



STUDY

# From Volunteering to Voluntourism

Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing  
Travel Trend

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# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1 The Development from Volunteering to Voluntourism</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2 Volunteerism as a Tourism Product</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>3 Respecting the Well-Being of the Child</b> .....	<b>10</b>
No to Orphanage Tourism!	11
<b>4 Voluntourism in Practice - An Analysis of 50 Products</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Selection and Preparation of Volunteers	12
Duration of Stay	13
Child Protection	14
Cooperation with Local Organisations	15
Follow-Up	16
<b>5 Recommendations and Requirements</b> .....	<b>17</b>
5.1 Requirements for Voluntourism Operators	17
5.2 Requirements for Child Protection Initiatives and Tourism Certifiers	18
5.3 Requirements for Policymakers	20
5.4 Recommendations for Travellers and Potential Voluntourists	21
5.5 Alternatives to Voluntourism	22
<b>References</b> .....	<b>23</b>

# Preface

Spending some time abroad and experiencing how people live in a different country is an impressive and very enriching experience. After all, travelling contributes to one's education - and how much more so does a trip that offers insights behind the tourism scenes and makes authentic experiences possible.

People who have volunteered for an organisation in a developing country will not only return with profound memories. In many cases, their world view has also changed: Those who personally witnessed how young men for example in Guatemala - some of them still children aged 12 or 13 years - leave at 4:30 am to harvest sugar cane and return grimy-faced in the evening at 8 pm, will be more inclined to choose fair trade certified sugar which ensures access to social protection and offers educational opportunities for children. Volunteering therefore does not only have impacts during the volunteers' stay in developing countries and emerging economies itself, but probably to a much larger extent once they are back home.

In addition to volunteer organisations, growing numbers of commercial tour operators are discovering the lucrative business field of travel and "help". Many sending organisations and tour operators design their products according to the demands of the travellers, who are interested to get engaged in short-term and adventurous projects.

In our first edition of 2015 we analysed 44 voluntourism products in the German-speaking market. According to our research, development-related learning through intensive preparation and follow-up, effective child protection and cooperation at eye-level with local organisations are far from standard in the sector.

The present analysis of 50 products conducted in spring 2018 unfortunately shows very few improvements. Changes for the better in some areas counteract changes for the worse in others. A big problem is that the products are becoming more and more flexible; the minimum length of stay within the project is decreasing.

Stays in residential care institutions for children, that we strongly oppose in a commercial setting, are still common. Despite the fact, that some of the German commercial operators publicly distanced themselves from voluntourism in orphanages, 14 out of 25 still offer such trips.

After publishing the first edition, we initiated an intensive dialogue with commercial voluntourism operators within the German-speaking countries. We encouraged the operators to further develop their programmes based

on important quality standards and to aim for an independent certification. Until today - 3 years later - this has not happened, yet. The commercial operators and their products fall short of the expectations and can therefore not live up to the full potential of responsible volunteering.

Nevertheless, volunteers themselves can contribute to a positive impact of their stay by realistically assessing their own skills, strengths, and expectations. As a voluntourist, one does not necessarily need to have a degree or finished training. However, it is important to find the right balance based on previous experience, motivation, and available time in order to identify a suitable project. A qualified physician can contribute in a meaningful way in a short-term placement. If one starts with rather limited or no job experience, one should choose a long-term placement in order to contribute meaningfully.

In many cases a responsible holiday trip or a volunteer placement at home may be more reasonable than a short-term voluntourism trip in the Global South.

Regardless whether a long-term volunteer placement, a short-term voluntourism trip or a responsible journey, the people in developing countries and their interests are most important. Using this as a guideline provides the chance for unique experiences which will have impacts that last beyond the end of the trip.

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## Chapter 1

# The Development from Volunteering to Voluntourism

For many years, church communities, sports clubs, and youth groups have been building up contacts and partnerships with organisations and groups in developing countries in order to facilitate mutual exchange. They organise encounters on their own - partly combined with work experiences. In the 1970s, students also began to organise their own traineeships in the Global South and East and stayed for a few months or even years. Staying abroad for six to 24 months has for many years been promoted by the German government through various programmes for young people, e.g. “Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr” (gap year usually taken to do voluntary work in the social sector), International Youth Volunteer Service, or “weltwärts”. These programmes enjoy great popularity.

Apart from young people wishing to volunteer in developing countries, there are also families, active senior citizens as well as employees during a sabbatical who are all interested in learning how people in other countries live and work. Most of them also wish to help and to actively contribute to reducing poverty in many of the countries visited.

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has since 2008 been supporting volunteer services of young adults in so called emerging economies and developing countries.

The support is linked to obligations: The participating organisations must for example subject themselves to comprehensive certification and the volunteers must attend a minimum of 25 seminar days for their preparation and follow-up.

“Weltwärts” considers itself as a educational programme. Since 2013, there is also support for young people from developing countries to be able to serve as volunteers in Germany.

Modern communication media, affordable flight connections and increasing travel experience of European tourists are additional factors facilitating this development and have in the past few years across society increased the demand for stays in developing countries.



Working with children is a very popular volunteering activity.

### **Voluntourism = Holiday Adventures Including the Feeling of Doing Good**

For some people, the long duration of stay and the intensive preparation associated with volunteering represent major obstacles. Many people are also uncertain how to organise a stay themselves, or they are worried that they might find themselves in unusual situations. They therefore start to look for packages as offered by commercial tour operators, which can be booked.

The concept of voluntourism - short-term volunteer services with high adventure - and experience-related content - has in the past few years gained massive importance. Spontaneously helping out for a day during a holiday, adding a week after a safari, or joining a project for one to three months - many different offers can be found on the internet and in travel catalogues. While in America, Australia, and New Zealand, voluntourism has been popular for decades, the European market has rapidly developed over the past few years.

