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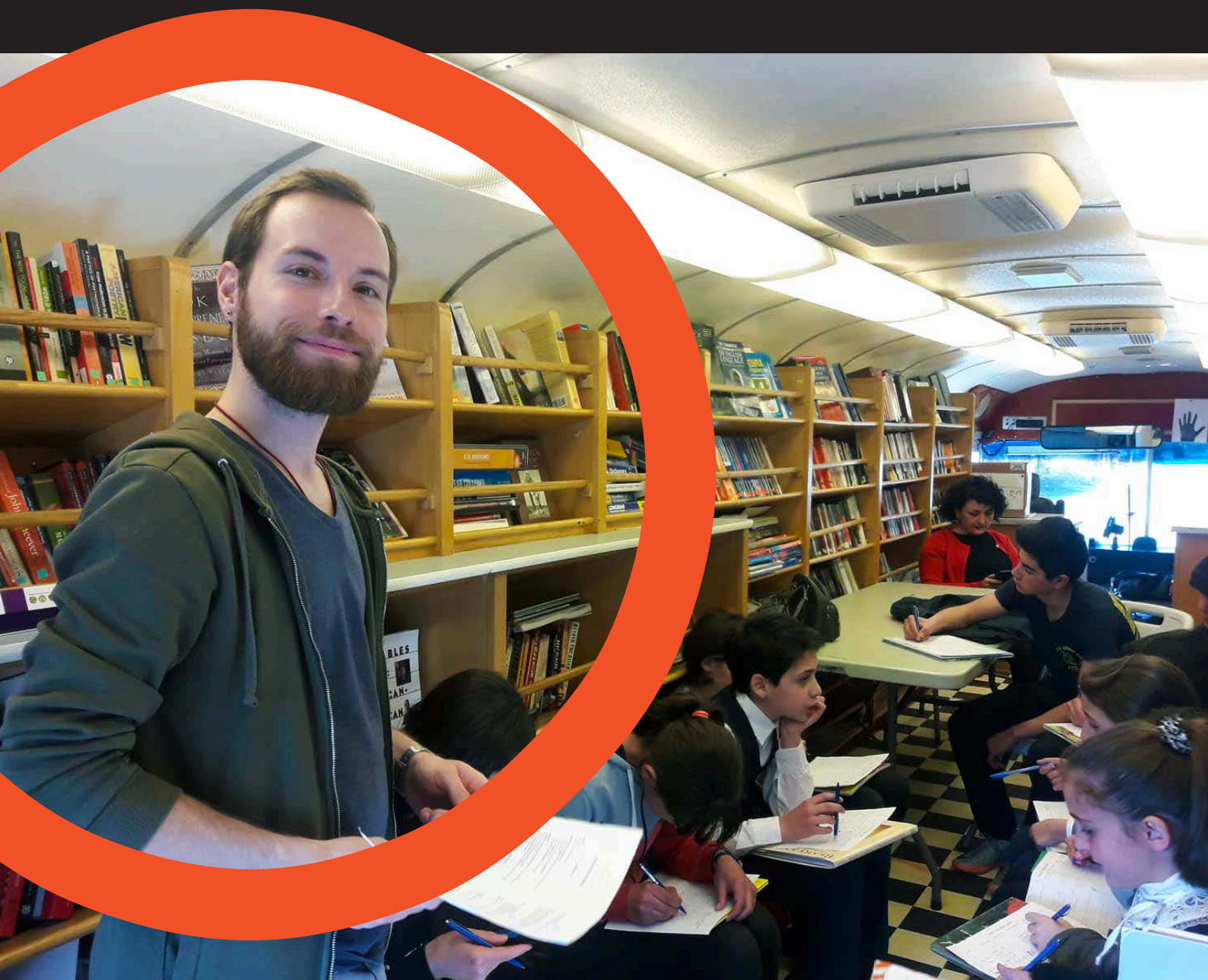
Ambrela

CASE STUDY

Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers in Places Affected by Migration

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Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers in Places Affected by Migration

Increasingly, the international community recognises global or development volunteering as an important tool for overcoming the challenges of international development (including addressing the issue of migration). However, volunteering is difficult to define and even more difficult to measure, as its forms and ways vary across borders and cultures. This case study presents selected positive examples of Slovak volunteering practice and its impact on entire communities – both in specific low-income countries and at home.

