



NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh

# INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING:

A Guide for NUI Galway Students



alive

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# International Volunteering: A Guide for NUI Galway Students

So you are interested in volunteering overseas? Here is a guide specially designed for you to support you as a volunteer! The aim of this ALIVE Guide is to provide you with information to help you in making an informed decision about volunteering in another country

## What is international volunteering?

International volunteering is simply volunteering in any country other than your own. International volunteering is giving your time, skills, and energy with any one of thousands of global organisations, issues, or causes, all to help make a difference in communities around the world.

## Why international volunteering?

There are lots of benefits to volunteering: the opportunity to give back, learning new skills, collecting diverse experiences, expanding your personal and professional networks and research has even identified physical and mental health benefits too! Whether you volunteer in your home community or one across the globe, you can help make a difference, plus receive a myriad of personal and professional benefits.

## When can I volunteer?

International volunteering can be:

- **Short term (2 weeks – 3 months)**
- **Long term (1 - 2 years)**

Short-term volunteering is usually described as intercultural immersion experiences. Examples of activities that can be completed in a short term period of time include: building, teaching or environmental projects.

Long-term volunteering is often done by qualified professionals in areas like nursing, engineering and teaching.

Each volunteer opportunity will require a certain amount of time commitment. You can choose to volunteer during the summer, holiday breaks, on Erasmus, on a year out, or upon graduation.

It is the accepted view that the longer the volunteer placement, the better it is for both you and the host programme. This makes total sense if you think about your volunteer placement as a new job - it takes time to learn the ropes, to get to know everyone and to become familiar with new systems.

So, in general, the longer you can stay as a volunteer, the better. But don't despair if you're one of the many who volunteer for a few days or weeks: if you do your research to identify an ethical opportunity, you can be part of a continuum of volunteers, one of thousands of others from around the globe giving whatever time they can to help make a difference.

## Do you plan to travel while you're overseas?

How will you balance the two, making sure you have enough time for both while remaining fair to the community and organisation with which you will be volunteering?





## What kinds of volunteer opportunities are there?

There are millions of different projects and tasks for volunteers to take on worldwide. Many international volunteer opportunities are focused on issues of community development, for example health and nutrition, building or repairing physical infrastructure, education and empowerment, and economic development. These may be ongoing efforts or in response to natural disasters. Similarly, many volunteer opportunities focus on environmental issues.

You could be volunteering with youth in Italy, a water programme in India, an IT project in Chile, a human rights initiative in Northern Ireland or an animal rescue facility in South Africa.

## Where can I volunteer?

Everywhere! Volunteers are found all over the globe, travelling to communities from Australia to Iceland, Chile to China. That said, some places are tougher to volunteer in; for example, countries experiencing significant civil unrest may not be the safest or most stable places for foreign volunteers and some countries' governments may have closed their borders to outsiders.

Keep in mind that there may be physical, political, or cultural restrictions in certain parts of the world based on your gender identity, religion, race/ethnicity, age, nationality, physical mobility, or sexual orientation. In some places, these restrictions will prevent you from volunteering altogether. In others, it may be possible to volunteer but unsafe or even just unwise. Spend some time researching the countries on your list to determine if any potential restrictions might pertain to you. Also, be sure to talk to former volunteers about their experiences there.

In addition, if your issue area or cause is politically volatile, you'll need to assess if it would be safe for you to volunteer there and would it be appropriate for a foreigner to get involved. For example, if you're interested in advocating for the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered citizens in a country with a history of violence towards those of non-heterosexual orientation, is it safe for you to get involved? Would your involvement help cast an international spotlight on the issue area and cause? Or would it distract from and possibly disempower locals.

The Department of Foreign Affairs' website ([www.dfa.ie](http://www.dfa.ie)) offers a range of information that will be of use to people who are travelling overseas to volunteer. This includes information on passports, visas, insurance, safety and travel advice for particular countries.

## ALIVE SUPPORTS YOU!

ALIVE is here to help you through every step of your volunteering – locally and internationally. We are here before you go, while you are away and when you return.

Are you ...

- thinking about volunteering overseas in a developing country?
- unsure of what questions you should be asking?
- wondering how your volunteering experience fits in with the 'bigger picture'?

