

# PRESENTATION OF SVI

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## 1. Who are we ?

We are the SVI, Service Volontaire International (International Voluntary Service), a non-profit youth association managed by and for volunteers, to whom we give the chance to engage themselves in voluntary projects all over the globe. We aim to make our projects accessible to all, regardless of their age, financial resources or skills.

Each year, we send about 500 volunteers to projects all over the globe, as we work with local associations in nearly 70 countries. Our volunteers help local independent organizations, which are not subsidized. Indeed, the local volunteers share our values.



### Key figures

- 2000 different projects in 70 Countries
- 500 volunteers a year
- About 80 volunteers at your disposal all along the year
- About a dozen of nationalities represented in our office

### Our values

The SVI seeks to promote a fairer, more peaceful and cohesive society by raising the awareness of young people as well as integrating them in development cooperation and international solidarity projects.

The SVI's aim is to encourage young people to be active in the society they live in and help them to become responsible and solidary world citizens. The young should not only get involved in voluntary projects abroad, but also contribute permanently to the society's development, promote solidarity and assistance.

The SVI attempts to raise young people's awareness to the challenges of the globalizing society, and encourages responsible, active, critical and solidary citizen attitudes. Moreover, the SVI seeks to present a different and reversed point of view on the relations between the North and the South, as the association is historically anchored in Asia. It leads the volunteers to ask themselves what they could learn from other people, cultures and associations.

## What means volunteering to the SVI team ?

Solidarity is our keyword. To us, international volunteering is more than just a trip, it is an enriching experience, which will change your everyday life as you will set out to discover new horizons. It is also a pleasant way to learn more about the associative sector while getting involved.

Volunteering equals encounters and exchanges with local communities as well as with volunteers from all over the globe. It is an informal way of education, open to the world.

The SVI does not do development as such and neither does it do humanitarian aid (emergency aid), but it supports the local associative sector; its aim being to promote the North/South partnership as well as the South/North one, by emphasizing on their complementarity. International volunteering is, in that sense, a two-way learning.

## Why do you have to pay to volunteer?

As the SVI is a non-profit association, we still need our volunteer's support to guarantee the association's everyday management (operating costs, promoting the association etc.)

The participation fees the local associations ask for - and which you give them directly once you are on the spot-, follow the same principle: as they are not subsidized, it is through your financial support that you allow the associations to exist and the local projects to persist.

## **2. Why choosing to volunteer with the SVI ?**

### Choosing the SVI...

... is choosing a non-commercial organization, which is open to everyone without any discrimination, while enjoying our solid experience in the international volunteering field.

### Our experience

The SVI was founded in 2009 by former volunteers, who had already experienced the associative sector, with the active support of the Belgian cooperation. The association could be created thanks to the collaboration of non-governmental actors, while raising the awareness about the commercialization of volunteering. Since 2011, the SVI is a member of Relie-F, one of the main federations of Youth Organizations in the Belgian French community.

The SVI works with a hundred associations and non-governmental organizations throughout the world, where to its volunteers are send. Moreover, it welcomes in Belgium and France a

hundred of foreign volunteers, who participate in the projects of our partners, such as the international youth work camp at the Dour Festival or the 'Arche' (Arch) project.

### No specific skills needed

Our volunteers do not need to have any specific skills, although they might need a certain awareness about the topic of the mission in some cases, as well as a basic knowledge of English – the work camp language. Nevertheless, the most important thing you need is a real motivation!

### Flexible projects

It is up to the volunteer to freely choose his project and his priority country according to his interests and availability – whenever possible-, among 2000 projects (environmental, social, etc.)

### Volunteer management

With our association, the volunteer can benefit from an individual preparation before his departure: our team is at his disposal to answer any of his/her questions and will give him/her access to a series of documents on our online library (guides, country information sheets etc.) Our team will also assure a follow-up during his/her stay and once he/she is back, he/she will have to hand over his/her travel diary.

### Personal enrichment

Volunteering with the SVI will allow the volunteer to enrich himself through the cultural exchange with the local communities and the other volunteers. Volunteering is a chance for people to practice a foreign language in an interactive way as well as to discover other customs while getting involved in a better cause. Volunteering with the SVI is a means to surpass oneself and to develop one's personality by living a once in a lifetime experience.

### The reality of volunteering

The SVI team commits itself to confront the future volunteers with the reality of volunteering. Volunteering is not about saving the world, but about exchanging one's culture while bringing a human and financial support to the local association. It is essential to collaborate with the host association so that the project can be beneficial to the local population. Therefore, the volunteer has to seek to integrate the local community if he wants the voluntary service to be a success, as such a service can be hard to experience, if the volunteer is not open to changes.

### 3. Various possibilities

#### Work camp subjects

We offer international work camps, where intercultural, intergenerational and solidary exchanges take place, in fields as varied as the environment, construction/renovation, social work, art and culture or even projects including animals.

The volunteer can, for instance, plant vegetables in a fjord in Hverageroi (45km east from Reykjavik), in an environment-friendly way.

With our partner in Argentina he can restore a school's playground, which is crucial as it is the only playground in the area (7km from Ocampo city centre).

