



To be read



--> Best practices Guidebook for
Sending organisations



--> Best practices Guidebook for
Training providers



--> Best practices Guidebook for
Host Organisations



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co-financed by Agence du Service Civique



European Open-Source
Humanitarian Aid Volunteers

EU Aid Volunteers Pilot Project

BEST PRACTICES GUIDEBOOK FOR VOLUNTEERS



FOREWORD

Why are we developing these Best practices guidebooks?

DG ECHO is in the process of setting up an EU AID volunteer corps, with the objective of engaging 10,000 volunteers from 2015-20. DG ECHO relies on the experience of a series of pilot projects - lessons learnt, standards and recommendations - to facilitate the setting up of this EU Aid volunteer corps.

France Volontaires, together with eight European NGOs (ECCB/Diakonie, FOCSIV, ACRA, Sloga, PIPA, SCD, HOT, Groupe URD), set up and carried out one of these pilot projects.

The EUROSHA volunteering pilot project developed an innovative volunteering framework in which volunteers (European and African) were deployed in teams in order to bring together local and international actors and carry out humanitarian information management activities.

As a result, the project produced some guidebooks to send, train, host volunteers.

- These Best practices Guidebooks are one of the deliverables produced for ECHO within the EUROSHA volunteering pilot project.
- From the consortium and volunteers side, producing these Guidebooks is a means of capitalising on the pilot project experience.

Who is it for?

- DG ECHO
- Consortium members
- Volunteers
- Organisations wishing to send, train and host EU Aid Volunteers in the future

How was it developed?

It was developed through a participative approach from selecting, training, technical and hosting organisations as well as volunteers, this document resulted from pilot project experience and lessons learnt.

Coordinating organisation and the Groupe URD, as expert, developed a template by project phase and to be completed by working groups: selection, training, hosting, and volunteering. Information was then analysed and compiled by a group of EUROSHA volunteers and finalised by consortium members.

How to use it?

These Guidebooks are comprised by various chapters which are related to the different phases of a volunteering deployment. According to the role you play or wish to play within EU Aid Volunteer, you must refer to a chapter or another one. However it is recommended to read through the whole document in order to know about the various processes and tips.

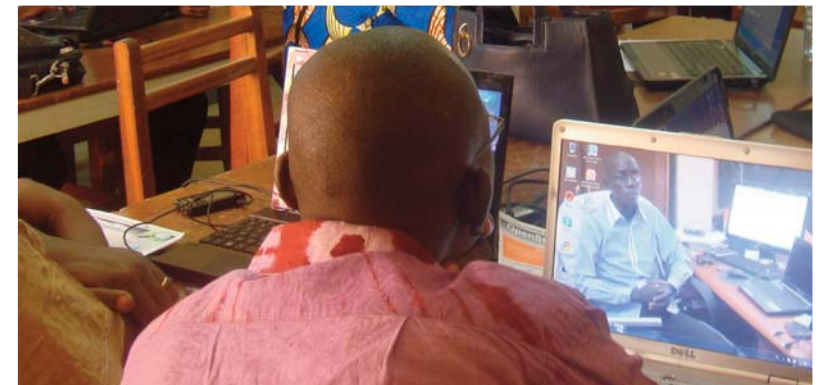


6. Close your mission

You have nearly completed your volunteering session. You are now about to leave your deployment country or you are already backing home.

In this section you will find few key activities that you should do once back.

- **Take part in the return session which might be organised by your host/sending organisation:**
 - o Prepare constructive questions/comments;
- **Organise communication activities to promote your project in the home country:**
 - o Get together with volunteers from your country and organise communication activities together;
 - o Prepare communication material for this purpose;
 - o Contact relevant people/organisations well in advance to discuss project-related workshops/presentations;
- **Write your assessment report and give feedback about the project to your sending organisation:**
- **Continue to follow and support the activities of the local volunteers you have worked with when you are back in your home country:**
 - o Discuss what they are going to do for the remainder of the project;
 - o Support them in organising feedback sessions, if applicable;
 - o Review the feedback presentation together, if applicable.
 - o Agree on a way to communicate (email? Skype?)



5. Prepare the closure of your mission

You have nearly completed your volunteer period and in one month you will depart.

In this section, you will find a suggestions that will enable you to wind down your project activities, organise feedback for local stakeholders and prepare for your return to Europe.

