

The European market potential for volunteer and educational tourism

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Volunteer and educational tourism is dominated by young people aged 15–30, although a growing number of older people (50+) want to participate too. The United Kingdom, Germany and France are the largest European source markets. Ensuring volunteer experiences are sustainably planned in full cooperation with local communities and you thoroughly understand what is needed is key to achieve success and address criticisms of the market.

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1. Product description

People who participate in volunteer and educational tourism want to learn for personal or professional reasons. Volunteering is the larger of the two tourism types and is a common form of tourism today. Volunteering while on a tourism trip benefits all stakeholders – the destination, community and traveller – provided it is done so sustainably. Educational tourism often involves an element of volunteering, which makes the two closely linked.

This niche market is sometimes called SAVE tourism. This stands for ‘Scientific, Academic, Volunteering and Educational’ tourism. The profiles of scientific, academic and educational tourism are very similar; education is the largest profile of the three.

Volunteer and educational tourism can each be broken down further.

Volunteer tourism, also known as voluntourism, refers to travel to volunteer in projects and activities, usually with a local community or organisation. The most popular types of volunteering involve working with children, wildlife conservation and marine conservation.

Volunteering can be either skilled or unskilled. This can be combined with other travel; often adventure travel.

Table 1: Types of volunteer tourism

Types of volunteer tourism	Description and typical activities
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Community projects	Most volunteering projects are community projects, often to improve the conditions of the host community. This is the largest segment of volunteering tourism. It accounts for around one-third of opportunities (36.3%) . It has a broad remit that includes working with children and the elderly, empowering women and girls, healthcare and teaching, construction and business development.
Working with children	There are many opportunities for working with children. These include working with disadvantaged children, sports coaching, nursery education, street children, disabled children and children in care. However, working with children in orphanages is widely criticised these days. See the section below, Orphanage Tourism, for more information.
Wildlife conservation and management	Wildlife conservation projects allow participants to visit incredible and remote destinations while helping preserve iconic wildlife and habitats. It is particularly common in Africa.
Marine conservation	Like wildlife conservation, marine conservation includes monitoring marine life, habitats and coastal ecosystems. These projects often allow participants to obtain a scuba diving qualification.
Construction projects	Construction involves building new schools or other community facilities and rebuilding or upgrading houses.
Sports coaching	Sports coaching typically involves working with children from disadvantaged communities. It can help children and communities adopt healthier lifestyles and provide access to equipment they otherwise could not afford.
Teaching and Education	Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), teaching posts and teacher training are the most common activities.
Medicine and Healthcare	This category includes a wide range of projects. Volunteer tourists can take placements in dentistry, medicine, midwifery, nursing, nutrition, physiotherapy, public health, occupational therapy and speech therapy. This category is usually for skilled volunteers.

Internships	Internships are generally unpaid work placements in the business sector, often in journalism, law, teaching, medicine, human rights, marketing, human resources or finance. They provide valuable work experience for university graduates and career breakers.
Disaster Volunteering	Natural disasters can temporarily increase volunteer activity to help with relief efforts. However, it is important that volunteers do not place additional strain on broken infrastructure, where food, water, medicine and shelter are often in short supply.

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting, 2024

A note about orphanage tourism. You will note that orphanage tourism does not appear in the table above. Although it is a sub-niche of volunteer tourism, it has been criticised in recent years as children in orphanages are often exploited as ‘attractions’ for tourists and ‘projects’ for volunteers. There is evidence of unscrupulous orphanages that prey on poor families by offering places for their children and others that are poorly managed where children live in squalid conditions. In the worst cases, orphans are poorly treated.

As a result, most of Europe’s leading volunteer tour operators and NGOs no longer support or offer voluntary positions in orphanages. You can read more about this issue in this article: [Orphanage tourism – shedding light on the orphanage scam](#).

Educational tourism provides tourists with learning experiences and opportunities for self-improvement, career enhancement and the chance to gain new knowledge. It often includes an element of volunteering. It includes student travel, language courses, workshops like cooking and art courses and study abroad programmes. Educational travel, when done through an educational establishment, is usually the primary feature of the trip. It may include some leisure aspects like sightseeing.