### **Increasing Demand**

In Germany alone, an estimated 15,000 to 25,000 volunteers make use of such flexible and often short-term placements a year. Their number significantly exceeds the number of those going abroad in the context of government-funded volunteer services.

### **German Volunteers Abroad**

Flexible volunteer work  
(estimate, 2014): 15,000 - 25,000



Regulated volunteer services (2016):  
7691 (among them 3,667 with weltwärts)



**Source:** Arbeitskreis Lernen und Helfen in Übersee (2017): Freiwillige in internationalen Freiwilligendiensten 2016, Estimate for flexible volunteer work according to data of leading volunteering organisations by [www.wegweiser-freiwilligenarbeit.com](http://www.wegweiser-freiwilligenarbeit.com)

The regulated volunteer services supported by the government recorded a 14,1 percent growth between 2013 and 2016 (Arbeitskreis Lernen und Helfen in Übersee 2017). Even if there is no reliable data with regard to flexible volunteer work and voluntourism products, the large number of offers on the internet allows us to assume that in the meantime the estimates of 2014 need to be raised significantly.

At the global level, voluntourism has also become an economic factor. In 2011, about ten million people worldwide are said to volunteer outside their own country (Clemmons 2012). Today, the turnover in the field of international volunteering is assumed to amount to several billion euros per year.

### **Operators in the Tourism Segment “Travel and Help”**

With increasing demand, the number of commercial operators also increased significantly. Out of 25 operators who offer voluntourism in German-speaking countries and who were selected at random, 22 are profit-oriented tour operators. In the past 40 years, significant changes occurred in both the commercial as well as the non-commercial segment.

### **Non-Commercial Segment**

For many non-commercial operators, volunteer services are an important tool to promote engagement in the field of development. The projects are often embedded in programmes for global learning. At the same time, in the non-commercial segment volunteer services and project visits are increasingly being used to generate income: Since the 1990s, more and more big charity organisations also developed project visits in order to enlarge their base for donations (Callan & Thomas 2005). For this reason, some aid organisations also start to cooperate with tour operators.

The dynamics of the voluntourism segment have also created mixed forms of commercial and non-commercial operators offering both regulated volunteer services and profit oriented voluntourism products.

### **Commercial Operators**

The commercial segment is characterised by significant growth and by a shift from operators focussed on learning to those focussed on adventure. Out of the 22 commercial operators analysed, only three were founded before 1990. The large majority of the operators originally offered language travel tours. Only in the past few years they developed voluntourism products in addition. Especially among the newly founded ones, there are operators offering only voluntourism. The enormous potential of the segment is also reflected by the TUI Group, for example. The world’s largest tourism corporate has two voluntourism operators among its brands.



Many organisations in developing countries work with international volunteers. Most of these organisations look for volunteers with qualifications, e.g. in the medical field.

The demand for project visits and short-term volunteering in the context of packages or round trips also increased. Even cruise tourists get offers to visit orphanages or to even work there for a short time during shore excursions. Backpackers get the possibility to volunteer spontaneously: In Cambodia, for example, upon their customers' request, taxi and tuk-tuk drivers recommend orphanages that open their doors to travellers.

### Organisations in Developing Countries

For a couple of years, local organisations have increasingly been looking for international volunteers as free staff. In a targeted manner, most of them recruit applicants for specific tasks. Out of 248 local organisations worldwide that work with international volunteers, however, only about one in nine cooperates with agents such as tour operators (Barnhart 2012). Most of them use their own websites, or online platforms such as [idealist.org](http://idealist.org) in

order to point out the possibility of volunteering. Three quarters of the local organisations only started to work with international volunteers from 2000 onwards. Only one in ten receiving organisations accepts volunteers without having any information on their previous knowledge or motivation. More than half of them, however, demand specific qualifications, e.g. in the medical field (*ibid.*), differing significantly from what most of the voluntourism operators expect.

Apart from non-governmental organisations as partners in countries with many voluntourism offers, there are also more and more agents and local profit-oriented agencies. Especially the bigger tour operators often use them in order to select projects that meet their demands in terms of duration of stay and possible fields of work.

## Chapter 2

# Volunteerism as a Tourism Product

The trends in supply and demand make volunteering products more and more touristic and commercially more marketable. Therefore, there is a danger that the needs of paying tourists gain importance while the interests of the local population move to the background.

### The Touristic Value of Volunteering

For example, the commercialisation of volunteerism requires shorter durations of stay and a high degree of flexibility as far as the working hours of volunteers and the combination with leisure activities are concerned. The work to be done by volunteers must also be designed in an attractive manner.

Jennifer\*, volunteer in an Indian hospital (4 weeks):  
“The project did not meet my expectations at all. That’s why after some time we only went to do the work that we were interested in. For example, in Germany it is not so easy to get into the operation theatre, which was really exciting. But in the organisation nobody really checked whether we came to work”.

*\* Name is known to the editors. Interview, 28/9/2014*

“It’s up to you - what, when and where: You decide on the country, project and how long you want to stay. You can start whenever it is convenient for you - any time of the year. You can combine multiple projects or countries, together with your friends, your family or as a group”.

*projects abroad, 10/02/2018. Translated from German www.projects-abroad.de/war-um-mit-uns/was-bringt-der-aufenthalt/“*

The projects most suitable for voluntourism are those where volunteers can join the work without specific previous experience and where it does not take them much time to familiarise themselves with the project. Long-term development work that starts with social and political changes, however, can hardly be used for tourism purposes. Voluntourism therefore gives an outdated image of development cooperation.

With more and more tour operators becoming part of the picture, local organisations risk becoming service providers in tourism that are supposed to be as reliable as a hotel or a restaurant. However, in comparison social

work is faced daily with new challenges, many of which are unexpected and difficult to plan.

The development of volunteer services into tourism products also leads to increasing competition among more and more tour operators. Many products are advertised by using poverty-related marketing. In such presentations, the people in developing countries and emerging economies are often passive aid recipients, while the travellers are being stylised as active do-gooders. Assigning characteristics in this way reinforces neo-colonial clichés and undermines an understanding of development that builds on the strengths and skills of local people.

