

Society of Goodwill



Public Attitudes towards Migrants in Slovakia

Analysis executed by VVMZ spol. s r. o.



Processing time of material:

July 2005 – October 2005

Compiling:

VVMZ, spol. s r. o., contracted partner of project „*Raising Public Awareness of Refugees and Migrants in Support of Their Integration*“.

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I. Function of monitoring:

The survey was executed in connection with promotion campaign aimed at raising public awareness of the major society on foreigners (with emphasis on the asylum seekers and illegal migrants) in the Slovak republic.

Project „*Raising Public Awareness of Refugees and Migrants in Support of Their Integration*“ is supported by Community Initiative EQUAL and its main objective results from its title. This activity, however, must be accompanied by mapping of public attitudes. In the beginning and at the end of the project this mapping will find out whether it is possible to make the positive raising of public awareness more efficient.

The objective of the survey is to research the inherited stereotypes of the Slovak people about refugees, what is their opinion and which kinds of prejudices towards the refugees could be affected by the outcome of the explaining public and media campaign.

Monitoring and the public opinion poll does not intend to achieve comprehensive statistical analysis, only to map the attitudes and the ways Slovaks behave towards people who seek asylum in Slovakia. The goal of the survey is not to copy surveys as those of UNHCR, SHV and other organisations.

The following survey material maps the period from 1st January 2003 to 31st October 2005.

Monitoring is related to the Situation analysis in Slovakia and to the Communication strategy proposal of the including milestones of the successful public and media campaign.

II. Supposition

We can define the present character of migration as expatriate, individual (in the cases of mass exodus during wars and conflicts) and economics, too.

Recently, many European countries have been facing various problems resulting from migration and which are related to the number of refugees that is on increase, especially of economic refugees. Therefore, it is necessary to work with the public opinion, which is supposed to be inclined positively in favour of acceptance of the increasing number of refugees.

The objective is to achieve that kind of state when citizens of the receiving state will easily accept refugees into their society and will not demonstrate discrimination, racism or xenophobia. The citizens are supposed to contribute to the inclusion and simple adaptation of refugees into their new home.

The starting point for the achievement of a kind of „ideal state“ is to map the public opinion on the refugees, how the people assess the migration policy and all the trends related to the migration policy. Consecutively, the target groups for the intended attitude improvement campaign can be selected.

Because of the Slovak republic integration into the EU, the Slovak government initiated the steps leading to the tolerance and openness of the society towards migration. On this basis, the national program of prevention against all the forms of intolerance and racism was authorized. The Slovak republic is to take care of refugees, as well as other members of the European “family”. Integration and social inclusion are the components of the asylum policy.

III. Methodology

In the next part, the methodology of mapping of the attitudes of relevant actors towards the refugees and towards the migration policy in Slovakia is described. In the following part the given entries are analysed and the conclusions are stated.

Entries for the analyses were achieved from the internet and thus were freely available. The time period was from 1st January 2003 to 31st October 2005. We apologise in advance to all the media which deal with the refugee problems, but because of inaccessibility of their archives, they are not listed in this analysis.

www.rasizmus.sk was a very useful information source. In the frame of the permanent monitoring of human-legal topics in media the monitoring of refugee, asylum seekers and migrants problem www.rasizmus.sk has been a priceless source of input. This web side was a relevant source of articles, especially of those media that were not accessible online.

We have divided entries gathering and the analysis into two basic files – the domestic and the foreign information sources. The Slovak Spectator was the one and only domestic medium we have analysed together with the foreign ones, as the readers of this paper are mainly non-Slovaks, as well as readers of the foreign media. Entries were gathered only from internet.

Specific methods:

- Gathering and analyzing all media articles about the refugee topic;
- Gathering all the public opinion polls done by non-governmental organizations (hereinafter referred to as „NGO“) concerning refugees;
- The survey at www.sme.sk;
- Choosing and selecting the most shared opinions, attitudes and approaches of Slovak citizens;
- Analysis of media-approach in topic „Asylum Seekers in Slovak Republic“;
- Filling in a questionnaire during the public lectures that will proceed in the project.

