



SISEMINISTEERIUM



Euroopa Liit
Euroopa Sotsiaalfond



Eesti
tuleviku heaks

A GUIDE

TO INVOLVING FOREIGNERS
IN NGO ACTIVITIES



Vabatahtlike **Värav**



The project “Promoting Voluntary Activities of New Immigrants in Estonia” funded by the European Social Fund and the Estonian state budget has created better preconditions for the involvement of new immigrants in local civic initiatives and has allowed them to contribute more easily to Estonian society. For example, the Volunteer Gate, which gathers volunteering information, has been translated into English and Russian. This guide has also been prepared in the framework of this project.

DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE ARE ALMOST 200 NATIONALITIES PERMANENTLY LIVING IN ESTONIA

Immigration to Estonia has been growing for several years now. The majority of immigrants to Estonia are from Russia, Ukraine, Finland, and Latvia ([see](#)). Almost half of the immigrants are Estonian citizens (so-called returnees; see Statistics Estonia's Database, RVR08: Foreign migration by age group, gender and citizenship ([see](#))). Estonia also has a few hundred beneficiaries of international protection (refugees in common parlance), most of whom are from Syria and Ukraine. In 2018, a total of 17,547 people came to Estonia, of which only 35 are beneficiaries of international protection. For a comprehensive overview of immigration by different types of migration, see the Annual Report on Migration and Citizenship 2019 ([see](#)).

A new immigrant is a person who has been legally residing in Estonia for less than five years (see Minister of the Interior Regulation No. 34 of 13.08.2014 - Adaptation Program, § 2). The guide focuses primarily on the involvement of people who have recently come to Estonia, but it is certainly applicable to foreigners who have stayed in Estonia for more than five years.

The Volunteering Survey, completed in 2019 ([see](#)), suggests that people who have recently settled in Estonia (or new immigrants), third-country nationals (i.e., non-EU citizens) are the most interested in volunteering. It also turned out that the willingness to volunteer usually decreases during the time spent in Estonia (as other networks necessary for living grow and evolve for the individual). However, it is certain that the involvement of people from different backgrounds and origins in voluntary activities of the organization will support their Estonian language learning, adaptation and integration.

IN ESTONIA, (AND ALSO IN THIS GUIDE), WE CONSIDER VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES THE ACTIVITIES THAT PEOPLE DO OF THEIR OWN FREE WILL, WITHOUT MATERIAL GAIN, FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE OR SOCIETY AT LARGE.

Donating things and helping family members are not considered volunteering.

When thinking about involving volunteers, we recommend that you follow the volunteering circle ([see](#)) and keep in mind all the important stages: planning, recruiting, adjusting and training, daily work, recognition, termination of a relationship, motivation. You can find a variety of instructional materials at the Volunteer Gate at ([see](#)). In this guide are specific tips that are important for involving foreigners. Remember that for this target group, it is important to think through the whole process of volunteer involvement.

WHY DOES A FOREIGNER WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

By volunteering, foreigners want to learn the Estonian language, get to know the local life and customs, and get to know new people in Estonia. Many of them have in their back pocket solid volunteering experiences in their home country. Unfortunately, a foreigner often gets stuck behind a language barrier or prejudice and finds it difficult to find a suitable volunteering opportunity on his/her own. Websites of the organizations lack information in an understandable language or people in offices do not know how to respond meaningfully to an approach. Often, NGOs have no experience in involving non-Estonian speakers, and their contact persons feel insecure when communicating in Russian or English.





WHY SHOULD THE COMMUNITY INVOLVE FOREIGNERS AS VOLUNTEERS?

The volunteering study quoted above shows that the communities have fears about involving foreigners as volunteers. For example, it is feared that preparing a foreigner for volunteering and being his or her mentor will take too much time, and the benefits of his or her involvement will not compensate for the time spent. It is also believed that foreigners are not ready to volunteer based on pure enthusiasm. In addition, the study highlighted fears of language barriers and cultural differences. It was also feared that volunteers who were already active would not have a favorable attitude towards foreign volunteers.

Of course, the involvement of foreigners is not and should not be the main objective of the community, but it is a rather diverse and varied target group, with people from very different backgrounds and skills. This is a great way to get fresh ideas and fresh breath into the community. In addition, the involvement of foreigners living in the community to volunteering helps local people to get to know them better.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN INVOLVING FOREIGNERS AS VOLUNTEERS?

Have you thought of giving foreigners a chance to volunteer, or has any foreigner contacted you about volunteering? Below are some suggestions that deserve special attention when involving foreigners.

PLANNING

- Think about the **tasks** that the community needs a helping hand with. Are there any activities that can be entrusted to someone who does not (yet) speak Estonian or does not speak it very well? Or do you have a job that requires knowledge of a foreign language spoken by a foreigner?
- Provide prospective (foreign) volunteers with **flexible opportunities** that take into account current trends in volunteering (e.g., micro-volunteering, e-volunteering). Think about whether your organization could allow participation, for example, for the entire family of foreigners.
- Think about how communication will work if a speaker of another language would join the community as a volunteer. Perfect **language skills** are not always the key, goodwill and enthusiasm can get one a long way. For example, if the person involving volunteers has poor foreign language skills, another volunteer can be used as an interpreter. Perhaps a foreign language-speaking support person could be found alongside the foreigner to volunteer with.



