

International Volunteering - Frequently Asked Questions

There are heightened risks associated with travel during the pandemic, both to individuals and the wider global community. This, and the ongoing challenges around international travel, are continuing to affect many of our international volunteering projects. We are closely monitoring the situation and will provide updates on our [web pages](#) and via social media as and when we have them.

We can provide information and advice about international volunteering within the context of the Covid situation. There are a number of issues to consider and we encourage you to read these FAQ's before applying for overseas opportunities at this time.

1. What volunteering opportunities will be available with international organisations this academic year?

Remote opportunities:

- We are running a number of remote volunteering [opportunities](#) with our partners whose overseas projects are paused due to the pandemic. These are a great way to gain experience with an international organisation, and a sustainable way to make a difference globally. They can also be a useful stepping stone to volunteering overseas.

Overseas opportunities summer 2022:

- Many of our partners are planning to resume volunteering projects for summer 2022. We are also hoping to run Team Rwanda if this is possible.
- All projects are listed on the [website](#), and are subject to change due to the ongoing pandemic. We advise referring to the advice below if you are considering volunteering overseas this year.

2. What can I do if I'm not ready to travel abroad yet or the projects I am interested in are paused?

- **Get involved remotely** - We are advertising remote opportunities with our international partners a great way to get experience with an international charity from home.
- **Find out more in readiness for when international volunteering begins again** - We suggest having a think about what kind of thing you would like to do, where in the world you would like to go, and the projects available. Also how you might need to prepare. International volunteering often requires some prior experience of volunteering and lots of research, preparation and fundraising, so you could use this time to your advantage.
- **Ask questions** - We are providing advice and information to any student interested in volunteering overseas. We know it's an uncertain time, and there are many complications to international volunteering at the best of times, so we are here to answer your questions and help you - volunteers@manchester.ac.uk.
- **Volunteer in the UK** - Lots of UK organisations will be in need of volunteers after such a challenging year, and you could gain valuable skills and experience with [international](#) or local organisations in readiness for volunteering abroad. Search [Volunteer Hub](#).

3. How can I prepare if I do want to volunteer abroad this year?

Some organisations are planning overseas projects for summer 2022. Due to the nature of the pandemic many of the projects may be subject to change or cancellation at short notice. There are also heightened risks associated with traveling at this time. If you are in a position to volunteer abroad, including being able to raise funds and organise visas, flights, vaccinations, and (crucially) insurance then:

- **Do your research** - in terms of what opportunities you might want to do, and balance your excitement and optimism with a realistic outlook. Organisations should have lots of transparent information about their projects and Covid considerations on their webpages. You can also speak to us.
- **Be prepared for changes or cancellations** - Whether projects are able to go ahead depends on a whole host of factors, including not just what is happening in the UK but in the host-country and globally, and not just in relation to the pandemic. You should think carefully about the risks of signing up to a project when there is a risk it might not go ahead. It is important to have insurance in place prior to booking anything (read the terms carefully!)
- **Find out what your deferral options are** - All reputable organisations should have a 'what if things change?' policy that is easily available. Could you defer if you can't go this year, what happens to any fees paid or due?
- **Understand the risks, and how the pandemic might be affecting them** - You should always undertake a risk assessment if you are planning on volunteering abroad and consider the impact of the pandemic on pre-existing risks, for example the pressure on potentially already weak healthcare infrastructure in-country.
- **Check the project safety information in relation to Covid-19** - Organisations should have this information available and it should be updated regularly as the situation changes.
- **Plan your timeline and checklist for decision making** - Volunteering overseas requires a lot of preparation and for a project taking place in the summer we usually advise signing up in semester 1, to give yourself enough time to fundraise, and organise flights, vaccines, insurance etc. Think about the time it will take to complete all the tasks you need to prepare for your trip, and the latest date by which you can realistically sign up to go.
- **Get comprehensive travel insurance before booking** - there are financial and other risks associated with not doing so. Check the terms carefully with regards to Covid-19 and potential changes and cancellations.
- **Check the airline policies for flight changes and cancellations** - if you are booking flights make sure your ticket has flexibility and that you understand the policies for making changes or if the pandemic impacts on travel before you commit;
- **Sign up to FCDO and your insurance company alerts for the destination country** - and make sure you are fully up to speed with any changes, pandemic related or otherwise in that country. For example, other issues may still be at play, such as the potential for natural disasters, political instability etc., the risks of which can be further impacted in a pandemic.
- **Be prepared to postpone if you don't feel ready** - International volunteering *will* eventually go ahead again and is likely to be a more exciting experience without the challenges that the pandemic currently poses. Volunteering remotely is a great way to get some skills and experience, as well as to get to know an organisation in a sustainable way before travelling many miles away to volunteer with them.

In summary:

If there is one thing we have all learned from the last 18 months it is that there are lots of unknowns. Even though there is a vaccine, we will likely have to live with the virus, and the uncertainty that comes with it for a while longer and this is certainly the case in many countries where international projects take place. Our main advice in relation to the situation is:

- **Use this time wisely** - you can use the extra time while things are paused to your advantage and look into your options for when international volunteering is possible again and even start preparations such as having conversations with the organisation and previous volunteers, researching the logistics, and the country and culture of your destination.
- **Embrace remote volunteering opportunities** - this is a unique time and remote volunteering is a great way to make a difference overseas, gain valuable skills and experience and to learn about a different culture, without leaving home. It's a great way to engage and experience the benefits of volunteering internationally without the costs or challenges of travelling.
- **If you do want to travel abroad to volunteer** - do your research and prepare carefully using our points above and the support and advice of the international organisation and the University Volunteering Team.
- **Be flexible!** - Be aware that things might change, and keep an open mind and back up options for if things do!

Any other questions?

Contact us on volunteers@manchester.ac.uk

*Please note that this information is likely to change throughout the year so keep an eye on www.manchester.ac.uk/internationalvolunteering and follow us on social media @uomvolunteering