The data-investigation methodology used in the Slovak media and the analyses are described in the following part.

The first step was to sort out the data according to the type of media they appeared in and according to date of publishing (Tab. 1a Slovak and Tab. 1b Foreign). Sorting the information by subject was the second step. The information either concerned the refugees (Tab. 2. a according to Slovak media, Tab. 2. b according to foreign media) or the migration policy of the Slovak republic (Tab. 3.a according to Slovak media and Tab. 3.b according to foreign media). The data were selected within these two categories by two criteria – relevant actors: public opinion, national institutions and their representatives, local authorities: NGO sector, refugees (in case of the category „migration policy“). We made a special group within the agents – information which contain all the data with informative character. Rated attitudes were the second criterion: positive, neutral and negative. The third additional criterion was set as the list of all agents who had given their opinion about the refugees in Slovakia and about the Slovak migration policy. In the end, the gathered and sorted information was evaluated and analysed.

All the media reports concerning the monitoring were noted down according to the further criteria:

- The number of reports noticed in every media in years 2003, 2004, and 2005.
- The list of agents (There were 7 groups: public, church, foreign organizations, foreign media, refugees, national institutions and their representatives, NGOs)

Let us highlight again: this analysis is not representative, it is based on only freely available information on the internet.

Information sources for the analysis:

1. www.google.sk
2. www.changenet.sk
3. www.pravda.sk
4. www.rasizmus.sk
5. www.siac.sk
6. www.slovakradio.sk
7. www.sme.sk
8. www.slovakspectator.sk
9. www.unhcr.sk
10. Helsinki Committee

Incidence of information about refugees and migration policy in media

To ensure the objectivity of the survey, information sources from media were divided into domestic and foreign ones.

Tab. 1a Slovak media

<i>s.n.</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>
1	24 hodín			2
2	ČTK		1	
3	Hospodárske Noviny		1	
4	changenet.sk			1
5	KORZAR		1	1
6	LIVE!			1
7	Markíza	1		
8	Národná obroda	3	3	2
9	Nový čas	1		
10	Plus 7 dní			2
11	Pravda	4	7	4
12	Rádio Slovensko	9	29	21
13	Rasizmus.sk			1
14	REUTERS			1
15	RPA			1
16	SITA	2	2	2
17	Slovenka			1
18	SME	2	11	3
19	STV			1
20	TASR		1	2
21	Zemplínsky denník	1		1
	Sum	23	56	46

Tab. 1b Foreign media

<i>s.n.</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>
1	AP	1		
2	BBC	2		
3	Britské Listy		1	
4	ČTK		1	
5	GLOBALINFO		1	
6	chechenpress.co.uk		1	1
7	ihf-hr.org	1		
8	INTER PRESS SERVICE	3	1	
9	interfax.ru			1
10	irr.org.uk/eurobulletin/IRR News	3	3	
11	kavkazcenter.com			1
12	migrationonline.cz	1		
13	Národná obroda		1	
14	Rasizmus.sk			
15	REUTERS		1	
16	Slovak Spectator	1	31	
17	slovensko.com		1	1
18	slovakradio.com			1
19	wienerzeitung.at			1
Sum		12	46	6

Qualitative: agents` opinion about 1) migration policy in Slovakia and 2) refugees/ migrants in Slovakia – three categories of statement expression: **positive, negative and neutral.**

Tab. 2.a According to slovak media

Refugee/ Migrant		Positive	Negative	Neutral
		2	5	1
<i>Majority public opinion</i>	SNS		1	
	SP-NS		1	
	Liptov		1	
	Rajecke Teplice		1	
	Trencin		4	
	Zemplin		2	
	<i>National institutions and their representatives</i>	Refugee camp		
par.výbor pre EaMP				1
MPSVaR SR				1
MZ SR			2	
MV SR (police)			1	4
MV SR (Palko)			4	
Migration office			2	3
<i>Local agents</i>	Bratislava			1
	Liptov		2	
	Trencín	2		
	Poprad		2	
	Povazie			1
	Zemplin		3	1
<i>NGO</i>	SEDV			2
	ČVO			2
	UNHCR	2		12
<i>Information</i>		1	2	21
	Sum	7	33	51

There were other criteria defined during the qualitative measuring of the public opinion which occurred in the Slovak media – there were mapped regions with high intolerance levels and rather conservative attitudes. Positive influencing campaign should be carried out very carefully and sensitively in these regions.