You will leave the country with the great feeling of having improved the living conditions of the rural population and of having accompanied them on the way to increasing own responsibility”.

*STA travel, 10/02/2018. Translated from German www.statravel.de/reisen-und-helfen.htm*



Environmental protection and wildlife conservation projects are extremely popular.





More and more round trips also include project visits or short-term volunteering.

### The Customer is King

Many voluntourism operators simplify the admission criteria for volunteer services considerably in order to send as many volunteers as possible. An intensive selection process would not only be costly and would take more time, it would also make it impossible to assign every candidate to a project.

Tour operators offering leisure-oriented volunteer positions often shy away from checking whether their customers behave adequately during their work. Projects involving children especially run the risk that people can get access to children in order to sexually abuse them. Furthermore, children and youths in the projects often regard volunteers as role models. Alcohol, cigarette and drug consumption may therefore have negative impacts. Love affairs between volunteers and local youths often cause major problems on the ground (Tomazos & Butler 2010).

While many voluntourism products cater to the interests of travellers, this happens at the cost of the interests of local communities. There is often a lack of participatory and long-term project planning involving the local population. Sometimes volunteers compete with local workers, as they offer their services free of charge.

Jasmin Johnson, Southern Africa Sustainable Initiative: "There are risks involved if unrealistic promises are being made and if the local population is not involved in the processes. Furthermore, the projects must have a long-term planning perspective. It must be checked if the expectations of both the local community and the tourists are realistic."

### Voluntourism - a Form of Sustainable Travel?

Many operators describe voluntourism as a form of sustainable travel - also because there is a considerable overlap between voluntourists and customers interested in sustainable travel. Most of the operators, however, have neither implemented an environmental and social management system nor do they have any independent sustainability certification. Statements about their social and environmental management have in many cases not been verified independently. Furthermore, most of the voluntourism opportunities are in developing countries, requiring long-haul flights with negative impacts increasing the carbon footprint.

## Chapter 3

# Respecting the Well-Being of the Child

Projects in which volunteers directly work with children in schools, play schools, or youth clubs are the most popular form of voluntourism, because the work is varied and does not seem to require much pedagogical qualification. The children may also be happy about new ideas for games, or about native speakers teaching them foreign languages. And the play schools and schools who take volunteers may be grateful for additional helping hands.

However, projects with children require special caution in the preparation and implementation. A basic rule is: The longer the volunteers stay and the better their experiences match the needs of the organisation, the more meaningfully can the projects be designed. The organisations taking volunteers cannot always guarantee that the work of the volunteers will be used meaningfully because they lack training concepts and staff capacities to guide volunteers. For example, there is a danger that volunteers in schools repeatedly teach children the same things at a low level (Unicef 2011). As a general rule, volunteers should not teach courses on their own, also in order to avoid dependencies in the local organisation.

In many cases, children cannot be protected sufficiently. There is a high danger of sexual and physical abuse, as in voluntourism projects or when living with host families, there are countless opportunities for volunteers to spend time with children or to be alone with them. An analysis of criminal investigations and

Jennifer\*, orphanage in Vietnam (4 weeks): “The nun in charge of the orphanage often brought tourists to the orphanage and showed them a group of children. The tourists could take photos with them and the nun explained in front of the children and tourists which one of them was raped and which one was not. I found this extremely shocking, as the children were exposed in front of strangers and their friends”.

*\* Name is known to the editors - Interview, 28/9/2014*

prosecutions in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands shows that a significant portion of 15 to 20 percent of all suspected cases of sexual exploitation of children abroad occur in the context of volunteer programmes (ECPAT International 2016). Many institutions do not have enough qualified staff to ensure permanent supervision in order to prevent abuse. The employees do not always seem to be sufficiently aware of the risks involved for children, for example when guests offer to take a child on an excursion (Terre des Hommes, Unicef 2008).

How children are presented to the tourists, for example in photos or in the context of performances, may also violate their dignity and rights.



Volunteers may offer meaningful educational support in class, but should not be teaching on their own.



On the European platform against sexual exploitation and violence against children in tourism, you can report suspected cases and observations:

[www.reportchildsextourism.eu](http://www.reportchildsextourism.eu) Germany, Austria, Switzerland and other European countries have their own reporting mechanisms for suspected cases of child abuse and exploitation of children. Should you observe suspicious behaviour or offers to children by a citizen of your country or should you, when booking your holiday, come across suspicious websites, please report your observations to the respective reporting office in your country.

### No to Orphanage Tourism!

Volunteerism in orphanages entails considerable risks for the children living there and should not be part of short-term volunteering. Internationally but also within the German-speaking market more and more voluntourism operators refrain from offering placements in and visits to orphanages. However, out of the 25 operators analysed, 14 still offer these types of programmes that put children at risk.

#### Risks of Development and Bonding Abnormalities in Children

Children who have for a long time lived outside their families in institutions such as orphanages disproportionately often show symptoms of psychological dysfunctions such as hyperactivity and bonding abnormalities. They are often particularly friendly and attached even to strangers (cf. Rutter 2006). The separation from a person a child is closely attached to may have considerable negative effects on child development (cf. Bowlby 1951, Main 1995). Repeatedly being separated from volunteers the child has grown attached to represents a risk factor that may cause further emotional trauma. This particularly applies to orphanages that do not have much staff and where the children lack a reliable attachment figure.

#### Dangers of Child Trafficking and Corruption

Due to the increasing interest in visits and volunteerism in orphanages, the orphanages' "demand" for orphans is also increasing. Unscrupulous middlemen make use of the poverty of parents who place their children in external care, hoping that the children will receive an education and have a better life. In Cambodia, 85 percent of the "orphans" in orphanages still have at least one living parent (Unicef 2011) and 70 percent of the orphanages have been opened by individuals without official registration (ibid.). Instead of getting education and protection, the children are usually put up in run-down accommodation and a large part of the teaching is to be done by volunteers, with many of them never having taught before.