RECRUITMENT

- Think about where the volunteers suitable for you might be and how they can get the information they need. If you want to involve a foreigner as a volunteer, you also need to think about where they move, what information channels they use, and where they might notice your invitation. Share information in the **information groups** targeted for foreigners (e.g., Expats in Estonia, Settle in Estonia). You could also consider holding an **information day** targeted at foreigners. To find people, we recommend working with the institutions that foreigners usually visit. For example, contact the organizers of the *Estonishing Events* series, the Foreign Languages Center of the Tallinn Central Library, the Integration Foundation, the International House or Universities of Tallinn or Tartu. Also, consider contacting companies employing a large number of people of other nationalities (e.g. start-ups and other companies in the IT sector).
- If a foreigner **contacts** you and is interested in volunteering, be sure to respond! Write or call or better yet, **schedule an appointment**. Get to know each other. Ask about a person's expectations, skills, and experience. Appreciate a person's courage and willingness to contribute time for the benefit of others in a foreign country! After the initial acquaintance, it is also easier to make decisions and give people the opportunity to find a suitable activity. If it still seems too difficult to offer volunteering to a foreigner, thank the person politely when saying no.
- If you have something to offer to those who have come from far away, put the relevant information about the organization's main activities and volunteering opportunities on your website in **English and Russian**. Also, submit your information to the Volunteers Gate, an information portal on volunteering, naturally in English and Russian.
- Think through the **use of words**. It is not always wise to invite people to volunteer, but rather to ask them to help with a specific task or role.
- If you already have a **foreigner volunteer in** your community, use him or her as a spokesperson to involve new people.
- If you do not have sufficient language skills to translate an advertisement or run an information day in a foreign language, consider engaging **volunteers for translation work**. (You can use the Volunteer Gate to find them as well). It is important that the invitation reaches the foreigners in an explicit and familiar language, as a person who has recently moved to Estonia may feel self-conscious and be afraid to contact you if he/she does not understand if his/her contribution would be helpful.

INDUCTION AND TRAINING

- Are you afraid that the involvement of foreigners may lead to confusion and inconsistencies due to different cultural norms? Prepare yourself and read the background materials. We also recommend using literature for a deeper understanding of cultural topics, such as "Exploring Culture" by Geert Hofstede or studying the following websites:

[Teaching Materials and Methodologies](#)

[Cultural differences and intercultural dialogue \(in Estonian\)](#)

[Cultural Differences \(in Estonian\)](#)

You can find great material for practical exercises, for example, [here](#).

- Also, pay attention to **the employees in your organization and the volunteers involved**. Explain to them the need to bring people from different backgrounds and origins onboard and introduce the key basics that will be useful when dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds. One way to get to know different nationalities is to visit cultural evenings with your employees and volunteers. They take place, for example, in youth centers and youth associations, including volunteers from the European Solidarity Corps.



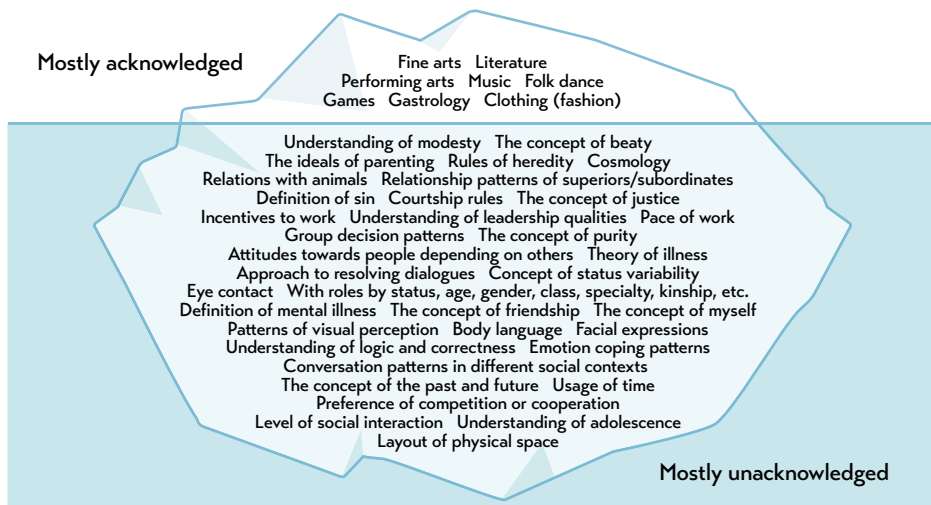
- Take time and introduce the new foreign volunteer the **work and activity** culture of the organization (importance of keeping to the time schedules, etc.). Use reflection techniques to talk about important details or write down the most important thing on a piece of paper. Consider also translating the **job description** of the volunteer.
- Provide clear information on whether and what **costs the** volunteer has to bear and what costs are to be borne by the organization. Remember that the good volunteering practice requires that volunteering should not result in an additional cost to the volunteer: **(see)**.
- If a foreign volunteer does not speak Estonian, engage him or her in a **role** where language proficiency is not so important at first. Of course, it would be wonderful if he or she could practice the Estonian language through volunteering and thus improve his or her language skills.
- **Introduce the new foreign volunteer** to other volunteers and the employees of the organization.
- Just as you are offering **training to** volunteers of local origin before they start, so do foreign volunteers need preparation. How much and what, of course, depends on the tasks that the volunteer will perform. As an option, you might consider appointing **an experienced volunteer** as a trainer and mentor of a foreign volunteer, and thereby they will learn together on the job.
- It is also worthwhile to agree on **operational** and **development goals** with the foreign volunteer. If the foreign volunteer stays with the organization for a longer period of time, we recommend that you conduct periodic development interviews to understand how the individual feels in your organization and whether you are together moving towards the goals you set.