Tab. 2.b According to foreign media

Refugees/ Migrants	Positive	Negative	Neutral
<i>Majority public opinion</i>	3	4	
<i>National institutions and their representatives</i>			1
<i>Local agents</i>		2	
<i>NGO</i>	1		
<i>Church</i>	1		1
<i>Foreign countries</i>			5
Sum	5	6	7

Tab. 3.a According to Slovak media

Migration policy		Positive	Negative	Neutral
<i>National institutions and their representatives</i>	Ministry of Internal Affairs		1	2
<i>Refugees</i>		2	4	1
<i>Local agents</i>	Zemplin		1	
	SEDV			2
	SHV		1	
<i>NGO</i>	UNHCR	3	15	3
<i>Information</i>			2	9
Sum		5	24	17

Tab. 3. b According to foreign media

Migration policy	Positive	Negative	Neutral
<i>Majority public opinion</i>	2		
<i>National institutions and their representatives</i>			2
<i>Refugees</i>			
<i>Local agents</i>			
<i>UNHCR</i>	1	2	
<i>Church</i>			
<i>Foreign countries</i>		4	3
Sum	3	6	5

Tab. 4 The list of agents participating (based on their free will) in the matter of refugees in Slovakia.

s.n.	List of names
1	People in Peril Association
2	Border line police
3	People against racism
4	Local folks, in camp surrounds
5	Local politicians, in camp surrounds
6	Migration office in Ministry of Internal Affairs
7	Ministry of Labour, social matters and family SR
8	Ministry of Internal Affairs SR
9	Ministry of Health SR
10	Refugees` camp representative
11	Roman-Catholic church
12	Slovak humanitarian council
13	Slovak national party (J.Slota)
14	Slovak unity – National party
15	Slovak Helsinki Committee
16	Committee of good will people
17	Slovak foreign policy association
18	World health organization
19	UNHCR
20	Minority and Human rights committee

IV. Evaluation

The Slovak media neither do write enough about asylum seekers and illegal immigrants nor mention the tolerance, understanding and respect questions towards the other cultures and traditions. The negative picture painted about refugees is sometimes built by media themselves. Refugees are shown in the media mainly in cases of criminal activities.

The newspapers SME and The Slovak Spectator pay attention to the refugees problems and the problem of (in)tolerance most frequently from all the Slovak media.

Radio Slovensko, daily papers SME and Pravda dealt most frequently with refugees` issues during the time period of the monitoring. In regional newspapers there were refugees` issues mentioned too – even in the eastern part of Slovakia. There is the highest number of refugees concentrated near by Slovak-Ukraine border. The weekly magazines

bring some news or thematically targeted articles about the refugees` issues sporadically. (For detailed information about the number of articles concerning migrant policy in each media see Tab. 1.)

The public refugees and migrant policy awareness has an increasing tendency in general. The most time spent by media on issue was during the Slovak accession to EU in 2004 as well as during transformation of the migrant policy and introduction of the new system to higher Slovak-Ukraine border security which will provide future for the Schengen border-crossing system.

The media focus mainly on the human/social point of view on the immigrants that had come to Slovakia. They do not often use the objective information.

NGO's usually show critical attitude towards the Slovak migrant policy and show recorded utterances of the third sector representatives.

Representatives of UNCHR speak most often about this matter. However, media do not really use the statements of representatives of Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior as their information source. If they do so, it is done only in case of an official Press Conference.

