

Volunteering in Ireland

A preclearance programme for the better regulation of the grant of immigration permission for persons who wish to do volunteer work in Ireland

Introduction

1. A new *preclearance procedure* to facilitate and streamline entry to the State for people who wish to undertake volunteer activity in Ireland from non-EEA states is now in place and former programmes cease from 30th April 2018. The programme applies to both visa and non-visa required non-EEA nationals. It will be reviewed after three years' operation.
2. Non-EEA nationals who are sponsored by an eligible organisation within the State for the purpose of undertaking volunteer activity in Ireland must seek prior approval to do so from the Department of Justice and Equality, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) before travelling to the State.
3. Under this procedure, voluntary workers will be permitted to enter and remain in the State for up to two years, with an option to apply for an extension for a third year, where there is a demonstrated need for their services and subject to compliance with all other immigration requirements that apply in individual cases.
4. Volunteering in Ireland applies to all non-EEA nationals applying for the first time. Transitional arrangements in respect of persons currently in the State as volunteers are outlined below. If it is your first time applying for immigration permission to work as a volunteer in Ireland, you **must** make your application from outside the State.

What is Volunteering?

5. Volunteering, for the purpose of this immigration procedure, is understood to be: *structured activity undertaken by individuals for no financial gain within eligible organisations for the benefit of society generally, while recognising that the act of volunteering also brings benefits to the volunteer.*
6. Volunteering can be undertaken across many sectors of society, including but not limited to:
 1. Arts, heritage, culture
 2. Out-of school education and youth services
 3. Religious and faith-based support activities
 4. Health support services
 5. Sport and physical recreation

6. Welfare and work for the community good for no financial gain by you and for the benefit of society, while also bringing benefits to you as a volunteer.

Who is a Volunteer?

7. For immigration purposes under this procedure, “volunteer” means a person who is:
 - 7.1 undertaking unwaged work for an eligible organisation - see below for explanation of eligible organisation;
 - 7.2 sponsored by an eligible organisation;
 - 7.3 financially supported by an eligible organisation for the duration of the volunteers stay in Ireland – including support for living expenses, accommodation, health insurance and incidental/out-of-pocket expenses;

Who May Apply?

8. As a Non-EEA national you may apply for permission to enter and remain temporarily in the State as a Volunteer if:
 - 8.1 you have been sponsored for the position by an eligible organisation in the State;
 - 8.2 you are from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland;
 - 8.3 you satisfy the definition of *Who is a Volunteer?* above;
 - 8.4 you are 18 years of age or older; and
 - 8.5 you are qualified to carry out the voluntary work expected of you.
 - 8.6 You are in possession of a clean police record (documentary evidence, including a current - not more than 3 months old - criminal records check and police clearance certificate, or certified English language translation of a criminal records check and police clearance certificate, will be required of the applicant);
 - 8.7 You are, where the work demands it, cleared to work with children and vulnerable adults (verification will be required and this must be sourced locally in Ireland from An Garda Síochána by your sponsor, the person will not be permitted to work with children and vulnerable adults until such clearance is received).

Who can be a sponsor? What is an eligible organisation?

9. A sponsor must be an eligible organisation. That is: A non-governmental, not-for-profit, voluntary or charitable body already

established and active in the State and that is on the public Register of Charities maintained and published by the [Charities Regulator](#) - Ireland's national statutory regulator for charitable organisations - or is a sports club or organisation whose national governing body holds recognition from [Sport Ireland](#).

What does Sponsorship mean?

10. Sponsorship means that the application made by a Volunteer under this Scheme arises from an invitation from an eligible organisation to the applicant to serve as a Volunteer.
11. Sponsorship also means that the eligible organisation undertakes to cooperate with the immigration authorities to ensure that the volunteer leaves the State on the expiry of his or her permission, or if directed to do so by immigration authorities, by withdrawing the sponsorship. Failure to cooperate with immigration authorities in this regard will impact on future sponsorship by that eligible organisation.