In many cases, the orphanages are not run in the interest of the children, but in order to generate an income - also from volunteers and tourists. The situation is similar in Nepal: Here, 80 percent of the orphanages are located in the three largest touristic cities (Pattisson 2014). In Nepal, too, individuals open orphanages without licences and without being monitored. Involuntarily, voluntourism may thus promote corruption and child trafficking.



#### No Voluntourism, but Long-Term Support

According to the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, an orphanage should be the last option for a child, in cases in which it is not possible to have him/her cared for by a family. Orphanages should be as close as possible to the children's original homes and should be run by qualified personnel.

The best support for orphans without any other option but to live in orphanages is therefore to financially support responsibly managed institutions, or a longer volunteer service during a stay of at least six months. For such a volunteer position, the volunteers need to be carefully assessed. Their qualified preparation by the sending organisation needs to be ensured as a standard in any case.

## Chapter 4

# Voluntourism in Practice - An Analysis of 50 Products

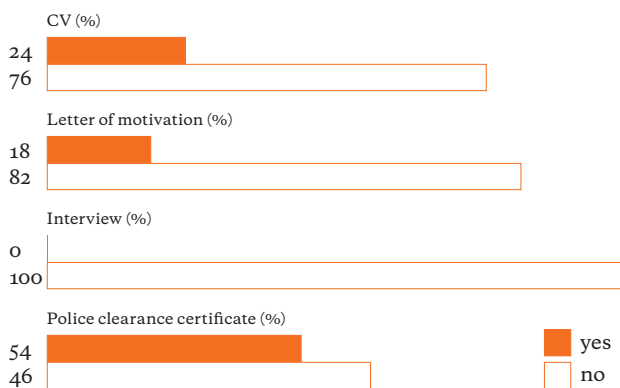
Commercial and non-commercial operators have a significant influence on how meaningful and effective volunteerism is for the local organisation and local people. Only if designed in a responsible manner a product can meet the expectations of everybody involved - of the volunteers and the receiving organisations.

In reality it becomes obvious that voluntourism operators hardly adhere to the basic rules of sustainable development and child protection. The present analysis of 50 voluntourism products sold by a total of 25 different operators provides evidence. All of them have a German website and can be booked in Germany.<sup>1</sup>

## Selection and Preparation of Volunteers

### Inadequate Selection of Volunteers and Lack of Basic Knowledge

Tour operators do not usually pre-select volunteers with regard to personal suitability, minimum criteria for language skills, or practical experience. Some operators explicitly advertise that every candidate can be assigned a position.

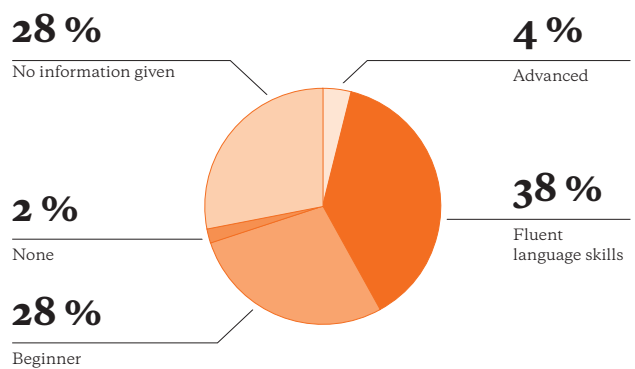


Selection Process

Out of 50 projects analysed, only 24 percent asked the volunteers for a CV and none of them required references, or conducted a personal interview before departure. Only 16 percent of the operators asked about previous job experience and not many more demanded at least a letter of motivation. Criminal records should be checked in a standardised manner. In comparison to the analysis conducted in 2014 (44%) the analysis in 2018 shows an improvement. Nowadays, the majority of projects requests criminal records in the application process (54%).

### Doing things differently! Good Practice in the Selection Process

A voluntourism operator asks candidates for a letter of motivation and for information about their experience and qualifications. On the basis of these documents, the operator develops an internal applicant's profile in the local language in order to introduce applicants to potentially suitable organisations that the applicant had expressed interest in. The placement procedure then takes 3 to 12 weeks.



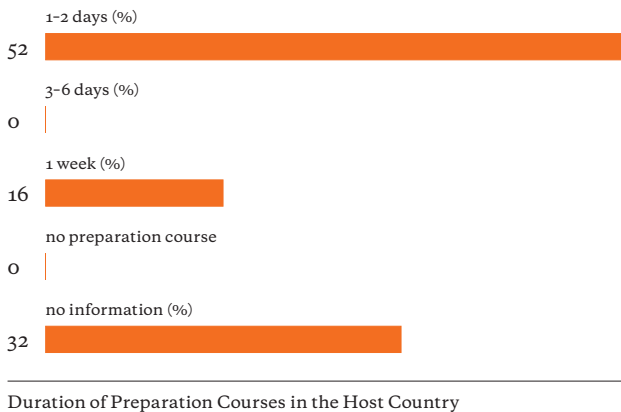
Precondition Language Skills

<sup>1</sup> As part of an internship with Bread for the World - Tourism Watch, Friederike Hertwig developed a framework for analysing voluntourism products. The results of her study can be found in her bachelor thesis (Hertwig, 2015). Hertwig's framework was also applied in this present study. The present analysis only refers to the information provided by the operators as part of their customer communication, i.e. in travel catalogues and websites, and refers to the time frame January to February 2018.

Good language skills are not a precondition for a placement. Even if volunteers are to teach English, they hardly ever have to provide proof of their languageskills. In 28 percent of the projects examined, basic knowledge of the national language and/or English was sufficient. Many operators do not provide any information regarding the language skills required.

**Lack of Preparation of the Volunteers**

Preparation also plays a central role in designing the stay in a sustainable manner. However, many operators do not provide any information on preparation courses. In many cases, the courses have to be booked and paid separately and are not a precondition for the placement.



