and respect. More important still, is the will of both parties to understand and to accept the other person’s way of thinking, set of values and social life style, as long as these are not contradictory to the prevailing democratic or human rights standards of the host country. From the newcomer’s perspective, this requires a readiness to be a part of the new society, however without losing one’s own cultural heritage. It is important to note that undermining an asylum seeker’s, a refugee’s or migrant’s own culture is likely to work against integration.

From the perspective of the host population, it requires a readiness to accept certain cultural differences between the host society and newcomers and the willingness to gain more in-depth knowledge about the specific problems newcomers face in the integration process. Openness, flexibility and a critical view towards one’s own set of values are key words in this respect.

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13 IFRC, Volunteering Policy (Geneva, 1999), p. 2
14 IFRC, Strategy 2010, p. 15
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Knowledge of the language and customs in the host country

In order to be able to understand and to be understood by the people of the host society and to feel at home, it is of great importance for newcomers not only to learn the language, but also to get some knowledge of the customs in the host society; prevailing values and standards, ways of non-verbal communication, ways to network in informal and formal circuits and, last but not least, the local sense of humour.

Voluntary social welfare work can contribute to a successful integration process in various ways:

1. As a means to bring cultures together

Personal contacts and interaction are at the very heart of front line voluntary work in social welfare activities and are often the very reason to become active in this field. Personal contacts and interaction are also key factors in accomplishing mutual understanding and respect between people from different cultural backgrounds, after all, unknown means unloved. Interaction with someone outside one’s own cultural community can thus be seen as a means to fight prejudice and to learn about one’s own way of thinking and social environment.

Social welfare programs in which asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are involved either as volunteers or as clients can therefore give a positive stimulation to the integration process as it facilitates personal interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. Precondition for this is of course the willingness of a volunteer organisation to adapt its social welfare programmes to changes in the population profile as well as to recruit asylum seekers, refugees and migrants as volunteers.

2. By its voluntary character

With voluntary service, the money that is normally spent on staff wages can be invested in the service delivery as a whole. Consequently, a larger number of projects can be set up and more volunteers employed. One could argue that volunteer organisations reach more people than professional organisations, and that their promotion of the inclusion of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants therefore has a bigger impact on society.

3. By making integration the principle aim of the project

Apart from serving as a means of bringing people together, the very aim of voluntary social welfare programs can be the promotion of integration, mutual understanding and respect; a migrant volunteer informing a school class in the cultural backgrounds of ethnic minorities in their society and causes for migration, or a volunteer and asylum seeker exchanging information about the culture and ways of their respective countries in a befriending project.

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15 Having said this, it should be emphasised that all voluntary social welfare programs do need adequate resources, to cover travel expenses, volunteer training, volunteer management costs etc.
4. By serving as a first step to active participation in the labour market and in civil society

Principally, the responsibility for creating equal opportunities for ethnic minorities in a society, especially with regard to education and employment, lies with the national authorities. As far as the under-representation of ethnic minorities on the labour market is the result of an educational backlog or unfamiliarity with the specific demands on the labour market, a broad spectrum of volunteer social welfare programs could be initiated to tackle this problem. Projects could range from additional language courses, volunteers acting as mediators with local service providers, guiding asylum seekers, refugees or migrants.

**Swedish Red Cross: Project Support** is a 2-year project which aims to enforce the integration of long-term unemployed (refugees), with insufficient knowledge of Swedish language to the regular labour market. The project was carried out between 1996-1998 in the municipalities of Jokkmokk and Älvsbynin, in northern rural Sweden, with a cooperation between the regional Red Cross districts and labour exchange offices.

The project consisted of three parallel measures: a support employment-work to underpin immigrants economic independence and self-reliance, an applied integration policy to make inclusion into normal life possible, and organisational restructuring for a more effective and humanistic reception and introduction. As a result, 52% of the participants got a regular job. In addition, the project has also lead to a more regular exchange of official practice between the municipalities and labour exchange offices.

Volunteering itself could also be seen as a way for asylum seekers, refugees or migrants to become acquainted with the prevailing “rules” in the (unofficial) labour market, thereby facilitating the road to future employment, possibly within the same organisation. At the same time, social welfare programs enable refugees and migrants to learn about the host culture and civil society structures, as well as to build up a social network, that can help them in their integration. Finally, one should also take in mind that refugee and migrant volunteers enrich an organisation by bringing in past professional experience.
Bulgarian Red Cross: In 2000 the Bulgarian Red Cross organised in its restaurant an experimental charity fund-raising lunch prepared by refugee women. It was the "refugee response" to the traditional charity lunches the BRC organises for people in need around Christmas and was directed to the staff of the Red Cross and other refugee supporting GOs and NGOs. The relative lack of variety of ethnic food in Bulgaria as well as the excellent quality of the home made dishes from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq made the lunch a success.

A few months later, on the occasion of 8th May (the International Red Cross day), the exercise was repeated on a larger scale, by inviting Embassies, and a wider range of NGOs and by offering food delivery in the office. The purpose was to raise funds for the refugee children summer camp with intensive Bulgarian language training, which traditionally takes place every year. 10 refugees took part in the preparation and serving of the food. About 200 people came. Approximately 15% of the necessary funding was raised for the camp.

