



“Refugees and European NGOs volunteering,
learning and changing the world together”

INFO SHEET

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TANDEM INFO SHEET

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1. WHAT IS TANDEM?

Tandem is an initiative set up to help and support refugees and asylum-seekers residing in Brussels. The aim is to provide a possibility for them to contribute to the community, and support the restoration of their dignity and autonomy through initially short-term volunteer placements at European-level NGOs.

Tandem also aims to bring the direct experience of individual refugees and asylum-seekers and the challenges facing them into EU level NGOs. These organisations are often concerned about the situation of refugees but may not have identified opportunities to support directly individuals here in Brussels.

2. HOW DOES THIS INITIATIVE HELP THE REFUGEE/ASYLUM-SEEKER?

Offering opportunities and supporting autonomy:

Many refugees and asylum-seekers are eager to work, contribute and give back to the Brussels community. Despite this, they are often stuck in reception centres with little structure to their day, and facing a lack of opportunities. Volunteering may help to restore their sense of self-worth and their dignity, crucial to their individual well-being and health, but also valuable in their path to rebuilding their lives here in Belgium.

After arriving in Belgium, many refugees and asylum-seekers often find it very hard to build a network of contacts and friends. Such a network is vital to get support, advice and to access employment opportunities, and for general well-being. Volunteering with European-level NGOs will enable refugees and asylum-seekers to meet and engage with new people - many of whom are themselves migrants to Belgium - benefit from their experiences, and establish and widen their social networks.

Alleviating financial uncertainty:

Currently, all refugees and asylum-seekers living in reception centres (those with a right to 'material assistance') receive a daily allowance of 1 EUR per day for all their costs outside the reception centre. Volunteering placements with a small, legally authorised allowance for costs, will be a great help to alleviate the uncertain financial situation for many refugees and asylum-seekers.

Supporting change-makers:

Engagement with your organisation may also support the capacity of individuals to work for change/reconstruction in their countries of origin.



3. HOW DOES IT HELP MY ORGANISATION?

Supporting your role in integration work:

Many people working in European-level NGOs care deeply about the difficult situation facing refugees and asylum-seekers but are often unsure as to how to make a meaningful contribution at the local, Brussels level. This initiative aims to facilitate this contribution and enable the NGOs to play a part in the integration and support of individuals.

Bringing new perspectives to your work:

Often, these organisations are working at the 'macro' level on migration and asylum issues: the perspectives that a *Tandem* volunteer could bring to the work you are doing may benefit your organisation and staff and could feed into research, policy and advocacy work.

Engaging a volunteer under this initiative could also provide an opportunity to develop links with the home countries of the refugees/asylum-seekers, and identify partners/contacts in those countries.

Increasing your capacity:

Engaging a *Tandem* volunteer will also, of course, provide organisations with additional volunteer capacity and allow staff and existing volunteers to meet new and interesting people.

4. IS IT LEGAL?

Yes!

Refugees, individuals in receipt of subsidiary protection, and asylum-seekers who have not received a final, negative decision on their application, are legally allowed to volunteer. This is distinct from employment so any restrictions/requirements regarding social security, taxes etc do not apply to volunteers.

Refugees and asylum-seekers do not need special authorisation to volunteer, aside from informing *Fedasil* (the Federal Agency for the reception of asylum seekers) in advance of their volunteering placement if they are living in a reception centre and receiving material subsistence.

Volunteers are allowed to receive a small fixed allowance for their costs. The volunteer and the hosting organisation should sign an agreement outlining clearly the tasks and hours involved, the allowance provided for reimbursement of costs, and other rights/obligations. Volunteering CANNOT be done for commercial businesses or private individuals.

The *Tandem* team have worked together with *Het Punt*, the Flemish Agency for Volunteering in Brussels to ensure all legal and admin issues are fully clarified. We can take care of all necessary paperwork to Fedasil, CPAS, ...



5. WHAT IS EXPECTED OF MY ORGANISATION?

- **To host a refugee/asylum-seeker as a volunteer for two weeks.** This is a short period to allow more volunteers to take part in the initiative.
- **To provide the refugee with a small fixed allowance** for costs of 25 EUR per day.
- **To establish an agreement with the volunteer.** This should specify, *inter alia*, information on the tasks and responsibilities of the volunteer and the hosting organisation, the hours involved, insurance coverage, the amount of the allowance. **NB:** This is not a contract. We can provide an example of this and *Het Punt* or the *European Volunteer Centre* can support your organisation with this.
- **To provide insurance coverage for the refugee** for accidents at work. Many organisations will have existing insurance coverage for volunteers, and refugees and asylum-seekers could be covered as normal under these policies. If not, *Tandem* can provide insurance.
- **To nominate a contact point** or similar who will lead on supervising and supporting the volunteer during their time at your organisation.
- **To provide the guidance and support** to ensure the volunteer can get their tasks done.
- **To provide the volunteer with a certificate** noting the number of hours/days that they volunteered and any training received.
- **To learn, cooperate and enjoy :)**

6. WHAT KIND OF TASKS COULD THE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS DO?

The volunteering tasks undertaken by the refugee/asylum-seeker should be agreed between the individual and the hosting organisation. This should not include tasks that through their nature, duration or frequency would not normally be done by a volunteer. Many EU-level NGOs may not be in the habit of engaging volunteers – as opposed to interns or trainees – so you may not immediately be able to imagine how they could support your work. Here are a few suggestions of the kinds of activities the refugees/asylum-seekers could help you with. The *European Volunteer Centre* is also available to provide advice and support on this, and we can put you in touch.

- **Supporting you with media work:** e.g. writing blog posts, taking photos, acting as interviewees for media outputs, providing testimonies, meeting your members/partners.
- **Supporting your research and policy work,** acting as interviewees, or supporting outreach to other refugees/asylum-seekers for research work and acting as interpreters.
- **Supporting your campaign activities,** e.g. helping you to reach out to other refugees and their communities in Brussels and Belgium.
- **Supporting event organisation** and provide logistical support at events.
- **Providing a fresh ‘out of the Brussels bubble’ perspective on your work,** e.g. bringing in new ideas to help design projects or activities.

7. HOW DOES MY ORGANISATION GET INVOLVED?

Get in touch!

If your organisation would like to host a volunteer, please fill in the form at <http://tandemvolunteering.org/get-involved/>

If you still have some questions or would like to discuss the possibilities with us first, don't hesitate to drop us a line at tandem@tandemvolunteering.org, or you can follow our *Facebook* page: www.facebook.com/Tandemvolunteering/

We will help to connect you with participating refugees/asylum-seekers who have suitable language skills and experience and/or skills to get involved with your organisation. Give us an idea of the type of work that would be possible – no need to be too detailed, our aim is to get the volunteering up and running and allow flexibility to both the organisation and the individuals – and when you would be able to host a volunteer.

8. WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

We are refugees and staff of European NGOs – some newly arrived and some with a long history of work with European-level NGOs. Working together with refugees and asylum-seekers in Brussels, we've recognised the mismatch between their desire to work, their experience and capacity, and the absence of opportunities to enable them to build a social network, access work, and most urgently, to give structure and purpose to their day-to-day existence.

By setting up *Tandem*, we are hoping to match willing NGOs with these individuals and play a small part in increasing the possibilities to restore the dignity and autonomy of the refugees and asylum-seekers here in Brussels, and support their integration and well-being.

We look forward to hearing from you!

The *Tandem* Team