Figure 1: Working with children is a popular volunteering activity



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting, 2024

Examples of volunteer and educational tourism experiences

The market for volunteer and educational tourism is very large. There are opportunities in destinations around the world, especially developing ones. The table below gives a snapshot of what is currently on the market.

Table 2: Examples of volunteer and education tourism experiences on the market in 2024

Experience	Type	Details
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Volunteer with Children Ghana	Working with Children	Volunteers work in daycare centres or special needs schools, supporting local staff.
Volunteer with Children Colombia	Working with Children	Volunteers support at-risk or vulnerable children in Colombia, develop new skills, meet new people and enjoy new experiences.
Teaching English Volunteering Madagascar	Teaching	Help the local Malagasy people achieve their English literacy goals. Working with local teachers to prepare English language literacy resources and participate in conversational English workshops.
Empower Women and Girls through Impactful Projects Livingstone, Zambia	Community Project	Volunteers act as mentors and advocates for women and girls, supporting them to develop confidence and skills.
Sea Turtle Conservation Sri Lanka	Marine Life Conservation	Volunteers help save turtles in the hatchery and gather research data to help change how the industry operates in the country.
Wildlife Rescue Centre Thailand	Wildlife Conservation	Volunteers work in an ethical wildlife centre where there are many species, including gibbons, macaques, bears, wild cats, tigers and crocodiles. There is also an elephant sanctuary on site.
Wildlife Research Internship Kruger, South Africa	Internship	Get involved in research projects that can involve mammals, birds, reptiles and entomology.
Mangetti Wild Dog and Elephant Protection Project Namibia	Wildlife Conservation	Help prevent animals and humans from coming into conflict, working alongside conservationists. Tasks include monitoring and tracking wildlife.

Volunteer on Construction Projects Pokhara, Nepal	Construction	Improve the learning environments at local educational facilities. Tasks include constructing desks, benches and whiteboards, painting classrooms, building libraries and developing sports grounds.
Volunteer Public Health Project Fiji	Medicine and Health Care	Assist in promoting well-being by educating and raising awareness about health. Working with the community and local nurses and running public health workshops.
Sports Coaching Volunteering South Africa	Sports Coaching	Coaching sports (football, rugby, cricket, netball, hockey, tennis, basketball, swimming) to underprivileged children in schools around Port Elizabeth.
Digital Journalism Placement Buenos Aires, Argentina	Internship	Gain hands-on experience in travel writing and online journalism.

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting, 2024

End market segmentation and consumer behaviour

The market for volunteer and educational tourism is dominated by young people who want to make a difference in other people's lives, learn new skills, meet new people or take time out from education or employment. In 2023, [travellers aged 18–34 accounted for 41.2% of the volunteer tourism market](#).

There is also a growing market of older travellers (50+) interested in volunteering overseas. The table below shows how all groups volunteer, but younger age groups predominantly practise educational tourism.

Table 3: Volunteer and Educational Tourist Market Segmentation

Segment	Volunteer	Educational
Gap Year Students	✓	✓
Students on School Trips	✓	✓
University Students	✓	
Young Professionals/Career Breakers	✓	

50+/Post-Family Market	✓	
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Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting, 2024

- Gap year students – This is the largest group of volunteers and educational travellers. Gap years are usually taken by young adults aged between 18 and 25. They are popular among young people from the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, France and the Netherlands. There is also a strong gap year culture in Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden). Volunteering overseas during this period continues to be popular amongst this group, and there have been multiple studies that demonstrate the personal benefits of volunteering.
- Students on School Trips – This is made up of volunteer and educational tourists, and Europe is a major market. They are usually aged 16–18 years old, and they travel overseas to learn as part of their national educational curricula. European cities are popular destinations for education and cultural development. Travellers to developing countries usually volunteer in community projects, similar to gap year students.
- University and other academic students – This is a small, distinct group that takes part in educational projects focused on specific subjects as part of their degree courses.
- Young professionals and career breakers – Many take career breaks for many reasons, such as to change careers, develop new skills or as a result of redundancy. Sometimes, employers will offer young professionals longer periods of unpaid absence. This group of volunteers is more likely to have specific skills that they can use, such as medical or teaching qualifications. As a result, this group is more likely to choose programmes that enable them to use and further develop their skills.
- 50+/post-family market – This is a growing market of people who have more time and money to travel and are also interested in making a difference and having authentic, immersive experiences. European tour operators recognise the potential of this group of tourists and have created targeted experiences for them. For example, [Projects Abroad](#) has a dedicated section aimed at adults over the age of 50. This market is expected to grow at a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 7.6% from 2024 to 2030.