The following aims were reached:

– unemployed refugee women without qualification were involved in an activity they know, are good at and enjoy doing. They were encouraged as people who can contribute and introduce new things in society;

– the refugees could help their children to have a recreational stay during summer and to improve their Bulgarian language;

– a basis for fundraising for refugees directly from the Bulgarian public and people residing in Bulgaria was set up (until that moment, all refugee related activities had been supported through foreign sponsored projects);

– the BRC profiled itself as a refugee supporting NGO effectively, the International RC day was celebrated in a more innovative way;

– initial links were established with the Embassies in Bulgaria as regards to refugees;

– 200 people could try the cuisine of the Middle East and West Asia.
4. Introducing Cultural Diversity in your Organisation

4.1. Introduction

The cultural diversity of the present-day society is an indisputable fact which creates challenges and opportunities for the whole society. In a multicultural society, people think, feel and act differently but at the same time still are exposed to common problems which demand cooperation for their solution.\(^\text{16}\)

National cultures, religions and tradition usually determine the ideological basis for and scope of voluntary work.\(^\text{17}\) In a multicultural society however, both the voluntary work itself and the organisations facilitating it should not only reflect the national or local ethnic profile, but should instead try to embrace all cultures present in this particular society. This process is referred to as “diversity management”.

Introducing diversity in an organisation can be a difficult task because existing assumptions about ways of working need to be changed. This change is however essential if the National Societies want to stay in the front line, helping the most vulnerable. The aim of this chapter is to provide information on how to change both the programs and the organisational structure of your National Society in such a way that they reflect the multicultural society. In order to help you with the process, this chapter provides checklists and recommendations in four different spheres that play a key role in the diversity process; changing the working culture of an organisation, the recruitment of volunteers, the reshaping of social welfare programs and redefinition of the public image of a National Society. Because these four factors are all equally important in the diversity process, and affect each other continuously, there is no specific order in which they should be carried out.

Although we do recognise the importance of diversifying the recruitment process of paid staff, we have chosen to concentrate solely on diversifying the volunteer recruitment, since the majority of human resources of Red Cross Societies consists of volunteers. Parallels can nevertheless easily be drawn.

4.2. Changing the working culture of your organisation

An important step in the process of introducing diversity in an organisation, is changing its working culture. This process of diversity management should result in a situation in which every member of an organisation is able to perform his potential while maintaining his cultural values. The aim of this process should therefore not be to assimilate different cultures into a dominant one, but to create a dominant diverse culture.

\(^{16}\) Hofstede (1991), p. 3

\(^{17}\) Govaert, van Daal, Münz & Keesom (2001), p. 54
Changing the working culture of an organisation according to diversity values is not always easy, because old assumptions and ways of doing things need to be challenged. Diversifying a working culture requires tolerance and respect for different modes of action. Even though a difficult task, changing a working culture should not be seen as a burden because when carried out successfully, a diverse staff can be a surplus value to the organisation's capacity.

Difficulties in creating a diverse working culture may be a result of the following facts.

- Lack of common accordance about the aims, values and “rules” of a diverse working culture.
- Reluctance of changing old attitudes and inability to self-critic.
- Lack of communication at work, which may nourish prejudices towards other cultures and their modes of acting.
- Some people may have political, cultural or personal opinions and reasons which may interfere their work and co-operation with people from different cultures.

### Checklist

- Introduce a policy statement making explicit your commitment to diverse human resources and how you intend to improve the representation of refugees and migrants at all levels.
- Emphasise the benefits of a diverse human resources and encourage everyone to be committed to make it work.
- Be critical towards traditional practices and procedures. Stay open for diversity and new opportunities.
- Communicate with staff and volunteers, develop a more open exchange of good practice within the organisation, give asylum seekers, refugees and migrants themselves an opportunity to contribute.
- Provide training in working in a multicultural setting to the staff at all levels, including the board level. The importance of managers showing a good example cannot be emphasised enough. See also chapter 5.
- Promote refugees and migrants to managerial positions and provide them with access to personal support.
- Offer proper working conditions and equal advantages to all employees and volunteers.
4.3. Diversifying the recruitment of volunteers

Since this guidance document focuses on National Societies’ voluntary social welfare services, this paragraph will primarily deal with diversity in volunteer recruitment. It should however be taken into account that refugees and migrants are often underrepresented both in the volunteer and professional sector in NGO’s. Lack of opportunity to participate actively on the labour market constitutes a barrier in the integration process and may lead to social exclusion and a discriminative society. This is why more work should be done to ensure that recruitment in National Societies is carried out with respect to diversity – gender, religion, race, sexual orientation and culture.  

Apart from lack of effort on the side of NGO’s with regard to the diversification of their recruitment process, lack of participation of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in voluntary work may also result from other factors:

- Being involved in voluntary work usually requires great effort, both in time and money. Some refugees or migrants are simply not in the position, economically or socially (e.g. difficulties in arranging childcare), to become active in voluntary work.

