

GUIDANCE ON VOLUNTEERING SAFELY

By volunteering with others and preparing yourself, you'll be in a better and more informed position to help those around you.

Where should you start?

Whilst it is up to you to decide whether you volunteer independently or through an organisation or group, there are some advantages of volunteering through an organisation. Volunteering with an organisation means that they can offer you a support network made up of other volunteers and, in some cases, staff. It can also be invaluable to have people to learn from, share with and help provide practical advice on staying safe and emotional support. Organisations have processes, contacts and insights to help you prepare to volunteer and can offer camaraderie whilst you're volunteering. There are some great Facebook groups and small registered charities that will welcome your help.

Think about how your skills and availability could be best suited to the volunteer roles available and how you could contribute to the support the organisations need.

Top tips

- Try to commit to the total amount of time an organisation has asked for.
- Be flexible and purposeful. Short-term volunteering can be positive if you are happy to carry out important but repetitive tasks in warehouses/workshops. You will find plenty of people like you eager to help.
- Don't underestimate the advantages of good preparation before you go. Ask the organisation for a document that outlines their way of working with volunteers. It should cover what you can expect from the organisation in terms of helping you to prepare, an induction and what to do if things go wrong.



- Make sure you take out the right kind of insurance before you go. The organisation or group you work with may recommend a particular kind.
- Volunteering in migrant camps requires emotional resilience and endurance, and the ability to adapt to harsh environments among people who have or are suffering trauma. Think about your suitability for this environment.
- Talk to someone who has already been to a camp about the highs and lows of volunteering. What did they do to manage their personal safety? What did they take with them? What lessons did they learn?
- Avoid being blasé about your safety, even if previous trips have been successful and safe.
- All visitors to any country should follow the laws of the country they are in. Use the [FCO website](#) to check these before you leave.
- Look through [All in Diary](#). This is a comprehensive resource developed by professionals who have worked for international aid and humanitarian organisations. It will give you a good insight into volunteering in a migrant camp to help you decide whether it would be suitable for you.
- Take care about any advice you give. It becomes easy for volunteers to influence the behaviour and actions of vulnerable migrants and this may be done unwittingly.
- Use social media responsibly. Respect others; refrain from taking photos or selfies. Children are particularly vulnerable; just like you wouldn't take photos of other people's children in the UK, don't take photos of unaccompanied children elsewhere. Never post photos online in case they are viewed by criminal networks.
- Read the [What do I need to know about UK asylum and irregular migration?](#), [What is organised immigration crime?](#) and [How to help refugees and migrants avoid harm from organised immigration crime](#) factsheets.

Wellbeing tips for volunteers

Volunteering in a migrant camp can be an emotionally draining experience. We have come up with some tips for your wellbeing:

- Eat and sleep as well as you can.
- Try a five-minute mind-calming exercise every day when volunteering. This could be listening to your favourite music, writing your thoughts down or focusing on your breathing.
- Laugh! As hard as this may be, joking and laughing will help to alleviate tension in your body.
- If you are a volunteer leader, prioritise your own self-care. You can't be a good leader or expect a team to follow you if you are feeling unwell and troubled.

When volunteering, you won't be able to help everyone you want to but you can make a useful contribution by following the information in this guidance.

Other ways to offer help

If you decide that volunteering in a camp is not for you, there are plenty of [other ways you can help](#), for example by donating items that organisations request on their websites or making a financial donation to a charity or community group.