You can also look at the market differently. The major consumer groups that dominate volunteer and education tourism are Gen Y (or Millennials) and Gen Z. These two young groups (aged 29–44 and 12–28, respectively) [account for around 50% of the global population](#). They are enthusiastic travellers and prefer to spend their money on experiences like travel. They are very tech-savvy and use social media for research, shopping and sharing. They prefer authentic and immersive travel, which volunteering appeals to very effectively.

People volunteer abroad for all sorts of reasons; often for a blend of personal and professional reasons. The table below outlines the broad motivations of people who choose to volunteer overseas.

Table 4: Motivations for volunteering

Personal and altruistic reasons to volunteer	Professional reasons
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<p>Chance to 'make a difference'</p> <p>Immersion in a different culture</p> <p>Meet like-minded people</p> <p>Promote cross-cultural understanding</p> <p>Personal development/build self-confidence</p> <p>Have fun/participate in adventure</p> <p>Sense of religious/moral duty</p>	<p>Gain work experience</p> <p>Gain an edge in the job market</p> <p>Transition into a job</p> <p>Decide if it is the right career</p> <p>Networking opportunities</p> <p>Apply classroom knowledge</p> <p>Gain professional confidence</p> <p>Gain qualifications</p> <p>Add value to a CV (curriculum vitae)</p>
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Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting, 2024

Tips:

Conduct a SWOT analysis of your business (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). This will help you identify whether your projects appeal to the market and what you need to change. This guide, [Conducting a SWOT analysis](#), will help you.

Find out more about the markets for volunteer and educational tourism using the CBI studies. These are: [What are the opportunities in the European gap year tourism market](#), [What are the opportunities in the European Gen Y tourism market](#) and [What are the opportunities in the European Gen Z market?](#) You can use these studies to help you create the right projects.

Consult the [WYSE Travel Confederation](#), which publishes research on the youth travel market. The WYSE also holds annual conferences for members that enable volunteer projects to network with potential buyers.

Accessible tourism in the European market

[Accessible tourism](#) is the ongoing endeavour to ensure tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people, regardless of physical limitations, disabilities or age. It encompasses publicly and privately owned tourist locations. The improvements benefit not only those with permanent physical disabilities but also parents with small children, elderly travellers, people with temporary injuries and their travel companions. Disabled tourists may travel individually, in groups, with their families or with their carers.

Accessibility and volunteer and educational tourism

Volunteering tourism is often about helping individuals reach their true potential, including people. Adapting your volunteer projects to support people with disabilities is key to helping them grow their confidence and use their abilities to provide the support they want to. Providing for disabled volunteers can also improve the quality of projects for all participants, as everyone can learn from other experiences.

In Europe, the [European Solidarity Corps \(ESC\)](#) offers a range of volunteering activities. It provides overseas volunteer placements for young people aged 18–30. It is committed to delivering diverse and inclusive programmes. They provide support tailored to volunteers with disabilities, including mentoring

and suitable physical environments. Read the article [Disability is not a barrier to international volunteering](#), which describes the positive experiences of several volunteers with ICS so you can see the benefits of catering to this large market.

You should carefully consider how you provide for people with disabilities on your volunteer projects. Most of all, you should be very clear about what you can and cannot provide. Being honest with potential volunteers is crucial so they can make decisions about what is suitable for them.

Tip:

Read the CBI studies [The European market potential for accessible tourism](#) and [Entering the European market for accessible tourism products](#) for practical and useful advice on making your tours accessible.