There are many local authorities giving statements to the media. The least space is given to the professionals working with the immigrants (psychologist, sociologist, demographer, culturologist, conflicts solving experts).

Media are interested in migrants only in the cases they have an attractive or abnormal life stories.

The people have very garbled information about how migrants are integrated in Slovakia.

A. attitudes towards refugees

Most of the information we gathered on the internet has an informative character. This information tells about transferring refugees through the border, the amount and refugees` according to their country of origin and information about the diseases brought to Slovakia by refugees, such as typhus, HIV, etc. There were thematically oriented articles published mostly during the migrants` riots in France and during the building of a new migrants` camp. Sometimes there were articles mentioning the refugees in s surprising context. The SP-NS Party, the right-wing extremists were mentioned in an article while having negative attitude towards immigrants in their platform.

„The SP-NS party has People’s platform besides Party rules document. There are controversial items. E.g. transforming the parliament democracy according to 30 corporate principals – typical for the fascist regime, rehabilitation of I. Slovak Republic and president Tiso, refusal of Asylum seekers, abolishment of formal national emblems and public holidays, intolerance towards ethnic minorities.“

(Plus 7 Dni: Ultra-national societies; 2005)

Daily newspaper Pravda of 24. 2. 2004 describes an incident that happened in town of Gabčíkovo. Two refugees had fought against unknown men. The positive part about the article was that it was written in informative way. The article has not ridiculed or humiliated the refugees. Hereby Pravda wrote that similar accident had happened before. Such an attitude is regarded as professional.

Local agents and residents have negative outlook in places where immigrants` camps, migrants` children houses, capturing camps and lodging houses are going to be built by the government.

The weekly magazine, Plus 7 dni brought the best article which shows a very good summary about the migration policy in Slovakia (history, number of applicants, applicants care). Plus 7 dni asked all three parties about their opinion –fugitives (Asylum

seekers, refugees), state representatives (Migration office of the Ministry of Interior), as well as non-governmental organization (UNHCR).

Ministry of Interior and its parts (Migration Office, Police forces, etc.) give very neutral statements about the number of refugees, asylum seeker admitting, and number of innovations in the migration policy or border control system which relates to illegal transport of migrants across the border.

Negative attitude:

Perhaps after a decade, should I be allowed some meaningful say, providing I blended in well (behaviour, language, etc.). If I have not blended in well by then, I do not really belong there, both from the point of view of the locals, as from my own, whether I want to admit that or not. In fact, in the event that I did not blend in well after a decade, there is a psychological border between me and the locals. So wishing physical borders away is not at all helpful. Heyes, Zilina, SS, november 2004

B. Foreign media and non-governmental organizations abroad

Foreign media, as well as non-governmental organizations abroad usually show their interest in the Slovak immigrants only when they have presumptions of breaking human rights and international agreements.

There are many prejudicial approaches against the Migration Office at Ministry of Interior (main source of which is mainly the UNHCR office) when asylum seekers' applications were rejected.

The Slovak Spectator is the one and only newspaper with the regular articles about the migration topics. Reports are targeted to scan and influence the public opinion with the cultural tolerance and solidarity. Analytical articles emerged against the migration policy. Information related to the providing the illegal services to the migrants occur more often. Out of 48 media articles there were 4 positive, 12 neutral and the rest were critical to the Slovak migration policy.

In the foreign media mainly the critical ones appeared, but also some objective ones.

Palko (former Minister of Interior) said that the police have intensified the struggle against people-trafficking. They arrested nearly 300 people-traffickers during the first six months of the year, compared with 70 traffickers two years ago, he added, CTK, 2003.

