



Soutien Belge Overseas

Lebanon Volunteer Programme 2018

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Who are SB Overseas?

SB Overseas is a non-profit organisation based in Brussels, Belgium, that provides humanitarian aid and educational and psychological support for the victims of the current crisis in the Middle East. Our foundational philosophy is to provide this aid without reference or discrimination towards any religious or political affiliation.

As well as providing direct, urgent humanitarian aid to civilians in conflict zones in Syria and in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, SB Overseas runs education and empowerment projects for refugees living in Belgium, Lebanon and Turkey. These include our flagship education and training centres for refugees in Lebanon, where we provide women and children with the skills and confidence to create a positive future for themselves.

To learn more about SB Overseas and our projects, please head to www.sboverseas.org/about-us.

2. What is the Lebanon Volunteer Programme?

a. Summary

SB Overseas is looking for enthusiastic and capable volunteers to teach English and help out with other programmes that we run in two of our schools and women's centres in Lebanon, both of which serve refugees living locally:

- one in Saida (south-west Lebanon)
- and another in Beirut.

Beginning in January 2018, the programme will be split into two branches:

- Branch A: a pure volunteering branch, through which volunteers will teach full-time in our centres;
- Branch B: a volunteering & Arabic learning branch, where volunteers will spend 9 hours/week taking an intensive Arabic course, and spending the rest of the week teaching alongside the other volunteers.

To get an idea of what the programme looks like on the ground, please head to www.facebook.com/groups/SBVolunteer to see updates and photos from our volunteers on the programme.

b. When can I join?

The programme will run from January 2018. The length of the placement depends on which branch of the programme you apply for:

- Branch A: you can apply for a standard placement of 2 or 4 months;
- Branch B: you can apply for a placement of 2, 4, 6 or 8 months depending on what level of Arabic you want to reach.

Your placement can start at the beginning of any "odd" calendar month (i.e. between the 1st-5th of January, March, May, etc).

c. What will the volunteering involve?

Volunteers' main role on weekdays will be to teach English to the children and the women at our schools and training centres. Volunteers teaching children will also assist in Maths and Science lessons that are given to them by our staff. After receiving training from our staff and external experts, you will be assigned several classes of children and/or women that you will teach for the duration of your stay.

Please note that a majority of volunteers (around 70-90%) are normally assigned to teach the children, as the number of women's classes is more limited.

For volunteers in branch A, this is a full-time commitment, as volunteers are required to teach for the full school day, every weekday from Monday to Friday. Although will have breaks during the day between lessons, you can expect to be spending most of this time planning and preparing your lessons. Volunteers in branch B will also commit to volunteering full-time outside of their Arabic lessons.

In addition to this, you will be asked to help out in other activities that take place in our centres in the evenings, on weekends and on bank holidays. For example, all volunteers will help to design, organise and run group activities for children in our centre, usually for one morning each weekend. These will include artistic activities, sports, games, and other forms of self-expression such as theatre.

Other tasks may include:

- assisting your fellow teachers in the classroom;
- leading one-on-one classes with students who need extra, or smaller classes for students with special educational needs;
- teaching English to your colleagues in the centre (i.e. the local teaching staff);
- lending a hand in SB Overseas' other local activities, such as distribution of aid from containers, or efforts to redecorate our centres.

d. What are the Arabic lessons like (branch B)?

The Arabic lessons for volunteers in branch B will be taught by the professionally qualified teaching staff in our centres. They will teach the Georgetown University Arabic curriculum, following course books published by the Georgetown University Press (<http://press.georgetown.edu/book/al-kitaab/alif-baa>), which we will provide a copy of to each Arabic learning volunteer. These volunteers will follow up to 9 hours of Arabic lessons per week, and will be able to follow beginner, intermediary and/or advanced courses based on their starting point and the length of their placement.*

* If the total number of volunteers in branch B exceeds 5 then students will have 9 contact hours per week. If the total is less than 5 then students will have fewer contact hours but more one-on-one time. Contact hours will never be less than 4.5 hours per week.

3. How can I apply?

a. Where can I apply?

You can apply by filling out the online application form, which you can find on our website at <http://www.sboverseas.org/volunteer/lebanon>.

b. What does the application process involve?

The first step is filling out the application form, as mentioned above. Once you have submitted your form, you will receive an automated confirmation that we have received your form.

We will normally contact you 2-4 weeks after this to let you know whether you have made our shortlist. We will then ask you to send a copy of your CV to volunteers@sboverseas.org and suggest a time to conduct a Skype interview.