A narrow majority of operators organises courses in the host countries. Out of the 25 operators 13 offer one or two day preparation courses; another four operators offer a weeklong preparation course. These courses take place in the destination countries and do not allow for an intensive and long-term preparation of the volunteers prior to their departure.

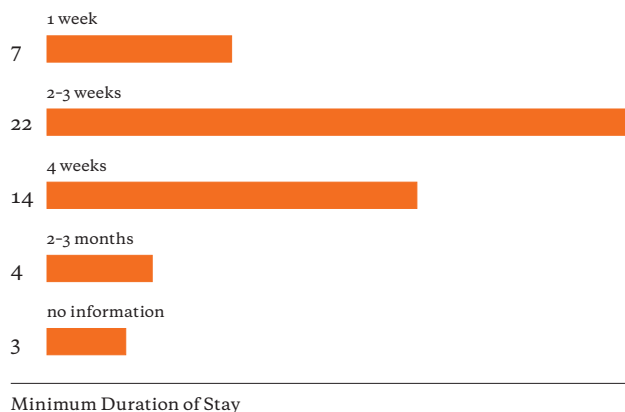
**Doing things differently!  
Good Practice in the Preparation**

An agency in Cambodia conducts role plays with new volunteers, so that they will better understand the difference between a traveller and a volunteer. The volunteers are prepared for the fact that in the local organisation they will have to obey rules and will have a boss - even if they themselves have paid money for the trip and for the opportunity to volunteer.

**Duration of Stay**

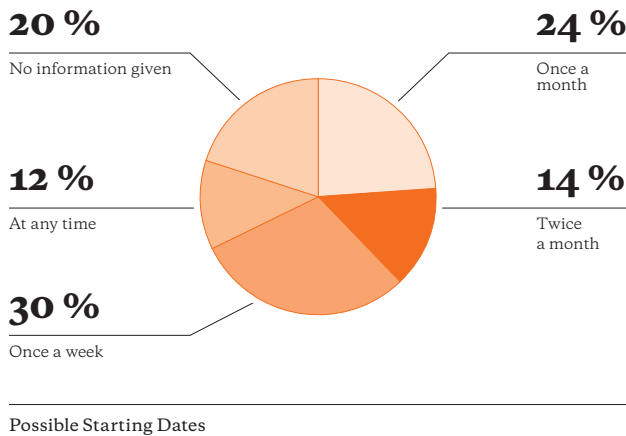
**Short Duration of Stay**

The operators offer very flexible projects, often with a short duration of stay and flexible starting dates. Based on the information on the provider’s websites, the actual length of stay of the volunteers can not be determined. However, an analysis of 400 bookings shows that half of all volunteer trips booked are five weeks or shorter. (Seidel 2017). The shortest duration of stay in the 50 projects analysed was one week. While in 2014 only five percent of the projects could be booked with a minimum stay of one week, in 2018 seven out of 50 projects were offered with a minimum duration of one week. Most of the projects require a minimum stay of two weeks. Only very few of them require a minimum stay of two months or more. But for people in the projects, especially children, the short duration of stay entails potential risks.



### Flexible Starting Dates

In almost a third of the projects, volunteers could start every week; another twelve percent even offered their customers a fully flexible starting date. One in four projects started only once a month on a fixed date. A high degree of flexibility is a considerable challenge for the receiving organisations. Sometimes they have to train new guests every week, which constantly causes disturbances of operational processes.



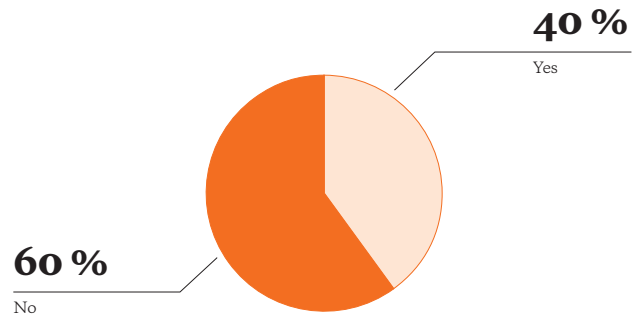
## Child Protection

Child protection measures are not a standard in the sector, even though 42 out of the 50 projects analysed include work with children. When volunteers live in host families, there is also a possibility of direct contact with children, which demands special sensitivity.

### Rules of Conduct for Travellers

Out of the 25 businesses analysed only ten have a code of conduct, which lays out rules for the volunteers' behaviour and their safety. Six out of these ten businesses have a child protection code giving their volunteers valuable guidance on how to protect the rights and privacy of children.

In comparison to the analysis conducted in 2014, there seem to be some improvements in demanding the volunteers to follow a behavioural conduct. Yet, only every second organisation has a code of conduct. If they exist, the conducts are often not binding - only in six out of 50 projects the code of conduct has to be signed by the volunteers.



Codes of Conduct

### Lack of Child Protection Strategies

19 out of 25 analysed businesses do not have any child protection policy, that describes measures taken and states specific responsibilities to protect children in a binding and transparent manner. Only in every second project (54%) potential volunteers are required to submit their criminal records in advance - even though 84 percent of all projects include working with children.

### Doing things differently! Good Practice in Child Protection

One operator has a child protection policy with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The policy stipulates that during the selection process it will be checked if volunteers or staff have any criminal record. In special training programmes, travellers and the receiving partner organisations are trained in child rights and child protection. A reporting mechanism for suspected cases of violence and abuse is part of the strategy and includes exact procedures and forms that have been prepared. In every country there is also a child protection officer in charge who is the contact person for child related concerns.



The needs and interests of the local population should play the central role in every volunteer programme.