2. What makes Europe an interesting market for volunteer and educational tourism?

Europe is an interesting market for volunteer and educational tourism because there is a large market of young people who like to take gap years, career breaks and extended breaks from work to volunteer. Overseas travel for education is also common in schools across Europe. It is estimated that [1.6 million people volunteer abroad every year](#).

The youth market of people aged 15–29, which dominates volunteer and educational tourism, is a very large segment. Globally, it is [estimated to account for 23% of all international tourism arrivals](#). Europe's youth population accounted for 73.6 million people, as of 2021, [accounting for 16.3% of the continent's total population](#), not including the UK.

Although the ageing European population is expected to lead to a decline in the youth population to 15%, these figures still indicate a substantial market for enthusiastic young travellers. Research by the CBI indicates that 5.4% of European tour operators promote volunteering and educational trips.

The global market is also interesting to explore as it shows that the market is growing. In 2023, [it was estimated to be worth \\$848.9 million \(USD\)](#). It is expected to grow at a CAGR of 6.1% from 2024 to 2030.

Figure 2: Value of Global Volunteer Tourism 2023–2030



Source: Grand View Research, 2023

Many factors are driving growth, including increased awareness of social and environmental challenges and an increased desire for meaningful travel experiences. The European volunteer tourism market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 4.6% from 2024 to 2030. Some of the most-visited developing destinations, like India and Sri Lanka, report growing numbers of young travellers.

The [WYSE Travel Confederation](#) provides interesting information about the youth travel market:

- In 2011, the WYSE estimated that there would be almost 300 million international youth trips a year by 2020, representing 59% growth in ten years. The pandemic affected these estimates, but growth indicators confirm that the market is growing again.
- Young travellers often spend more than other tourists. This is likely because they have more time to travel so they spend longer at the destinations.
- Young travellers are likely to return to a destination at some point in the future. Research in Australia showed that 54% of young travellers returned there later in life.
- The youth travel market is more resilient than other markets. They are also more likely to travel when there are uncertainties in the job market. They are less likely to be deterred from travelling by threats such as terrorism, political and civil unrest, natural disasters and disease.
- The age range for youth travel has increased from 24 to 30 years in terms of behaviour. This is likely as young people are studying longer and settling down later in life.
- Young travel has a significant impact at the local level. Youth travel expenditure accounted for 20% of global tourism expenditure in 2017, likely because this group spends longer travelling than others. It is also estimated that they spend around 60% of their budget at the destination. They look for value and local products, and they tend to spend their money with local suppliers directly.
- Young travellers influence other young travellers to visit the destinations they enjoyed through social media and word of mouth. They also add atmosphere and 'buzz' to destinations, making them more attractive to other travellers.

Tips:

See what the European Union (EU) has to offer. It has a range of online resources to support young people who want to volunteer. This includes the [European Youth Portal](#) and [Eurodesk](#). It is worth exploring these resources to see what information you can find about volunteering in Europe.

Explore European associations that you could network with to access this market. They include the [British Educational Travel Association \(BETA\)](#) in the UK, and [Solidarites Jeunesses](#) (France), an association for popular education and international volunteering.

Visit the [SAVE Travel Alliance](#) website, a network for connecting responsible travellers with sustainable destinations.

3. Which European countries offer the most opportunities for volunteer and educational tourism?

The European countries that offer the most opportunities for volunteer and educational tourism are the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy and countries in the Scandinavian region (Denmark, Norway and Sweden). This is based on the size of the youth population in these countries and their inclination to volunteer.

Research conducted in the United States (USA) to determine which countries volunteered most activities found that [nationals from many European countries volunteer](#), contributing to a strong volunteer culture. Remember that these figures do not distinguish between volunteering in their home country or overseas.

