

Dear friend,

Thank you for expressing interest in volunteering with Balkan Sunflowers (BSF). We hope that the following information will answer your questions. We look forward to hearing from you.

Balkan Sunflowers Applications Office

Contents:

1. Volunteers for Social Reconstruction in the Balkans
2. Mission Statement
3. About Us
4. Dates and Projects
5. Cancellation and change
6. Special notes for all BSF projects
7. Activities
8. Health and Accident Insurance
9. Contribution to Costs
10. What to bring
11. To bring if possible
12. Project information
13. Travel
14. Vaccinations and Health
15. Stipends
16. Food and accommodations
17. Charging volunteer costs to projects
18. Arriving
19. Living in Kosovo

1. Volunteers for Social Reconstruction

The experience of war and of being driven out of one's home are traumatic -- and we cannot change that. Nor can we change the realities of poverty, displacement and social disintegration in much of the Balkans. But we are not powerless.

Balkan Sunflowers allows non-technical people, (though of course people with skills or professional training are very welcome!), to participate "hands-on" in the humanitarian relief effort. This can bring the much-needed spirit of solidarity to the affected communities.

2. Balkan Sunflowers Mission Statement

Balkan Sunflowers brings volunteers from around the world to work as neighbors and friends in social reconstruction and renewal. By organizing social and cultural activities, we promote understanding, further non-violent conflict transformation, and celebrate the diversity of the lives and cultures of the Balkan region. Volunteers bring skills, experience and enthusiasm to societies that have been depleted by conflict, and the volunteers are themselves enriched by their involvement in community building. Balkan Sunflowers activities are intended both to achieve concrete results and to enliven and empower the participants and their communities. Through play, art, sport, work and celebration, and in

compassionate response to traumatic experiences, we serve the communities with whom we live.

3. About us

Balkan Sunflowers is an international grassroots organization that was originally started to aid the Kosovar refugees. Volunteers wanted to help in a way donating money could not. They believed that person-to-person contact is able to help restore community life, soften the experience of being uprooted, and overcome the sense of abandonment, in ways that emergency aid and political support can not.

We believe that the commitment of international volunteers participating in the local community's social reconstruction fulfills a crucial function in promoting caring and open society in countries recovering from war.

Balkan Sunflowers volunteers work in vulnerable communities in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia. They organize children's and youth activities, workshops, teach courses, provide access, etc. They aim to make life easier and more rewarding, and to contribute to a climate of trust and self-confidence in which people will more easily see the opportunities open to them. Balkan Sunflowers projects may not only encompass the practical reconstruction but also support positive interaction between ethnic groups.

We have established community centers within refugee camps, villages and towns which provide a place for social and organizational gathering, schooling, classes (such as arts and crafts, language, music, community theatre, pottery, painting etc.), organized sports and many other activities. Balkan Sunflowers relies on volunteers to achieve its goals.

4. Dates and Projects

We do not have regular training dates during the current period. Contact us directly (office@balkansunflowers.org) with dates you are available and you will soon receive confirmation whether you can be placed for the project or not. We have projects in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania. The exact places and work you will be doing will depend upon current programming - you will need to be flexible! Please look at the Current Needs page, under "Volunteering" on the website.

5. Cancellation and change

BSF strongly recommends that you make sure either that your air tickets allow changes or cancellation or that you purchase travel insurance for this purpose. It is possible that projects will stop if sufficient funding is not secured. We do not like to discourage our potential volunteers, as there are excellent ongoing projects, but there is the possibility that there will be fewer available postings. Therefore, tickets that can be changed or travel insurance is well-advised.

Please remember that the initial 6 weeks of stay is a "trial period" for you, and for us. ***Balkan Sunflowers reserves the right to terminate cooperation with a volunteer after a trial period of six weeks or at any time in extreme situations.***

BSF cannot be held responsible for any financial consequences due to cancellation or change of program or if a volunteer is asked to leave for cause.



6. Special notes for all BSF projects

- You should be at least 21 years old.
- You commit for minimum 6 months. (Exceptions with special skills or for special programs.)
- You should understand about that food and medical care are not what you are used to.
- Housing conditions are adequate, but bedrooms and other facilities are shared, and sometimes crowded.
- While we have accident insurance (see below), this does NOT cover the direct consequences of war; in other words it does NOT cover MINE accidents or other UXO (unexploded ordinance - e.g. cluster bombs). Nor is it a substitute for medical insurance. More below.
- Balkan Sunflowers houses are non-smoking. Smoking is allowed outside or on balconies.