We organise these interviews on a regular basis. We prioritise organising interviews for more urgent applications: for instance, an application received in early February to join the programme in March will usually be pushed to the front of the queue. Candidates who have applied to join the programme further in advance, therefore, might have to wait a little longer for their interviews to be organised.

You will receive a final notification about the success of your application within 2 weeks after your interview. If you are selected for the programme, we will normally give you a deadline of around 3 weeks to book your flights to Lebanon, which act as a final commitment on your part that you will join the programme.

c. Can I choose when I go?

You may indicate on the form a preference for participating at a particular time of year, as long as the placement starts on an “odd” month (e.g. January, March, May, etc.), and if you are selected, we will usually be able to fit you into a cycle that suits you.

There may be candidates, however, who we are interested in recruiting, but for whom there are no places left in their chosen cycle. In this case, we may offer them a place on another cycle, for which they have already indicated they would be available.

d. Can I choose to stay longer?

The standard volunteering placement length is two months minimum. For the sake of continuity for the students in our centre, we do not accept shorter placements than this.

Volunteers in branch A will have the opportunity to extend their placement to 4 months, although this extension will depend on a positive evaluation of the volunteer's work. This evaluation will be conducted by the local management towards the end of the first month of the volunteer's placement. The evaluation will assess whether the volunteer has adapted emotionally to the challenging work environment, and whether the volunteer has shown an appropriate level of commitment and team-ethic in their work.

Volunteers in branch B have the choice of applying for a 2, 4, 6 or 8 month placements.

e. Can I choose which city I go to?

No. You can only apply to be a part of the programme as a whole, and you will not be able to choose whether you volunteer in Beirut or Saida. This decision is made by our local management, who will assign you to one or the other centre once you have arrived in Lebanon.

f. Can I choose who I teach?

No. In the motivation section of the application form, you are welcome to state a general preference for teaching either women or children, so that we have a general idea of which volunteers would prefer which kind of work. In the end, though, the final decision regarding which groups you will teach will also be made by our local management once you have arrived in Lebanon. This means that even if, for instance, you indicate a general preference for working with women, you must be prepared to work with children as well, if this is what you are asked to do by our local management.

Normally you will be assigned to teach either women or children, but not both. Occasionally, we may ask one or two volunteers from a given team to teach both groups, if that is what is needed, but this is an exception to the general rule.

Usually a higher proportion (70-90%) of volunteers will be assigned to teach children than to teach women. For example, if we had a team of 7 volunteers in our centre in Beirut, we would normally assign 5 or 6 volunteers to teach children, and 1 or 2 to teach women.

g. Can I organise a side project while I am in Lebanon?

At SB Overseas, we always welcome initiatives by volunteers to run their own personal projects during their time with us. This might range from some individual communications effort like a personal blog, to something organised for the sake of the women and children in the centre, such as workshops on photography or first aid, or more complex projects to teach other useful skills, such as business skills or computer skills.

There are two factors that you must consider, however, if you want to organise a project. The first factor is time: remember that your schedule will be full-time (see section 2c), and you will only be staying for two months. This, along with the demanding nature of your teaching work, will mean that you will not necessarily have enough time or energy to fully develop a complex project.

The second factor (particularly relevant if your project will require SB Overseas' input) is limited resources, both material and human. This refers partly to the fact that our centres will not necessarily have all the materials you need, and also that we will not be able to contribute financially to your project (although see information on personal fundraising in section 5e). But in particular, you must remember that our staff are very busy already, and will not have the time to plan your project for you, although they may be available on a limited basis to help you implement it. So, if you want to see your project realised, you must plan it in detail by yourself, and present your planned project proposal to our management. Your proposal must include the following:

- the project's objective(s);
- a description of the project's activities (including an indication of the total number of hours needed for each activity);
- the resources needed, including materials, space and personnel (including the number of hours you will need access to each of these);
- a rough calendar for implementation;
- the total cost of the project, and any fundraising options and objectives.

It will obviously be difficult to plan all of these aspects in detail before you see our centres for yourself and get a feel for how things work. However, you should see this as a first draft of your proposal, with the details to be figured out once you have arrived. By sending us your proposal before you arrive, our management will be able to advise you on the feasibility of your project, and if so what preparations you should consider making before your arrival.

4. What skills or experience are required?

a. What languages do I need to speak?