Table 5: Worldwide countries with the highest numbers of volunteers, 2024

Ranking	Country	Question: % of adult respondents who stated they had volunteered their time to an organisation
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1	USA	41.90%
2	New Zealand	41.53%
3	Norway	38.83%
4	Canada	38.06%
5	Australia	37.90%
6	The Netherlands	37.15%
7	Ireland	35.00%
8	Switzerland	34.12%
9	Austria	30.34%
10	UK	30.34%
11	France	28.52%
12	Finland	27.87%
13	Japan	24.72%
14	Belgium	24.05%
15	Germany	22.74%
16	South Korea	21.33%
17	Italy	21.12%
18	Denmark	19.75%
19	Czech Republic	18.20%
20	Spain	14.81%

Source: Volunteer FDIP/John Hopkins Center for Civic Society Studies, 2024

The United Kingdom

There are 12.2 million young people aged between 15 and 29 in the UK. This represents around 18.1% of the total population, almost one in five people. Of the population of 68 million, this is a significant number of young people. The gap year concept originated in the UK. Volunteering during a gap year is a common occurrence

amongst British ‘gappers’. [25% of people in the UK have taken a gap year](#), and 15% have taken a sabbatical.

There is a strong volunteering culture in the UK. An estimated [14.2 million people volunteered through a group, club, or organisation in 2021 and 2022](#). Almost one in five (16%) of British people say they volunteer at least once a month.

There are many British tour operators that specialise in volunteering overseas, and the UK is one of Europe’s leading providers of gap year experiences. Examples of companies that cater to this market include [Gap360](#) and [The Leap](#). Southeast Asia is a favourite for volunteers from the UK, particularly India and Thailand and, more recently, Cambodia and Vietnam. South America is also becoming a popular destination, especially Costa Rica, Peru and Argentina. Wildlife volunteer experiences are popular in African countries like Kenya and Tanzania.

The [Year Out Group](#) is the British association that maintains a list of approved gap year-provider organisations in the UK. It supports tour operators that work in the sector and provides a directory of approved gap year providers. It is a good source of British volunteering and gap year companies for you to be aware of.

The UK also has a big market of educational tour operators like [Rayburn Tours](#) and [Travelbound](#).

Germany

There are 13.2 million young people aged 15–29 who live in Germany, representing 15.9% of the population.

Germany has a long-standing culture of ‘global citizenship’, which contributes to the desire to volunteer abroad. The education system in Germany is quite flexible, and students are encouraged to travel and volunteer before, during or after their studies. They can also include internships as part of their studies. In 2018, [28.8 million people were involved in voluntary work in Germany](#), representing 39.7% of the population. 64% of Germans said they would consider taking a sabbatical if it was an option.

The tour operator market for volunteering and educational tourism is well-established in Germany. Examples of companies specialising involved in youth travel include [RUF Jungendreisen](#) and [Go Jugendreisen](#). [Freiwilligenarbeit](#) offers a wide range of volunteering opportunities worldwide for German volunteers. [AIFS Educational Travel](#) has many volunteering projects aimed at young people.

France

France is home to 11.9 million young French people aged between 15 and 29, accounting for 17.5% of the total population.

In France, the gap year is referred to as a ‘sabbatical’, and it is well regarded among the population. It is an interesting market to target as French employees are entitled to [6–11 months of sabbatical leave](#) once they have worked in an organisation for six years or more. Blogs like [Take a sabbatical to travel, how do I do it](#) are useful for planning long trips. Research conducted by Opodo found that [67% of French people would take a sabbatical](#) if they could.

Several tour operators serve the market, such as [Sans Frontiers](#), [Sejours Educatifs](#) and [Vefe Voyages](#). [France Volontaires](#) is a French platform for international volunteering. It enables volunteers to travel to destinations like Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Cambodia and the Philippines.

Netherlands

The Netherlands has 3.3 million young people aged between 15 and 29, representing 18.8% of the population. Dutch students are more likely to go abroad for exchanges or internships than students from other EU countries. A survey found that [8% of 18–25 year-olds would like to take a gap year](#) after secondary school or university, and 31% would like to do an internship.

Source: Nuffic, 2022

In 2022, Europe was the most popular destination for youth travel (52%) but 35% planned to travel outside Europe. 15% planned to do a study programme or internship in Asia; South Korea and Japan were the most popular destinations. Ghana is another popular destination for Dutch students to take gap years. Their knowledge of the English language is very good, which gives them the confidence to travel to places where English is spoken.