ALIVE is here to help offer information and support to NUI Galway students considering volunteering internationally. Information offered here provides a starting point and volunteers should visit, email, or attend an ALIVE workshop to learn more about international volunteering.

ALIVE does not advocate for one particular volunteering group or organisation over another. And this guide is not legal document, but only one source of information outlining further resources.





# How to Volunteer Internationally

## How do I volunteer abroad?

Most volunteers go with volunteer-sending organisations or programmes while others decide to travel independently and are not affiliated with a sending organisation.

## You can volunteer in another country:

- **With a Sending organisation:** You as the Volunteer contact a Sending Organisation that has links around the world with a Host volunteering project.
- **Independently:** Plan your own travel and link directly with a volunteering project.
- **With an NUI Galway programme:** Join your fellow students with annual overseas volunteer projects.

## International Volunteering with NUI Galway

There are student and staff led international volunteer opportunities at NUI Galway. Visit the ALIVE website [www.nuigalway.ie/alive](http://www.nuigalway.ie/alive) to learn more about opportunities with the Chaplaincy, Suas Society, Gaisce Society, Voluntary Services Abroad (VSA) and many more!

## Volunteering Independently

For some, the ideal volunteer abroad experience is to travel arriving in a country, seeking out a volunteer opportunity, making introductions and getting started. For others, going with a programme that arranges such logistics as housing and meals in advance is a far better fit. Both can result in an extraordinary experience ... it really just depends on what you are looking for and comfortable with. There are pros and cons with both options.

## Volunteering with a Sending Organisation

### What is a Sending organisation?

These are agencies, organisations or commercial companies that arrange volunteer placements in developing countries.

They may be:

- Not for profit/ nonprofit
- For profit
- May charge a fee
- May not charge a fee
- Government supported
- Faith based

Examples of sending organisations are:

- Habitat for Humanity
- Suas
- Alan Kerins African Projects
- Chernobyl Children's Projects
- i-to-i

There is a lot of variation—both in terms of what is provided as well as in cost—so you'll want spend some time researching and comparing to decide what structure or type of programme you might want to volunteer with. Find the organisation that best fits you!

## Does it matter whether the volunteer-sending organisation is for-profit or nonprofit?

Some volunteers choose a nonprofit volunteer-sending organisation because it was formed primarily for the public good. Others have no preference for nonprofit or for-profit, instead focusing on finding the volunteer program, regardless of structure, that offers the location and volunteer opportunity they are looking for.

At the end of the day, it comes down to doing your research. Prices vary widely whether nonprofit or for-profit and there are ethical, mission-driven organisations on both sides, just as there are for-profit and nonprofit volunteer-sending organisations that could do a better job of arranging quality, sustainable service opportunities. Ask the questions that are important to you and you should be able to find the volunteer-sending organisation whose mission, practices, and opportunities are the best fit for you.

Check if the organisation has signed the Comhlámh "Code of Good Practice for Volunteer Sending Organisations" which sets out the responsibilities of organisations. The code requires agencies to ensure that volunteers are fully informed about their role, cultural, health and safety issues and aware of their responsibilities. Anyone interested in volunteering overseas is encouraged to consult the list of NGOs signed up to the Code of Good Practice on the Comhlámh website ([www.volunteeringoptions.org](http://www.volunteeringoptions.org)).

## Volunteering with a Sending Organisation

### How does it work?

**The Sending Organisation:** You apply to the sending organisation to volunteer and they support you with training. They have specific projects in Host communities for which they prepare you.

**The Host Project:** Host projects are the organisations or community groups in the destination country that receive volunteers. Host communities are the people with whom volunteers work and live with while undertaking their overseas volunteering.



# Making the Decision

## How do I know if volunteering abroad is right for me?

If you are open to experiencing new things, learning from other cultures, and embracing customs, then such an experience will benefit you as an individual.