- Perception on volunteering differs according to culture. Many asylum seekers, refugees and migrants already do a lot of informal voluntary work for the benefit of their own communities or in a RCO/MCO structure and, because of this, are not aware of different possibilities to volunteer or do not see a reason for volunteering in the Red Cross’ formal voluntary context.

- Some asylum seekers, refugees and migrant are not able to participate in volunteering because of their poor knowledge of the host language.

- Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can, like local volunteers, have prejudices about working with people from different cultures and have difficulties in overcoming barriers.

- In some countries asylum seekers are not allowed to volunteer, or lack insurance. In other countries, references are needed in order to become a volunteer. Refugees and migrants with a limited social network cannot always come up with the needed references.

- Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are sometimes not aware of the possibilities to do voluntary work for the Red Cross, because they lack information on the national activities carried out by the specific National Society.

- Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants often lack information of the way in which Red Cross voluntary work is carried out (i.e. selection procedures, working hours, education possibilities and responsibilities) and may therefore be hesitant to participate in it.

Diversifying the volunteer recruitment process means that more effort should be made and more opportunities should be given for refugees and migrants to actively participate in all aspects of NGO work. National Red Cross Societies as major employers of volunteers in the EU should promote a good
practice in this area. They should recognise the contribution asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can make as volunteers and look at ways of changing their culture of work to make it more accessible for everyone. 19

Diversifying the recruitment of volunteers is beneficial for both National Societies and asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. For the latter, volunteering offers an opportunity to take part in local civil society, to work and socialise with local people from a wide range of backgrounds, to learn about the systems and culture of the host society, to put existing skills into good use and to learn new skills that may facilitate their active participation on the labour market. At the same time, having a multicultural work force improves the image of Red Cross as a multicultural organisation and thus presents a good example to society. In this respect, a National Society should encourage its refugee and migrant volunteers to apply for paid positions within the organisation.

There are however some important factors to take into consideration when recruiting and working with refugee and migrant volunteers.

- It is a misconception that all asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have a desire to work with other refugees and migrants; they can very well be solely interested in the regular Red Cross activities. One should therefore not automatically consider refugee and migrant work as the only possibility for a refugee or a migrant volunteer.

- Voluntary work with other asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can be quite burdensome for some asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, because of own past experiences. Contra-indications like these will be dealt with more specifically in chapter 5.3.

- Lack of guidance for new refugee and migrant volunteers during an initial period may lead to a situation, where a refugee or a migrant volunteer does not feel at ease in his work or the voluntary group with which he is working. Failure of becoming “familiar” with the voluntary work or the voluntary group easily causes drop outs.

- Asylum seekers’, refugees’ and migrants’ motives and expectations concerning voluntary work may differ from those of local volunteers. If the motives and expectations of a possible refugee or migrant volunteer are not understood, the chance of a new volunteer leaving is high.

- As it happens with all volunteers, refugee and migrant volunteers are sometimes asked to do tasks that should actually be carried out by paid staff. This is especially the case when an interpreter is needed. Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants as multilingual speakers are often the first ones to be asked to interpret voluntarily. This may cause difficulties, especially since voluntary interpreters are not provided with similar support as professionals, even though the demands of the work are the same. See also frame.

19 PERCO (2000): Refugees included, Seminar to discuss the participation of refugees in NGOs in Castiglione, Italy, p. 9
Use of refugee children as interpreters, for example during consultation hours, requires careful consideration. Refugee children cannot possibly be objective to the subjects they are translating for their parents, which can affect the quality of the interpretation. Besides, hearing of their parents’ suffering and personal experiences and/or problems may cause serious psychological implications. In addition, this can also lead to so called authority-conflicts between the parents and their children. The child grows up prematurely and gains too much power in the family.

Although it should be taken into account that refugee or migrant volunteers do not necessarily have an interest or the expertise to work with asylum seekers, refugees and/or migrants, the ones who do can attribute largely in helping Red Cross societies to better meet the needs refugees and migrants in a vulnerable situation. Not only are they acquainted with cultural characteristics, they might have experienced similar problems and difficulties and now have the emotional strength, confidence and expertise to give help to others. Other important reasons why refugees and migrants can be a great asset in voluntary work with other refugees and migrants:

■ they can have a greater flexibility and empathy with other refugees and/or migrants.
■ they can support to preserve a refugee’s or migrant’s cultural identity.
■ they can teach young refugees and migrants their mother tongue.
■ they speak the language and understand the needs of refugees and/or migrants and can make their integration to a new host society more comfortable because of their personal experiences.
■ they can act as mediators between refugee and migrant communities and host institutions which can increase the knowledge of the Red Cross among refugees and migrants.
■ While volunteering, the host society learns about their culture and they in return show their willingness to be part of that particular society and thereby help to fight racism and xenophobia.

20 Because of better knowledge of the language and cultural habits of the host society, refugee children may feel themselves superior to their parents which causes difficulties to the parent-child relationship.
21 PERCO (1999): The role of volunteers in the integration of refugees, Madrid seminar report, p. 7
22 PERCO (1999): The role of volunteers in integration of refugees, Madrid seminar report, p. 9
Checklist

● Emphasize the skills and potential asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can bring to the Red Cross as volunteers, not the skills they lack. Use successful refugees and migrants as role models and mentors to show their potential. 23

● Develop targeted approaches towards ethnic minority communities and use individuals as mediators to make both volunteering in general and the specific Red Cross voluntary activities more known among asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, in order to attract them to volunteer.