Introduction: Volunteering develops people's potential as well as their social capital

Currently, the measurement of the participation and impact of volunteering focuses mainly on volunteering based on belonging to a particular organisation. Spontaneous activities of this kind, carried out by individuals directly among people, are often omitted.¹

One can agree: Development volunteering consists of implementing activities for the benefit of other people and organisations in low-income countries, formerly referred to as developing countries, without the right to remuneration. Even though development volunteers do not receive a salary or wages for their work, they often get their expenses, such as transport, meals and accommodation, covered either by their sending or host organisations, or directly by specific donors who cover the activity. Through their volunteering, young people pass on their expertise, a combination of knowledge, skills and experience, directly in the field. Importantly, the volunteers gain much in return and develop their potential at the same time.

In this study, we use a specific example of one of the members of Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations, ADRA Slovakia, to illustrate how their volunteers' views of global challenges and

¹ UNV, 2018: Current Estimates and Next Steps – The scope and scale of global volunteering

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future plans change. Further, we will outline how the volunteers acquire important social capital: new contacts, partnerships and an amount of useful knowledge, skills and experience. Both the hosting, receiving organisations as well as the sending organisations at home grow together with their volunteers. At the same time, we will show how the mitigation of forced migration through specific Slovak volunteer projects happens when the sent young people work directly with migrating communities looking for their new homes.

Volunteer Veronika Zimová educated socially excluded children of parents who had returned to Albania. Volunteer Martin Pavelka worked on the re-employability of internally displaced persons in Georgia. Another Slovak volunteer, Anna Hruboňová, was part of an education centre for the youngest Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Due to their work abroad, all three of them became migrants themselves and may be considered young ambassadors of our Faces of Migration campaign².



Veronika Zimová
ADRA Albania volunteer



Martin Pavelka
A volunteer in Small Projects Istanbul
and before that in organisation
For Better Future



Anna Hruboňová
ADRA Libanon volunteer

Launch of the official development volunteering programme in the Slovak Republic

Different forms of global, international or development volunteering as a form of assistance to those in need abroad have been operating in Slovakia for decades. The pioneering organisations among the Ambrela members include eRko, SAVIO, St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work, and others. Based on Ambrela's recommendations (still entitled the Slovak NGDO Platform at the time) in 2011, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic (MFEA SR) launched an official, state-subsidised programme for sending junior and expert volunteers to the so-called developing countries within the framework of official development assistance (ODA) of the Slovak Republic at the beginning of 2012.

² Ambrela, 2019: How Many Faces of Migration Do You Know? [In Slovak language]

Since then, development volunteering has been defined and used as one of the tools of ODA SR³. At the turn of 2012 and 2013, ten organisations (mostly Ambrela members) immediately joined the programme, and forty development volunteers were sent into the field. The projects were financially supported by the SlovakAid scheme. Most volunteer projects could be included in categories such as the field of social development, social work, health care and education, all in the provision of services to the local community, including sharing of know-how and the transfer of experience.

Since then, the budget for sending out volunteers has stabilised, and the MFEA SR, as a donor, simplified the selection criteria and administration of applications through SlovakAid. Annually, a call is issued for the submission of applications for grants for sending out volunteers and expert-volunteers within the ODA SR. Their purpose is to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the so-called developing countries, namely the goals such as: reducing poverty, helping to transform society, raising educational attainment, etc. The main goal of volunteering is to support SlovakAid's interventions in partner countries in accordance with the current Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019 – 2023⁴, whilst also keeping in mind the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2019, twenty-four applications by seven organisations (mostly Ambrela members) were approved⁵, and selected persons were sent on missions to thirteen low-income countries.

ADRA Slovakia as a leader in sending young people abroad

ADRA Slovakia⁶ is a Slovak humanitarian and development organisation which operates in low-income countries as well as in Slovakia. It is a part of the international network entitled ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency). In 2018, it celebrated twenty-five years of its existence. By its foreign partners in the field of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and global volunteering (precisely for the high-quality pre-departure preparation and well-functioning volunteer cycles), it is often described as one of the Slovak leaders in sending young people to low-income countries. ADRA Slovakia trains and sends out Slovak volunteers through two volunteer programmes – the first one focuses on the above-mentioned volunteer stays in the programme countries of the official development cooperation of the Slovak Republic through the MFEA SR programme administered by SlovakAid⁷; the second one is the EU Aid Volunteers⁸ initiative. In this study, we will focus on the first of the two.

