

## COVID-19 and International Volunteering: How the Pandemic Affected International Volunteering Organisations

*The pandemic has not only affected the global economy and our personal lives but is also presenting real challenges to organisations in the field of international volunteering. What must be done to overcome and even profit from these difficulties?*



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Travelling, visiting unknown places, and meeting different people from all over the world to work together on a common cause by contributing to important initiatives and projects – during the many national lockdowns and (inter-)national regulations, this has become more and more difficult and for a while, even impossible. As international volunteering depends on all the factors mentioned above, it is no wonder that the pandemic has seen several international volunteering organizations calling off their important projects and programs.

Now, with the situation seeming to improve slowly and many organizations re-introducing their projects, there are two essential questions left to be answered: What will be the future role of organizations providing volunteering opportunities abroad? How can they profit from the COVID-19-experience?

- First of all, it is of the utmost importance that organizations keep providing a platform for (international) volunteers to stay in touch and not lose contact with one another as having a social network plays a major part in international volunteering. If this cannot be done in person (as it was and, in some countries still is the case during the pandemic), they should think about creating a digital platform.
- Secondly, it is essential that these organizations strategize means to tackle all of the challenges they have been confronted with during the pandemic.

- Finally, international NGOs and other volunteering organizations need to collaborate and cooperate by sharing their knowledge on risks, travel, and various visa restrictions to ensure the safety of all volunteers that are willing to go abroad. This way, they can also easily help volunteers navigate through the different national restrictions, depending on the country they want to volunteer in. As we all know: Shared knowledge is power multiplied!

The pandemic and the “new normal” is not only a problem or a challenge but also a great possibility to re-think our old habits. Now is the time to revolutionize and improve the field of international volunteering: If these organizations manage to keep up with the challenges they are being confronted with now, this innovative and fresh thinking can have a lasting impact on the field and make it more attractive than ever.