7. Activities

Volunteers are asked to be flexible and ready to adapt to the existing work structure. With that in mind, we welcome creativity and new ideas, as well as the energy and skills you may bring. Bring with you anything specific you may need. Obviously contact us if you need anything that you cannot obtain and we will see if we can help. But improvisation will be the name of the game!

See the project information below and the “What we do” pages on the website to see what we are doing.

8. Health and Accident Insurance

Balkan Sunflowers volunteers are insured under our accident insurance plan for the time they will be in the Balkans. This insurance is with *Winterthur*; it is the insurance used by Service Civil International (SCI) /International Voluntary Service (IVS). **Look at the coverage below. It is minimal. You are recommended to carry your own comprehensive insurance.**

It covers accidents, and damage that you as a volunteer may accidentally cause to the property or person of a third party.

There are important limitations to our coverage:

- It is intended to be complementary to other insurance schemes, i.e. it covers only those items that are not covered under private or state insurance schemes. Those who have no other insurance should be aware of the limitations of coverage provided by SCI. BSF recommends to ALL volunteers that they take out personal insurance.
- It does not include accidents that are a direct consequence of war (e.g. mine explosions, bombing, shelling). It will cover indirect consequences (e.g. illness that is caused by poor hygiene conditions or by food quality, accidents due to a decline of safety rules typical for conflict areas).

- Your own travel insurance should cover: your valuables, your travel, cancelled tickets.

Coverage for accidents

- a maximum of 9.500 Euro for doctors, medicines and hospitalization
- a maximum of 111.000 Euro for total or partial disability (standard = 49.600 Euro)
- a maximum of 12.500 Euro for death, plus 3.000 Euro if 1 dependent child (up to and including 18 years of age) or 6.000 Euro in case of more dependent children.
- a maximum of 1.550 Euro for emergency repatriation in the same continent and 3.100 Euro world wide.

Coverage for illness

- up to a maximum of 6.250 Euro for doctors, medicines and hospitalization up to 1 year for the same case
- up to a maximum of 1.555 Euro for emergency repatriation in the same continent and 3.100 Euro world wide.

Third party responsibility, i.e., the responsibility of the branch/organization towards its volunteers and all other persons, as far as work camps or other placement of volunteers are involved and/or the responsibility of the volunteers towards all other persons except the branch/organization and other volunteers:

- Up to a maximum of 3.720.000 Euro for an injured or killed person, several injured or killed people in the same accident, or material damage.

9. Contribution to Costs

We ask every volunteer to contribute to the fundraising necessary for these projects to continue. We ask for a minimum contribution to costs of 200 Euros (or 240 USD) for your stay. This contributes to application office overhead, and insurance. Balkan Sunflowers will cover your basic accommodation, and food costs. Over six months, the volunteer contribution covers a small fraction of your basic costs.

You need to cover your travel costs and personal insurance.¹

The volunteer contribution isn't a fee which you have to pay yourself; you can for example fundraise (in your university, your school, your family, local newspaper, neighborhood, organization, church) to cover this cost and the travel and maybe even some extra money for your project. We may in the near future provide fundraising materials and ask volunteers to raise € 2000 before coming. A newspaper article, a fundraiser, etc. – it can be done. It is not a requirement yet – but consider trying this, if accepted.

10. What to bring

- "Contribution to costs" (€200), to pay at the office in Prishtina
- 1 photo of yourself for your BSF ID card.
- Photocopies of your passport.

¹ EVS volunteers do not pay the volunteer contribution; their travel costs and insurance are paid by EVS.

- Driving License - very useful if you can drive.
 - Money:
 - Eating dinner out, beer, a weekend away, clothes, CDs – bring enough cash for your needs.
 - Many volunteers end up staying longer than their original plan, so some extra cash comes in handy.
 - There are cash machines in main cities.
 - If possible bring some money in small bills for arrival. This way you can avoid problems with taxi drivers, etc.
 - Kosovo uses the Euro. Macedonia and Albania have their own currencies.
 - Sleeping bag. (We may use your sleeping bag or BSF bedding in the BSF house or your own sheets. Your host family will have bedding for use there.)
 - Warm clothes for the winter.
 - Clean serviceable clothes. Don't bring your best clothes and best shoes. At the same time, college "holes in jeans" look doesn't work.
 - In the summer period Kosovo and Macedonia are hot. Spring season brings lot of rain and lower evening temperatures.
 - Flashlight is useful because of the many power cuts. (Of course, available to purchase in the region!)
 - It is nice to bring some pictures of you and your family, your hobby's, etc.
 - Take some toilet paper for on the road!
- Note: Most everything you **need** is available here.