- i. English: fluent. English will be the working language of our volunteer teams in Lebanon. Volunteers should be capable of reading, writing and communicating clearly and confidently in English, as well as teaching for a beginner's level.
- ii. Arabic: non-essential but useful. Arabic is the mother tongue of all of the students and most staff at our centres. You will be able to speak with the staff in English or Arabic, but speaking in Arabic during your teaching is discouraged as far as possible, in order to provide an immersive learning environment.
- iii. French: non-essential, minimally useful. French is an official language in Lebanon, but it is only spoken in certain areas. You will find that very few among the students, staff, and local refugee population can speak French.

b. Do I need teaching experience? Will I receive training?

As most of our volunteers will be tasked with teaching primary-school age children, any experience teaching or working with children or young people is highly desirable, but not essential. Working with young children can be a challenge for even the most talented teachers, as it requires a lot of energy, patience, positivity and a problem-solving and creative frame of mind. Any volunteer who has little experience of working and interacting with children will as such undergo a steep but rewarding learning curve once lessons have begun.

We will provide assistance in this learning process by providing brief training sessions for volunteers. The training covers techniques and strategies for engaging children, managing classrooms, dealing with traumatized children and working well for an extended number of teaching hours. Volunteers will also have access to advice and assistance from our professional staff throughout their placement.

For volunteers who will be teaching women, some experience of teaching or working with women in empowerment projects or similar environments is desirable, but again non-essential.

c. Is volunteering experience useful?

It is always useful to have had some experience with volunteering before taking on a heavier commitment but it is not a requirement. What is most important is your drive to help those less fortunate than yourself and your willingness to deal with situations that can be mentally and sometimes emotionally tiring.

d. Is any other experience useful?

Some experience of living away from home, and the moderate level of resilience that comes with that experience, will be useful to any volunteer. Teamwork, leadership, problem solving, creative thinking and time-management skills are all desirable, but by far the most important quality we look for in our volunteers is that they are motivated to help those less fortunate than themselves.

5. How are logistics and finances organised?

a. Will I sign a volunteer contract?

If you are selected for the programme, you will be asked to sign a Terms of Engagement before taking part in the programme. This document will outline your duties and obligations towards SB Overseas, and vice-versa. In the case of any serious breach of the terms of a volunteer's placement, SB Overseas will reserve the right to terminate the agreement, and end the placement.

b. Does SB Overseas provide accommodation or cover living expenses?

Volunteers will live together in group apartments (one each in Saida and Beirut) provided by SB Overseas, and will stay in shared rooms (usually 2-4 per room). SB Overseas will cover a large portion of the rent and utility bills for this accommodation (see below). If you are selected for the programme, you will be asked to sign a Terms of Engagement before taking part in the programme. This document will outline your duties and obligations towards SB Overseas, and vice-versa. In the case of any serious breach of the terms of a volunteer's placement, SB Overseas will reserve the right to terminate the agreement, and end the placement.

Meals will not be provided; volunteers will have a well-equipped kitchen they can use to cook for themselves. That said, SB Overseas does provide a basic food budget for volunteers. SB Overseas will cover up to \$100/week of food costs per apartment. This is usually enough to cover basics such as rice, pasta, milk, juice, vegetables, bread, etc. Any food expenses above \$100/week will be covered by volunteers.

However, due to a limited budget for these expenses, SB Overseas are also asking volunteers to contribute as well: **we require volunteers to make a one-time contribution towards their accommodation costs (and tuition costs for branch B):**

- for volunteers in **branch A**, we ask for a contribution of **\$250/month** (i.e. \$500 for a 2-month placement);
- for volunteers in **branch B**, we ask for a contribution of **\$425/month** (i.e. \$850 for a 2-month placement). The extra \$175/month will go towards the cost of their Arabic tuition and the coursebook.

N.B.: We use US dollars as a currency because it is legal tender in Lebanon. The exchange rate between dollars and Lebanese pounds is fixed, meaning that you can also choose to pay in Lebanese pounds.

c. Will I need a visa?

All foreign travellers will need a visa to enter Lebanon.

If you are staying for a 2-month placement, **and** your passport is from one of the following countries, you will be available to obtain a free visa at the customs desk upon entering the country:

Andorra – Antigua and Barbuda – Argentina – Armenia – Australia – Austria – Azerbaijan – Bahamas – Barbados – Belarus – Belgium – Belize – Bhutan – Brazil – Bulgaria – Canada – Chile – PR China – Costa Rica – Croatia – Cyprus – Czech Republic – Denmark – Dominican Republic – Estonia – Finland – France – Georgia – Germany – Greece – Holland – Hong Kong – Hungary – Iceland – Iran – Ireland – Italy – Japan – Kazakhstan – Kirgizstan – Latvia – Liechtenstein – Lithuania – Luxembourg – Macau – Macedonia – Malaysia – Malta – Mexico – Moldova – Monaco – Montenegro – New Zealand – Norway – Panama – Paraguay – Peru – Poland – Portugal – Romania – Russia – Samoa – San Marino – Serbia – Singapore – Slovakia – Slovenia – South Korea – Spain – St. Kitts & Nevis – Sweden – Switzerland – Tajikistan – Turkmenistan – Ukraine – U.K. – U.S.A – Uzbekistan – Venezuela

If you are not from one of these countries, or you plan to stay longer than 2 months, then you should obtain a visa with your local Lebanese embassy before departure.