ADRA Slovakia sends young people on a “mission” there where they are needed – based on consistent communication between the sending and host organisations, as well as the needs of the local communities. The volunteers in the field do not do the work that could be done by a local person but are

3 SAMRS, 2020: *Sending Volunteers and Expert Volunteers to Developing Countries as Part of Official Development Assistance* [In Slovak language]

4 SAMRS, 2019: *Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019 – 2023*

5 SAMRS, 2019: *List of Grant Applications Under the Call SAMRS/2019/D – Sending Volunteers and Experts to Developing Countries* [In Slovak language]

6 ADRA Slovakia, 2020: *About Us* [In Slovak language]

7 SAMRS, 2020: *Sending Volunteers and Expert Volunteers to Developing Countries as Part of Official Development Assistance* [In Slovak language]

8 European Commission, 2020: *EU Aid Volunteers*

supposed to bring their expertise, for instance in IT, marketing, communications, project management, human resources or education. It is done in this way not as a matter of superiority but as a principle: not to take away work from local people⁹. At the same time, the volunteers learn new skills in multicultural environments and groups, and they also gain new experience themselves.

In the last six years, ADRA Slovakia has sent out almost thirty development volunteers.¹⁰ Some went to help typhoon victims in the Philippines or socially excluded families in Kenya, budding activists in Ukraine, traumatised people after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, internally displaced women in Georgia, Roma children of returnee parents in Albania, and refugee communities in Lebanon. In this publication, we will focus on the last three volunteer examples and projects.

Specific volunteer projects and work with people who migrate

Young people sent to low-income countries by ADRA Slovakia worked on their “missions” for six to twelve months. Hence, this Slovak member organisation of Ambrela focuses on long-term development volunteering.

In 2018 and 2019, volunteer Veronika Zimová worked in two annual cycles for the host organisation ADRA Albania¹¹ in Tirana. Primarily, she focused on the management and preparation of new projects. She also went directly to Roma children together with her colleagues and participated in tutoring classes and extra-curricular activities for excluded groups of pupils. In the autumn of 2019, she received the national award ‘SlovakAid Volunteer of the Year’ for her work.¹²

Volunteer Martin Pavelka worked in the Tserovani settlement at Georgian organisation For Better Future¹³ for twelve months in 2019. The organisation focuses on supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially the most vulnerable groups – women, children and young people. Martin’s host organisation was founded by these internally displaced persons. Under its leadership, there operates a social enterprise entitled Ikorta¹⁴, at which twelve internally displaced women make traditional enamel jewellery. The creation of enamel jewellery has a strong tradition in the country and the annual increase in the number of tourists in Georgia helps as well. Martin focused on rebranding, increasing the company’s visibility, more effective marketing and launching an online store, as well as deepening cooperation with local companies. Furthermore, as a mentor, he was in charge of supporting the employability of the displaced community through social entrepreneurship. As he is also interested in environmental protection, he managed to launch a recycling programme in public institutions in the settlement.

9 Markovič Baluchová, 2018: How to Strengthen the Capacities of Organisations in the Management of Humanitarian Volunteering (Interview with the director of ADRA Slovakia) [In Slovak language]

10 ADRA Slovakia, 2019: Global Volunteering [In Slovak language]

11 ADRA Albania, 2020: About ADRA Albania

12 MFEA SR, 2019: Volunteers of the Years 2018 and 2019 Were Awarded in Košice, the European Volunteering Capital [In Slovak language]

13 For Better Future, 2020: FBF news

14 Ikorta, 2019: About Ikorta



Volunteers are visiting Syrian families directly in their homes in Beirut so that they can picture their living conditions, problems and challenges.

At the turn of 2019 and 2020, volunteer Anna Hruboňová worked as support staff in the educational project for the children of Syrian refugees at host organisation ADRA Lebanon¹⁵ in Beirut. She was also very involved in the office. She helped write project applications to the various donors' grant calls to gain funding for a full renewal of the training centre. Moreover, she was also involved in writing safe water and sanitation projects in which ADRA is active – particularly in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon. She also prepared a vocational course for young people from poorer backgrounds, who had experienced difficulties finding employment or paying for university education. However, she was not able to experience the implementation of this project due to her early departure back home (related to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020).

15 ADRA MENA, 2020: ADRA Lebanon

Migrating people as a target group of volunteer projects

All three young people sent from Slovakia worked in very diverse, international teams. They could communicate with their colleagues effectively mainly thanks to having studied and understanding the context from which their counterparts came and in which they lived. Equally important was: not to give in to their own established norms and beliefs, but to listen carefully to what the locals were telling them. Thanks to pre-departure training, intercultural sensitivity and verbal and non-verbal communication, they were able to successfully implement their volunteer activities and build relationships in the new communities – professional as well as personal.

