



# Volunteering with refugees or displaced people

[VOLUNTEER.IE](https://www.volunteer.ie)



Volunteer  
Ireland  
Obair Dheonach Éireann



Volunteer  
Centres  
Ionad d'Obairí Dheonacha



The refugee crisis may seem like an insurmountable global issue, but it can be tackled one community at a time, one caring heart at a time. This is one of the biggest problems our world is facing, but by volunteering with a few families or individuals who have been displaced, you will make a difference.

## What to consider before volunteering with refugees

When volunteering with refugees, it is important to be culturally sensitive and keep in mind that the people you are working with may have had some seriously traumatic experiences. It means being sensitive to these experiences, and if you are working for an organisation, volunteers should avail of training that prepares them for possible situations that may arise with refugees and how to face them.

To better understand those you wish to

help it can be useful to read a book chronicling the experience of a refugee. In addition to what you learn in your training; patience, the ability to work through language barriers, and a creative approach to problem-solving are essential to being a successful volunteer. While your experience as a volunteer with refugees can truly have a positive impact on the lives of people who have experienced hardship, it is not a task to be taken on lightly.

# What you should expect

When refugees first arrive in Ireland it can be bewildering for them. Navigating a new country and a foreign language is a big challenge, made worse if you have no money and are scared and alone.

Volunteers can be a support for those seeking refuge in Ireland who have been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

**The following processes should be in place to ensure both the safety of refugees but also to support volunteers and organisations engaging volunteers**

<b>Role Description</b>	The organisation should provide you with a clear description of your role and responsibilities eg the specific tasks that need to be carried out, the place of volunteering, your expected hours etc. These should be set out before you start. However, if you are volunteering in response to an emergency you may not receive your role description until after you start.
<b>Volunteer Policy</b>	Organisations should have a volunteer policy in place that outlines the responsibilities of both the volunteer and the organisation and how any volunteer-related matters are handled within the organisation. It will also explain how any difficulties can be dealt with, should they arise. Many smaller organisations won't have a volunteer policy in place. Again, if this is the case, it is important that you understand your roles and responsibilities and how issues will be dealt with before you start your role.
<b>Training</b>	Organisations should provide you with training in how to carry out your role. In times of emergencies things move at a faster pace and what may usually be 2-day training for example is no longer possible. It may instead take the form of a short video, written guide or 'on the job' training. It is important that you receive adequate training and feel safe and confident to carry out your role. Do not undertake a volunteer role if you have not been properly trained to carry it out.
<b>Volunteer Agreement</b>	This is a type of informal volunteer understanding. It is not a legal contract but solidifies the relationship between you and the organisation by defining what is expected from both parties. Not all organisations will have this in place, particularly during times of emergency, although it is considered best practice. What is important is that the organisation clearly lays out what is expected of you and what you can expect of them.

<b>Garda Vetting</b>	You may be required to complete Garda Vetting if the people you come in contact with are under 18 or deemed to be vulnerable.
<b>Attendance</b>	You are expected to turn up and carry out your role as agreed. The professionalism and success of the volunteer programme depends on you and on your conduct. Please always arrive on time and carry out your tasks as well as you can. Not turning up without letting your supervisor know can jeopardise the programme.
<b>Volunteer Coordinator/Supervisor</b>	In all cases, you should have a named volunteer supervisor or coordinator who supports you and who you can contact if any issues arise. Buddy systems may also be set up to support you in your role.
<b>Complaints</b>	Should any issues arise, most organisations will work swiftly to resolve complaints. How they are addressed should be laid out in their volunteer policy or complaints policy. If they don't have a policy, the organisation should be clear with you from the start how they will address any issues that arise.
<b>Expenses</b>	Some organisations may be able to cover expenses for volunteers, others may not. Either way this should be set out and agreed from the start and if expenses are reimbursable, the organisation will advise you on how to claim them back.
<b>Insurance</b>	Organisations must have adequate insurance cover in place and volunteers must be explicitly included in this policy. If you are unsure, ask your volunteer supervisor.
<b>Recognition</b>	<p>All organisations are encouraged to acknowledge the work that volunteers do and to ensure volunteers stay motivated and continue to volunteer with the organisation.</p> <p>It might be a simple heartfelt thank you or a card at the end of the programme or something bigger like a Christmas dinner for example.</p>

**Always remember that volunteering can be hard work, but it is a very rewarding experience.**

**If you would like to volunteer register your interest at [i-vol.ie](http://i-vol.ie) or contact your local Volunteer Centre.**