11. To bring if possible

- School and art materials including: English language-books, Macedonian or Albanian-English dictionaries.
- Children's videos.
- Books: art, computer, sciences, children, etc.
- For children's theatre we also need costumes, hats, dresses, masks, elastic, etc.
- Any thing for activities like sports, music, etc.
- Second hand cameras and films for a photo workshop, videotapes for a video club.
- Musical instruments

Good quality donated goods are helpful. If you are spending money (buying new) for some of these items, check with us first. They are often available in this region – so if you have cash donations for particular purposes it may be better as well as easier to spend it here..

NOTE: If you bring a lot of this material with you please contact our office first in order to clear your arrival with customs; they are not always easy and it would be a loss of money if you have to pay high taxes. If you are carrying a lot, try to prearrange approval with your airline. Many are cooperative. But if you do not check you could end up spending a lot on extra luggage costs. **Do not pack in large heavy suitcases.** Don't bring too much personal material – there is not room in BSF houses.

12. Projects

Macedonia:

Klanica Roma Children's School Project. This Skopje program works with some of the poorest of the poor. Most of the children do not attend school. Our education program includes kindergarten, catch-up schooling, and help for children who do become enrolled in school.

Albania:

Roma Children's Project. We have a good educational program with Roma children. However, we do not have funding for international volunteers. We can accept completely self-funding volunteers.

Kosovo:

In Kosovo now there are some great projects working:

- **Plemetina program.** There have been many projects here. Current work includes a kindergarten, youth activities, and support for community development.
- **Community Activists Network.** With one phase complete, a new phase will begin in 2006. A European Voluntary Service program, to support young volunteers to work with local youth to decide what they want to do in their communities – and do it. Apply through VIA Netherlands, SCI France, CVS Bulgaria, OWA Poland, SCI Romania, SCI Hungary, SCI Germany, SCI Sweden and Balkan Sunflowers Euskadi.
- **Gracanica Education Center.** Includes kindergarten, starting school program (language support), homework help, and extra-curricular programs.
- **Great Films that Change Our World.** This project intends to put outstanding feature films on political and human rights themes on Kosovo-wide television.
- **The Roma and Ashkalia Documentation Center.** The RADC works on advocacy and information for these minority communities. Our volunteer works as support, project development, and consultant with the Center.

In addition to normal needs, we are particularly looking for people who might be interested in working with our team in Prishtina, with strong backgrounds in:

- Financial control, accounting, budget design and management
- Development: grant writing and donor relations
- Administration

13. Travel and visas

For Kosovo a VISA is required, and issued only at the border. With an invitation letter from Balkan Sunflowers there should be no problem entering.

Visas are required for many nationalities for Macedonia or Albania, or passing through other countries to Kosovo. You can check further – or better, double check – with the relevant embassy in your country or the sites below.

<http://www.embassyworld.com/embassy/yugoslavia>

<http://www.embassyworld.com/embassy/macedonia>

<http://www.embassyworld.com/embassy/albania.htm>

Even if coming to Kosovo, we recommend you check if you need a visa to enter Macedonia. If you can get a visa for the period you are in Kosovo, a Macedonian visa will allow you freer travel to other locations, and easier get away weekends, and participation in Balkan Sunflowers programs that may be in Macedonia.

14. Vaccinations

What vaccinations and medicines are necessary partly depends on your personal attitudes as well as on where you are from; be sure to ask your doctor about the details.

- Recommended by some as 'definitely needed': Typhoid, Hepatitis A, also suggested boosters for Tetanus and Polio.
- If you want Hepatitis B, remember this takes two weeks unless you ask for the 'accelerated route'.
- If you mention to their local practice nurse that you are a voluntary worker, the inoculations could cost you nothing.
- For general travel health info not limited to the USA:
<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>
- For USA requirements and recommendations (may be useful to residents of other countries):<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/easteurp.htm>

15. Stipends

If you dedicate yourself as a long term volunteer, we may provide you a stipend, but only after you have been a volunteer for 2 full months.

- Stipends will not be paid for the first month of voluntary work. As stipends are paid at the end of the month worked, in practice that means that a stipend may be paid at the end of the second month.
- Stipends are applied for with the country coordinator(s).
- The stipend will be € 160.
- Stipends will be paid where a funded project has a budget line of support for the BSF volunteer / consultant. This budget line includes not only the stipend, but other support costs. If no project supports the volunteer, a stipend will not be paid.
- For some positions, there will be volunteer support entered as other budget lines in projects – for example, if we can charge a project for financial management, that will support paying a financial coordinator.