Only you can know for sure if such an experience is appropriate for you. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

### What is my motivation for wanting to volunteer abroad?

Examine your motivations. There are many reasons you may want to volunteer abroad, including:

- it is an adventure
- for opportunity to live simply
- cultural curiosity
- to be an ambassador
- something new, something challenging
- time for a career shift
- learn new skills
- learn a language
- launch a career in international aid and development
- to make new friends from around the globe
- build schools and digging wells because they're needed

Understanding your motivations is an important part of the decision to volunteer internationally. What fuels and inspires you? Why volunteering and not just travel or holiday? After all, your volunteer responsibilities may very well be hard work and you could always garner the benefits of international travel adventure, cultural exchange, new places and experiences in other ways.

### How do I expect to contribute to the community I will be volunteering with?

What will be your impact? When making a decision, it's important at all times to consider the host community, remembering that your presence will have an impact not only on you but also on them.

### Have I volunteered locally to get experience first?

Get your feet wet as a volunteer in your own community by giving time to local organisations, issues, and causes. Consider volunteering in an area similar to what you'd like to do abroad; for example, if you're looking to help build infrastructure overseas, try volunteering with Habitat for Humanity or a similar organisation locally. The important thing is to be comfortable with your role as a volunteer and understand what to expect from the experience.

## Making the Decision - Consider the Costs

International volunteering involves travel and an organization to host you. Many volunteer abroad programmes require fees to help offset the costs of setting up your volunteer experience, supporting staff, providing housing, and other logistical details. You will need to pay for your meals, transportation, and housing. There are lots of options to fit what you can afford.

Before you send money ...

Before making a final decision about which organisation you would like to volunteer with, ask for a breakdown of how the fee will be spent. This will help you to get a more detailed picture of how the organisation is structured. If you are planning to fundraise to cover the costs of your placement, it will also provide you with information to pass on to potential donors.





# Finding the Right Volunteer opportunity

## QUESTIONS TO ASK THE ORGANISATION



Whether you decide to go abroad with a volunteer-sending programme or are going on your own, independently, there are lots of questions to ask the organisation and information to research about the organisation.

### About your role as a volunteer

- Learn what you can about the sort of work you'll be doing
- What is my volunteer position? What tasks will I be doing?
- What level of physical activity should I prepare for (e.g. heavy lifting, lots of walking, etc.)
- What skills should I have in order to be an effective volunteer?
- What kind of training and/or orientation will I receive?
- Are there any particular tools or project supplies I should bring with me? (If going with a volunteer-sending organisation or program), what kind of support will I receive while I'm abroad? How often will I be required to check in with them? Will I have visits from program staff?
- Will I be interacting with locals as a volunteer or largely working behind the scenes?
- Will other international volunteers be onsite? How many?
- What will my hours be as a volunteer?
- Will I have free time or days off to travel?
- Are there planned excursions? Will there be additional costs for these?
- Where is the volunteer project located? What is the work environment like?
- Who will I be working with? Will I be largely working independently or with a team?
- What language resources will be available to me? Will onsite staff speak my language? Are there classes or a translator available?
- What costs should I be prepared for? (If going with a volunteer-sending organisation or program, ask what is included in your program fees, e.g. airfare, housing, in-country transportation, insurance, meals, etc. Also, consider asking for a budget or breakdown of where your fees will go and ask if all or part of your fees will be tax deductible)
- Are there any security or health concerns I should know about?
- Are there vaccinations required or recommended for the area I will be living in? Do I need to take malaria prophylaxis? Should I bring any particular health-related supplies (mosquito nets, water purifiers, etc.)?
- Are there any physical or cultural barriers you think I might experience based on my gender identity, physical mobility, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, etc.?
- Can you accommodate special needs like dietary restrictions, allergies, physical mobility, etc.?
- Is your organisation family-friendly? Do you accept youth volunteers?
- Can couples volunteer together? If they are married, unmarried, GLBTQ, etc.?
- What is the timeline for the volunteer project or position?
- How will my work as a volunteer be sustained after I leave?
- What expectations does your organisation have of me once I've returned home?
- Does your organisation offer tools and resources for returned volunteers? An alumni community?

Now is your time . . .  
and you get back so  
much in return!