What must the sponsor do?

12. The sponsor must verify that:
 - 12.1 there is a need for the person applying under this Scheme;
 - 12.2 the applicant is suitably qualified to discharge the duties and responsibilities of the position;
 - 12.3 the applicant has a clean police record (documentary evidence, including a current - not more than 3 months old - criminal records check and police clearance certificate, and a certified English translation if the original is not in the English language, will be required);
 - 12.4 supporting official documentation will be required to prove the applicant is cleared to work with children and vulnerable adults, (verification will be required. This has to be sourced locally in Ireland from An Garda Síochána by the sponsor, the person must not be permitted to work with children and vulnerable adults until such clearance is received;) and that child protection policies and procedures in line with the [Children First Guidance](#) are being implemented by the sponsor;
 - 12.5 the applicant will be supported through the provision from the sponsor of funds and/or accommodation that are sufficient to maintain the applicant throughout the period of his or her permission to remain in the State, under the Scheme, and can provide evidence of this;
 - 12.6 the applicant will not rely on State benefits including health, medical and social services supports.

What the Volunteer may do and may not do while in the State:

13. As a Volunteer you may:

1. work for your sponsor in the activity described in your application;
2. travel abroad for short periods for example holidays, attending conferences and return to the State subject to re-entry visa requirements where applicable;
3. seek one change of sponsor in any 12-month period - you need to make an application to INIS in this regard.

14. As a Volunteer you may not:

1. change sponsors more than once in any 12-month permission period while in the State under this Scheme;
2. engage in paid employment in any capacity while in the State;
3. claim any State benefits, or rely on public funds for services, including medical, health education or other social services;
4. bring any family members with you;
5. apply to change your immigration status while in the State;
6. spend more than two years on aggregate volunteering in the State; other than when a third year extension is permitted with the same sponsor.

Other Important conditions:

15. Applicants should also remember:

1. The initial permitted period of residence under this Scheme is 1 year (12 months) and the maximum is 2 years (24 months). You may, for example, spend 24 consecutive months in the State or break the period into two separate lots of 12 months each, separated by time.
2. Your application (other than for a change of sponsor) under this Scheme must be made from outside the State.
3. You must be covered by private medical insurance, from a company authorised by the [Health Insurance Authority](#) for the duration of your time in the State. Your sponsor may include you in their group insurance scheme. Travel insurance may suffice but only during the first year of your stay provided it covers you: -
 - 3.1. for the full period before you arrange medical insurance,
 - 3.2. at a minimum of €25,000 for accident and €25,000 for illness and disease, and
 - 3.3. for any period of hospitalisation.
 - 3.4. In addition, it is advisable that applicants have insurance to cover repatriation in the event of serious illness or unforeseen events.

4. You will not be entitled to claim any State benefits.
5. As a volunteer, you may be eligible for **one** extension of the period beyond 24 months, to an aggregate total of 36 months. Any application for a third year extension must be made before your current permission expires. It will only be for volunteer service with your current sponsor and will be considered only if your sponsor can demonstrate a genuine need.
6. No further application under this Scheme will be permitted if a person has completed, or is about to complete in the aggregate, 36 months volunteering in the State.
7. A change of sponsor, if accepted, does not alter the overall maximum period for which permission under the Scheme will be given.
8. A non-refundable fee, on first application, of €100 applies to this application. This fee is in addition to the fees in respect of a Visa, if you are from a visa-required country, and in respect of registration. The application fee must be paid by the applicant at the time of application.
9. An application for a change of sponsor during any 12 month period, or for a second year, requires a non-refundable fee of €50.