SJ Vietnam, our Vietnamese partner, asks our volunteers to organize summer activities for the children: Basic English classes, sporting activities or exposing the children's drawings and inviting the parents to come and see them.

In Russia, the volunteers can paint graffiti on the walls and playgrounds. This kind of volunteering is ideal for young people with craft skills.

In Mexico, our partner, a non-profit organization in Puerto Vallarta, works for the social and environmental development in the region, in particular for the preservation of sea turtles. The volunteer will be in charge of finding turtle nests, collect the eggs, maintain the incubators, look after the baby turtles and put them back into the water.

#### On the spot

On the spot, beyond participating in our work camps, enjoying a collective experience and improving their English, thanks to the exchanges with other volunteers, our partners will provide accommodation for our volunteers.

#### Take off on your own

A volunteer can take off to a short or long term work camp.

The short term international work camps last from 2 weeks to 1 month. They are generally composed by 5 to 15 volunteers who work and live together during their stay. The volunteers come from different backgrounds, and although they do not know each other, they are going to work together on a common project.

As for the long term projects, from 1 month to 1 year, the groups are smaller: composed by 3 to 4 volunteers. Their tasks are the same as for the short term projects, but as their stay is

longer, it is essential for them to get really involved in the project. Before deciding to leave for a long term project, the volunteer has to be willing to live in community for months with life conditions, which might be very different from the ones he is used to.

### Internships

The SVI also offers internships to communication, translation, lobbying or computer graphics students in its headquarters in Belgium.

Furthermore, it is also possible to intern at partner associations abroad if the volunteer is a development and cooperation student or a communications student.

### Go as a group

The SVI also offers international work camps for groups: scouts, youth houses, schools and youth associations in Germany, France, Iceland, Mexico, Russia, Senegal or Vietnam, among other destinations. All our collective projects are exclusively designed with and for the group. It is therefore important to plan the mission duly in advance and to inform the partners about the participants.

A group is composed by at least 5 people aged from 17 to 30 years, who decide to get involved in a local project. These projects can last from 2 weeks to several months, depending on the local partner.

We aim to make volunteering projects accessible to all. The pre-departure training in Belgium, a hand with the administrative formalities (visas, invitation letter, and plane tickets), a 24h emergency number on the spot, conferences with the partners, as well as all the necessary documents to prepare your trip are included in the registration fees. Moreover, the people composing the group will then have the chance to leave for individual work camps of their choice by paying only 50 euros for a year, participation fees they will hand to the local association excluded.

We will ask the group to participate in the promotion of our association by distributing flyers or putting up posters in order to compensate for the lower costs.

### Leave with your family

Our Vietnamese partner, SJ Vietnam, and some other associations throughout the globe (Mexico, Russia, Iceland, Morocco, Kenya) give families the chance to participate together on a voluntary project by providing a baby-sitting service on some spots or integrating the children in the local childcare. Generally, teenagers can participate in the project with their parents.

These projects are thought to make volunteering accessible to young families, but also to add a new intergenerational dimension to the voluntary projects.

#### 4. For starters

Before registering, the volunteer has to make sure he/she has understood the stakes of volunteering. Participate in such a project, is not an easy decision to make and he will have therefore to have given it much thought and be really motivated.

First, it is highly recommended that he/she chooses a project which really interests him/her, in order for him/her to enjoy his/her stay. Nevertheless, as a first experience it is recommended not to choose a trip which is too long or too ambitious, as the volunteer might be exposed to a cultural shock. All our projects can be found online on our database.

Though it is preferable to pick a project rather than a country, we recommend going to a country, which the volunteer feels connected to and whose culture and customs he wants to get to know.

It is also important to consider the financial aspect of such a voluntary project. Do not forget that the transportation fees to the international work camp are at the volunteer's charge. If his budget is restricted, he can choose a country which is nearer to his own, such as Greece or Portugal (if he is from Europe), rather than a country on the other side of the globe, for which a plane ticket would be much costlier.

#### 5. Getting ready to volunteer

With the confirmation of registration at one of our international work camps, we advise the volunteer to inform himself about the host country and the formalities he will have to consider (visa, vaccination etc.). In order to do so, we have a series of documents at the volunteer's disposal in our online library and he/she can also contact us whenever he/she is in doubt. Furthermore, it is possible to organize an informative Skype session with the person in charge of the local association.

Moreover, we organize a pre-departure training session where the volunteer can get ready for the international work camp and life in community.

We will also send him a detailed road map with all the information he needs to get safely to the work camp he chose to integrate.

## 6. Useful advices

### Vaccination

Before his departure, the volunteer should make sure he is informed about the health conditions in his host country. He should not forget to make an appointment with his doctor (and dentist) in advance. If he needs to get immunized, he will sometimes have to do it several months in advance, in order for the vaccine to be effective.

### Visas

The volunteer has to seek information at the Embassy or Honorary Consulate of his host country about the conditions of entry and apply for a visa, if necessary.

### Plane tickets

If the volunteer plans his project in advance, he will benefit from better plane tickets.

