



Mareena's mission is to contribute to building a Slovak society which appreciates diversity and accepts people from other countries regardless of their religious, ethnic or national backgrounds.

Mareena's goal is to help with the integration of refugees and migrants in Slovakia. Mareena assists migrants in the integration process through a customised volunteering programme, provides them with educational and skills-based courses and creates a safe space for locals and foreigners to meet through community activities. Mareena also raises awareness about the issues of integration and migration amongst the majority public.

The project Building Diverse Communities is a part of our community programme.



Building Diverse Communities

The project consists from a cycle of activities, which aim to connect communities of locals and foreigners in Slovakia. We believe, that communities should connect people and not to separate them, so we created a program, which allows people to get to know each other and to find a connection in the areas, which are usually dividing – culture, language and traditional cuisine.

The project reflects the current situation, when the lack of mutual interactions between migrants and Slovak majority leads to a mutual distrust. According to Eurobarometer, which was published by European Commission in 2018, Slovakia is the third country with the smallest interactions between these groups. For this reason, we realised that it's necessary to work with both target groups. Project Building Diverse Communities is a reaction to this needs. It's a cycle of regular community activities and events with a purpose to create a space for people to interact and to get to know each other. The activities are focused on four main areas (culture, languages, gastronomy and stories). Our newest and one of the most successful activity is Folkekøkken. It's a Danish concept of common dinner with a specific cuisine (we've already organized Afghan, Danish and Slovak editions) and discussion about the culture. The whole dinner is prepared in a cooperation with our client from the country. Through these interactions guests can better understand a different culture, but also practise a foreigner language.

Duration of the project is one year (August 2018 – September 2019) and it consists from regular weekly activities and events in aim to bring people living in Slovakia (both, foreigners and Slovak majority) to the one place and give them a space to interact between each other.

There was already one previous edition of the program last year. The concept was updated according to feedbacks and also according to our internal strategy. The biggest change was the target group – during the first years we've been focusing mainly on foreigners (migrants and refugees), but we realized, that it's necessary to also change the public attitude, if we want to be able to create a safe and decent environment for them to work, study or settle down. Since than 163 people from Slovakia and 80 foreigners visited our activities and had a chance to meet and get to know each other.



Currently, we are on the second round of the project. The last edition finished in August 2018, when we organized our biggest event yet, Mareena Fest. It's a community festival including musical performers, info-stands, discussions, workshops and international cuisine. Approximately 100 people visited the fest. Subsequently, the second edition of Community connect started in September 2018 and by the end of the year, we've organized 34 activities and events (3 weekend brunches, 3 movie nights with movies about migration, 2 outdoor activities, 3 Folkekøkkens, 4 events with traditional soups, 3 language coffees, 3 game nights, etc.). The plan for 2019 is to organize at least 1 or 2 activities every week. The whole project will culminate at the Mareena Fest (September 2019), which will be also a space for us to collect inputs, but also to count the total number of newcomers to our activities. These people will take a survey about their interactions with foreigners, which will provide us an overview on how the project changed their knowledge and attitudes toward migrant.

The main long-term goal of this project is to connect communities of Slovaks and foreigners and to change the negative attitude among them in the society. To be able to achieve it, we do not want just to continue in the program, but we plan to increase the number of activities and grow also in the number of participants. Besides that, we would like to add one more focus area (currently we have four of them: culture, languages, gastronomy and stories) – religions. We are aware, that it is a very sensitive topic, but the lack of knowledge is also a source of the fear in the society. That's why we are preparing a new activity, which will be also under the project Community connects, A tea for a soul. It will be a series of moderated friendly discussions between a representative of a Catholic community and a Muslim community. The topics of the discussion will be mainly spiritual and the main aim of the activity is to find what the both religions have in common.

The project focus on the communities, which was given just a very little attention in the Slovak society so far - to refugees and other foreigners and their connections to the local majority. The lack of interactions between these groups is the problem, which we are trying to target, because it can lead to prejudice and fear. Besides that, here are just a very few organizations which work with foreigners in Slovakia.

Also their involvement is done in an innovative way. We also involved the community created during our activities and we offer them an opportunity to cooperate with us as an ambassadors or volunteers (currently we have individual volunteers, who are working directly with our clients, community volunteers, expert volunteers and interns, lecturers and mentors), which contribute to further development of our clients. We accentuate to the direct involvement of the people from our target group to our activities as well.