N.B. All passports bearing an Israeli or Palestinian visa stamp are ineligible to obtain a Lebanese visa.

d. Do you cover travel costs?

Volunteers will need to use their own funds to book their flights to and from Lebanon.

SB Overseas will cover costs for transport that is necessary to the work you will be doing. This will include transport to and from Beirut International Airport on the days of their arrival in and departure from Lebanon.

Although public transport networks in Lebanon are underdeveloped, local private transport is still reasonably cheap: a taxi ride in Beirut will usually cost around \$5-6.

e. Do you cover insurance?

SB Overseas will not provide travel insurance to volunteers. We ask all volunteers in Lebanon to sign an agreement with SB Overseas, such that the organisation will not be held financially responsible for any injury or loss of property. It is therefore highly recommended that volunteers arrange a personal travel insurance plan to cover themselves during their trip, as medical care in Lebanon can be very expensive.

f. Can I start a fundraising campaign to cover personal expenses?

Volunteers who do not have required savings at their disposal to cover the various expenses described above are encouraged to raise it through personal fundraising initiatives such as bake sales, sponsored runs, crowdfunding, etc. The staff at SB Overseas will be at volunteers' disposal to provide them with advice, marketing resources and other long-distance support for their fundraising effort.

Many of SB Overseas' supporters and volunteers have also expressed interest in launching an online donations campaign to further support our projects to help refugees and victims of conflict, or a crowdfunding effort to begin a new small-scale collaborative project in our centres. We fully support any effort by volunteers to generate support for their efforts or for our work. However, our support for individual fundraisers is conditional on the following:

- 1)** All fundraisers (or any other publications) require prior consent from SB Overseas in order to use SB Overseas' name, logo, branding, photos or other media. Please indicate to us via email if you intend to begin a fundraising campaign in conjunction with your volunteering placement.
- 2)** If you are raising funds to cover personal expenses, you do not require any further authorisation from SB Overseas, as long as you respect rule #1, and make absolutely clear to your sponsors that the funds raised are for your personal benefit and will not contribute to SB Overseas or its projects. You will need to send us the link to your fundraiser so we can verify this.
- 3)** If you are raising funds to donate to SB Overseas (including for collaborative projects – see rule #4), your fundraiser must be directly linked to SB Overseas' bank account, to provide a guarantee to all stakeholders that all the money you raise goes towards SB Overseas projects.
- 4)** If you are raising money for a collaborative project you would like to launch in partnership with SB Overseas, you must first discuss your goals and budget for the project with SB Overseas management before posting the fundraising campaign. While these details will be worked out collaboratively, SB Overseas will retain the right to a final decision on all aspects of such a collaborative project, including budget decisions.

If you do not respect these conditions, we will place a request with the website hosting your fundraiser to remove it.

6. Common concerns

a. I could be volunteering at home!

Volunteering anywhere is always a fantastic way to use your free time to make a difference in the world. Lebanon is currently facing an unprecedented crisis and the need for action cannot be overstated. If you feel your time and efforts would be best used at the epicentre of the human disaster created by the war in Syria, then Lebanon is a good place to start.

b. Will my volunteer work make a difference?

Increasingly, we find that those who are thinking of volunteering abroad are sceptical of the usefulness of their efforts. For instance, a volunteer project to build a school in a poor village might be guilty of “pushing out” local professionals who could have done the same job for a fair wage, and as such, aid projects can be guilty of draining local economies of their vitality and skills. While this may sometimes be the case in *development* aid projects, *humanitarian* aid projects such as ours in crisis areas such as Lebanon are different, as the urgent needs of the beneficiaries take priority over the (already overstretched) local economic structures and labour force.

We employ salaried teachers from Lebanon and Syria in our schools, many of whom are themselves refugees. We also feel, however, that it is just as important for people from abroad to come and show their support, to show that these refugees have not been forgotten by the outside world.