16. Food and Accommodation

- Normally new volunteers will live in a host community with a host family.
- BSF will provide € 150 for food and accommodation to a host family.
- If after 3 months with a host family, a volunteer decides to live on their own, with approval of Kosovo coordinator, then the same amount can be allocated for their food and accommodations. Costs beyond that are their own responsibility. Damages or costs for any accommodation they take are their responsibility. As they are considered a representative of BSF, even if they are contracting privately for a flat, they are responsible to keep the flat clean and presentable, repair any damages, replace anything broken, and maintain it in good order.
- A volunteer living in a BSF flat/house will have allocated € 75 for their share of house food and household materials. This is not personal money; it is allocated for the house. The balance of the allocation (normally 150) is toward rent, utilities, etc.

- BSF does not provide other food allowances – eating out, etc.

17. Charging Volunteer support to projects

BSF attempts to include support costs for volunteers in project proposals. We are not able to do this in all projects. It is approximate, and depends on a variety of factors, but we attempt to use the volunteer support budget line this way:

- The support line we seek is, currently, € 600 per month.
- Roughly, this € 600 covers:

○ Stipend	160
○ Food/housing	150
○ Insurance	30
○ Travel	25
○ Communications	25
○ Language tutor	50
○ Small projects	50
○ BSF	110
Total	600
- Any unspent portion (first month of volunteer service, otherwise unspent from budgets) are for general BSF use.
- All expenses must be supported by expense receipts.

18. Arriving

Normally, if we know when you will arrive, we will meet your airplane or bus. We will work something out with you if that is not possible. If you are not being met by BSF, taxis are available. You should have small bills in order to have some control in what you pay. Taxis in Kosovo are generally quite fair – except perhaps coming from the bus station or airport. Normally, taxis in Prishtina cost €2-2.50 to get most places. From the bus station, expect to pay €5.00. If you are traveling light and want to avoid the extra costs, you can walk out of the bus station and find a taxi with a meter. From the airport, pay no more than €15 (true of both Skopje airport to Skopje, and Prishtina airport to Prishtina.)

In Prishtina, the BSF office is in the Youth, Sports and Culture Hall, or the “Sports Center”, also called Boro e Ramiz. It is across from UN headquarters. It is in the same building as the British Council, on the floor above the British Council, next to the library. Our house is nearby, in the center of Prishtina, near the OSCE headquarters. It is on Fehmi Agani Street, near the Health House, and almost across the street from the “Samurai” (honest!) restaurant. Both of the locations are very easy for taxis to find.

19. Living in Kosovo

Kosovo/a is an ex-war area, and there are associated risks. Day-to-day life is safe, but mines and unexploded ordinance remain a threat. Danger is minimal, if you follow the mine safety guidelines distributed to you on arrival.

The biggest safety risk is auto accidents, either as a passenger or pedestrian. Practice safety: minimize night travel, wear seatbelts, take care when walking, etc. There is no drinking and driving. While real risks remain, mine accidents are down to a couple per

year, and violent crime rates are lower than in many western countries. Traffic safety is improving.

Ethnically motivated assaults, both against property and people, has steadily declined. The violent elements of society are still there. As an international you are not a target for violence. However, internationals should expect to be treated more and more like everybody else, and should exercise the normal caution. People may assume that any NGO employee is rich, and you may as a result be a target of 'ordinary' violence and theft. Bring only what you are prepared to lose, get appropriate travel insurance, and take appropriate precautions.

In late 2005, "status talks" about the future status of Kosovo - independence, conditional independence, more than autonomy, autonomy - are beginning. It is possible that violence will be used by groups who feel their interests are not being met.

As regards potential violence against women, none of our volunteers has been harmed. There have been intimidating incidents, in an overall positive environment. We have safety guidelines. For many women, the level or kind of inappropriate interest (remarks, staring) that may be expressed here is upsetting.

Volunteers may live in a BSF house/apartment or with a host family. Increasingly, we aim to place most volunteers with a host family for at least part of their stay. Volunteers who have done so often report that they have found a new family, gotten a better sense of the community, and with a little effort have developed language proficiency. Living with host families involves - as does living in a BSF house - a loss of privacy. Food may be simple, though usually host families are extremely concerned that the volunteer eat - and eat! Local food may be cooked in more oil and have more salt than you are used to. Diets are not vegetarian. Most local people smoke.

Kosovo has our largest international volunteer group. There is usually a lot of contact among the volunteers - after meetings and trainings, on weekends, etc.

