

A photograph of a group of six people running away from the camera in a desert landscape at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow over the scene. The people are dressed in casual athletic wear. A central white rectangular overlay contains the text.

FIRST STEPS TO BECOME A RESPONSIBLE INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER



INTRODUCTION

In this short manual, we want to explain you how to move the first steps in the international voluntary service's world. Because some time the problem is exactly this: where do I start? We want to clarify which are the different paths a volunteer can follow, helping you to get in direct contact with the right associations, avoiding intermediary costs. You will discover how the path to access the world of volunteering is built on a series of "steps" which involve essentially two main spheres: the KNOWLEDGE and understanding and the CHOICE and analysis of the possibilities. But everything comes from an interest and a passion that can be nurtured. We wish you an enjoyable reading and we hope that downloading this short guide is only the "first step" towards a beautiful solidarity adventure!

Team Ayni

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INTEREST

02

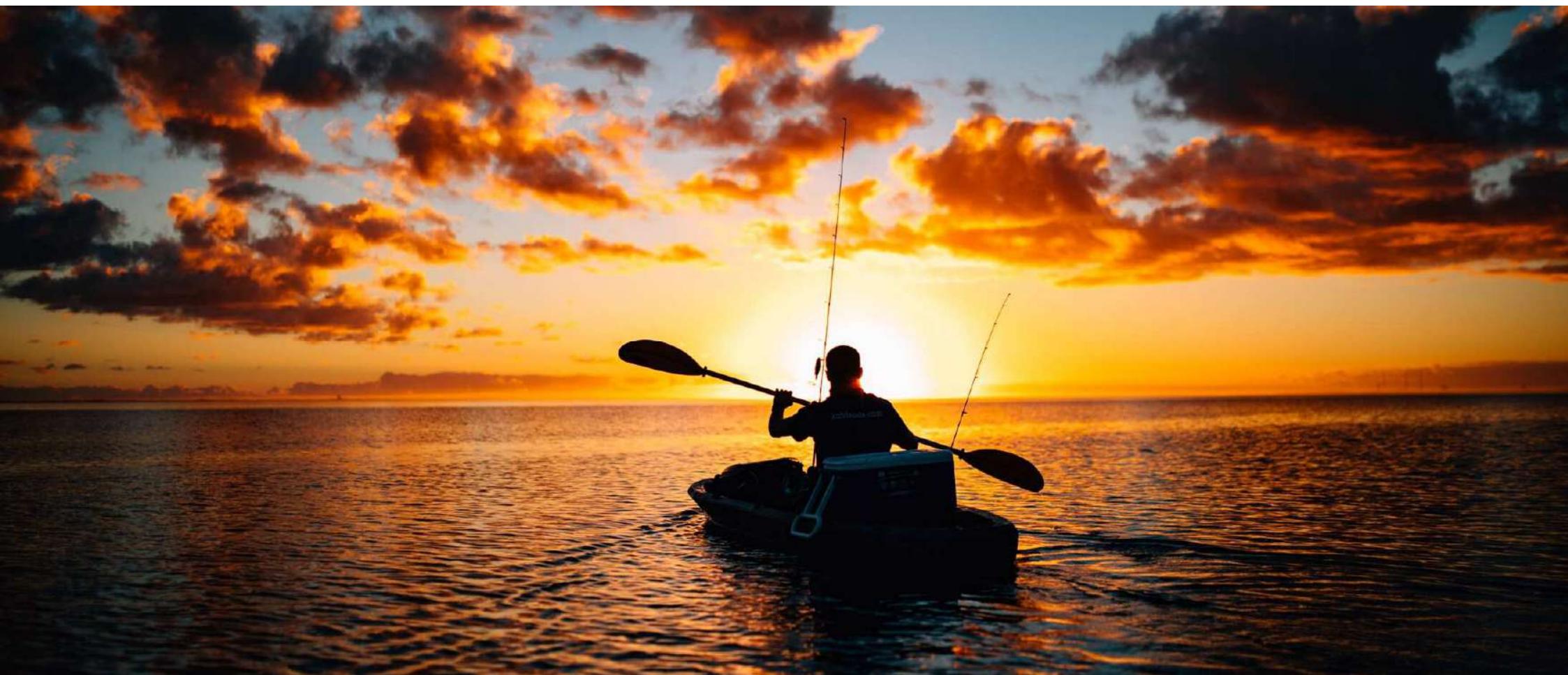
KNOWING

03

CHOOSING

04

GET READY



- INTEREST

It could seem obvious, but get passionate and especially get interested about international development topics are fundamental for a volunteer. Where does it come from and how is that interest nurtured?

Every day, through TV, smartphone, radio or newspapers, we receive a great amount of news about:

- Wars
- Injustices
- Discriminations
- Inequalities

How do you react to these news? Do you passively accept that this is the reality of things and you change channel? Maybe not...

01

01

The first step to become an international volunteer is the INTEREST for what is happening on the Earth on an economic, social, cultural and environmental level. It means to look beyond the borders of our little world to recognize that there are other worlds (connected to ours). They are fascinating worlds, far or close, that are often dealing with exploitation, inequalities or conflicts.

