

Frequently Asked Questions

Tuesday, 09 December 2008

Last Updated Monday, 27 September 2010

Q: Does it still make sense to do volunteer work in the Balkans?

A: Yes. Though the 1999 war is long past, peace-work is more important than ever! Our peace-work is empowerment of minorities through education, creating possibilities for meeting and understanding, media work.

Q: How much time passes between filling out the application form and receiving word of whether I am indeed going to be a volunteer?

A: We will contact you as soon as we can. In general, when we receive a completed application form from you, then you should hear within a few weeks.

Q: When and how will I know when I will be expected to go there?

A: When we have processed your application we will also give you the latest information on project status and need. We can then discuss with you a starting date.

Q: How can I prepare myself for the trip?

A: Read the information on this website. Take a look at project descriptions on the Projects page. Find more info resources on living and working conditions in the south Balkans yourself. Contact other volunteers and those who have already returned in your country through the BSF office.

Q: How do I get in contact with other volunteers?

A: You can contact our office to find former volunteers in your area.

Q: What kind of training will be provided?

A: You will receive an orientation when you arrive and then on-going training while here.

Q: In what ways can I help Balkan Sunflowers fundraising?

A: You might know better than us grant-giving organizations in your country and how best to approach them. We'll help you out with the project details if you help us with the grant applications.... For these possibilities, please contact our office.

Q: Once I've been told that I am welcome as a volunteer, will I get any information about where to go and how to get there?

A: Of course you will! Look at Volunteer Information , on the website.

Q: What role is there for a small NGO like BSF in the Balkans, where there are already so many organizations who can bring more materials and money into the region?

A: The nature of our work is often different from that of larger organizations. We focus on "social reconstruction" - people. The accomplishments of Balkan Sunflowers volunteers so far are remarkable when you consider our small size.

Q: Does Balkan Sunflowers involve different ethnicities in our activities?

A: Balkan Sunflowers is not about helping one or another population group in particular - we're out to work for and with people of whatever nationality or ethnic group.

Q: Whom do I contact if I have any questions?

A: Check the website and email us.

Q: Do I have to pay for my own travel and accommodation as a Balkan Sunflower volunteer?

A: You pay for your own travel expenses. Check Volunteer Information for details. Except in rare cases where project funding may cover your costs here, you would also be responsible for your costs here. Details are in the Volunteer Information . By the way, we encourage you to do as others have done: fundraise this and further support in your community.

Q: Do I need special insurance or does Balkan Sunflowers take care of insuring the volunteers?

A: Every Balkan Sunflowers volunteer will be insured under our accident insurance for the time they will be in the Balkans. This insurance is with Winthertur, the company used by the international volunteer organization, Service Civil International (SCI). Volunteers should consider this supplemental to their own insurance.

Q: How high are living costs in the region?

A: Kosovo is almost as expensive as the average Western European country.

Q: How safe is it for volunteers? What safety precautions can I take?

A: Be more careful than you'd be in a village back home - be as careful as you'd be in New York City or Amsterdam. Be prepared for the unexpected. The good or the bad might come in unexpected ways. Take the obvious precautions. Do

not bring unnecessary expensive equipment (cameras etc.) And avoid attracting attention by dressing expensively, wearing jewelry or carrying cameras and the like around your neck. You might want to take out travel insurance as our insurance does not cover theft of personal property. If you leave a camera or money visible at an activity in a public place, expect to lose it.

Q: Will I be able to contact home when I'm in Kosovo? A: Yes. Communications are quite good from the region. You will be able to get a local SIM card inexpensively. We have internet at most of our sites, and it is common now in cafes, etc.

Q: What is Balkan Sunflowers' political position?

A: Our aims are to help the people of the region bring more of a sense of 'normalcy' to their lives. A person is a human, be they refugee (from this conflict or another), displaced person, host-family member, none of the above, Serb, Albanian, Kosovar, Macedonian, Roma, Vlach or any other label, freely-chosen or not. Balkan Sunflowers is not connected directly to any conviction or religion. There have been Balkan Sunflowers volunteers of the widest possible range of religious and other beliefs; and we have received donations from a Yoga foundation, from churches, synagogues, an Islamic organization, and from other bodies with a religious or a political connection, but these grants were given with no strings attached to the philosophy of that group.

Q: What does Kosov@ mean?

A: Occasionally this "æspelling" is used. This is a politically neutral reference to Kosovo/Kosova. The Serbs refer to the territory as Kosovo. Usage of this name can imply support for the Serbian view of the issue, though this is also the international politically recognized word. The Albanians refer to the territory as Kosova. Intrinsic in this spelling is the Albanian desire for a free and independent state. Independence was declared in February 2007 and has been recognized by some 70 countries. Serbia strongly opposes and does not recognize independence. We normally use one or the other spelling of Kosovo / Kosova and various place names depending on the context of use.

Q: How do we mentally prepare for working as a volunteer with Balkan Sunflowers?

A: The situation provides challenges. It will almost certainly not be as difficult as working with refugees close to the immediate traumas of war. But, yes, challenges. Consider why you want to come. Reflections may be interesting for you, though most of it was written at a time much closer to war and war trauma.