## Cooperation with Local Organisations

When organising volunteer services, the local project partners should always be of key concern. Not only should they benefit from voluntourism financially, but they should also be actively involved in the development and implementation of the products.<sup>2</sup>

Fair Trade Tourism, the world's first and still only Fair Trade certification scheme for tourism, has also developed a standard to certify voluntourism programmes.

Selected standards for good cooperation with local organisations and receiving communities referring to the lines of Fair Trade Tourism<sup>3</sup>:

1. The local population is actively involved in the development of voluntourism products and benefits economically and in the form of knowledge transfer. Local people are not put at a disadvantage by the volunteers in terms of access to jobs and resources.
2. The long-term cooperation with the local organisation or the receiving community has been put down in writing.
3. A feedback system has been established through which the receiving organisation can give feedback on the volunteers and the amount and distribution of financial resources.

<sup>2</sup> In this analysis, only the operators' information given in their customer communication was collected. Therefore nothing can be said about the implementation of the quality standards mentioned, but there is information on the indicators "price transparency" and "type of accommodation".

<sup>3</sup> [www.fairtrade.travel/Our-certification-standard-and-criteria](http://www.fairtrade.travel/Our-certification-standard-and-criteria); 10.2.2018

### Lack of Price Transparency

Most of the products analysed are very expensive. The travellers often assume that a lot of money must therefore reach the local organisation. Unfortunately, the price of the product hardly reveals how the money is actually distributed locally.

48 percent of the 25 operators analysed do not publish any information on how the travel price is distributed. Especially the very expensive operators seem to be offering very irresponsible products (Smith/Font 2014). Only four operators in the present analysis made their finances transparent and stated which percentage of the overall travel costs goes to the local organisation.

Employee at an orphanage in Cambodia: “They give us 100 dollars for one month, that’s decided by the tour operator.” In this case, volunteers pay 1,695 euros for their stay in Cambodia. This money would be sufficient to pay the annual salary of a local teacher.

Source: ZDF/Second German Television (2014): *Das Geschäft mit dem Mitleid*. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeVgYjUYQec](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeVgYjUYQec) (10.2.2018)

### Accommodation in Host Families

In the majority of the projects (31 of 50) the volunteers are accommodated in guest houses, so called volunteer houses, where several travellers live together. In twelve projects volunteers are placed in host families. In six projects homestays or volunteer houses are offered - depending on the availability. In one project no information on the type of accommodation is provided. Not only by working in the local projects but also by living with local families, the volunteers gain a better understanding of the living conditions of the local population. At the same time, the accommodation of volunteers in host families bears risks for their children and requires particular measures and preparation for the protection of children.

### Follow-Up

Only one of the operators analysed offers a follow-up to the volunteer service with a development outlook. Some of them point out that there is a network of former volunteers who exchange experiences. Tour operators also seem to be using these networks for promotional activities, targeting new candidates. However, there is no systematic approach that would facilitate a long-term partnership with the local organisations and encourage civic action.



Back home the experiences and impressions during a volunteer service may be shared with others.



## Chapter 5

# Recommendations and Requirements

### 5.1 Requirements for Voluntourism Operators

Commercial and non-commercial operators of volunteer services are required to develop standards to protect children effectively and to place the local organisations at the centre of their products. Especially with regard to child protection they may use rules and standards as an orientation that are already legally binding at the national level. For example, this includes voluntary commitments, training programmes, or police clearance certificates as a precondition for the work in institutions for children and youths.

#### 1. Designing Voluntourism Products in a Sustainable Manner

Integrate volunteer services into concepts of sustainable travel and pay attention to social standards and the ecological footprint. This includes fair contracts, good working conditions and climate-friendly mobility. Publish your sustainability performance in a transparent manner and undergo an independent assessment.

#### 2. Ensuring Child Protection

Introduce a child protection policy in your company and develop a child protection management system. A child protection policy describes the responsibilities for child protection in the company and bundles tangible measures. A risk and impact assessment with regard to the Rights of the Child is part of the policy.

An important part of the child protection policy is a code of conduct for volunteers according to which they assure in writing that they will adhere to the rules of the company's internal child protection system. This includes rules on how to deal with children, procedures to report observations of any assaults against the well-being of the children as well as information on how to handle photos of and with children. Encourage your local project partners to develop and implement similar tools.

#### 3. Entering Solid Partnerships with Local Organisations

Enter long-term partnerships in which the local organisation plays a front role and analyse, together with the receiving organisation, what kind of support is needed there. Jointly undertake risk assessments, for example

with regard to the competition for scarce resources and possible displacement of local workers. When planning the volunteer's stay, the needs of the local organisation should be the decisive factor. The local organisation should decide independently what kind of volunteer service is needed. If you are not able to identify a local partner organisation, check the possibilities of cooperating with renowned and established institutions in governmental and non-governmental development cooperation.

#### 4. Avoiding Poverty-Related Marketing

When marketing your travel products, take responsibility for the rights of children and local people and protect their dignity. Responsible advertising also includes exact project descriptions. And it includes placing them in a development context while considering the risks involved. This puts the role of volunteers into perspective and the focus will be on supporting the project, and not on the special experiences and leisure fun of the volunteers.

#### 5. Ensuring Transparent Pricing

Show in a transparent manner how the travel price is distributed and foresee a rather large share for the local communities. Also consider the staff needed in local organisations that might for example need to employ a coordinator for the volunteers. Since it is not sure that there will be long-term financial support from the volunteers after their stay, do not claim that such a support is likely in order to avoid compensating the efforts required.

#### 6. Improving the Selection of Volunteers

Introduce tools for the selection of candidates and establish standards such as letters of motivation, CVs and police clearance certificates. The details regarding the suitability of a candidate for specific tasks should be discussed in a dialogue with the receiving organisation. If the candidates have hardly any experience, the duration of stay should be longer. The final decision on the selection of volunteers who do not have sufficient experience and knowledge should be taken in coordination with the receiving organisation.

#### 7. Improving the Preparation of Volunteers

Ensure a good content-related preparation of volunteers and avoid neo-colonial clichés of poverty and underdevelopment. In the preparation courses, also reflect on the volunteers' expectations.

