

# VISAS AND TRAVEL TO RUSSIAN FEDERATION

In 1997 the Russian government introduced new regulations for entry to the Russian Federation by foreign citizens. It is important to abide by these regulations, and to understand their impact in causing delays and stress to all concerned. **Visas are your responsibility.** IVS and its Russian partners will help as much as they can but have no influence over Russian government bureaucracy. It should be possible to obtaining a visa by post but in some cases a visit to the embassy (in London or Edinburgh) may be necessary. The Russian Embassy in Edinburgh tends to be less busy than the London Embassy.

## Timescale

**Before you can apply for a visa you will need either an invitation letter from Russia or an MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) number.** IVS partner organisations in Russia can get these for you. (MFA numbers are issued for visas arranged through registered travel agencies. You will be issued with an MFA number if you are staying in/travelling through Moscow, as in this case our Russian partner organisations arrange your stay through a local travel agency. Otherwise you will receive a faxed invitation letter from the organisation who run the work camp.)

A minimum of 30 days before the proposed date of entry to the RF by the volunteer, the IVS partner organisation in the RF (YVS, VSU or Peter and Paul) needs to have the following information about the volunteer, in order to process the visa invitation. **It is therefore not possible to be placed on a workcamp in the RF if you apply less than 30 days before it is due to start.**

Information required:

- Name and surname
- Home address
- Date and place of birth
- Sex
- Citizenship/nationality
- Passport number
- Passport validity/expiry date
- Profession or occupation
- Post or rank held at present (if applicable)
- Name and full address of college/university, or employer
- Probable dates of entry/exit from the RF (including travel before/after the workcamp)
- Intended length of stay in RF
- City in Britain where you intend to apply for visa (London or Edinburgh)\*.
- **Copy of page of your passport with the photo.**

20 days before the date of entry of the volunteer, the partner organisation in the RF has to complete a special application form to present to the RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

Within 5 working days the MFA issues a formal invitation for the volunteer. This is given to the embassy/consulate where the volunteer stated they would apply for their visa. At this point, IVS will be informed by the RF partner of the date the volunteer can call to pick up the visa. This can normally be done by post, if you supply a stamped addressed envelope with registered delivery postage (please enquire at embassy before trying this), but may involve a visit in person to the embassy. The visa will not be issued to the volunteer without this MFA number. Collecting the visa may involve a considerable wait at the embassy, especially in London. It is important to apply to the embassy (London or Edinburgh) that you specified in the first place. It is NOT POSSIBLE to collect it from London if you said you would be doing it in Edinburgh (or vice versa). As stated above, in some cases you will be issued with a written invitation instead of an MFA number. In this case you will be sent the invitation, to be sent to the embassy along with your application.

## Other Points

The volunteer should contact the RF embassy/consulate in Britain to get the visa application forms, and fill them in, as soon as they can after they have been informed by IVS that they have been offered a place on a workcamp in the RF. Simply fill in the forms and keep them safe. The process of obtaining a visa is then completed by the volunteer visiting the embassy with their MFA number/letter of invitation, or applying by post if applicable, once they have been told they should do so (you will also need to provide the embassy with several passport photos, your passport, a stamped addressed envelope if applying by post, and the consular fee in cash or postal order - see overleaf). You should obtain the application forms from the embassy in advance so that you have them when you need them. The embassy is sometimes VERY difficult to get hold of on the telephone. You can download the application form from their website, or from [www.russialink.org.uk/embassy](http://www.russialink.org.uk/embassy). There is a useful website for embassies at [www.embassyhomepage.com](http://www.embassyhomepage.com).

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\* Please remember when choosing which city to apply for your visa at, that you may need to visit the embassy in person. If, however, you have no geographical preference, we suggest using the Edinburgh Consulate as they are often faster to respond as they have fewer applications to process.