● Provide information and be clear about the voluntary work (selection procedure, working hours, education possibilities and responsibilities) you are offering an asylum seeker, refugee or migrant, his/ her tasks and the expected outcome. Communicate clearly what you expect from the volunteers. Give the refugee or migrant the opportunity to ask questions.

● Make sure that you understand the motives and expectations of a new refugee or migrant volunteer and try to match those with the voluntary work you are offering him.

● Make a clear distinction when paid staff is needed instead of volunteers. Specify the tasks of a volunteers and do not give additional tasks such as interpreting afterwards.

● Do not offer voluntary work with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants as the first or the only possibility for a potential refugee or a migrant volunteer.

● Create volunteering opportunities that do not cause enormous economical burden for a refugee or a migrant. Create the possibility to pay refugee and migrant volunteers upfront for travel expenses etc.

● Utilize asylum seekers’, refugees’ and migrants’ special skills such as language 24 and intercultural skills and provide them with opportunities to volunteer for the benefit of their own communities.

● Offer volunteering as an opportunity to gain work experience, and ensure that asylum seekers, refugees and migrants will receive language and other support, including training. 25

● Provide some sort of initial guidance for a new refugee or migrant volunteer so that he will feel ease with the work, the people and the organisation. Introduce refugee and migrant volunteers to the voluntary group and make sure that they are accepted. However, be aware that by providing this guidance, you do not put a refugee or migrant volunteer in a special situation.

● When making use of refugee or migrant volunteers as interpreters, provide them with adequate training beforehand.

● Although it is a reality, steps should be taken to avoid using refugee children as interpreters.

● Make sure that all volunteers act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. 26 Encourage volunteers to stay open to diversity and respect different cultures, as the Fundamental Principles require to do so.

24 As for translation activities take note of page 11.
25 PERCO, Join forces for integration in Europe, Digest of activities 1998-2000, p. 11
26 The seven Fundamental Principles, Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universal, were proclaimed by the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross, Vienna, 1965.
4.4. Diversifying social welfare programs

According to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the design and development of social welfare programs must start with a matching between the client’s needs and capacities and the goals and capacities of the National Society. To today, the participants of the Red Cross social welfare programs have increasingly diverse needs and capacities which places a challenge to National Societies. To be able to alleviate the life of all persons in need in a society, the National Societies have to consider an ever increasing range of matters when planning social welfare programs.

Even though the voluntary programs of National Societies can be well perceived by the local population, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants might still feel left out if the programs are too much outlined to follow the national culture. Changing the social welfare programs to become more accessible for everyone is necessary because it allows more people in need to be reached and a better quality of the social welfare programs for the target groups. It is of vital importance that the Red Cross National Societies are seen as organisations that provide services regardless of people’s status or background.

When planning social welfare programs for asylum seekers, migrants and refugees, the National societies should be aware of the following:

- Different ethnic minorities have specific needs and problems depending on their background and because of this, projects should be developed to suit these differing needs.

- Many National Societies are not aware of refugee or migrant activities by other organisations in their area and because of this, there may be some overlap in activities.

- For certain cultures, it can be considered a taboo to talk about or express certain needs, which makes it harder to find out what people are actually asking for.

- Many asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are unable to take part in regular Red Cross activities because of the difficulty of speaking the language of the host society.

- Religious or other cultural factors may hinder some asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from taking part in social welfare programs. Women from different cultures are sometimes unable to participate in integration activities because of social and cultural factors concerning their role in the family and the community.

- Refugees and migrants should always be included in the process of designing and developing social welfare programs that are of their benefit.

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27 IFRC (1999): Federation volunteering review project, p. 6
**German Red Cross, Adentro:** a project addressed to Spanish senior citizens which aim was to increase awareness of getting old in the hosting country Germany. The projects was primarily aimed to those senior spanish citizens who already were experienced in taking leadership role in the migrant community.

The aim of the three year project (1997-2000) was to train some spanish senior citizens to be able to help the other elderly (spanish) migrant population with the specific problems they might confront when getting old in the host country Germany and to increase their knowledge of the possibilities available to solve these problems.

Senior citizens participating in the Adentro programm were trained to provide information on the already existing structures of the German support system for elderly and to use specific methods and techniques such as evaluation and inquiries to analyse the living conditions of elderly migrants in community. Participants were also taught to organise, carry out and evaluate community based activities in favout of other elderly migrants.

During three years, Adentro reached 150 Spanish senior citizens who are now the basis for future GRC activities enabling elderly migrants to deal positively and competently with getting old in their host society.

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**Checklist**

- Try to integrate asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in regular Red Cross activities where possible, in order to avoid segregation. Where needed, design activities that are specially targeted at refugee and/or migrant communities.

- Try to make use of the expertise and the output of people from different ethnic backgrounds when planning social welfare programs. 29

- Undertake research on the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from different cultural groups to find out what kind of activities they wish to have, making use of the help of RCO’s, MCO’s and refugee and migrant communities. Be aware of possible taboo issues; make use of the expertise of refugees or migrants when choosing the proper approach.