The Application Process

16. An application to enter the State under this Scheme must be made from outside the State, unless you are seeking a permitted change of sponsor.
17. Applications must be made in accordance with the instructions on the INIS website. You need to click the application link button on the website and then complete the Volunteer Permission Scheme application form.
18. Applicants must provide a valid email address with their application as all communications with regard to the application will be by email. Applicants should monitor their email account as this is the email address to which all updates are sent. You will receive a decision on your application for this scheme via your account.
19. If you are seeking a permitted change of sponsor, or extension (with the same sponsor) for year 3, you may apply in Ireland.
20. For the avoidance of doubt, applicants and sponsors should be aware that the absolute maximum aggregate time that can be granted under this Scheme is three years.
21. A letter of approval under this Scheme will remain valid for six months from the date of issue. If not used within that time a fresh application will be required.

Non-EEA nationals requiring an Entry Visa

22. If you are a non-EEA national requiring an entry visa you must have prior approval from the Department of Justice and Equality, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) under this Programme before making an online visa application seeking entry to the State as a volunteer.
23. Persons approved for the Scheme will be granted a “D” reside (long stay “volunteer”) visa before entering the State. An additional fee applies for your visa.
24. Travel to the State as a Volunteer may only be undertaken when an entry visa stating this reason for seeking entry has been entered into the Passport of the non-EEA national. This will be verified by the Immigration Officer at the port of entry on your arrival in the State by reference to the reference number contained in your letter of approval.

Non-EEA nationals not requiring a Visa

25. Non-EEA nationals not requiring a visa (check [here](#)) must have prior approval from the Department of Justice and Equality, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) under this Scheme to enter the State as a Volunteer.
26. If your application is successful, you will be granted a letter of approval. You must present your letter of approval to the Immigration Officer at the port of entry on arrival in the State, who will verify its contents by reference to the approval number contained in your letter.
27. You will not be permitted entry to the State for the purpose of working as a Volunteer unless you can produce the prior approval letter obtained before travel to the State.

Registration in Ireland

28. All non EEA nationals remaining in the State for more than *90 consecutive days* must register with **INIS Registration Office or /GNIB** and be issued with a Certificate of Registration (IRP card). Please note an annual registration fee applies.
29. A Certificate of Registration (IRP card) will be granted for an initial 12-month period. A volunteer may seek further yearly permission(s) without further reference to this office, by applying for further permission from the Registration authorities (GNIB/INIS Registration Office as applicable) up to a maximum of two (2) years in total, subject

to the person meeting all the necessary qualifying criteria under this procedure.

The Unsuccessful Applicant

30. If an applicant is unhappy with the outcome of his or her application, an appeal may be submitted at no additional cost within six weeks of the letter of refusal, addressing the specific grounds on which the initial application was refused. No further correspondence will be entered into in respect of an application.

Transition arrangements

31. The Volunteering in Ireland Programme also applies to all non-EEA nationals who have or had a permission to be in the State as a volunteer prior to 30th April 2018.
32. Any person who has been active in the State as a volunteer and whose aggregate time in the State currently exceeds three years will be permitted to finish out a current permission, but will not be granted any further extension.
33. Persons who are in their first or second year permission as volunteers, may apply under this Scheme, but 36 months volunteering in Ireland in the aggregate is the maximum permitted.

Note

How we use your information and the Legal Basis

1. The Department of Justice & Equality, INIS, treats personal information provided by applicants carefully and will not disclose personal data to third parties except in accordance with the law.
2. Therefore, the processing of personal information provided by you in this application will be carried out in compliance with the law on data protection and under the executive power of the Government.
3. In furtherance of an application under this immigration procedure we will take into account all known information and relevant factors including your previous immigration history and may;
 - 3.1. request further information or documentation, from you or from third parties as evidence of the bona fides of your particular case;
 - 3.2. disclose personal information provided by you in your application to third parties for the purpose of establishing your bona fides in connection with your application; and

- 3.3. use information provided by third parties in arriving at a decision on your application.
4. Such third parties would include other Government Departments, An Garda Síochána (the Irish national police force), your sponsor (or previous sponsors if applicable) and other organisations or persons referenced by you in your application.

The Department of Justice and Equality reserves the right to amend or suspend this Scheme at any stage.