#### **8. Increasing the Duration of Stay and Avoiding Short-Term Placements Involving Children**

Offer stays which are as long as possible and allow for sufficient time in the receiving organisation for the preparation of volunteers. Do not offer short-term stays in projects with children at all and offer placements in orphanages only as part of volunteer services that last for more than six months and include intensive preparation.

#### **9. Establish Forms of Follow-Up**

Establish motivational incentives in order to regularly inform former volunteers about possibilities to support their former host organisations and point out possibilities for development-related action after their trip.

## **5.2 Requirements for Child Protection Initiatives and Tourism Certifiers**

### **1. Adapting Child Protection Activities to the Requirements of Voluntourism**

Child protection measures such as the “Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism” of the organisation The Code were developed with the objective of reducing the risks of children worldwide of falling victim to commercial sexual exploitation. The measures by tour operators mainly refer to training programmes for their own staff and awareness raising among travellers. In order to adequately react to the impacts and risks of voluntourism and to ensure the effective protection of children, additional guidelines for voluntourism products were developed. Since 2018 they are being tested and will be an inherent component of a membership with The Code. They capture the impacts of business operations on the well-being of children, reduce risks in a targeted manner and develop adequate options to deal with violations of children’s rights.

### **2. Certification Criteria for Voluntourism**

Apart from the ecological footprint and the social impacts of travel, which can already be assessed in the context of sustainability certification, voluntourism involves particular requirements with regard to child protection and the cooperation with local organisations. The standards should include the existence of a child protection policy and a code of conduct for travellers as well as written contracts with the receiving organisations covering financial and non-financial support.

The operators should conduct formalised selection and preparation processes that can be verified and should offer the volunteers opportunities for a follow-up. The assessment of these standards should be done by an independent expert and the certification should be recognisable by the customers.

## Selection of Existing Guidelines and Standards

In the last few years many organisations and initiatives developed standards and guidelines for responsible volunteering. Some are directed towards non-profit sending organisations, others focus on commercial tour operators. Thus far, only a few standards serve as the basis for an independent certification.

### Certified Quality Standards

*Fair Trade Tourism:* Fair Trade Tourism certifies tourism businesses in southern Africa. In 2015 the organisation extended its standard with additional criteria for responsible volunteering products. This includes standards for the preparation and selection of volunteers as well as the fair and equitable collaboration between the sending and receiving organisations. There is a strong focus on measures for the protection of children and wild animals. This standard covers the quality criteria demanded in chapter 5 to a large extent. So far, six businesses are certified.

[www.fairtrade.travel/Our-certification-standard-and-criteria](http://www.fairtrade.travel/Our-certification-standard-and-criteria) (10.2.2018)

*QUIFD - Agency for Quality in Voluntary Services, RAL - Association for Quality of International Volunteering:* Both agencies have developed certifications for non commercial volunteering services. These standards put a strong focus on the preparation and follow-up of the volunteering experience. The certificate is the prerequisite for public funding of international volunteer placements in Germany.

[www.quifd.de](http://www.quifd.de), [www.ral-freiwilligendienst.de](http://www.ral-freiwilligendienst.de) (10.2.2018)

### Recommendations for Non-Profit-Organisations

*Comhlámh - Code of Good Practise for Volunteer Sending Agencies:* The Irish organisation committed to human rights and global justice has established a Code of Good Practice for organisations involved in facilitating international volunteer placements. The code consists of eleven principles for the selection, the development of projects as well as the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the volunteer placements. A comprehensive set of indicators helps to monitor the implementation of the code. Right now there are 44 organisations committed to implementing good practice through the code, some of which get audited by independent external institutions.

[www.comhlamh.org/code-of-good-practice-2-2](http://www.comhlamh.org/code-of-good-practice-2-2) (10.2.2018)

*Weltwegweiser - Quality standards for international volunteering:* Together with 10 volunteer sending organisations, the service point for international volunteering in Austria developed a quality standard. The standard aims to support non-commercial organisations to develop meaningful placement opportunities. The standard is planned to be advanced and further developed into a certification.

[www.weltwegweiser.at/qualitaetsstandards](http://www.weltwegweiser.at/qualitaetsstandards) (10.2.2018)

### Recommendations for Commercial Organisations

*ABTA Volunteer Tourism Guidelines:* The British Travel Association has published guidelines for tour operators offering volunteer activities abroad in 2016. The guidelines have been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and aim to improve volunteer tourism standards throughout the travel industry. The guidelines show many good practise examples and links to relevant organisations but do not include a certification standard nor any public commitment.

<https://abta.com/about-us/press/abta-launches-volunteer-tourism-guidelines> (10.2.2018)

*TheCode.org:* The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism is a multi-stakeholder initiative of the tourism industry. Since 2018 tour operators that offer trips to orphanages or volunteer placements in residential care institutions cannot become a member of The Code. The initiative encourages operators offering other voluntourism products to systematically embed and implement child protection measures.

[www.thecode.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Voluntourism\\_booklet\\_1.pdf](http://www.thecode.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Voluntourism_booklet_1.pdf) (10.2.2018)

*TIES - International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators:* Already in 2011 the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) together with an international advisory committee developed a practical guideline that aims to help international voluntourism providers to plan and manage their programs in a responsible and sustainable manner. The guidelines have a strong focus on strategies for managing and monitoring effects of voluntourism on local communities.

[www.ecotourism.org/voluntourism-guidelines](http://www.ecotourism.org/voluntourism-guidelines) (10.2.2018)

## 5.3 Requirements for Policymakers

### 1. Applying Legal Measures also to Child-Related Tourism Products Abroad

The Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, the so-called Lanzarote Convention, demands in Article 5 awareness raising with regard to the rights and the protection of children. The convention also refers to contacts with children as part of cultural and leisure activities and thus includes volunteering and volunteer services.