## About living abroad

### Ask about housing options

- Is housing provided? If yes: What type of housing is it?
- Will I have my own room? How many people will I be living with?
- If my housing is with a host family, how are they selected?
- Are they affiliated with the organisation?
- What should I expect (e.g. what are the shower/toilet facilities like, will I have access to electricity, is a computer or internet access available, etc.)?
- What should I bring (e.g. bedding, toiletries, etc.)?
- If housing is not provided: What type of housing is available in the area? What local and/or online resources are available for arranging housing? Is there a place to stay temporarily upon arrival (e.g. hostel or stay with a family) so that I can set up housing once I get there?
- How much should I expect to pay for housing?
- What type(s) of housing should I expect?
- What should I bring (e.g. is bedding generally included, etc.)?
- Can or will I be living near my volunteer project? If not, will I have access to transportation?
- Will there be day-to-day tasks that I'm responsible for (for example, cooking or cleaning)?
- Ask about local foods that meet your dietary restrictions
- Are meals provided? Can you accommodate dietary needs and restrictions?
- Are there local meal options for vegetarians, vegans, etc.?
- Does your organisation offer any type of local survival guide or orientation that covers such things as how to use transit, find cheap food, avoid unsafe areas, etc.?
- How can friends or family contact me while abroad?
- What are your emergency plans or procedures?
- Is there a local doctor, clinic, or hospital I can go to in case of emergency?
- Why are international volunteers needed for this work? (Make sure they know the benefits both for you and the community.)
- What do you think are the largest challenges for international volunteers at this organisation? Is there anything I could do in advance to prepare for them?
- Do you engage local volunteers? (This is an important question both for cultural exchange—working side by side offers rich opportunities to learn more about one another's cultures and lived experiences—and sustainability, as local volunteers provide continuity as international volunteers come and go. Finally, involving local volunteers also ensures that the human and social capital developed by volunteers stays at least in part in the community.)
- How are local citizens involved in determining what projects to do? What role do local organisations play in this process?
- Who will the volunteer projects benefit? What are the goals of the project?
- How do you match volunteers to projects, both in terms of skills and interest?
- Do you need the skills and experience I can bring to the project?
- Are staff members local or international? (If going with a volunteer-sending organisation or program), are staff members part of your organisation?
- How is your organisation funded?
- Do you have partnerships or relationships with any government organisations? International NGOs? Religious communities? Universities?
- Does your organisation have any specific political or religious affiliation?
- Do you have liability insurance for volunteers? Do you provide evacuation or medical insurance? Do I need to carry any specific type of volunteer or emergency insurance?

### About the organisation

- How old is the programme or organisation? How long have you worked with international volunteers?
- What is the organisation's mission? (If going with a volunteer-sending organisation,) how long has your organisation partnered with this local volunteer site? What impact have your volunteers had for their organisation?
- (If going independently,) do you regularly accept international volunteers?
- How many international volunteers have you accepted (if going independently) or sent (if going with a volunteer-sending organisation)?
- What age, nationality, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. are your volunteers?

ALIVE would like to thank Idealist.com for compiling and sharing this list of important questions.

If you enjoy  
volunteering -  
spread the word!



# Finding the Right Volunteer Opportunity

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF



When you have decided to volunteer internationally, then how do you choose the type of volunteering opportunity or project.

### What do I want to do?

The first step towards figuring out what you'd like to do as a volunteer abroad is to assess skills and interests. What are you good at? What do you enjoy? Where do you have experience? What do you hope to learn? Keep in mind that these skills aren't just what you might list on your CV but also qualities like strong interpersonal skills, being at ease with public speaking, expertise in photography or drawing, etc.

The next step is to decide how you want to engage your skills and interests in international volunteering. Would you pick up a hammer and spend a few days or weeks assisting with the building of a playground or school? Are you looking to volunteer directly with citizens in foreign communities? Or are you more interested in behind-the-scenes work like capacity development? Deciding how you want to use your unique skills, whether they are linked to your career or just something you happen to be good at, will help you determine what type of volunteer opportunities to seek.

Here are some more questions to ask yourself to help you find the right volunteer opportunity:

- What are my skills?
- What type of work would be best suited to me?
- Would I like to work directly with the host community, or would I prefer to volunteer alongside other visiting volunteers?
- What kind of conditions would be best for me when volunteering?
- How long am I prepared to commit myself for?
- What are my personal health and emotional needs?
- What type of environments am I most comfortable with?