- Undertake research in different regions to find out what activities are already carried out for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants by other organisations and how the Red Cross can attribute an extra value. Establish ways of working with RCO’s, MCO’s and other NGO’s to ensure that their services and activities are complementary and not in competition. Where possible, try to cooperate in an activity.

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29 van Daal & Broenink (1998): Intercultureel vrijwilligerswerk, p. 89
Do not treat asylum seekers, refugees and migrants as homogenous groups, but make the social welfare programs as flexible as possible. Focus on the individual and try to take more consideration of an asylum seeker’s, refugee’s or a migrant’s background. Avoid uniform solution.

Make sure that cultural and religious habits do not hinder anybody to participate in social welfare programs, e.g. different religious holidays and feast-days should be respected.

When necessary, provide activities in the refugee’s or migrant’s own language.

Make a special effort (for example by creating “Women only” spaces) to include women from different cultures in Red Cross activities.

4.5. Working on the intercultural image of your organisation

In today’s world, with a public consisting of various groups with different objectives, interests and needs, the image building process is more complex than ever. In the process of diversifying your organisation, working on an intercultural image is nevertheless an important step. Working on an intercultural image should also be seen as an opportunity for National Societies because:

- More potential staff and volunteers can be reached to participate in Red Cross work for the most vulnerable.

- More people in need can be helped when all target groups are aware of Red Cross activities.

- Well functioning multicultural National Societies can be seen as good and instructing examples that promote tolerance and prevent racism in society. Because the Red Cross is seen as an example for society, it is important that the National Society acts in a way it has promised, in order to maintain and strengthen its reputation as a tolerant and open organisation.

The way in which Red Cross National Societies are perceived by different cultural groups should therefore be in accordance with the changing society. Red Cross National Societies should be seen as organisations that can manage cultural differences and are welcoming and easily reachable for all members of society.

However, when working on the multicultural image of your National Society, it should not be forgotten that the public image is not only formed on the basis of official statements but also on the basis of its actions. It is thus of vital importance that National Societies meet the expectations they create in publicity campaigns, in order to attain and retain the trust of the public.

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30 Vos & Schoemaker (1999): Integrated communication, concern, internal and marketing communication, p. 34
Being aware of how your National Society is perceived by the public is necessary before any action on the diversification of your image can be taken. Research on the public image should therefore be seen as a necessary precondition for the process. The following facts can be seen as useful when undertaking this research.

- Reserve enough time for the research; a complete research on the Red Cross image might take three to four months. Careful planning is the basis for successful research.
- Communicate regularly with the research institute you are using. Be clear about what you want to know and how you want to go further with the research in order to avoid misunderstandings.
- Make sure that all cultural groups living in society are represented in order to get a complete picture about Red Cross’s image.
- When using questionnaires and interviewers, make sure that they are available in different languages. The role of interviewers from different ethnic backgrounds is especially important since they know how to reach different asylum seeker, refugee and migrant groups and are able to communicate with them in their native language.

In April 2000, The Netherlands Red Cross carried out a research on how it was perceived by different groups in society. The following points were discovered:

- Only less than half of the people see the Red Cross as a modern organisation.  
31
- Many Moslems mistakenly perceive the Red Cross emblem as a Christian symbol which excludes them from participating in Red Cross activities.  
32
- Many non-Islamic do not recognize the Red Crescent as a same organisation as the Red Cross.
- Most of the refugees and migrants know about the international activities of the Red Cross, but only few know about the national activities carried out by the Netherlands Red Cross.

When working on an intercultural public image, National Societies should not only be aware of their public image, but also whether the information they disseminate reaches all refugee and migrant communities in society: the Dutch research (see frame) pointed out that the awareness of the Red Cross National Societies is particularly low among asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The following should therefore be taken into account when giving information about Red Cross activities:

- Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers often use different information channels from national ones: (f.e. community newspapers, radio and informal networks). Very often a personal approach (face-to-face) is used in bringing certain information across. Because of this, informa-

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32 PERCO (2000): Refugees included, Castiglione seminar report, p. 12
tion on the Red Cross disseminated through the usual information channels will fail to reach many refugee and migrant communities.33

- Publicity material used to disseminate information about the Red Cross and its activities may consist symbols and expressions that are not known in all cultures. Because of this, some refugees and migrants may not be able to understand the given information.

- Some asylum seekers, refugees and migrants may have false perceptions of what they know about the Red Cross and its activities (for example volunteer work and social welfare programs) if the given information is not clear enough. Because of these perceptions some refugees and migrants may be reluctant in participating Red Cross activities.

- Poor knowledge of language, illiteracy or social isolation may also hinder refugees, migrants and asylum seekers of becoming aware of the Red Cross activities.

Checklist

On the intercultural image

- Emphasize the openness of the Red Cross to all people systematically; do not sent contradictory messages.

- Emphasize Red Cross’s political, religious and cultural impartiality in publicity items.

- Emphasise that the Red Cross and the Red Crescent are one and the same organisation.

- Give explicit and accurate information on activities and recruitment and avoid false promises in order to prevent misunderstandings.