- **Prepare a detailed work plan for the remaining weeks:**
 - o Be realistic about what's possible
 - o Organise who in the team is in charge of what;
- **Discuss the end of the mission with your host organisation:**
 - o Are there issues that need to be resolved before you leave?
 - o Is there any equipment that will be left behind? If so, who is responsible for this equipment? Ensure that a proper procedure is in place for the handover of equipment and for its maintenance.
- **Organise feedback sessions for local stakeholders and partners:**
 - o Be open to new and creative ideas for presenting the results of the project;
 - o Ensure that every stakeholder is invited to at least one feedback session and make sure they know about the sessions well in advance;
 - o Find a suitable venue for the event and make arrangements accordingly;
 - o Have fun – it's your last time to meet people you worked with for the past months;
- **Organize a debriefing with your entire volunteer team raising the following questions:**
 - o What have we learnt?
 - o What are we likely to remember from this experience?
 - o How to continue our collaboration when back in the home country?
- **Organise a goodbye party to celebrate your achievements.**

What does it mean to be an EU Aid volunteer?

Principle 1

The volunteer must have a real motivation for a social commitment as well as intercultural and physical skills.

Principle 2

The volunteer must agree on defined working and living framework.

These principles are from the experience of EU Aid Volunteer, pilot project « EU, Local and Online volunteers : key actors for inclusive humanitarian information sharing in crisis preparedness »

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1. Introduction

This Mini Guide is aimed at volunteers about to start their mission. It is based on the experience of the 25 volunteers deployed for the EUROSHA pilot project (2012-13).

The contents in this mini guide are presented as per the different phases of your mission. For each phase, it provides you with some key questions and important points that you need to think about.



- Access to electricity supply or Internet connection may be limited, not only for you but also for the major humanitarian agencies in the field
- Thus your activities may be slowed down by an action (or inability to act) of other actors
- Here are some practical examples of negative factors that may affect the humanitarian system: complicated bureaucratic system which may slow down obtaining necessary authorisations, corruption, language barriers hampering communication with local authorities and local communities, difficult weather conditions reducing your ability to travel...and many others!

Tips & advice:

- Be flexible, especially from the “timescale” point of view
- Be able to adapt your plans to quickly evolving conditions
- Be very clear in what you say and in your communication in order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings
- Learn basics of local language
- Don't stress yourself out too much, try to learn how to accept current conditions
- Bringing things like matches, a torch, Swiss knife can be very useful

“During our deployment we had to face many challenges. For example, things were not going as fast as we were expecting them to go. We had to be very patient”

Claudia (Italy), EU Aid Volunteer in Chad

■ **Communication processes with organisations and within the team**

- Establishing regular and efficient communication processes with your partners in the field and within the team is crucial for obtaining good results
- It is necessary to make a distinction between rumours and facts
- Be objective, crosschecking all information if possible
- Meet on regular basis, maintain regular communication via phone calls, Skype, emails etc.
- Sharing ALL information with the team can prevent many misunderstandings!

Tips & advice:

- Start and finish every day with a meeting in order to plan your activities together
- Before going on a mission, make sure that you speak enough of the local language

- will have to find a solutions as a group
- On the other hand, this is a great experience from which you can learn a lot about yourself and about the others too
- Thus, working and living together as a team has positive and negative aspects
- Personal space and leisure time can be very limited
- There are not many opportunities to prepare yourself for this side of your volunteering experience – some situations you just have to live and experience!
- It may be important for you to elect a team leader

Tips & advice:

- Try to make a distinction between your personal and professional life
- One solution to minimise clashes on a professional level can be to ensure that each team member has their own duties and responsibilities and that everyone has a certain degree of autonomy in managing their own responsibilities
- Try to make sure that everyone to has their own private space and private time
- Be flexible, tolerant, listen more and talk less!
- Communicate as a team on a regular basis with a cool head and take time to analyse the situation
- Don't keep your frustrations to yourself.
- Find activities that help you to relax (listening to music, reading a book, sports...)

"Sometimes it was really challenging to live and work together every day. We would need more time just for ourselves, to rest, to talk to someone outside of the team. Another problem was absence of team coordinator and difficulty to divide tasks in the group. Communication was very important to solve all these problems in the team."

EU Aid Volunteers in Kenya

■ **Practical conditions of humanitarian action in the field**

- You will learn a lot about the practical conditions of humanitarian action in the field (logistics, communication, transport...)
- Sometimes the reality of these conditions may hamper or slow down your work
- Humanitarian action is very complicated, unpredictable and evolves swiftly (depending on the context)
- You probably will not have the same working conditions that you are used to in Europe
- Be prepared for problems with electricity, Internet, water supply, transport, etc.