### Can you cope with the climate?

If you're not a hot weather person, then perhaps locations near the equator are not for you. And if monsoon conditions sound miserable, you might not want your volunteer abroad experience to coincide with a region's rainy season. Similarly, be sure to consider if certain climates tend to affect your health; for

example, if smog makes your allergies or asthma flare up, locations with significant air pollution might not be the best choice.

### Who's going and who will be volunteering?

Some people love to travel alone; others need or prefer the company of others. Likewise you may want to volunteer alone or as part of a team of volunteers.

### Think about your personality and lifestyle.

Are you the type that can be flexible and adapt to what might be very different circumstances than you expected? Are you open to learning and being out of your element? Make sure you have a good idea of the environment in which you flourish as well as where you would feel stifled; for example, if you are someone who needs significant periods of time alone to feel centred, a volunteer position working and living as a team might not be ideal.







Hi my name is Adrian Skelly and I am a post graduate student studying Health Economics. I volunteered in India in the second year of my Bachelor of Commerce.

I spent the summer teaching English, maths, gymnastics, music and dance with two other NUI Galway students. In the mornings I was volunteering with a group of children in a primary school, afternoons in a HIV and AIDS centre and evenings with children who were previously child labourers. The days were long! It was an eye-opening experience where I had the opportunity to meet people from all over India. Volunteering for me was a real learning experience and an opportunity to put myself outside my comfort zone, experiencing new cultures first-hand.

My advice to my fellow students volunteering internationally is to learn to live off rice for two months! Since I returned to Ireland I continue to volunteer through fundraising, supporting Irish volunteers who go to West Bengal, and I am aiming to create an Irish based charity. I received many benefits from my volunteering. It even had an impact on my decision to apply for a Masters at NUI Galway in Health Economics with the School of Business & Economics to peruse my research interest in how developing nations' governments distribute finance and funds for health and educational purposes. I am definitely returning to West Bengal for a summer or maybe even a year in the near future!





## Before you go...

### Practical Checklist of Things to Consider when Volunteering Aboard

**Accommodation:** There are numerous accommodations types offered. Accommodations may be dormitory style, with a host family, at a campsite or in some cases private living quarters. If the programme does not provide housing you will need to find out if the programme you select is able to help you locate housing.

**Affiliations:** When looking into programmes you may want to consider the political, religious, etc. affiliations the programme has. For example, if you are looking into a programme that is affiliated with a particular religious group you may want to inquire about how the aim/goals of the programmes may or may not be affected by this affiliation.

**Application Process:** Note how long a programme requires for an application to be processed. Often you will need a recommendation letter, which you may want to seek out before you begin looking for programmes.

**Charity vs. Compassion:** The difference between charity and compassion centres around your role as a volunteer. You should not enter the programme thinking that you can change the world or that your way is the right way. Instead you should focus on the learning experience that can come out of such an opportunity. Be open to being taught new ideas and seek to make connections with the people you will work with.

**Co-workers/Volunteers:** Worth consideration is the programme size. Will you be working alongside other volunteers or will you be placed with a programme on your own? Do volunteers begin in waves or are they all placed at the same time? Also does the programme you are considering have a group leader/supervisor on the project with you?

**Embassy:** Ensure there is an Irish Embassy in the country you will be volunteering and know how to reach the Embassy by phone. You can prepare this information before hand by visiting the Irish Embassy website. This is particular important as passports can go missing! The Department of Foreign Affairs website is very helpful <http://www.dfa.ie>

**Expectations:** Are the projects defined and does the programme clearly outline your duties for the duration of your volunteering? Do you know what the programme expects from you? Have you made your expectations of the programme known?

**Fees:** Some programmes require a fee for participants. How much of this fee goes towards your insurance, travel, etc. Ask for a breakdown. Does funding go directly to the community you will be volunteering with on the ground?

**Food:** Are meals part of your programme fee? If so how many meals are day are provided? Is the water in the region potable? Also if you have certain dietary restrictions inform your programme before you arrive.

**Health and Wellbeing:** Ensure to research regional health concerns like malaria. Are there regionally required and recommended vaccines?

**Medical Insurance:** Does the programme provide an insurance plan? If your programme does not include insurance you will need to check your current insurance plan to see if you will be covered while abroad, if not you may want to look into purchasing a temporary international health coverage plan.