DAILY GUIDANCE

- Pay **constant attention** to introducing the organization's **work culture** (e.g., arriving on time, timely notification in case of inability to come, etc.) and explaining why such arrangements/rules are important to the organization.
- If there is no (initially) **common language of communication**, be creative: use pictures, diagrams, body language to communicate and explain.

- Remember that **different background systems, cultural space**, etc., can create **barriers to communication** between people. Differences can be expressed, for example, in communication, perception of time and values (e.g., different work styles, different ways of resolving conflicts, different perceptions of social hierarchy). We often interpret another person's behavior based on our own norms/stereotypes (i.e., we are not prepared to understand the reasons and meaning of another person's behavior). Remember that there are no right and wrong cultures, only different cultural spaces. Furthermore, it is not just culture that influences a person's values and behavior, but different layers and facets: each person is first and foremost an individual with his or her unique character, dreams and values, and culture is only one factor. The most effective way to get to know and understand each other is through **warm and open communication**. If something seems incomprehensible, react immediately and discuss the situation with the volunteer. Intercultural communication is a matter of continuous dialogue and self-analysis. Instead of looking for differences, it is worth trying to find similarities.
- Be open to listening to **feedback from** the foreign volunteers on the work process and their role in it. They may have good ideas on how to do things differently and better.
- Include foreign volunteers in a **community** with others (incl., organize joint activities, get-togethers, etc.) so that someone who has recently moved to Estonia can find new acquaintances and friends.

CULTURAL ICEBERG



RECOGNITION AND MOTIVATION

- Remember, **motivation** is forward-looking, while recognition is a thank you for the work already done. Motivating is one of the main topics under the guidance of volunteers and must be based on the needs of the person as an individual.
- Everyone, regardless of nationality, needs **recognition**. Most organizations involving volunteers organize an annual event of appreciation. There is always the opportunity to give a volunteer a thank you card, a small gift, or the like. It is also an appreciation when you invite volunteers to drink coffee and give them feedback on how their work has contributed to the goals of the organization. The best volunteers can also be nominated for county-wide and national recognition events. When planning for recognition, we recommend you follow the traditions and opportunities of the association and find a way that suits you. We certainly do not recommend distinguishing between the recognition of Estonian volunteers and foreigners.

TERMINATION OF RELATIONSHIP

- Give the foreigners **feedback** on the work done and ask how he or she felt in the process, including his/her assessment of work organization, experience gained, etc.
- Offer a new migrant volunteer a **confirmation or recommendation letter** to certify his or her volunteering experience.
- **Share your experience** with other associations and organizations.
- Ask the **foreign volunteer** to share their **experiences** with other immigrants.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- Just because a person doesn't speak the same language as you does not mean that he or she is stupider than you!
- There are no better and worse cultures, only **different** cultures. Each person is special and different, culture and cultural background are only a part of him or her.
- In order to support language learning and facilitate communication (especially when the activity takes place in the premises of the organization), attach an Estonian language label to more important items.

CHECKLIST: ARE YOU READY TO INVOLVE A FOREIGNER?

1. Has the volunteer involvement process as a whole thought through in your organization? Do you know where to find information to improve the involvement process?
2. Have you thought about what kind of work tasks foreigners could do in the organization?
3. Have you planned what channels you could use to find and inform foreigners?
4. Review your homepage: Does it contain information that you involve volunteers in your organization? In what language is the information available?
5. Have you considered how to organize communication between the employees, the local, and foreign volunteers?
6. Have you discussed with the team what it might mean to involve people from another background? Have you done any practical exercises?
7. Do you have a plan for the initial guidance and training of foreign volunteers?
8. Have you considered how to integrate foreign volunteers into joint activities with the rest of the team?

GOOD LUCK!

Additional information:

<https://vabatahtlikud.ee/>
info@vabatahtlikud.ee