Veronika Zimová's host organisation ADRA Albania implements several projects which all have in common tutoring classes for children with learning disabilities, especially for those from socially disadvantaged families of the Roma minority. Tutoring classes take place at partner schools but also at the community centre near the Roma settlement in Fushë-Krujë¹⁶. Veronika participated in the completion of an important project, entitled simply 'Integration after Migration', which focused on the so-called returnees¹⁷. *"These people are unsuccessful asylum seekers of Roma origin, who had to return from Germany back to Albania together with their families. As a minority, they are now again looking for their place in the major society and are re-discovering their old-new homeland. Many children are excluded, not integrated into the educational process, so additional teaching alone does not suffice,"* Veronika explains. That is why her team also worked with parents, especially in the field of awareness-raising, prevention and positive education, with an aim to raise awareness of the need for education.

Volunteer Martin Pavelka worked with internally displaced persons¹⁸ (IDPs) who had had to flee their homes because of the Georgian-Russian war for the South Ossetian region in 2008. Immediately after this war, the Georgian government had several settlements built in border regions. The largest is the settlement of Tserovani near Tbilisi, where about 8,000 ethnic Georgians live in two thousand simple houses. According to Martin, the two hundred years long Russian domination, especially the consequences of the fall of the Soviet Union and the related chaos, is still strongly felt all across the country. After the collapse of the USSR in 1992 – 1994, a civil war started in the country, caused by the issue of the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. To this day, both separatist areas backed by Russia are trying to secede from Georgia. Still, as the country is immensely diverse and multi-ethnic, people's needs there vary. According to Martin, the main issues to be addressed are the integration of marginalised groups, support for employment in the regions and the support for the rural economy. *"In Georgia, there are many volunteers, especially thanks to the European Voluntary Service programme and the American Peace Corps programme. Much funding has been invested in development cooperation with Georgia. However, for further changes to take place, the initiative must come from the state administration, but*

16 Markovič Baluchová, 2019: Tutoring Children From Excluded Communities as the Core of Volunteering Projects in Albania (Interview) [In Slovak language]

17 ADRA Albania, 2019: Integration after Migration

18 Markovič Baluchová, 2019: Improving Social Enterprise Activities and Educating Disadvantaged Youth Through a Volunteer Stay in Georgia (Interview) [In Slovak language]

this is not happening much. Therefore, I consider it key that the development of good governance and civic activism are supported," the Slovak volunteer explains the situation in the country.

As part of the ADRA Lebanon projects, volunteer Anna Hruboňová worked mainly with the children of Syrian refugees.¹⁹ *"Over the hill, you can literally see from Lebanon to Syria, which is why about one million Syrian refugees live in this neighbouring state. Considering the size of the original population, it's a huge number,"* Anna explains. This small Middle Eastern country, which itself had gone through a civil war and a conflict with Israel in the past, has a population of only 6.8 million. Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country experienced a political, financial and refugee crisis, all at the same time.

Besides intercultural sensitivity, empathy, but also assertiveness, it was important for Anna to know the regional context well. It was also necessary to visit clients' families at their homes so that one could picture their living conditions. ADRA is known locally for its educational centre which helps children who lag behind in school and experience difficulties with integrating into the education system. *"This is a common problem for Syrian children, as they have been out of education for a long time due to the war and a life on the run. They have missed several school years and lost their study habits. A life in poverty deteriorates the situation even more,"* Anna Hruboňová explains. At the ADRA Lebanon centre, there was a safe and enjoyable learning environment created for the children. Despite the trauma of war and fleeing their homeland, they (like any other children) enjoyed the little things.

From volunteering to working in the development sector

Development volunteers do not bring financial assistance with their arrival and stay in low-income countries. Even their options are limited – in terms of the time scope of their stay and implementation of activities, systemic problem-solving, taking responsibility for a particular "mission" in a given post-conflict area. However, in addition to determination and expertise, the "symbolic" and social capital of volunteers is also important and credible. Together with their sending and host organisations, the volunteers represent their own (direct or indirect) role – to contribute to the Global Goals and to ending global poverty, often linked to human-caused conflicts and subsequent humanitarian crises, which unjustly keep millions of people in need.²⁰ Often, the effort to contribute to the fulfilment of Agenda 2030²¹ goes beyond the volunteer stay. All three young people sent abroad by ADRA Slovakia remain in the development sector. Moreover, they now prepare or coordinate other volunteers themselves.

After her return from the volunteer stay, Veronika Zimová remains in the non-governmental sector. She now works as a project manager at ADRA Slovakia and is in charge of humanitarian volunteer projects through the EU Aid Volunteers and development volunteering supported by the SlovakAid programme.