**Orientation:** Does your programme provide an orientation process? Is there a debriefing process after your trip? Have you spent time researching the region you will be visiting: cultural customs, dress, food, weather, religion, politics, etc. Does your programme have some process of integrating you into the community you are entering?

**Packing:** This will depend on the region you are travelling to. Make sure to look up the seasonal weather patterns for the time frame you will be travelling. To get a better idea of items needed contact your programme.

**Safety:** Research the area you are travelling and remember to ensure your personal safety at all times.

**Support:** Is there a support system in the country? Will there be a director/liaison person nearby? In the case of political unrest, does your programme have an evacuation plan? What do you need to do in the case of a serious medical emergency? How often will your programme be in contact with you?

**Visas:** Unless you are staying for more than a couple of months you will more than likely only need a passport. However to know for sure you will need to contact the Sending Organisation. Also keep in mind that getting a visa is a process that can take between a few weeks and a few months.



## Things to know before you go

Before you go, be sure to plot out your own thoughts, goals, and motivations. Spend some time writing down your goals for your volunteer experience—what you hope to realistically accomplish, what you'd like to learn—and create a list of places you'd like to see, sites you'd like to visit, and experiences you'd like to take part in. Think of this as your own personal road map.

### Fundraising

From bag packing to sky diving to shaving your head there are many ways that you can fundraise. Many organisations will have support and ideas for you and will welcome your desire to fundraise for them.

It is important however to think about why you are fundraising, who you are fundraising for, and the method you are using to fund raise. When you are fundraising it is important to be clear about what you are going to do with the money you are given. Did you know NUI Galway has a fundraising policy on campus? Contact ALIVE to learn more.

### Research

Make an effort to learn as much as you can about the country and, as much as possible, the specific region or community you'll be travelling to.

Laws: For example, some countries have strict laws about alcohol and drugs.

### Understanding Development

Volunteers are encouraged to focus on issues of development when thinking about overseas volunteering. What is development? According to Comhlámh "Development is empowerment: it is about local people taking control of their own lives, expressing their own demands and finding their own solutions to their problems."

To bring a global development perspective to your work as a volunteer, it is vital to have some knowledge of the Millennium Development Goals, Globalisation, International Institutions, Debt and Trade. They form the wider context within which your experience will take place. Having some knowledge of the bigger picture will help

you to understand the forces that might shape events at the local level of your placement.

### Volunteer Impact

In order to ensure positive volunteering experiences of international volunteers and host communities, volunteers are encouraged to be well informed and prepared in advance of going overseas. Time spent considering the following issues before you decide to go overseas as a volunteer can help to ensure that your actions have a positive impact on the places and the people you work with: historical context, gender, power relations and racism.

Visit these websites to learn more about the Development Perspective:

[www.developmenteducation.ie](http://www.developmenteducation.ie)

[www.volunteeringoptions.org](http://www.volunteeringoptions.org)

[www.galwayowc.org](http://www.galwayowc.org)

### Voluntary sector

Before you join their efforts as a volunteer, spend a bit of time learning more about the history of NGOs in that part of the world. Have they for the most part been welcomed as a community partner? Are they generally distrusted by the government? Are there large national NGOs? Do they tend to be small grassroots groups? Similarly, try to learn more about the country's history of working on the specific cause or issue you'll be involved with. Knowing a bit more about how NGOs—and their volunteers—are perceived, as well as the realities of working on their chosen cause or mission, will help you be better prepared, so ask former volunteers and search for information online.

Student volunteers with an Estonian rural development project pictured on Galway's William Street with Estonian writer, Eduard Vilde.





# While Volunteering

## Adopt a Learning Approach

Volunteers need to adopt a learning approach to their volunteering.

## Comhlámh's Volunteer Charter

Volunteers are encouraged to sign the Comhlámh's Volunteer Charter, which sets out seven principles that aim to encourage responsible, responsive international volunteering. Each principle contains a list of questions to help you make sure that you have thought about the issues raised, and that you know why they are important. You can download a copy on the Comhlámh website.

## Ethics and Volunteering

Am I really helping? This is one of the common questions asked by those considering international volunteerism. Unfortunately, there isn't an easy answer. There are, however, ways to make sure that you help more than harm and that your good intentions come across to others with positive results.

