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**BE BOLD,  
BECOME A VOLUNTEER!**



Vabatahtlike **Värav**





# BE BOLD, BECOME A VOLUNTEER!

This article is for you if you have only recently moved from another country to live in Estonia. We are delighted that you have found a home with us. In order to become more familiar with our language, culture, and people, we encourage you to consider volunteering.

## WHO IS A VOLUNTEER?

**In Estonia, we consider the following activities as volunteering:**

- what is done voluntarily, not compulsorily or coercively;
- for which no financial or other material consideration is received, although the benefit may be of another nature; such as necessary knowledge and skills or new acquaintances;
- which takes place outside of your home and family, for the benefit of someone else or society at large.

## IT IS ESTIMATED THAT ONE OUT OF TWO PEOPLE LIVING IN ESTONIA HAS BECOME A VOLUNTEER.

With the help of volunteers, many wonderful and powerful things are born in Estonia; volunteers work in various fields, starting from internal security all the way to culture and sports. In summary: there are many different ways to volunteer, and one can certainly find a satisfying and suitable role in the field of interest.

In order to make volunteering more accessible and easier for people coming from another cultural area, the Movement Kodukant and the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior are implementing a project "Promotion of Volunteering of New Immigrants in Estonia." For example, the Volunteer Gate, which gathers volunteering information, has been translated into English and Russian. This guide has also been prepared in the framework of this project. Our activities were funded by the European Social Fund and the Estonian state.

## WHY VOLUNTEER?

If you have only recently moved to Estonia, you will certainly notice a lot of unique phenomena, customs, and other things that do not seem familiar to you.

Perhaps the way Estonians conduct their business seems strange, or you feel that they are cold and distant in terms of communication manners. If you want to better understand Estonian society, make acquaintances and form friendships, and practice the Estonian language, we definitely recommend that you consider volunteering.

## BY VOLUNTEERING YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- improve learning / practicing Estonian;
- become familiar with local life and customs;
- get to know Estonian work culture;
- meet new people and make new acquaintances;
- learn new skills and refine existing ones;
- apply your skills: you will most certainly have the skills, knowledge, and experience that NGOs in Estonia are in dire need of;
- do work that can later be included in the CV;
- feel good by doing good!

## AS A VOLUNTEER YOU CAN DO A LOT OF GOOD:

- your new community and living environment will benefit from your skills, knowledge, and experience;
- you can improve the lives of people in the community.
- you can help improve the living environment of your new home;
- you can share knowledge and experience about your culture and traditions;
- you will help create an open and inclusive community.



## SOME EXAMPLES OF AREAS INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS

In Estonia, the most popular areas of volunteering are the **promotion of local life** and **the protection of the environment and nature conservation**. If you live in a nice urban area or a smaller community, it is definitely worth exploring whether there is a **community** or **village association**. On environmental issues, the Estonian Nature Foundation offers opportunities for volunteering through **nature initiatives**. Of course, every spring in Estonia, the world-famous **Let's Do It** will take place, where everyone, including you, will find enough to do!

**Youth organizations** where you can, among other things, very consciously develop new skills, are eager to involve volunteers. If you are interested in **sports**, it is definitely worthwhile to look for the sports movement Scult. **Animal shelters** and several smaller associations deal with helping animals in distress.

There are also many opportunities in the cultural field to get involved. For example, **the Black Nights Film Festival, Design Night, Opinion Festival, Tallinn Music Week** and many others involve volunteers. All you have to do is react quickly when volunteer recruitment campaigns launch. Volunteers are constantly involved in museums as well as the **Science Center AHHAA** in Tartu and the **Central Library** in Tallinn.

There are also many opportunities for volunteering in the **social field**, for example the **Food Bank** is very happy with any volunteer helping hand.

Here are just a few examples to get your thoughts flowing. There are, of course, hundreds of other interesting opportunities.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Undoubtedly, you may have a variety of questions when you start looking for and choosing volunteer work. We strongly recommend that you familiarize yourself with the good practice of volunteering ([see](#)) and ([see](#)) which describes recommended codes of conduct for both volunteers and those involving volunteers.

### • Can volunteering cause additional costs?

As a general rule, we assume that since a volunteer already contributes time and skills, he or she should not pay for doing it. Good practice in volunteering also recommends that the NGO should cover the direct costs related to volunteering. For example, it is customary for the involving organization to compensate for the volunteer's transportation costs and other direct costs incurred during the volunteering activity (e.g., materials needed to conduct a workshop). Unfortunately, not all organizations have the resources to cover the costs, and it would be a good idea to negotiate the facts with each other before starting and, if necessary, to fix them in writing.

### • I don't speak Estonian very well. Are there any suitable volunteering activities for me?

It is possible that the representatives of some organizations are frightened by the fact that you do not speak Estonian (very well). However, there are plenty of organizations that can offer appropriate roles even when your Estonian is not yet very fluent. What's more, volunteering is a great way to learn and practice a language!

### • How much time does volunteer work take?

You can choose it yourself. There are a lot of different roles on offer, which require a contribution of very different amounts of time. When looking for and choosing an activity for volunteering, think carefully about your options. Would you like to volunteer little by little and rarely? Or would you be willing to contribute a few hours each week, for example? Would you be ready to volunteer on-site at the organization or even online? Be accurate and honest about your time opportunities when dealing with organizations involving volunteers, do not make empty promises.

### • I could volunteer, but where do I look for a suitable activity?

It is a good idea to start your search at the Volunteer Gate, which has information in Estonian, English, and Russian.

It is definitely worth asking for advice and information from friends and acquaintances living in Estonia. If you live in a smaller area, find out if you have a community (such as a village or settlement) association and contact them. You can start your search on the local government website: local associations are often listed there.



## TIME TO GET STARTED!

### ASK YOURSELF:

- What would interest me?
- How much time do I have?
- What are my strengths? What are my skills and talents?
- What can I offer/teach others?
- What kind of experience am I looking for?

### FIND OUT ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S CAPABILITIES:

- Does the offered role meet my expectations and time capabilities? Is it of interest to me?
- Does the association offer me counseling and/or training to get started?
- Would the organization provide me with a specific contact person to contact in case of problems?
- Does the organization seem open and ready to receive me?



## WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES ASSOCIATED WITH VOLUNTEERING?

There is no law governing volunteer work in Estonia, and thus voluntary activities may be arranged somewhat differently from organization to organization. For example, in some organizations, contracts are concluded with volunteers, and in some organizations, they are not. Find out how the work is arranged in the organization you are interested in.

Fulfill your commitments. It is extremely important to be in the agreed place at the right time and to complete things by the agreed time. Be sure to let us know if something is incomprehensible or impossible for you, or for some reason cannot be done by the agreed time or in an agreed form. Read more about volunteering in a good practice document or work organization documents of the organization. It is always wise to agree on the organization's expectations and your responsibilities before you begin volunteering. If the organization does not tell you its expectations, be sure to ask!

As a volunteer, feel free to share your skills and experience. Listen and explain. Sometimes you have to be patient to match your habitual work style with that of the organization where you volunteer.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON VOLUNTEERING IN ESTONIA?

See more at the Volunteers Gate: <https://vabatahtlikud.ee/>