2. Prepare yourself to volunteer

You are interested in applying to be an EU Aid Volunteer.

In this section, you will find information that will help you decide whether or not you are ready to be EU Aid volunteer.

To do so, read through the following questions and try to answer them as fully as possible. They should help you to understand what is involved in being an EU Aid volunteer and therefore take an informed decision.

■ **Are you in good health?**

- Have you consulted a doctor in the last three months? General practitioner or specialist?
- In recent months, have you had to stop working or interrupt your studies for health reasons?
- Are you presently in good physical and mental condition? Are you capable of working? Do you suffer from any of the following illnesses? Or have you suffered from them in the past?

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| ■ Heart disease | ■ Digestive disease |
| ■ Nervous disorder | ■ Back problems |
| ■ Skin disease | ■ Allergies |
| ■ Lung disease | ■ Other |

- Do you have to take medication on a regular long-term basis? Do you have any health issues that might put you (or your colleagues) at risk during your mission, especially if you do not have easy access to medical care? (e.g. diabetes, hepatitis, etc.)
- Are you in good enough health to cope with difficult and tiring conditions? (e.g. allergies, insomnia, etc.)
- Are you ready to deal with health issues in the deployment country/area?
- In terms of mental aptitude, what are your personal strengths and weaknesses, and in what way are they particularly relevant to this type of mission?

Tips & advice:

- Consider your general health, both physically and mentally, and the consequences that deployment could have on your health. If necessary have a general health check-up. Check that you are up to date and that you have had all the necessary vaccinations.

Vaccinations checklist

- TB
- Diphtheria/Polio/Tetanus
- Hepatitis A and B
- Meningitis
- Typhoid

Vaccinations you will probably have to add for a volunteering contract

- Yellow fever
- Rabies

- Consider your dietary preferences, your capacity to adapt to new and often rather different food and how tolerant you are prepared to be. For instance, are you willing to eat rice or goat meat twice a day every day for six months?
- If you have ever had psychological problems, consider discussing the mission with a psychologist.
How do you feel about the deployment?
What may easily upset you?
What resources may help you overcome difficulties?
- Get to know what other factors might be a risk for your health.
- EU Aid volunteers may have to meet certain criteria in order to be accepted on the programme and/or undergo a full medical check-up. Do you know what these criteria are and have you checked that you fulfil them? Will you pass the medical check-up?

"We haven't had big health troubles. We only had some stomach problems because of food poisoning (a check-up at the doctor was necessary for two of us) and some problems with insects we didn't know. One of the volunteers had some huge burns on her body and we didn't know what could cause them. She went finally to the doctor who explained about the Nairobi fly and the dangers of this little insect. Now we are warned against this little devil!"

Federica (Italy), EU Aid Volunteer in Central African Republic

"I realized it was my birthday only when one of my European volunteer colleague wished it to me! It is not something we really care about here."
Désiré (Burundi), EU Aid volunteer in Burundi

"Kenya consists of more than 40 ethnic communities. Kenyans can easily detect from which tribe the person they are facing is. It can matter during a meeting, to go deeper into a discussion or better understand this person's position. This is something my European colleagues could not always know or notice while they talked to him like he was a European."
Caroline (Kenya), EU Aid Volunteer in Kenya

■ Working with humanitarian workers in the field

- The EU Aid Volunteer programme focuses on humanitarian assistance
- Thus, during your deployment you will work with various humanitarian organisations: local, national or international NGOs, UN agencies, DG ECHO, local authorities, etc.
- Each agency may have a slightly different approach in its work
- Your experience will vary depending on the different humanitarian actors you engage with
- The same actor can have different role or approach in different countries
- Sometimes it can be difficult to approach humanitarian agents in the field

Tips & advice:

- Try to get to know as much as possible about humanitarian organisations in your deployment country
- Different agent, different approach!
- Establishing good relations with NGOs can be very useful in order to get fresh information from the field, for example about the current security situation in the country
- Be prepared: Cooperation and communication may be defined or perceived differently by actors. This might slow down your rhythm.
- Bear in mind that the majority of humanitarian workers are superbusy. Take this into account when planning your activities. Be patient and be prepared to adapt.