„For each fugitive we have to have 3 sq/m space available. The capacity of the camp Secovce is 162 places. Fugitives are divided into coloured sectors. There are between ten to twelve beds in a room with old furniture. Even though our people are vaccinated against jaundice we have experienced tuberculosis, scabies, varicela, jaundice AIDS and suspicion of malaria.“ , said Mr. Laskody, camp head, Britske listy, 28. 4. 2004

"We don't want the camp here," said construction worker Alexander, 60, as he sipped a beer in a pub during a lunch break. "We are scared of what can happen if they let them [the refugees] go out [of the camp]. There'll be more petty crime, thefts and so on, and when they start mixing with the locals, diseases will spread around, even venereal diseases," he said, his friends nodding their agreement, The Slovak Spectator, 2004

„INTOLERANCE towards refugees in Slovakia is minimal. However, the country's asylum system is fragile and might not be effective enough to handle the increasing number of asylum seekers once it enters the EU. The numbers are critical. In 2003, only 10 of 10 350 asylum seekers in Slovakia received a positive decision on their application. The vast majority of asylum seekers simply "disappeared", moving westwards or into the market of human trafficking“, said Pierfrancesco Maria Natta (UNHCR official), 2004, SS

SR is one of the few countries in the EU in which medical screenings are compulsory, and very few applicants are affected by serious diseases. The same for criminality, we have no record of particular crimes committed by applicants. The reality is that migrants and refugees are victims of criminal gangs who are keeping them in terrible conditions, SS, UNHCR, november 2004.

"We've never had anything like this here. People simply don't know what to expect. It's natural they are worried," said Mayor Pálffy. He added that because of a lack of "any information about the refugee camp, I'm worried that their [refugees'] presence could raise crime levels, like [illegal] money changing and perhaps even prostitution, and they could also spread various diseases", SS, 2004

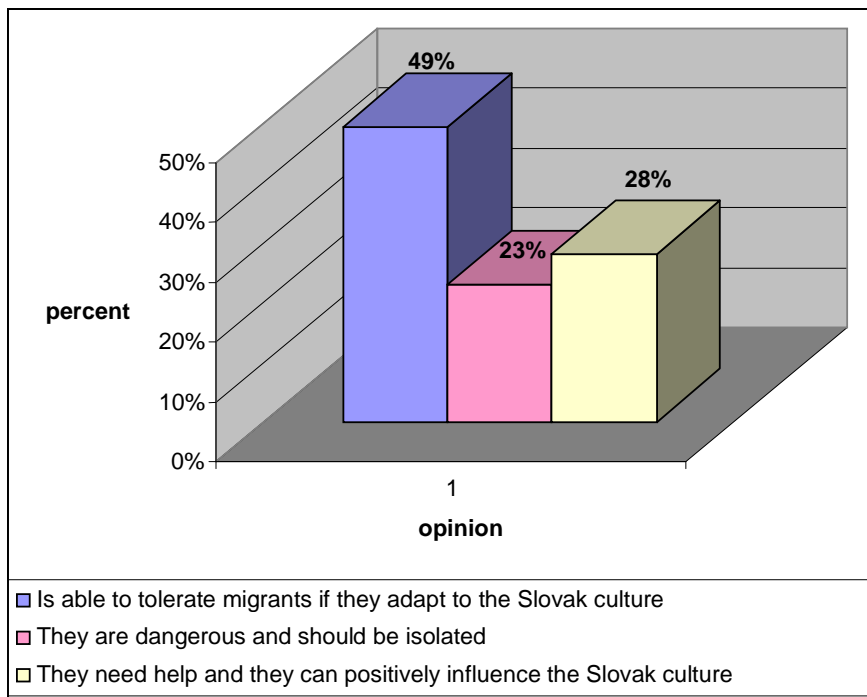
All indicated sources are available at the Refugee Sources.

V. Survey results on www.sme.sk

Number of respondents is 2 248:

- 49% is able to tolerate migrants in the case they are able to adapt to the Slovak culture,
- 23% has a very negative attitude and they think that refugees are dangerous for the Slovakia and they should be isolated,
- 28% think that refugees need help and they can positively influence the Slovak culture.