Dutch volunteers have a strong sense of duty and responsibility. The Netherlands has a long history of volunteering, although recent trends reveal that the number of volunteers in the country fell from 37% in 2016 to 30% in 2023. However, the intent to volunteer has risen significantly to 56%.

Dutch operator [Kilroy](#) is the largest youth and student travel agency in Northern Europe, with branches in eight countries in Scandinavia, the UK and Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg). Kilroy researches the youth travel market, which is interesting to read. You can learn more in the [Kilroy Young Travel Insight Report 2023](#) and the [Gap Year Travel Report 2024](#).

Scandinavia

Volunteering plays an important role in the culture of Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), and the gap year culture is similar to that in the UK. Across the three nations, there are around four million young people aged 18–29, or 19% of the total population.

Like Germany, Scandinavian countries have a strong culture of global citizenship and overseas travel. Volunteering is also highly respected by employers, families and friends who may have had similar experiences in their youths. Young Scandinavians are also inspired by experiential travel and like to share their experiences on social media. Popular destinations include Southeast Asia (Bali, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam), Central and South America (Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru), and Africa (Ghana).

76% of Swedish people would take a sabbatical if they could.

Several tour operators serve this sector. [Voluntärresor](#) is Sweden's largest volunteer travel agency and is managed on a non-profit basis. It aims to help as many people as possible to take part in educational and affordable volunteer projects around the world. Danish company [Jysk Rejsebureau](#) offers a range of volunteer projects aimed at young people. [Kilroy](#) also serves the Scandinavian market and offers both studies and internships abroad.

Italy

In Italy, 14.9% of the population is aged 15–29, accounting for around 8.8 million people. In 2018, it was estimated that the number of people taking a gap year would increase 20% yearly. Italians are also among the most motivated of European nations to take sabbaticals, with [81% stating they would take one if they could](#).

[Avventure nel Mondo](#) is an Italian tour operator that offers volunteer trips. It is interesting to note that the operator supports Hanuman ETS, an Italian charity that provides funds to responsibly managed orphanages in Nepal. If your business offers trips to orphanages, you must be absolutely sure they are managed properly and benefit the children, not the business or the tourists.

Figure 4: Meaningful and immersive experiences are essential components of volunteering today



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting, 2024

Combining volunteering with an immersive culture attracts volunteer tourists

Young people today are very clear about how they want to travel and use their time and budgets. Volunteering offers them a great opportunity to see the world, give something back to local destinations and communities, and enrich their lives. As such, having an immersive cultural experience is just as important as volunteering.

Interacting with communities has become one of the most important factors in volunteering trips. For instance, staying with a local family and living life as they do, enjoying home-cooked meals and absorbing the local language creates a highly immersive experience. It is one they will remember and treasure forever. This example of a [homestay and volunteering in a social enterprise to support disadvantaged and disabled women](#) at the [Hoa Ban Protecting Center](#) in Vietnam is a clear example of a truly immersive volunteering experience.

Note the blogger's quote as an example of a volunteer's aim to make a real difference:

"What we loved about this project was that we could bring skills that we already had in marketing and journalism to fulfil Mrs Thuang's needs. We're incredibly proud of the fact that we were able to contribute to her social enterprise and her goal of supporting at least ten additional women each year."

The [Finca Exotica Ecolodge](#) in Costa Rica provides another example of a best practice. The volunteer programme enables participants to contribute to vital conservation efforts around sustainable agricultural practices, wildlife conservation, community development and marketing. Volunteers work alongside local experts and enjoy the region's incredible biodiversity.

Prioritise sustainability and social impact to cater to Gen Z and Millennials

The Gen Z and Millennial groups are among the most sustainably orientated of the major consumer groups. They are concerned about climate change and understand the need for sustainability in all areas of their lives, including travel. They are also driven by social equality and like to know their actions have a positive impact. Volunteering on projects that are well-managed and have measurable positive effects on people's lives is important to them.