■ Working and living as a team

- You are going to live and work together as a team with the other EU Aid Volunteers
- Living and working together 24/7 may generate complications and you

"If we had some difficulties to work and live together at some points during our deployment, we all agree that it was more due to personal differences rather than intercultural ones (even if the statement "PASTA WITH KETCHUP IS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE!" was rather frequent by our Italian EUROSHA member)."

Marion (France), EU Aid Volunteer in Burundi

"One example of an intercultural day-to-day thing was meals. I was sometimes frustrated that my team was not showing the wish to prepare and take meals together, especially diner, until I asked them about their own habits at home and understood that meals were not organized the same: everyone eats wherever (s)he feels hungry. In France it is usually seen as an opportunity to talk and share with friends or family while eating (something nice!) together. In other countries meals may not be the moment where this happens; it can be a certain day during the week of a different period of the day."

Marion (France), EU Aid Volunteer in Kenya

■ Cultural differences in a professional sphere

- Be aware of cultural differences that may have an impact in the workplace
 - o Different perspectives in relation to time, e.g. Africans perceive Europeans as constantly rushing whereas Europeans perceive Africans taking too much time or not being on time ...
 - o Relations between men and women in the workplace, e.g. bearing in mind that it may not be easy for a man to be asked to do something by a young woman (volunteer)
 - o Religion, e.g. allowing time for prayer breaks for Muslims in Chad during volunteers' activities
 - o Ethnic identity and potential power relations

Tips & advice:

- Be patient, be flexible, take a step back from your own way of perceiving and analysing behaviour around you.
- Build your own cultural assessment
 - 1) try to understand your own culture and how it has shaped your standards, the way you communicate, the way you do things,
 - 2) accept your colleagues' cultural differences (European or local)
 - 3) see them as strengths and added value and a means of optimising your shared experience

■ Are you ready to leave?

- Why do you want to leave and join a volunteer programme?
- Are you ready to be separated from your family and friends?
- Have you already lived or visited a developing country? If not, what differences do you expect to find?
- Are you ready to give up your European comforts and live in tougher conditions? Are you ready to face challenges, such as power cuts, no running water, limited choice of food? Are you ready to live in a simple living environment with very basic furniture and facilities? Are you prepared to live without facilities such as an oven, fridge, western toilet, etc.?
- If you are local volunteer, are you ready to live with people who are not used to and/or uncomfortable with power cuts, water cuts, etc.?
- Are you ready to deal with your emotions during your mission, such as cultural shock, homesickness, etc.? Have you thought about different ways of dealing with this (e.g. Skype calls with family if Internet is available - but what if it's not?, making time for informal moments with the rest of the team, or on the contrary spending time alone, reading or doing yoga, etc.) or do you need to prepare for this?



Tips & advice:

- Don't leave for the wrong reasons! Leaving home to spend several months abroad, especially in a developing country, is not a decision to be taken lightly. Ask yourself whether you are leaving for something (such as for a new experience, discovering a country, etc.) or from something (running away from a personal situation, trying to please someone else, etc.).
- Tell relevant family and friends (and for administrative matters if relevant) that you are thinking of applying for a volunteer programme and what it involves.
- Try to think about what you will/could do with this experience when you return home after deployment.
- Ask yourself how you will spend your spare time in the field, depending on the kind of mission that is offered to you, and if this suits you. For example, if you are based in a remote, rural area, bear in mind that social activities (in terms of night life, cultural activities, etc.) may be limited, and you will have to bring books, music, movies on your laptop, etc.
- Try to gather information and advice from local people, volunteers or expats who have been living in the country for a long time.

■ Are you ready to live and work in a humanitarian context?

- Do you know the difference between a humanitarian context and a development context?
- Are you ready to deal with people facing humanitarian issues, such as access to food, water, shelter, etc.? Especially if you are a local volunteer, are you ready to work in contexts where people from your own country are facing these challenges?
- Do you know the kind of challenges the humanitarian sector is currently facing?
- Are you ready to adapt your behaviour (e.g. clothes, daily life, attitudes, social mores) if your deployment country/area/ humanitarian context requires it?
- What type of personal and/or professional challenges might you face when you return home after several months in a humanitarian context?

■ Intercultural differences in your team

- Are you prepared to be an EU Aid Volunteer which means living and working in a multicultural team? Are you prepared for this shared experience which may be an added value for you and your team, as well as a source of difficulties?
- Are you prepared that it won't always be easy to optimise the added value or to resolve the difficulties?
- Each person of a different nationality in your team may have their own working and living habits!
- Do you accept that different nationalities bring different ideas, opinions, approaches and solutions to your work?
- Are you aware that problems may also arise due to personal differences or misunderstandings as well as intercultural differences?