- Use different ethnicities (models), languages and symbols in publicity campaigns.

- When so, emphasise that your organisation provides specific programs to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

- Present the National Society in public events such as concerts to make it more known among all the age groups.34

On communicating the intercultural image

- Focus on the receiver when communicating information, make research on how different target groups disseminate information35.

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33 PERCO (2000): Refugees included, Seminar to discuss the participation of refugees in NGOs, p. 12
34 NCB (2000): Imago van het Nederlandse Rode Kruis bij allochtoone groepen in Nederland, p. 52
35 PERCO (2000): Refugees included, Castiglione seminar report, p. 14
● Provide information in different languages and through specific information channels used by refugees and migrants. Find out where is the place to be when you are looking for your target group, for example present in festivals and events for ethnic minorities. Use a personal approach.

● Launch publicity campaigns especially targeted at refugee and migrant communities, to increase their knowledge of the Red Cross and its activities in the host society.

● Provide asylum seekers, refugees and migrants with clear information on Red Cross (activities). Try to use plain language in order to avoid misunderstandings and false perceptions.

● Recognize cultural factors when doing publicity; avoid symbols, images and phrases that can be insulting or unknown in some cultures; these could confuse the receiver and cause a false interpretation of the given information.

● Create and utilize regular communication networks with migrant and refugee communities, RCO’s and MCO’s in order to provide and exchange information about the Red Cross and its activities. Sometimes promoting yourself “in the field” proves to be more effective than disseminating information via publicity campaigns.
5. Support in Voluntary Work with Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants

“Volunteering is an act of brotherhood that builds bridges between communities since volunteers are able to transcend differences and work for the society imbued with understanding and mutual respect.”

5.1. Introduction

Although most volunteers will stress the fact that their work is very satisfactory, volunteering in social welfare activities can be quite demanding at the same time. When working with asylum seekers, refugees or migrants (both as volunteers and customers), there are two specific factors a volunteer should be well prepared for and guided in throughout his work, in order to avoid unnecessary strain on the side of both the volunteer and the customer. Firstly it is important that a volunteer learns how to communicate with different cultures. Secondly a volunteer should be educated in dealing with possible psycho-social problematic of his client. Proper preparation and guidance will not only benefit the volunteer, who will be more at ease and happy in the job, but will also benefit the asylum seeker, refugee or the migrant, who will feel better understood and accepted.

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with some useful facts and recommendations on how volunteers can be well prepared for and be guided in their work with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

5.2. Intercultural communication in voluntary work

The culture in which people grow up largely determinates their behaviour, perception and the ways on how they communicate and express themselves. When people from different cultural backgrounds interact, it is natural that misunderstandings occur. Since communication is essential in voluntary work, particularly when working with asylum seekers, refugees or migrants, being aware of different social and cultural values is of vital importance.

Dealing with cultural differences should be seen as an interesting process that will be educational for each party involved and can enrich worldviews. Intercultural communication provides a tool to overcome cultural misunderstandings that can occur in voluntary work. At its best, a volunteer who understands cultural differences can contribute to the integration of a newcomer. The newcomer often finds
himself alienated from his home country and surrounded by strangers whom he does not understand. A volunteer’s understanding attitude towards cultural values and norms of an asylum seeker, refugee or a migrant can therefore function as a starting point to successful integration. In the worst case, cultural misunderstandings can lead to an end of a relationship between a volunteer and a refugee.  

It should be remembered that managing cultural differences is a long process which requires intense and systematic work from both parties. The aim of intercultural communication is not to be able to fully understand each other, but to accept other cultural values and norms. Another thing to take into account is the fact that not all misunderstandings between two people from different cultural backgrounds are the result of cultural differences; misunderstanding might as well result from different individual habits, thoughts, values and assumptions. In other words: intercultural communication is not the answer to all problems. The following examples show how misunderstandings between a voluntary worker and an asylum seeker, refugee or a migrant can occur. It should be kept in mind that each culture has its own characteristics and that the following examples are quite generalist in nature.

- Misunderstandings or miscommunications can be caused by different content and form of communication or different interpretations of given information. In high-context cultures part of the message is in the physical context and only little is expressed verbally. In low-context cultures such as the most of the European societies are, the message is often expressed verbally as a whole. This may create difficulties for example in finding out the needs of an asylum seeker, refugee or migrant, when he expresses them in a way unfamiliar to a volunteer.

- Some asylum seekers, refugees or migrants can be from cultures that act reserved to strangers or, for reasons of politeness, give an answer they expect the opposite party wants to hear. Interaction with people from cultures of high uncertainty avoidance is often highly ritualistic and very polite. This may cause confusion for people who are used to open communication with strangers from the beginning.

- Communication with the opposite sex can be unfamiliar to some refugees and migrants. This can be the case especially if an asylum seeker, refugee or a migrant is from a highly masculine culture where people tend to have little contact with the opposite sex, whereas in most of the European societies communication with opposite sex is very common.

- Discussing sensitive issues and personal feelings can be a taboo in some cultures. Being too curious about personal issues can be humiliating for some asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and can prevent them from expressing themselves later on.