Neither group appreciates greenwashing, which means making false claims about the sustainability of actions. To embed sustainable actions into your business and projects, use the CBI studies below to help you.

- [How to be a sustainable tourism business](#)
- [Tips to go green in the tourism sector](#)
- [Tips to become more socially responsible in the tourism sector](#)

Be mindful of the critical views and negative impacts of volunteering

There has been a lot of criticism about the true value of volunteering and whether it causes more harm than good. In addition to orphanage tourism (described above), some common criticisms include:

- Volunteering for brief periods often addresses symptoms rather than root causes. For example, building a school without ensuring long-term teacher support can leave communities with facilities but no sustainable plan for long-term education.
- Volunteer projects can lead to dependency on foreign aid, which can deter local communities from developing their own solutions.
- Volunteers can take paid jobs from local people, such as construction, teaching and medical roles. This can limit opportunities for local people to earn income and gain employment experience.
- Volunteers may unintentionally impose their own cultural values or solutions that do not align with communities' needs or traditions. This can lead to misunderstandings or even resentment from local people.
- Volunteer programmes prioritise profits over meaningful impact. This could mean the focus is more on the

volunteer's experiences than the communities' benefit.

- Volunteers may not be qualified or properly trained for the work they are assigned, leading to potential harm or inefficiencies.
- Well-meaning volunteers may inadvertently do more harm than good, such as teaching incorrect information, providing ineffective medical care or disrupting community dynamics.
- Volunteers working on conservation projects may accidentally disturb local ecosystems or wildlife due to inexperience or poorly planned projects.
- Volunteering can reinforce harmful stereotypes, such as the belief that volunteers are coming to 'save' communities in developing countries, also known as 'white saviourism'.
- Volunteers may be unprepared for the emotional challenges involved in working in difficult or traumatic situations, such as disaster zones or impoverished areas. This can lead to mental health issues.
- Volunteers may return home disillusioned if they feel they do not have the effects they hope for, leading to feelings of frustration or guilt.

To mitigate these criticisms, volunteer programmes must be assessed thoroughly and planned in collaboration with local communities. The focus must be on long-term benefits rather than short-term solutions.

Today, volunteers are much more alert to opportunities that may cause more harm than good, such as visiting orphanages or poorly managed elephant sanctuaries. However, as a local operator, it is your responsibility to ensure that volunteer projects are sustainable, authentic and transparent for both communities and volunteers.

E-volunteering is a growth opportunity

E-volunteering, also known as virtual volunteering, is carried out remotely. It enables people to give their time and skills to projects all over the world. It is a good way for businesses to boost their employee engagement and improve staff morale. If the skills required can be provided remotely, it can also help address some of the criticisms levelled at volunteering.

Examples of volunteering tasks that can be done remotely include translating documents, designing websites, editing and writing proposals or brochures, designing infographics, online tutoring and mentoring, and consultancy for marketing, finance or HR. Volunteers can also host webinars.

This type of volunteering is likely to appeal to working people. However, many young people like to stay in touch with communities they have visited and keep supporting them once they have returned home. You should consider any tasks that could be suitable for e-volunteering and think about how you could offer them on your website. However, you have to be certain that you are not taking a paid job from a local person.

Of course, asking for donations is a good idea. See how this school in Uganda has included a call to action for a [£10 donation a month to sponsor a child](#) through its UK-registered charity. People who have volunteered at the organisation in the past will often donate.

Tips:

Make sure your projects include activities that involve the community, as volunteers want to get to know the people they are living alongside. The more immersive the experiences, the better. Cooking or working alongside local people, for instance, breaks down a lot of barriers and is very immersive.

You have to ensure your projects are sustainable and you can measure their effects directly. You should be aware of the criticism surrounding volunteer tourism and make sure your project cannot be labelled as doing more harm than good.

Find out more about the negative impacts of volunteering so you can be sure that your projects do not do anything that could be considered harmful. There are lots of articles you can find on the internet like [Volunteering abroad is popular and problematic](#) and [The business of voluntourism – do western](#)

do-gooders actually do harm?

Acorn Tourism Consulting Limited carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).