Tips & advice:

- Make the most of this experience of living and working with volunteers from different countries! Get to know each other, exchange and discuss your culture, habits, customs, current affairs (food, music, politics, sports, etc.)
- In order to overcome intercultural difficulties, try to understand each other's culture and what "lies behind" your colleagues' behaviour.
- Knowing each other and understanding each other's culture will make your teamwork more efficient and strengthen your team spirit!
- Find a consensus and define your team's working hours from the start. Bear in mind that working hours do not have to be the same for everyone.

4. Carry on your field mission

You have reached the deployment place where you will commence your volunteering activities.

In this section, you will find a work plan that will enable you to settle in this new environment with your team and start your activities as quickly as possible.

In order to better understand and prepare yourself for your future deployment experience, you should consider the following points.

■ Insecurity in your deployment country

- Are you prepared to live in a country where the level of insecurity may be higher than you are used to in Europe?
- Are you prepared for the fact that analysing the security context in a country may be difficult?
- Are you aware that it is often a lack of information, or a lack of different sources, that makes analysing the security context difficult?
- Are you aware that there is a difference between the feeling of insecurity and the level of insecurity itself?

Tips & advice:

- Be prepared for all eventualities!
- Stay calm. Whatever happens, try not to panic!
- Communicate regularly with your local partners, host organisations and local communities in order to keep up-to-date about the security situation in the region
- Make sure your host organisation does everything to ensure that your accommodation is secure
- Register in an embassy so that you receive regular security messages

"During our deployment phase we definitely felt insecure at certain moments. We really hope it will not happen in the deployment phases of the future EU aid volunteers, but they have to know that anything is possible. In our case we felt insecure in the Central African Republic because of the rebel group Séléka was heading to the capital to overthrow the regime. The city of Bangui was full of armed soldiers and tensions were high. Several times a day we received phone calls about the security situation in the country and the city. At a certain moment, tensions were so high in the capital (for example, when the citizens invaded the French Embassy) that we were obliged to stay inside the house."

Jorieke (Belgium), EU Aid Volunteer in Central African Republic

Tips & advice:

- Living in a humanitarian context is not the same as living in a development context. You may experience unstable situations (which will require you to be flexible and remain cool headed). You may meet people who are unable to respond to their most basic needs (food, shelter, water, health, etc.) and who depend on organisations such as UN agencies, and international and local NGOs. You may work in places such as refugee camps. Or you may be based in a village where everyone is fairly self-sufficient and nothing will really strike you! Just bear in mind that you may face very different situations and you need to be prepared for this.
- Living as a 'humanitarian aid' volunteer means that you will have to respect the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity and independence. Bearing this in mind, think about how you would react if a difficult and unforeseen situation flares up in the field (e.g. an unforeseen political debate between people from two different tribes during a meeting you organised).



■ Are you ready to get involved into a volunteer status and experience

- Do you have a good understanding of what it means to be a volunteer?
- Do you have a good understanding of what the volunteer status entails, especially regarding daily subsistence allowances (DSA) or per diem and insurance?
- What does it mean to you to engage as a volunteer?
- In your opinion, what are the positive and negative aspects of the volunteer status?
- What are my objectives from this mission, what do I expect or want to achieve?

Tips & advice:

Being a “volunteer” does not mean the same thing in different countries, even in European countries.

For example, in France there is a distinction between (i) a “bénévole”, who gives his/her time (and maybe specific skills) for free to a charity organisation, and (ii) a “volontaire” who is usually sent abroad to provide support to a French or local organisation the allowance will depend on the host organisation and on the contract. For instance, in France the volunteer there are several status: Service Civique volunteering (for people under 26) and the volunteer for international solidarity (VSI) which targets experienced international workers.

Thus depending on the sending organisation, the legal framework and your future mission, your volunteering conditions may vary in terms of duration, duties, allowances, insurance, regional mobility outside your deployment country, your rights at home once you return from your mission.

Find out about your volunteering contract and all the conditions before signing!

As well as administrative issues, being a volunteer implies:

- **Commitment** to a particular experience based on values connecting all the volunteers living and working in a developing country, including helping the community, mutual assistance, learning about and experiencing living in another culture, learning from people you will meet during your mission, sharing your experience with former, current and future volunteers, etc.
- ‘Duty’ to take advantage of this experience beyond of your volunteering activities! Open your eyes, listen, exchange with people. This is an opportunity to detach yourself from your usual way of thinking and seeing things ... and come back home enriched!

