

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Since April 2000, asylum seekers (people in the process of applying for refugee status) have been able to volunteer. This includes whilst they are appealing against a decision to refuse them asylum and those whose application has been turned down, but are registered with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for return to their home country when practical. Asylum seekers do receive a document saying that they must not engage in paid or unpaid work but this does not include genuine voluntary work. Home Office guidance states that care should be taken to ensure that activity undertaken by an Asylum Seeker is for a not-for-profit organisation and does not amount to either employment or job substitution. It confirms that Asylum Seekers are entitled to receive out of pocket expenses just like other volunteers.



People from overseas

People from European Union member countries are fully entitled to volunteering in the UK. (This also applies to countries in the European Economic Area – EEA). People from outside the EEA who have a visa to work or study in the UK may volunteer as long as they are still undertaking the activity that is stated on their visa and as long as their visa allows them to undertake 'unpaid work' or volunteering. Note that 'Visitor Visas' do not allow their holders to volunteer. If a person volunteers on a visa that does not allow this activity they could in theory be deported. At best, if the authorities find out, they would face severe problems seeking a visa in the future. It is also possible to get a visa to come to the UK specifically to volunteer, but this must be arranged in advance and certain restrictions apply. Previously known as a Volunteer visa, this is now confusingly described as the 'Charity Worker' subcategory of Temporary Worker status. Further information UK Border Agency, The Home Office department responsible for border control and immigration issues. www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk



Why involve a broader range of volunteers?

Although the answer may seem straightforward, there are many advantages to involving a diverse range of volunteers. Considering more of the benefits might help your organisation to identify some of its hidden barriers.

Firstly, organisations can always benefit from fresh approaches, so involving people with a broader range of backgrounds and experiences can help you to plan new projects and reinvigorate long-running ones.

Secondly, incorporating a wider range of ideas might help your organisation to improve its service and work more efficiently to fulfil its aims, whether these are fundraising, tree-planting or counselling.

Thirdly, reflecting the local community can boost an organisation credibility and improve its ability to focus on local needs. This could help you to develop new ideas or to meet specific funding criteria.

Fourthly, volunteering should offer everyone a fair chance to contribute and avoid excluding people through labelling, for example a client or a service user. Volunteering is mutually beneficial for both sides, so anyone should be able to participate as a volunteer.

Fifthly, as an organisation becomes more representative of the community it works in, the more welcoming it becomes.

You can benefit from a snowball effect as your organisation diversifies and is accessible to new clients, customers and staff and a greater pool of potential volunteers.