Graph 1 Respondents` opinion from www.sme.sk survey



Source: survey at www.sme.sk; graph made by - author

VI. Other surveys mapped

Many organizations which work with the fugitives have defined terms „immigrant“, „asylum seeker“ and „refugee“ in their own way. Terms are often mixed up, but in the fact, there is only a slight difference between them.

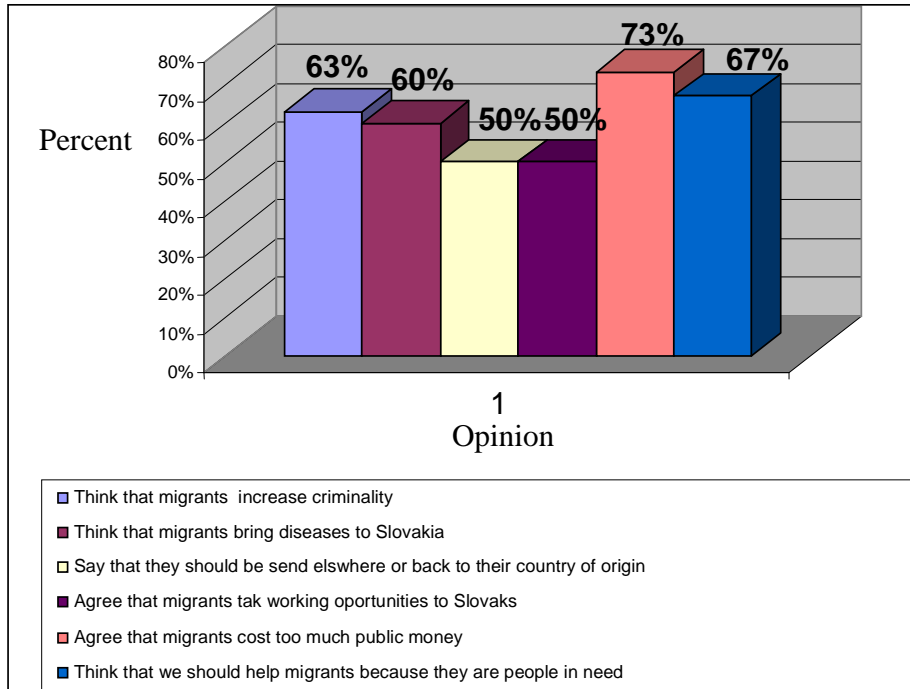
The Association of People against the Racism monitors regularly the topics about human rights on their web page. Monitoring covers only the most read Slovak newspapers, though.

Daily information and annual analyses (by UNHCR in Slovakia) are freely available.

Last detailed public opinion poll about migrants was made 5 years ago by Focus Agency, in 1998 and 2001:

- 63% Slovak respondents think that migrants increase criminality,
- 60% respondents think that migrants bring diseases to Slovakia,
- 50% respondents think they should be sent somewhere else or back to their country of origin,
- 50% respondents agree that migrants take working opportunities to Slovaks,
- 73% agree that migrants cost too much public money,
- More than two third thinks that we should help migrants while they are people in a need.

Graph 2 - The respondents` opinion from survey made in 1998 and 2001



Source: Focus agency, graph made by: author

The Slovak people understand the moral responsibility to help the people in a need and difficulties. They are only afraid of the myths around the refugees which are not based on the rational arguments and the facts.

VII. Conclusion

The results of the surveys and the analyses show that there is a need to educate public about refugees. One should stop the xenophobic tendencies of the majority by an information campaign.

Monitored public opinion tendencies

- Tendencies to compare the fugitives with the gypsies,
- Self-government representatives are poorly educated about the migrant problems and their unknowingness causes negative public opinion very often,
- Self- government is not willing to invest into the migrants` accommodation,
- Parents do not want to help young fugitives that come without guidance,
- There is a public opinion that refusing fugitives is not a racial expression,
- Asylum seeking immigrants are often the victims of the violence,
- Fugitives are often connected with the diseases and the criminality,
- Fugitives are another unemployed people on the Slovak labour market,
- Different culture is often classified as another religious affiliation,
- Slovaks say that Slovakia is wonderful country; they are afraid of fugitives that are looking for refuge;
- Slovaks have tendency to undervalue fugitives because of different habits, religion, skin colour and they use unintelligible language.