This is what will distinguish you in the field from an NGO employee who will engaged for his/her job, to fulfil a specific role with concrete duties and responsibilities towards his/her hierarchical superiors and results to achieve (and potentially more resources!).

“The EUROSHA project was for all of us a first chance to contribute in the humanitarian field and maybe even a first step to a professional career in the humanitarian aid sector.”

Morgane (France), EU Aid Volunteer in Cameroon

“Volunteers are here to add value to a community. The advantage of being a volunteer is having a first responsibility, without any big pressure to achieve big results. Also learning by doing was a big advantage. We had the chance to learn a lot of things while being in the field. We learned how to organise our work, how to work with different actors, we handled the budget and we almost set up our own whole project.”

Jorieke (Belgium), EU Aid volunteer in Central Africa Republic

“A challenge is that you might not receive the same professional recognition because of your volunteer status.”

Anna (Czech Republic), EU Aid volunteer in Burundi

“Your place to stay can be a fantastic little palace but it can also be a place where you would rather not live.”

Lenka (Czech Republic), EU Aid Volunteer in Central African Republic

“If your living conditions (such as humidity, darkness and low temperatures) are affecting your health, your sending/host organisations should give you the support you need to find alternative accommodation.”

Janja (Slovenia), EU Aid Volunteer in Kenya

■ Getting ready: PRE-DEPLOYMENT TRAINING

- Are you ready to spend time with your future volunteer colleagues even before our deployment commences?
- Are you willing to live and work with bigger group of volunteers?

Tips & advice:

- The pre-deployment training is organised in order to help you 1) gain new knowledge and skills that will be useful during your deployment, 2) feel part of a group of volunteers, and 3) know your future volunteer colleagues better.
- Get actively involved during the training
- Ask as many questions as possible in order to understand all the topics of the training
- Try to absorb as much knowledge and skills as possible, since you will be probably deployed immediately after training
- Use the training to share experience and focus on practical issues that will be most useful during your mission in the field
- Get to know other volunteers, especially those who you will be working and living with in the field

“The training was the great opportunity to get to know each other better and build up the feeling that we are part of a bigger initiative.”

Adelina (Bulgaria), EU Aid Volunteer in Burundi

■ Getting ready : BASIC LIVING CONDITIONS

- Have you prepared all the personal things you will need during your deployment?
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proper clothes according to the climate in your deployment country (do not assume that it will automatically be hot and humid wherever you go in Africa! The Rift Valley in Kenya can be pretty rainy and cold) | <input type="checkbox"/> Mosquito net, if one is not supplied in your accommodation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight with extra batteries | <input type="checkbox"/> Swiss knife |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping bag, if you are going to be based in a cool area (or a light sleeping bag if you are in a hotter area) | <input type="checkbox"/> Mosquito repellent (several bottles) |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking shoes |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Rain gear |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone and contact information for family and friends |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> etc. |

Tips & advice:

- Gather information about your accommodation in deployment country to see what is already arranged and what still needs to be done, in order to prepare yourself for your living conditions
- Be aware that accommodation conditions will inevitably vary between and within deployment countries
- Be prepared for more modest living conditions than in Europe but your accommodation must still meet certain standards (i.e. it must be safe and not insalubrious).
- Gather information about any personal items you may need during your deployment (clothes, what personal hygiene items and cosmetics are available in deployment country, sleeping bag, etc.)
- If you have not been camping since you were a child, organise some basic camping trips in order to get you in the right frame of mind and prepare yourself for your new accommodation which probably will not have all the facilities that you are used to.

■ Are you ready to participate in and represent an EU-run programme?

- Are you aware of what it means to be sent on behalf of the EU (or any organisation)?
- What does it mean to be a “European volunteer”?
- Are you prepared to work with remote support and supervision from Europe? This support and supervision can come from a consortium of European NGOs with all the complexity that this entails in running of a volunteering project.
- What do you expect from your host organisation? To what extent do you expect your host organisation to support you or, on the contrary, give you a certain amount of autonomy during deployment? Are your expectations realistic?

Tips & advice:

- Be aware that being part of a European programme does not necessarily mean working in direct cooperation with European Union representatives or DG ECHO field staff.

Being part of a big European project supported by ECHO lead us to feel like the representatives not only from our own country but the whole European Union. It also helped our credibility towards new partners and for material support during the mission.