From the interest, PASSION can arise. If you also feel that socio-economical inequalities and environmental problems concern you, no matter the geographical distance, you did your first step to become a responsible international volunteer. Welcome!



2. KNOWING AND UNDERSTANDING THE VOLUNTARY SERVICE

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We started off on the right foot, but obviously we are not volunteers yet (if not in the spirit)! How do we proceed? The first thing to do is try and get to know the world of the voluntary service abroad, in order to understand how we (with our characteristics and skills) can become part of it.

A) KNOWING THE CONTEXT

Banal question, maybe. But do we all know who are the international volunteers working for and why? In which contexts do they work? Why their presence is so important for international cooperation? And, about that, do we know that the volunteers are not cooperants?

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The international voluntary service is an activity set in the international cooperation domain. The volunteer has two fundamental functions in that field:

1. Spread in his/her own community and at a global level, positive behavioral models (solidarity, interculturality, sustainability, etc.) by creating invisible nets and connections among the communities.
2. Give an impartial support in low resources contexts (disadvantaged associations and communities)

If you think you cannot fully understand what is the meaning of cooperation and international voluntary service, if you feel you do not know the differences among the various associations and institutions, it is fundamental to deepen your knowledge. Infact, it is in that context that you will find your path to become international volunteers.

[Read more on Ayni School \(unit 1\)](#)

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B) KNOWING OURSELVES

It is as much important to also understand:

- With which skills and competencies we can contribute to the world of the voluntary service
- What do we expect from this experience in terms of human growth, personal or professional

In order to answer these questions, it is useful to have an idea of what can the usable competencies be in the world of the voluntary service and understand how the experience that we wish to live can help us in our growth path.

[Read more on Ayni School \(unit 4\)](#)

The steps that follow lose their meaning if we are not able to answer these two questions! So, do not ignore them but face them with all the possible honesty.



3 CHOOSING

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Once we understood the world of cooperation and international solidarity, and thought about what are we looking for and what can we offer, here we are at the core of our little manual: choosing the PATH of the ASSOCIATION or organization we want to collaborate with.

A) CHOOSING THE PATH

What do we mean with the term "path"? We refer to the kind of voluntary service a person wishes to do. Because the voluntary service is wide! Do not think that the different paths are, in the end, equivalent. There are very different experiences, with different objectives and prerequisites.

The volunteer can be:

FINANCED (COSTS COVERAGE)

- Through institutional programs (Civil Service, EU Aid Volunteers, Solidarity European Bodies...)
- Partial financing by some NGOs

Where to find it:

- Official pages of the above-mentioned programs (some references on our [homepage](#))
- Some associations in the [Ayni Network](#)

NOT FINANCED (SELF-FINANCED)

With NGOs and associations which do not have funds to cover the expenses of the volunteers.

- Platforms like [Ayni Network](#)
- Info Point for youths in your city

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MISSION (GROUPS OF VOLUNTEERS)

It concerns especially Italian no-profit institutions which offer training and coordination for a group departure.

Where to find it

- Platforms like [Ayni Network](#)
- [Ayni Groups](#)

AUTONOMOUS VOLUNTARY SERVICE

It concerns primarily local (abroad) and community institutions. The volunteer travels autonomously and is welcomed as soon as he/she gets in the place.

- Platforms like [Ayni Network](#)

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SHORT LENGTH

Ideal for who has specific competencies (counselors, doctors, etc.) or who is looking for a human and cultural experience.

Where to find it:

- Platforms like Ayni Network
- Info Point for Youths

MEDIUM/LONG LENGTH

Ideal for who wants to develop new personal and professional skills.

- Platforms like Ayni Network

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WITH AN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE

When the volunteer relies on an Italian association that does not directly manage a development project, but it has different partners in the world that does it (sending organization + welcoming organization)

Where to find it:

- Some references on our [homepage](#)
- Info Point for Youths

WITH AN ASSOCIATION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When the volunteer agrees directly with the association that manages the development projects, either internationally or locally (welcoming organization only)

- Platforms like [Ayni Network](#)

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GENERIC

A path that doesn't request particular skills or previous professional competencies. The prerequisites are generic.

Where to find it:

- Platforms like Ayni Network

SPECIALIZED/PROFESSIONALIZING

Collaboration that requests professional/academic competencies, skills and knowledge. It is necessary to meet the specific prerequisites.

- Platforms like Ayni Network
- Website of specialized associations (like Doctors Without Borders for doctors)
- Above-mentioned financed programs, such as Civil Service or UN Volunteers

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HOW DO I UNDERSTAND WHICH PATH IS BETTER FOR ME?

You are young, flexible and want to gain useful experiences for your career

→ Try with financed and/or professionalizing programs. Prefer the long lengths and avoid intermediaries.

You are at your first steps, you don't travel a lot and don't speak foreign languages really good.

→ Go with an international voluntary service association for a voluntary camp or choose the Missions/Groups for volunteers.

You have a degree or a professional who wants to give value to your competencies through a specialized collaboration.

→ Choose the Autonomous voluntary service or the Missions and avoid all unnecessary intermediaries. The length is not relevant but it is important that the program you select is for specialized volunteers.