- Communication with people from different cultures can cause frustration and insecurity for both parties because of the extensive adjustment needed in a short period of time.

- A volunteer can sometimes be faced with an ethic dilemma if his and the refugee’s or migrant’s views are opposite and the volunteer can not accept them. Unusual and diverging habits of acting and thinking can sometimes create conflicts between volunteers and their clients.

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37 Emminghaus, From first aid in emergencies to intercultural encounters, 1989, p. 116
38 PERCO, The role of volunteers in the integration of refugees, annexes to Madrid seminar, 1999, p. X
39 Pinto, Intercultural communication, a three step method for dealing with differences, 2000, p. 64
40 PERCO, The role of volunteers in the integration of refugees, annexes to Madrid seminar, 1999, p. X
41 Pinto, Intercultural communication, a three step method for dealing with differences, 2000, p. 67
42 Pinto, Intercultural communication, a three step method for dealing with differences, 2000, p. 74
People often reject any information that does not fit into their own view of the world. They fear that the information will upset their world view and that this will harm their sense of security. In the worst case volunteer’s inability to understand the refugee’s or migrant’s cultural values and behaviour code can release racist and xenophobic feelings toward them.

Conflicts do not only occur between persons from the local community and newcomers. Conflicts within the asylum seeker, refugee or migrants community (for example in case of civil war of ethnic issues at hand in the home country) are quite feasible as well. In case a refugee volunteer is confronted with an “enemy” from his home country while carrying out his voluntary job, there is a risk that he will refuse to help this particular person.

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**Spanish Red Cross, The School of Social Mediators for Immigration, EMSI**

EMSI, founded in 1995, is a public service promoted by Madrid region’s social service council and managed by the Spanish Red Cross’ regional branch in Madrid. The aim of the EMSI is to facilitate cultural interchange by activating different immigration groups and locals living in Madrid Autonomous Community.

EMSI provides training on diversity issues especially for people working in immigration programs either at professional or voluntary level. One of the School’s premises is diversity, which is reflected not only by the students, but also by the contents of ethno-cultural considerations and their influence in interpersonal relationships, communication and cohabitation. As a result, EMSI has been able to provide so called cultural mediators for various institutions and organisation active in Madrid region to facilitate the co-operation and communication between different cultural groups.

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**Checklist**

*Tips to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts*

- Make sure that volunteers can accept and deal with ambiguity.  
  
- Avoid stereotyping refugees and migrants since every situation involves individual beings, and behaviour cannot be explained only by cultural factors. 
  
- Avoid attitudes of superiority and paternalism based upon presumptions of a better knowledge because this can place a refugee or a migrant in a position of dependency. Rather emphasize the volunteer’s task to help a refugee to help himself and to be responsible for his integration process. 
  
- Emphasize the importance of finding common interest instead of highlighting the differences between a volunteer and a refugee or a migrant. 

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44 PERCO, The role of volunteers in the integration of refugees, Madrid seminar report, 1999, p. 16

45 European Commission, Psychology in humanitarian assistance, 2000, p. 22

46 van Daal & Broenink, Intercultureel vrijwilligerswerk, 1998, p. 93
● Co-operate with asylum seeker, refugee and migrant communities, RCO’s and MCO’s in order to achieve exact information on cultural norms, values and behavioural codes of specific refugee and migrant groups.

● In a conflict situation caused by cultural differences, provide all parties of the conflict with assistance and support. 47

● Provide a volunteer or a refugee with a possibility to change partner if he does not feel himself comfortable in a current situation.

Training

● Train volunteers to become aware of their own cultural norms, values and behavioural codes. 48

● Provide volunteers with accurate and complete information about refugees’ and migrants’ cultures. They should acknowledge cultural differences and recognise how they affect thought, feelings and action.

● Emphasize the importance of mutual respect and tolerance. Volunteers should be able to see situations from the perspective of their own norms and values but also from the perspective of a refugee’s or a migrant’s norms and values.

● Inform volunteers how to act in situations where differences in norms, values and behavioural codes occur, and of the interpersonal and intercultural conflicts that can emerge. 49

5.3. Psycho-Social aspects in voluntary work with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants

In voluntary work, the demands of the job can have psychological and emotional implications for the groups and individuals involved. Volunteering can be especially difficult when working with asylum seekers, refugees or migrants, because of the many problems they have to cope with in a new host society. These problems include trauma, frustrations about inability to control one’s own life, grievance about forced emigration and loss of family, and difficulties in coping with the host culture. It has to be kept in mind that refugees and migrants do not have similar problems because of their different backgrounds and causes of emigration.

Refugee children and unaccompanied minors are extremely sensitive to psychological stress and trauma and because of this, need special care and attention. Volunteers working with them have to be guided and trained, in order to be able to understand their specific situation as well as to provide them with the sufficient support.

48 Pinto, intercultural communication, a three step method for dealing with differences, 2000, p. 173
49 Emminghaus, From first aid in emergencies to intercultural encounters, 1989, p. 118
Minimizing the negative effects of voluntary work such as stress and burn-out is of vital importance to a National Society. Stress can often have a negative influence upon the volunteer, it can make him feel pressured or lose interest in his work with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. One should be aware of the following:

- Not all people are aware of what volunteering in social welfare work with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants implies. When the work description is not clear enough and does not meet the expectations of a volunteer, he can easily become frustrated, disappointed or do the job wrongly which might in the worst case harm refugee or a migrant.