Barbara (Poland), EU Aid volunteer in Kenya

We learned that there is not only a cultural difference between Europe and Africa, but also in between European countries there are big differences. We learned a lot about our mutual countries, habits and customs, but we don't have the feeling that our European identity is really changed through this project: we are still French, Italian, Czech... with our specificities, but are able to work together without problems!

Morgane (France), EU Aid volunteer in Cameroon



■ Are you ready to live in an intercultural context?

- Will you be able to communicate with people in the field (language proficiency)?
- Have you already shared a flat with flatmates? Are you willing to share accommodation with several people?
- Have you had a previous experience of working or living with people from different countries?
- For European volunteers. What kind of issues may be problematic in day-to-day life for a European in a developing country (Asia / Africa / formerly colonised / religion / caste system / or whatever is applicable to your future deployment country)? For example, in some cultures it is unacceptable or frowned upon for women to smoke in public, it may be difficult for people to understand why young women are not yet married or why you do not go to church, it may be unacceptable to wear clothes that reveal arms or legs, it may be unacceptable for Europeans to have a romantic relationship with a local person, etc.
- Are you ready to live and work with people who have completely different opinions to your own, over issues such as women's position in the family and in society, religion, politics, etc.?
- For local volunteers. What will you do if a European colleague's behaviour clashes with way things are normally done in your country? e.g. choice of clothes, smoking or drinking, greeting people, etc.
- How do you feel and react when you are part of a group? What do you think about working in a group of volunteers? What position do you think you will have within the group?
- Are you ready to speak a foreign language on a daily basis, starting at breakfast time?
- Are you ready to make compromises with other peoples' way of doing things? Are you prepared to compromise your standards that may be different from yours?
- Do you think that you and people from a different country can learn something from each other? What for example?

Tips & advice:

- Know yourself - and use this volunteering experience as a good opportunity to know yourself even better
- Understand your own culture and how it has shaped your identity, standards, the way you communicate, the way you do things and accept that you represent one culture among many others.
- Do not place too much pressure on intercultural issues. It can take time to know and understand each other. Sometimes you may not even succeed in fully understanding your foreign neighbour, but that's okay, so long as no-one gets hurt and everyone enjoys their experience!

■ Getting ready: YOUR MISSION

- Do you know and understand what the project is all about?
- Do you have the contact details of your host organisation's field staff? Have you already contacted them to confirm arrival date and time?
- Do you know exactly what is expected of you during the mission? Have you already had your briefing, or will this happen on your arrival in the field?

Tips & advice:

- If you have not yet received them, ask your sending / host organisation for the Terms of Reference for your mission (a written document that specifies the duration, the conditions and the objectives of your mission)
- Gather all possible information about the project and especially deployment phase
- Ask the sending and host organisations to communicate transparently about the project, including what has already been decided and what still remains to be arranged
- Contact the sending and host organisations regarding any aspect of the project that you are interested in
- Contact other volunteers to exchange information

"For a real preparation you need all the information that you can rely on."
Federica (Italy), EU Aid Volunteer in Central African Republic

"Find out about security planning in your deployment country and if your host organisation has an evacuation plan."
Aude (France), EU Aid Volunteer in Chad

Tips & advice:

- Make sure you have all the documents you need, originals, several photocopies of each and scanned copies on your computer in case you need to send them by Internet.
- Make sure your passport is still valid and covers the whole of your deployment period.
- Acquire an international driving licence if you drive and if you are authorised to do so by your host organisation
- Take several passport photos with you
- Find out about visas. Do you need a visa? How do you apply for a visa and where? How long does the application process take? Do you know what duration you should apply for? (e.g. six months? twelve months?) Do you know what type of visa you should apply for?
- Check whether your country has an embassy in your deployment country. If not, make sure that you know which embassy to contact if necessary.

■ Getting ready: YOUR DEPLOYMENT COUNTRY

- Do you know enough about the context (historical, economic, political, social, development, humanitarian, etc.) of your deployment country?
- Are there any security measures to respect and evacuation plans in case of security issues?

Tips & advice:

- Gather as much information as possible about the context of deployment country (historical, economic, political, social, development, humanitarian, etc.)
- Find out whether sending and/or host organisations have security and evacuation plans for the deployment country. If not, find out who you can turn to in case of an emergency (gather all important contacts).
- Make sure you are proficient to at least basic level in one of the official languages of deployment country (and if necessary take language classes before and during deployment).