Already during his work in the Georgian settlement of Tserovani, Martin Pavelka understood that he wanted to continue to work in the field of international development. After having completed his one-year stay through the SlovakAid programme, he became interested in the European and slightly more

¹⁹ Markovič Baluchová, 2020: A Volunteer Stay in Lebanon Terminated Early due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Interview with Anna Hruboňová) [In Slovak language]

²⁰ Markovič Baluchová, 2019: Knowing the Motivations of Volunteers Before Their Leave on a Mission [In Slovak language]

²¹ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2019: The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development



The ADRA Albania team, together with volunteer Veronika, implements extra-curricular and tutoring activities for children in the community centre in Frushe Kruje.

robust EU Aid Volunteers initiative²². It allows young people to spend a year in a humanitarian context, which was another great opportunity and new experience for him. In the autumn of 2019, Martin was sent as a senior coordinator of volunteers to Turkey. He is now in charge of fifty local volunteers at organisation Small Projects Istanbul, which provides counselling and works directly with Syrian refugee communities in Istanbul.

Anna Hruboňová (as well as Veronika and Martin) professionally fulfilled her desire to get an insight into the world of humanitarian and development work, learnt how non-profit organisations operate abroad and how projects are prepared and adjusted in practice. Currently, she works as a project assistant at ADRA Slovakia. Her stay ignited her curiosity to explore this work in more depth. She is open to the idea that she would travel out again when the situation of the global COVID-19 pandemic calms down a bit. Now, mandatory return activities associated with her stay are awaiting her – in the form of media outputs and appearances, and online presentations of her stay results. The general public should be better aware of the importance of volunteering supported by the state budget of the Slovak Republic, as well as the success of young Slovaks outside the EU.

²² European Commission, 2020: EU Aid Volunteers

Conclusion: Sent out young people from Slovakia as faces of migration

We can consider Veronika, Martin and Anna as needed ambassadors of change – looked-for faces of migration within the campaign Faces of Migration of Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations, through which we strive to explain the issue of migration to the public through the lens of Global Goals.

All three young people sent on a volunteer “mission” abroad through ADRA Slovakia noticed that many fellow citizens around them (not only in Slovakia) use the word migrant as an insult. The terms²³ often get mixed up. Only few people can distinguish between a migrant and a refugee, so no distinction can be expected between terms in other categories, such as an asylum seeker and later a person granted asylum, an internally displaced person (IDP) or a returnee. However, these three people from Slovakia, who worked with all the vulnerable groups, now contribute to raising awareness at home, fight prejudices and stereotypical portrayals, trying to correct public opinion about the phenomenon of migration as something negative through their own personal experience and stories.

A migrant usually voluntarily crosses the borders of his/her state for work, study or volunteering (as it was in the case of Veronika, Martin and Anna some time ago). Refugees flee their homes to escape from war, or a loss of liberty, otherwise they would be in danger of death, torture, and imprisonment (as were Anna’s clients in Lebanon). It was volunteer Anna who noticed that the debate on migration often included a significant dose of racism: *“When people from Africa come to Europe, they are ‘bad migrants’, when Europeans come to live in Africa, they are ‘cool expatriates’.”* She adds that in Lebanon, it works similarly, and foreigners are divided into three categories. *“The first category is ‘refugees’ who flee the war in Syria; the second group is ‘migrants’ who came to Lebanon from poorer countries with the prospect of better earnings; the third group is ‘expats’. It is us (Europeans and Americans) who have also come for work, but no one would label us migrants,”* the Slovak volunteer explains.

Anna sees the reason²⁴ for anti-immigration sentiments also in the fact that the reform of the Slovak education system is proceeding only very slowly: *“There is a lack of a deeper emphasis on critical thinking training, work with information and media literacy. Therefore, I am glad that there are a few non-governmental organisations in Slovakia (like Ambrela and its members), which focus on global education in schools and are changing the situation for the better.”* Veronika and Martin add that, besides civil society, the media and educational institutions should be held accountable and expected to provide unbiased and objective information on the issue of migration. In their opinion, a change in the direction of erasing myths and prejudices about migration will be very difficult and slow without awareness-raising and education.

In recent years, thanks to travel, volunteer and study stays, as well as globalisation, much has changed in our region.²⁵ *“For instance, through their grandchildren’s experiences, grandparents are slowly becoming acquainted with the issues of diversity, otherness, and sensitivity to other cultures,”* says Slovak volunteer Martin Pavelka. He is not alone in wishing that the global COVID-19 pandemic does not slow down this well-started change.

23 International Organization for Migration, 2019: Essential Terms in the Field of Migration and Integration of Foreigners [In Slovak language]

24 Markovič Baluchová, 2020: A Volunteer Stay in Lebanon Terminated Early due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Interview with Anna Hruboňová) [In Slovak language]

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