### Be open-minded

Things may be very different in the community you travel to than what you're used to—resist the temptation to think that you know how things can be accomplished better, faster, more effectively, more inclusively, etc. Go into volunteering with an open mind; learn how things are done locally and offer your experiences and expertise as possible complementary approaches and tools.

### Be a partner

Approach volunteering as a collaborative effort, offering your time and skills as additional assets to local know-how and expertise while recognizing that you have as much to learn as you do to give.

### Be ethical in your choices

There are many things you can do to make sure that your volunteer service is done in the most ethical way possible. For example, be sure to learn how the organization you'll be volunteering with intends to sustain your efforts—will they have a steady flow of volunteers tackling the issue? Another important thing to find out is how they involve locals—will you be partnering with local citizens? Similarly, try to determine how the

**Fun tip!** View [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) for "In-country dos, don'ts, and probably shouldn'ts" developed as part of their online International Volunteering Resource Centre

community was involved in deciding what volunteers should do. Is the project or service needed or wanted? Was it suggested by locals? Have community members led, or even been involved in, the planning process?

### Be reflective

You might be living in a community with very different ideas of social equality than what you're used to, especially around such issues as gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or physical mobility. You should make every attempt to be sensitive and open to learning about local cultural norms. Know your boundaries and communicate with your host or sending organisation about your concerns. There will be different opinions, thoughts and interpretations. Like any learning, learning from overseas volunteering takes some effort, some curiosity and the asking of a whole lot of questions. Consider reflecting on your experiences as you volunteer and keep a diary. Seek out more information and information that is below the surface level.





## Returning to Ireland

### Return Shock and Adjusting

For many people, returning home can be a time of confusion and of differing emotions. Chances are you've been through a life-changing experience. You may view the world around you with a new and sometimes surprising lens. Similarly, be sure to allow yourself time and space to reflect on your experiences—both the good and the bad—processing what you lived abroad as well as any new feelings or perceptions that might arise upon your return home. Share with people and have conversations about your experience. On returning, you may need time to process your experiences and to readjust to life at home. There are many issues that may cause you to ask questions or feel out of place when you return home.

### De-brief

Many organisations arrange for de-brief or return training opportunities. Here volunteers can raise issue and share experiences. Mutual support can be helpful and volunteers can often come to terms with their experiences. Sharing your stories with others can help you reflect on and continue to learn from your experiences.

### Staying Involved

Having volunteered in a community abroad, there's a pretty good chance that you know quite a bit about the area, the organization you volunteered with, and the issue or cause they were addressing. With all that knowledge earned through on-the-ground action, it makes sense to stay involved from afar. You may volunteer in Ireland, run a campaign or consider a career in development.

### ALIVE Certificate

#### Recognition

Think about applying for the NUI Galway Presidential Award for Volunteering, the ALIVE Certificate, for your international volunteering experience. It's great for your CV and an opportunity to share with others your achievement. You can apply at [www.yourspace.nuigalway.ie](http://www.yourspace.nuigalway.ie)

#### Share experiences

ALIVE is always glad to hear from you! Come along or email ALIVE about your volunteering. Maybe you could share with your fellow NUI Galway students your experiences.





## European Voluntary Service (EVS)

EVS is a volunteer programme that is open to all young people aged between 18 and 30 living legally in one of the 27 programme countries of the European Union (plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey). The programme enables young people to volunteer in one of the many approved hosting organisations (there are several thousand in total) in participating countries for between 2 and 12 months. Volunteers are not expected to have qualifications in any particular area and cannot be excluded because they don't have such a qualification.

Everyone benefits: the volunteer gains experience and skills and an insight into a different way of living, while the host organisation, and those it cares for, benefit from the energy and enthusiasm of the young person, while learning about another culture.

EVS is managed and promoted by Léargas, the National Agency in Ireland for the management of national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training.

Learn all about EVS on the Leargas website: [www.leargas.ie](http://www.leargas.ie)

### NUI Galway and EVS

ALIVE is an accredited EVS Sending Agency for NUI Galway students. Come along to the EVS information sessions organised by ALIVE each semester. Topics to be covered at the information session:

- Benefits of EVS to volunteers and sending organisations
- How to get involved and how the process works (application forms, deadlines etc.)
- How to find a host organisations
- Experiences of NUI Galway students on EVS projects in France and Italy.