National law, too, has to reflect the trend of voluntourism and must be amended and expanded in the context of evaluations. Since the Federal Law for the Protection of Children (Bundeskinderschutzgesetz - BuKiSchG) came into force in Germany in January 2012, employees and volunteers in child and youth institutions need a police clearance certificate. Tour operators have so far not been covered by the BuKiSchG, even if they send their customers to institutions abroad that work with children and youths.

### 2. Sensitising Travellers

Embassies should raise awareness among travellers applying for visa to popular voluntourism destinations by sending them information and by providing information on the country websites about the risks and opportunities of voluntourism.

Tourist boards and tourist information offices should also report about the consequences of voluntourism and should point out to travellers that they should book projects only with approved agencies and should not visit children's homes.

### 3. Increasing Education about Voluntourism at Schools and Universities

As part of school education and academic advice offered to students interested in going abroad, young people should be sensitised for the development-related sense of volunteering. They should be encouraged to handle voluntourism in a responsible manner. Schools, educational institutions, and youth centres should support young people in selecting a sending organisation or tour operator.

### 4. Linking Government Support to the Existence of Standards

Governmental institutions should only support volunteer services if they have introduced child protection measures and standards of development-related effectiveness. The activities supported should be part of programmes in development education and intercultural learning. In regulated volunteer services this is already largely the case. With regard to the support of short-term volunteering offered by non-commercial operators, these standards must not be weakened, but must be strengthened.

## 5.4 Recommendations for Travellers and Potential Voluntourists

### 1. Selecting the Tour Operator with Due Consideration

Do not choose operators who focus their marketing on poverty. Neither children nor the local population should be presented as passive aid recipients in pictures or text.

When selecting an operator, also pay attention to his commitment to sustainability and give preference to operators who have undergone an independent assessment.

#### Ask questions and demand detailed information!

A respectable operator will without any problems answer your questions and welcome your interest:

- Are there preparation seminars (in Germany or in the host country) or preparation materials?
- For how long has the operator already been working with the local organisation? Where can I get further information about the organisation?
- How much of the price paid for the product will go to the local organisation and what will they do in return?
- Who is taking care of me in the host country? Are there local mentors who will help me in case of problems?

With regard to projects with children, you should ask further concrete questions:

- Will there be any special sensitisation with regard to the rights of the child? Will I get support if I do not have experience in working with children?
- How will I be introduced in the project? How will the children understand that I work there and who is my boss?
- How many full-time employees does the project have, and how many volunteers?
- To whom can I turn to if I observe any grievances?
- Is there a minimum duration of stay?
- Is the school, the children's home, or the youth club an institution approved by the government?

### 2. Questioning One's Own Expectations and Realistically Assessing the Benefits

Stay as long as possible and question your tourism-related expectations. As a volunteer, integrate yourself into the project and adapt to the local conditions.

Reflect on the usefulness of your work in projects with children: What does my work mean for the child and is it possible for me to fulfil the child's expectations that I raise?

### 3. Keeping in Touch after Returning Home

Think about how you can keep in touch with "your" project after your stay and how you can support it, so that the receiving organisation will benefit from your volunteer service on a sustainable basis.

After your return, you can also effect positive change in every day life back home. Your consumption and travel behaviour can contribute to creating fair working conditions and to protecting the environment.



For travellers, authentic and warm encounters, like here with Bedouins in Jordan, remain memorable experiences.

## 5.5 Alternatives to Voluntourism

Generally, regulated long-term volunteer services represent a meaningful option for those who in terms of age and motivation meet the criteria that make them eligible for support. The long duration, intensive preparation and follow-up make this kind of volunteerism particularly valuable.

However, depending on the motivation and time available, there are also other meaningful alternatives to the common voluntourism products.

### **Travel in a Socially Responsible Manner and Support Local Organisations!**

Voluntourism candidates who mainly want to contribute to poverty alleviation and support local projects may also do so by choosing a holiday that has many positive effects in the destination. Both the Fair Trade label in southern Africa and the TourCert label for tour operators place particular emphasis on ensuring that a high percentage of the price paid for the holiday package remains in the host country.

Furthermore, it makes sense to support reputable organisations in the host country with a donation on

location, or to financially support a trustworthy development organisation here.

### **Gather Authentic Travel Experiences!**

Many voluntourists seek special experiences and would like to gain insights into the living situation of people in developing countries. However, particularly profound experiences may also be realised, for example, by visiting community-based tourism initiatives. Many of these products include very authentic programmes and allow for deeper insights and learning.

### **Volunteer in Social and Environmental Projects in Your Own Country!**

Many volunteers would like to gain practical experience in social work or environmental protection. In Germany and Switzerland, too, there are volunteer service exchanges and various options to support social and environmental initiatives by volunteering. Many organisations issue traineeship certificates and also allow for flexible forms of organisation which are possible alongside university studies or jobs.

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## Further Information and Recent Analyses

[www.bettercarenetwork.org](http://www.bettercarenetwork.org); [www.bettervolunteeringbettercare.org](http://www.bettervolunteeringbettercare.org)  
The website of the Better Care Network, an association of international child rights and development organisations and institutions, has a library with resources on child protection and analyses on voluntourism. One working group focusses on responsible volunteering.

[www.ecpat.de](http://www.ecpat.de)  
ECPAT Germany is committed to protecting children from sexual violence and exploitation. Amongst others issues, ECPAT Germany focusses on child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.

[www.fairunterwegs.org/Voluntourismus](http://www.fairunterwegs.org/Voluntourismus)  
The internet portal "fairunterwegs" provides tangible tips and background information for travellers to help them design their holidays in a fair manner. It calls upon the tourism industry to act responsibly.

[www.tourism-watch.de](http://www.tourism-watch.de)  
Tourism Watch at Bread for the World works with ecumenical partners towards sustainable, socially responsible and environmentally friendly tourism and publishes the "TourismWatch" online five times a year.

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