Conventional stereotypes:

- The picture of people who attack the Slovak republic
- Strong opposition against refugee "ours vs. other's"; this causes the very strong negative picture about immigrants,
- In general, Slovaks understand the moral duty to help people in need; but the myths make them afraid to accept them,
- The myths are usually based on the fear of unfamiliar thing; one may break this barrier by making communication channels, cultural tolerance, tolerant thinking and empathy to others` problems,
- The problem is not the refugee, the immigrant; but the attitude, intolerance and racism that make it hard for migrants to adapt to society.

Observed needs/ influencing the public opinion

- Providing people who work with the migrants with migrant lectures,
- The Member of county Parliament and other self-government representatives as well as priests should speak about tolerance,
- To provide communities which come to contact with the migrants with necessary materials,
- To organize meetings with the migrants` camps representatives; talk with them about the state grants possible for their functioning,
- To talk at the public schools about refugee issue,
- To provide the state employees with lectures about immigrants,
- To organize the meetings with camp surrounds residents.

VIII. Campaign milestones

Who are fugitives?

- They are the people leaving their homeland, hating home. Leaving relatives behind, running from persecution, repression and violence in their countries.
- **They are the people like us.**

What is their aim?

- They do not want to harm the host country and make barriers against cohabiting with the host country majority,
- They do not want to disturb or damage the culture. They do not want to push us out of our country,
- Their motivation is not the hate towards our country, they want to find their refuge,
- They simply want to find the place for safe living; they want to live valuable lives.

Public stereotypes are results of obtuseness

- During the communism there were no immigrants taken, therefore we are not used to their presence,
- People lived in cultural and social isolation that produced refugees, actually,
- Let's go back before 1989 and remember how was taken care of our Slovak emigrants; we should not forget our moral debts,
- Slovaks running from communism met with understanding in the western countries, nobody suspected them of damaging host country culture,
- If we are lucky to live in a better environment than others it should be our duty to help as much as we can. They had not created their persecution by themselves.

They have names...

The asylum seekers and illegal migrants are taken like "the others". It is easy to forget that each one of them is a human being, with memories from childhood, family, friends with happy and painful life in the same time. Each of them observes breathlessly what's happening around him. Each one of them has dreams and hopes. The run away has name. Each one of them has its own personality even when they appear as one big group.

Even people who would usually help can lose instinctive mercy in the xenophobic atmosphere. Each asylum seeker has his own story about violence, fear and escape. It is *necessary to learn that the one who runs – man, woman or child – stands for the fail of human rights protection in their home country. The refuge is not responsible for such a mistake..*

Give them a second chance

If immigrants are available to reorganize they may enrich the environment around them. If they are given a chance, they are able to bring a new cultural dimension, new abilities and experience to their new home surroundings.

What can we do?

Let's spread the idea that every asylum seeker is an individual and has been running from human rights violation or general violation. We should be interested in the countries where immigrants are coming from. Oppose the racist politics which take an advantage by making campaigns against immigrants and thus gathering votes. Don't mix up asylum seekers and economic migrants!

Contribution to the society

- The idea that minority would threaten integrity in any way is absurd; on the contrary, many refugees are asset for the society in economic and cultural reasons,
- Diversity and cultural diversity is an enrichment for everybody - new values are being created and the society is moved forward; multicultural countries are the most developed countries in the world because of synergy effect,
- Living together with other cultures might be solved successfully by good intentions,
- All foreigners in Slovakia have the rights to keep their culture habits and traditions unless they don't break laws of the Slovak republic,
- There is only the prejudice barrier in thinking of the major society,
- Refugees who stay, live and work in Slovakia are good for our economy; there are many educated, smart people; while they come to Slovakia in working age, Slovakia had not had to put any money for their education.