■ Are you ready to live in a (potentially) insecure environment

- Are you okay with the possibility of dealing with an insecure situation?
- Are you flexible enough to handle unstable situations?
- Are you prepared to live with security measures, even if this means that you are not allowed to even leave the house at all?
- What would you put in your evacuation bag?
- Are you capable of packing your belongings in fifteen minutes in an evacuation?

Tips & advice:

- Before accepting your mission, get informed about your future deployment country and specific area where you may be based. Take into consideration both official sources of information, such as your Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also feedback from the field on security issues, in order to get a balanced picture.
- Bear in mind that you might have to be evacuated if the security situation in your deployment country deteriorates.

A basic evacuation bag includes

- Original and copies of passport and any official document you would need to leave the country and/or enter another country
- Basic hygiene items: soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, deodorant, towel, sanitary pads
- Medical treatment if needed and prescription
- Comfortable clothes: 3 T-shirts, 1 pair of trousers, 3 pieces underwear...
- A blanket, sleeping bag or something to cover yourself with to sleep
- Toilet paper
- Spare cash
- Bottled water and some snacks or canned food
- Flashlight, matches and candles
- One or two personal items (a picture of your family, your favourite music, a sentimental object, etc.) in case you feel blue during a stressful evacuation situation!
- A book because you may end up waiting for long periods of time during the evacuation process!

Get in touch with the field staff of your host organisation. Ask them about practical things, such as local transport, clothing, what you can and cannot buy there, etc.

"During the training session we were asked to tell what things we would keep for an evacuation bag if we needed to leave a place in less than 15 minutes. We made lots of fun about this. But this module was very useful as in CAR we had to leave the house in less than 20 minutes when rebels reached Bangui."

Federica (Italy), CAR/ Cameroon volunteer

3. Prepare yourself to go in the field as a volunteer

You have been selected by DG ECHO to be an EU Aid volunteer and you have some time to prepare for your deployment.

In this section, you will find a work plan that will help you prepare for your departure as an EU Aid volunteer.

■ Getting ready: HEALTH

■ Have you thought about your health in general and are you in good condition? Do you need to make an appointment for any specific **Are you ready to live in a (potentially) insecure environment**

- ic health issues? For example:
 - ☞ Dentist
 - ☞ Ophthalmologist
 - ☞ Physiotherapist
 - ☞ Gynaecologist
- What is the health situation in my deployment country?
 - Will you be deployed in malaria prone country/area?
 - Do you have to get particular vaccinations? What medicine should you take with you?

Tips & advice:

- Make sure you know your general health condition (including blood type)
- Get the necessary vaccinations
- Prepare any medicine and first aid material that you need to take with you (basic medical kit and specific medication).
- Consult with doctors, sending organisation, local organisations and local volunteers about possible health risks in deployment country
- If you are going to be deployed to malaria prone area make sure you have the necessary protection (prophylaxis, mosquito nets and repellents)
- Make sure that you have all your necessary medical prescription(s) (and copies). Carry these on you on the plane, if you need to take medication during the flight.
- Take an extra pair of glasses.

Basic medical kit should include

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☞ Painkillers | ☞ Water disinfecting tablets (in case you cannot find bottled water) |
| ☞ Sterile gauze pads and adhesive bandages | ☞ Anti-diarrhoea tablets |
| ☞ Antiseptic wipes, spray or soap | ☞ Vitamins (in case you feel the local food lacks vitamins) or other food supplement (if you are vegetarian/vegan for example) |
| ☞ Thermometer | ☞ Cough lozenges |
| ☞ Small scissors | ☞ Intestinal disinfectant and antacid medication |
| ☞ Eye wash | ☞ Antispasmodic drug |
| ☞ Pack of plasters | ☞ General antibiotics |
| ☞ Tweezers | |
| ☞ Condoms | |
| ☞ Calming lotion for burns | |
| ☞ Antibacterial soap | |



■ Getting ready: ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- Do you have all the necessary documents?

- Passport
- International driving licence
- Health documents: Certificate of vaccination, personal Health Record, Blood group card (if you have one)
- International credit card (in some countries it may be better to have a Visa card, in others a MasterCard) or Traveller's checks
- Assignment letter from your sending organisation

- Is there an embassy for your country in the deployment country? How will you inform them of your stay? (Existence of a nationals register, online registration...). If not, is there another embassy you can rely on?
- Is there a EU office? Do you have their contact details?