An alternative to the above system is for the volunteer to use a travel agent to obtain the visa on their behalf. This will normally involve the volunteer booking their flight through the travel agent as well, and there will almost certainly be a substantial fee charged for the work of obtaining your visa - it may, however, be a bit quicker.

The embassy may only keep records of invitations/MFA numbers for 10 days after they are issued. It is therefore important that you contact the embassy and apply for your visa as soon as possible after receiving your invitation/MFA number. If it isn't possible to apply by post and you cannot go there on the date specified, or within a couple of days after that date, make sure you tell the embassy when you will be coming to collect the visa so that they do not throw it away.

**It is extremely difficult (normally impossible) to change the dates of your visa once the invitation/MFA number has been issued.** Please think carefully about your planned travel dates at the time you make your application to IVS, and include a note requesting a visa for a specific starting date and finishing date to allow for any travel before or after the workcamp. If you do not do this your visa will be issued only for the exact dates of the workcamp. Visas are usually for a maximum of 30 days.

### **IMPORTANT**

As soon as you have been offered a place on a workcamp that you wish to accept, please arrange your travel and then **immediately inform IVS of the dates which you will need your visa for (even if this is just to confirm that they are the same dates first specified.)** The Russian partner organisation will then start their work to get the invitation/MFA number in order to get your visa. This can take quite a while. It is imperative that you **confirm your acceptance of the workcamp place, and inform IVS of the visa dates required, as a matter of urgency. If you don't then you may end up not getting a visa!**

### **Additional costs**

*Consular fee:* If the normal IVS visa system is used, the RF embassy will charge according to how urgently the visa is required. This will vary from £30 if applying well in advance, up to perhaps £100 or more if applying only 1 or 2 days before.

The partner organisations in RF charge the volunteer a fee for the work they have done to obtain the MFA/invitation for them. This is payable upon arrival in the RF in cash and is usually £10 to £20 (payable in US dollars). This is simply a reimbursement to them for the charge the MFA have made to them.

Once in the RF (and Ukraine) volunteers have to pay for their internal travel. As it is **very difficult** for foreigners to obtain rail tickets at short notice (you cannot just buy them at the station as in Britain), the partner organisations YVS and VSU will buy tickets in advance for the volunteers. These will be given to the volunteer upon arrival at the relevant partner's office in Moscow. These tickets then need to be paid for in cash (US dollars), and an extra 15% (approx.) is normally added to cover the cost of the work involved in obtaining the ticket. It is possible for a volunteer to arrange their own travel if they wish, but they must inform IVS that they plan to do so at least 4 weeks in advance. Otherwise tickets will be bought for them, and they will be charged for them at full price. The cost of travel to each workcamp (from Moscow) will be notified to the volunteers in advance.

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**It is important that all volunteers going to the Russian Federation/Ukraine confirm their acceptance of any workcamp place offered as soon as possible in order to facilitate visa and travel support. Failure to do so will delay work to help you get a visa, and increases the risk that you will not get one in time.**

All volunteers will receive a "country briefing sheet" in advance, in addition to the usual workcamp information sheet.

All volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend a special preparation day in June (London/Edinburgh/Cardiff) at which they will be given a lot of helpful information, and be able to meet volunteers who have previously been to the Russian Federation.

### **LAST BUT NOT LEAST**

Please remember to give the IVS office your travel details as soon as possible, including exact time and place of arrival in Russia, airline, flight number or train number etc. The partner organisations need these **at least two weeks before you arrive.**

### **Addresses**

**The Embassy of the Russian Federation**, Consular Section, 5 Kensington Gardens, London, W8 4QS.  
Tel: 0207 229 8027 Fax: 0207 229 3215  
Open to callers Mon-Fri, 9.00-11.00

**Consulate General of the Russian Federation**, Consular Section, 58 Melville Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7HF  
Tel: 0131 225 7098 Fax: 0131 225 9587  
Open to callers Mon-Fri, 9.00-12.30 and 14.00-17.00