### Watch out for the stereotypes and the cultural shock

National stereotypes can differ from one country to another, but they are all negative judgments on others. We are all responsible, victims and users of stereotypes.

Abroad we will tend to identify ourselves with regard to our customs and therefore emphasize on the cultural differences that might exist. Also, our hosts might as well have stereotypes towards our nationality.

The cultural differences, which might exist, explain the difficulties and tensions we might encounter while staying in a country with a culture different from ours. These differences are also known as 'cultural shock'.

These changes we might be confronted to, can be disconcerting and express themselves through anxiety or stress. However do not panic: it is normal that when we lose our familiar points of reference, we have a hard time adapting at first. However, this change of environment is a passionate challenge – which we have wished for!

To avoid a bad experience, we want to provide some advice to the volunteer:

It is important to seek information about the host country. In order to do so, there is a series of documents at the volunteer's disposal, which allow him/her to gain an overview of the country. We encourage him/her to deepen the topics that interest him the most. This gathering of information before the volunteer's departure will prevent him from feeling disorientated.



If the volunteer is mentally prepared to suffer a cultural choc, it will be easier for him to overcome it. Indeed, this ill-being takes place mostly in his head. For some people, it is the most difficult thing about travelling. However, if the volunteer wants to appreciate his host country, he will have to succeed in overcoming this cultural shock.

The volunteer should avoid being too judgmental about the new culture he is confronted to. He should be open-minded and flexible, seek the contact with the locals and be curious. Such an attitude keeps him from being isolated and makes the adaptation easier. This process will not be achieved in one day. This is why the volunteer will have to be patient and insistent in order to quickly feel well at ease.

The volunteer will be given the chance to explore a new side of him, to learn how to be more open-minded and less judgmental on the first approach. He will learn how to communicate his point of view while understanding and respecting other ways of thinking. He will learn how to respect the differences and how to accept the point of view of others. He will be able to show the local community that he came to give a helping hand, bring a support in order to build, together, a lasting project. He will have shown that with the SVI he has become a responsible, active, critical and solidary citizen.

### When you are back

Going on an international work camp with the SVI is more than just a mission, it is a commitment. Once the volunteer is back, we will ask him to hand in his travel diary and we will interview him on his experience. From now on, he will form part of the SVI family and will get the chance to keep being involved with us, through the training of future volunteers, the monitoring of work camps or the management of the association. His participation in a work camp allows him to become a member of the association and he can therefore get involved in the association's activities.

## **7. How to become a host association**

In addition to our international partners, the SVI also has partners in Belgium.

The 'Arche' in Brussels, for instance, is a non-profit association, whose objective is to create reception facilities for mentally disabled people and to offer them a better social integration.

The international volunteers, who will stay for at least 3 months, will be in charge of supporting the disabled people in their everyday life and they will be accommodated in one of the association's homes.

Moreover, our international volunteers can participate in work camps on different music festivals, such as *Couleur Café* or the *Dour Festival*, where SVI volunteers have a dedicated stand and participate in the organization.

### Become a host association

- If you are a non-profit organization, an administration or a company with a social mission,
- If you manage a local or regional development project, which could occupy volunteers during their stay (at least 6h a day, 5 days a week) and if this project has concrete long term results,
- If you want to integrate young volunteers, during at least 2 weeks, in your project,
- If at least one of your employees is fluent in English and capable of supervising volunteers in their work while allowing them to integrate the local life.

You can become a host association and collaborate with the SVI.

The SVI will take care of recruiting and assuring a follow-up of the volunteers for free. In exchange, you will be in charge of the assurances, the food and the accommodation (camping, municipal halls, host families etc.)

## 8. Contact us

You are interested? Contact the SVI by mail at [info@servicevolontaire.org](mailto:info@servicevolontaire.org) or by phone. We will be pleased to receive your project proposals.

## 9. No to voluntourism

Nowadays, the traveler's expectations evolve and the tourist industry is well aware of this fact. It therefore does not hesitate to multiply its offers and products, even if it means that poor countries are turned into amusement parks to make as much profit as possible.

Humanitarian tourism, also called volunteerism, is a form of voyeurism, a new form of racism- positive racism. Even without any skills you can help the poor and disadvantaged, because they are 'underdeveloped'.

Commercial companies have turned the 'humanitarian' concept into a profitable and fashionable good: 'seeing and helping the poor is an unforgettable experience!', therefore it is absolutely normal that a volunteer would have to pay from 700 to 2000 euros – transportation excluded- for a two week volunteering in a developing country. However, this money is not aimed to support the association on the spot.

If you want to do tourism, hire a real travel agency, which offers you tours organized by professionals. By doing so, the money you invest remains inside the country you visit. On the other hand, if you want to volunteer, choose the associative sector, which knows the local needs. The mix between volunteering and tourism is just another attracting marketing concept, which in reality only offers the worst in volunteering and tourism: absurd projects at a high price.

The consequences of this abusive commercialization of volunteering are often to deplore for the associative sector as well as for the local populations who are turned into a tourist attraction. This is why the SVI tries to fight this phenomenon.