If you want to do voluntary service as an educational experience during summer holidays.

→ You can choose the Autonomous voluntary service, the Missions or the propositions of the international voluntary service associations. The voluntary service will probably be generic and short.

Do you understand now why knowing yourselves, your own resources and objectives is part of step number 2? Because without knowing what can we offer and what do we expect from the experience is impossible to choose your own path for the voluntary service.

B) CHOOSING THE ASSOCIATION

Once we choose for the “path”, it is important to focus on the choice of the association. You must look at 3 things in an association:

- Sector of action/mission/cause
- The program of the voluntary service
- Organigram/structure of the association

1. Sector

The volunteers are involved in a wide range of sectors, such as the education, the environment, the community, the rights of women, the cultural preservation, and so on. It is important to choose an association that works for a cause in which we believe or that we consider important.

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2. The program

It is the voluntary's Job Description. It is important to search for the duties, the work rhythms, the responsibility level, the activities, etc. Does the association proposition correspond to what we are looking for?

3. Organigram

The structure of the organization really influences the experience lived by the volunteer. In a big and international association, you will live a different experience compared to a small reality, almost familial or communitarian. There is not right or wrong!

BIG ORGANIZATION:

Punctuality, resources, siding professionals of cooperation, procedures and systematic approach...

SMALL ORGANIZATION:

Welcoming environment, interpersonal relationships, contact with the local element, possible disorganization...

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WHAT DO I HAVE TO LOOK FOR IN AN ORGANISATION WITH A GOOD VOLUNTARY SERVICE PROGRAM?

Trasparency and reliability: observe the website, the feedbacks of other volunteers, social media and interactions on social media, eventually correlated articles on online newspaper and blog.

Clarity: detailed information on duties you will be assigned to and the accomodation offered.

Seriousness: demonstrated through the request of CV, interviews or documents (such as the police record). Or by offering a pre-departure orientation through manuals, meetings or Skype calls. A superficial recruitment process does not suggest a good voluntary service program.

Low prices: the associations that ask for a low money contribution or none at all are the ones that valorize more the role of volunteers within the associations.

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DOES A "TOO EXPENSIVE" VOLUNTARY SERVICE PROGRAM EXIST?

The voluntary service programs, from the economic point of view, usually offer one of those 4 solutions (with the exception of the FINANCED voluntary service):

- Free program, where meals and accomodation are offered by the association
- Free program, where meals and accomodation are at the expense of the volunteer
- Program with a contribution, where meals and accomodation are included
- Program with a contribution, where meals and accomodation are at the expense of the volunteer (the contribution only covers administrative costs and/or includes a donation to the project)

(flight, insurance, visa are always on charge of the volunteer)

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The common solution is the volunteer with a contribution. According to the payment requested, we can realize which kind of program we have been offered:

From 10\$ to 50\$ per day:

- The price is due to the basic offered by the association such as: meals, accommodation, 24/7 on the field assistance in case of emergency, orientation or training, transports and welcoming at the airport, administrative or maintenance costs.
- Very often, the costs of the project are also included, such as for example the materials used for a programmed activity with volunteers, fix costs, etc.
- Sometime, the contribution can rise when the project is located in isolated locations (logistic difficulties of refurbishment) or protected areas.

More than 50\$ per day: a contribution over 50\$ per day is asked for more than the costs of the project and offered services. Such a high price can be due to:

- Accommodation in line with touristic standards, often in renowned destinations
- Meals in line with touristic standards
- Personal assistance exclusively dedicated to the volunteers
- Assistance in the organization of the trip in an agency “style” (reservations, visa, etc.)
- Touristic/cultural activities in the area included in the contribution

The lowest the contribution, the highest is expected from the volunteer.

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4. PREPARATION

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Once you defined all the aspects relative to information, training and choice, it is the moment to get ready to the departure! The preparation is on two levels: THEORETICAL and PRACTICAL

A) THE THEORETICAL PREPARATION INCLUDES:

- A course of training before the departure
- Review or acquisition of linguistic competences
- Planification: activities to do with students, educational contents, etc.
- Reading newspapers, books, publications to better understand the socio-political and cultural panorama.
- Planification of free time (trips, visits, activities)

B) THE PRACTICAL PREPARATION INCLUDES:

- The vaccines for the traveller: to be requested at your own Local Health Authority
- The visa: mandatory for some destinations (according to the different case, it can be obtained at the consulate, online or directly upon arrival at the airport)
- The travel insurance: fundamental for all destinations
- The luggage: get informed about what to put in your luggage according to the climate and the activities you will have to do

CHOOSE AYNI SCHOOL FOR YOUR PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING :

- 100% online course
- trainers with experience in the sector
- 4 thematic units + extra unit
- rewarding feedbacks from our students
- recommendations from associations such as IBO and The Nuru Trust



[Sign up now for our course of Education to the International Voluntary Service](#)

Ayni Cooperation is a social project that promotes the meeting and collaboration among volunteers and associations for the international development. We make available to our community a free research and contact platform, we offer 100% online training and we coordinate groups of volunteers for missions on the field.