NUI Galway student volunteer Brian O'Shea pictured on his EVS in Italy.







## Important links:

### **ALIVE – NUI Galway's Student Volunteering Programme**

**[www.nuigalway.ie/alive](http://www.nuigalway.ie/alive)**

This is your first point of call find out everything you need to know about volunteering! We are here before, during and after your volunteering experience.

### **Volunteering Options**

**[www.volunteeringoptions.org](http://www.volunteeringoptions.org)**

Created by Comhlámh, this website has an "Online Database of Opportunities" for international volunteering and loads of information.

### **Comhlámh**

**[www.comhlamh.org](http://www.comhlamh.org)**

A membership organisation that supports returned development workers and campaigns on global development issues.

### **Galway One World Centre**

**[www.galwayowc.org](http://www.galwayowc.org)**

GOWC is a meeting point for people looking for information on a variety of development topics, including Human Rights, Anti-Racism, and Globalisation. They are located in Galway-drop in for a visit!

### **Irish Aid – Volunteer Centre**

**[www.irishaid.gov.ie/centre](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/centre)**

The Irish Aid website acts as a guide to volunteering, allowing the individual to review all the options available to them - short term, long term, online volunteering or volunteering in Ireland in support of overseas development. This website also helps individuals to start thinking about volunteering, to look at the various options, question why they want to volunteer and what do they want to get out of their experience.

### **Idealist.org**

**[www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/index.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/index.html)**

The Idealist.org International Volunteerism Resource Centre (IVRC) is an online resource designed to help you make informed decisions about volunteering in another country.

### **EVS – European Voluntary Service**

**[www.leargas.ie](http://www.leargas.ie)**

The programme enables young people aged 18- 30 to volunteer across Europe for free!

### **World Volunteer Web**

**<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/>**

The World Volunteer Web supports the volunteer community by serving as a global clearinghouse for information and resources linked to volunteerism that can be used for campaigning, advocacy and networking. It is an online hub where the community can meet, share resources and coordinate activities to mobilize volunteer action in support of the Millennium Development Goals.

### **United Nations Volunteers**

**[www.unv.org](http://www.unv.org)**

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organisation that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.

### **Department of Foreign Affairs**

**[www.dfa.ie](http://www.dfa.ie)**

The Department of Foreign Affairs' website offers a range of information that will be of use to people who are travelling overseas. This includes information on passports, visas and insurance. Read the travel advice!

### **International Travel and Health – World Health Organisation**

**[www.who.int/ith/en/](http://www.who.int/ith/en/)**

Information on health risks for people travelling.

### **Volunteer: A Traveller's Guide to Making a Difference Around the World**

**[www.lonelyplanet.com/volunteer](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/volunteer)**

Online resource with discussion board and advice.

### What is volunteering?

Volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services. As an NUI Galway student volunteering is the opportunity to gain experience and skills.

### What do volunteers do?

talk to people • work with animals • drive cars • plant trees • write letters • paint walls • sell books • host events • raise funds • cook dinners • walk dogs • play music • organise meetings • listen to people • give first aid • collect for recycling • work with young people • spend time with older people • keep accounts • campaign on justice issues • office work • after school support for children and much more!

### What is ALIVE?

ALIVE works with schools, charities, community organisations and within NUI Galway to provide volunteering opportunities in a wide variety of roles. We are dedicated to helping NUI Galway students volunteer in the area of their choice which suits their individual needs, interests and time commitments. We are here to offer you information, advice, guidance and support throughout your volunteering experience. We also reward your efforts with the NUI Galway Presidential award for volunteering, the ALIVE Certificate.

### More volunteering guides for NUI Galway students include:

- Guide to Volunteering with Children and Youth in Homework Clubs
- How to Volunteer: Step by Step Guide



To find out more about  
volunteering...

email [alive@nuigalway.ie](mailto:alive@nuigalway.ie)

browse [www.nuigalway.ie/alive](http://www.nuigalway.ie/alive)