The work you will be doing is crucial. With your high level of English, you will bring to these children something that few others in the country can. Many of the children that you will be helping to educate have been without formal tuition for many years, a deficit that risks being a permanent blight on their lives. Every student who learns enough to be able to have access to the Lebanese public school system is another child that has a chance to become a successful and productive member of society in the future. Achieving a certain standard in the English language is one of the core requirements for access to these public schools. Your work will therefore help to bring back a sense of normality to the lives of these unfortunate children.

c. Isn't it dangerous in Lebanon?

There are areas of the country that are considered high-risk but all projects that our volunteers are involved in are in very safe regions. At no point throughout the volunteering project will individuals be asked to work in areas or conditions that are unsafe.

d. Are there any health risks associated with travelling to Lebanon?

Minor health risks common to the Mediterranean and Middle East regions (sun burn, insect bites, etc.) can be dealt with by taking normal precautions and remedies. It is also recommended that volunteers are inoculated against the hepatitis A & B viruses, although this is more a precaution than a necessity.

If you have a pre-existing medical condition, we recommend that you consult a doctor to discuss your trip before you fly out.

e. Would I be able to return home for a weekend break?

Our volunteering placements emphasise continuity for the students in our centres, which is why we do not accept placements of less than 2 months. Regular and sustained attendance at the centres is crucial to building and maintaining a healthy and productive relationship with the project's participants, be it the children or their families. Thus, potential volunteers should apply knowing that an uninterrupted placement is a commitment they will be expected to make.

That being said, we would never force any volunteer to stay against their will. If a volunteer has a valid reason for a trip home then we will be able to accommodate them (see more under "8. Human Resources").

7. What is Lebanon like?

a. What is the culture like?

Lebanon is a great mosaic of cultural and ethnic groups, as a result of mixing between the between indigenous Phoenician people and the foreign cultures that have ruled the land at various points over course of thousands of years.

The religious spectrum is equally diverse: in Lebanon, you will find significant populations of Muslims (Shia and Sunni), Christians (Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Melkite, Protestant, Armenian Apostolic) and the minority Druze religion, which under the Lebanese political division is designated as one of the five Lebanese Muslim communities (Sunni, Shia, Druze, Alawi, and Ismaili). There is also a small Jewish community in the country although they represent less than 1% of the population.

The Lebanese State is secular but family matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance are still handled by the religious authorities representing a person's faith.

b. Are the customs and social norms very different?

The Lebanese people are very proud of their tradition of hospitality and will go to great lengths to make foreigners feel welcome in their country.

The cultural and religious diversity of Lebanon extends to its social and cultural norms. These range from very liberal and progressive to more conservative and traditionalist, depending on the area you find yourself in, and/or the ethnic or religious group that you are interacting with. As such, having a general knowledge of different groups' customs beforehand is wise so as to avoid causing offence.

Some of the areas in which volunteers will be working are very disadvantaged, meaning the cultural norms will tend to lean further towards the traditionalist/conservative end of the spectrum. In some cases, we may ask volunteers to dress modestly when entering such areas, as a gesture of respect to the local culture.

c. Is there much of a night life?

Lebanon has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to bars, clubs and pubs, and plenty of would-be patrons ready to enjoy them – whatever day of the week it is. Competition for clients is fierce, so friendly service, low prices and interesting entertainment is the norm. Nights out Lebanese-style means all night out, with party-goers getting home well after the sun comes up.

8. What human resources I have access to?

a. Volunteer Welfare

Volunteer welfare is a priority across all of SB Overseas' projects. If any of our volunteers are unfortunate enough to be suffering some personal difficulties during their stay in Lebanon, there are a few ways to seek support.

As is often the case in the non-profit sector, you will find that our teams in Lebanon are unusually kind, generous, and understanding people. Your first port of call will be your team leader, who will be tasked with primary volunteer welfare. Other local staff and project managers will also be on hand in Lebanon to provide you with assistance and support.

In the unlikely event that you find that your concerns are not being heard, you will have access to the volunteer coordinator, who is ultimately responsible for the programme.

In the event of a family bereavement, medical issues or other serious circumstances, we can help you in arranging travel back home before the end of your placement.

b. Future opportunities with SB Overseas

At SB Overseas, we are always on the lookout for talented people to join our team. Any volunteer who proves themselves with outstanding work in the field will always be welcome to approach us for a more permanent role.

9. How can I get in contact?

You can find out more about us via the following:

Email: volunteers@sboverseas.org

Telephone: +32 2 377 8908

Website: www.sboverseas.org/volunteer/lebanon

Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/SB.Overseas.charity

www.facebook.com/groups/SBVolunteer

Twitter: @sb_overseas

Instagram: sb_overseas