- Feelings of inadequacy and inability to help a refugee or migrant as expected can cause frustration, stress and burn-out. These feelings can arise in particular if volunteers for example are confronted with traumatised refugees, and they are not trained to deal with the situation. 50

- Volunteers can find themselves affected by the traumatic experiences of the refugees they work with, especially when they identify themselves with the refugee's history and suffering. In particular, refugee volunteers should be aware of over-identification, since they run the risk of re-living personal traumas, such as insecurity, inability to control one’s own life or loss of family. Local volunteers on the other hand, can be confronted with situations of rape or family breakup which may release previous traumatic experiences. 51

- Helping an asylum seeker or refugee can arouse feelings of frustration, powerlessness and guilt when a volunteer learns, that the world is unjust, and that he is not able to help a refugee in a way he had hoped. 52

- Working with asylum seekers can be especially hard and may sometimes seem futile. Because of incertitude of receiving a status, asylum seekers might be difficult to reach and can sometimes refuse the help a volunteer is offering.

- Long term unwanted acculturation and difficulties in social integration can cause psychological stress to refugees or migrants. Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can sometimes criticize the host culture and therefore refuse the aid that volunteers want to provide. This can easily lead to mutual frustration and termination of the voluntary program.

- Volunteer’s frustration and tiredness can also be a consequence of a poor recognition of his work by the National Society.

- Feelings of having too much responsibility towards a migrant’s or refugee’s life can render a volunteer stressed and fatigued. The fact that migrants and refugees often put enormous trust and expectations in a volunteer and are dependent on them increases this feeling of stress.

- Refugee volunteers can be sensitive to psychological and emotional traumas especially when helping a refugee coming from the same area and being faced with the juxtapositions of the conflict which they have escaped from.

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50 PERCO, The role of volunteers in integration of refugees, the Madrid seminar report, 1999, p. 9
51 European Commission, Psychology in humanitarian assistance, 1999, p. 25
52 European Commission, Psychology in humanitarian assistance, 1999, p. 23
Refugees and especially refugee children as interpreters may sometimes feel too sensitive towards the message they translate and because of this, give false or insufficient information, or can become traumatised themselves when hearing about their parents’ suffering.  

**Checklist**

*Recruitment process*

- Make sure that proper selection procedures are used when recruiting volunteers. As a basic rule, don’t recruit volunteers under 18.  
- Assess the skills of each volunteer individually and make sure that they will be recruited to the right tasks, according to their abilities.  
- Be aware that not all persons have the adequate profile to work with refugees and migrants.  
- Explain clearly what a volunteer is expected to do, and include him in the whole process from the beginning. Ask about his expectations, motivations and hesitation concerning the work and how he intents to deal with it. Make sure that his expectations are realistic.  
- Make sure that all volunteers have a neutral attitude towards asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. In a case of a refugee or migrant volunteer, assure that he has no prejudices towards other refugees or migrants and he is prepared to work with them.

*Training*

- National Societies have a great responsibility to provide their volunteers with proper training. Lack of training can have serious implications for both volunteers and clients.

- Train a volunteer to cope with stressful and emotional situations and to indicate his/her boundaries in such a situation. A volunteer should be able to make a clear distinction of what he can and can not do in order to support a refugee. Emphasize that a volunteer is not responsible for solving all the migrant’s or refugees’ problems, but can only try his best to alleviate their sorrow. Help a volunteer to see a refugee/migrant rather as a survivor than as a victim.

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53 PERCO, The role of volunteers in the integration of refugees, annexes to the Madrid seminar, 1999, p. X  
54 PERCO, The role of volunteers in the integration of refugees, Madrid seminar report, 1999, p. 9
● Explain to volunteers clearly where their help ends and when they should refer a refugee or a migrants to professional social welfare worker or psychologist.

● Make sure that a volunteer informs his customers clearly of his work and does not give false expectations about what he can do to help his client. Make sure that interventions are time-limited.

● Avoid using refugee children as interpreters to protect them from possible traumas.

**Feedback and support**

● Provide volunteers with regular feedback and evaluation on their work to keep up their motivation, e.g. exit interviews and supervision.

● Organize voluntary meetings, mutual support among the volunteers may help to improve stress and contribute to making the experience more meaningful.

● Encourage volunteers to express themselves and talk about their experiences (e.g. with a friend or in a group) to prevent sudden breakdown. 55

● Offer psycho-social support for volunteers. When talking about a volunteers personal experiences and problems, absolute confidentiality should be guaranteed.

● Limit the number of traumatic cases a volunteer is following. 56

● Encourage and reward volunteers of the work well done. Let them know that their work is appreciated.
Abbreviations

ECRE European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EU European Union
EUROSTAT Statistical Office of the European Communities
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
NCB Nederlands Centrum Buitenlanders
NGO Non-Governmental Organisation
PERCO Platform for European Red Cross Cooperation on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants
RCO Refugee Community Organisation
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
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