



Volunteer Information Pack “Omladinska organizacija Svitac”



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Bosnia and Herzegovina



Street Maps of Brčko:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Df_m-JpbzsT0yazHtfhUKH9X38c&hl=en_US&ll=44.87396297892898%2C18.80564849999996&z=15

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Svitac and Brčko

Who are we?

“Omladinska organizacija Svitac” is a Bosnian NGO working in the town of Brčko, situated within Brčko District, a multi-ethnic enclave in the north-east of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Brčko District is unique in this multiculturalism, as it is the only region of the country where all nationalities coexist and where any nationality makes up a dominant percentage of the population.

Our organization began life as Firefly Youth Project, and was founded in 1998 by Ellie Maxwell, an international aid worker. In its early stages, it only had international staff members who were funded by Edinburgh University students. It quickly took on Bosnian staff members and began to run a number of creative arts, languages and arts workshops. In 2003, it was registered as a NGO, was renamed Svitac, and began to operate under the leadership of Gordana Varcakovic, our current director. Firefly International became a UK registered charity and continues to work as Svitac’s main international partner.

Our current staff consists of 4 members, including Gordana Varcakovic, Edina Vošanović (our International and Local Volunteers Coordinator), Sanjin Vošanović (our Music Coordinator, FutureShorts Film Festival Coordinator and Summer Music Camps Coordinator) and Milos Popic (Project Officer and Volunteer Service Coordinator). Each staff member works with our local volunteer teams and international long-term volunteers’ team. You can read more about our staff via the Svitac website, and get to know them in person!

We provide a range of educational and arts-based activities which we believe enables young people to come together, interact and socialize in a safe and welcoming environment. Svitac upholds the principle that all young people should be able to participate irrespective of their own financial circumstances and this is why all of our activities are offered free of charge. We are committed to a multi-ethnic Bosnia, in which the respective ethnic groups (Serb, Croat and Bosniak) work together within an open, inclusive and tolerant society. Although our work is focused upon the needs of the surrounding community, we are also continually exploring ways in which we can establish broader international links.

We also facilitate evening language classes which are popular with adults of all ages, in order to help them improve their language skills. This is important in times of globalization, where languages seem to be the key to personal development, building relationships, exchange of information and job opportunities. While the youth are our main focus, we believe that engaging all members of society is integral to our success.

Brčko District and Brčko Town

Svitac's ethos is very much rooted within the community in which it operates. Brčko District was established in 1998 as a neutral, multi-ethnic, self-governing administrative unit. It is formally part of both Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is the only multi-ethnic entity in Bosnia and, as such, is a model for a tolerant, inclusive and multi-ethnic Bosnia. Brčko District currently has 100,000 inhabitants, and the town of Brčko accounts for about a third of that total. Brčko town is on the right side of the river Sava, which functions as a natural border line which separates Bosnia and Croatia – the border crossing checkpoint is actually located on the bridge which crosses the river. Brčko is a small town and most areas and shops are within a few minutes walk of the main pedestrian street. Although the town has a safe and enjoyable living environment, in outlying areas of the district unemployment is as high as 40%, with young people being particularly affected by unemployment.



Activities and Courses

Language courses

English and German courses are organized for adults of all ages to help them improve language they learnt at school, or through music or movies but not necessarily with a native speaker. The conversation classes provide an opportunity to practice pronunciation and more fluid conversation in a space where they can feel comfortable to practice and learn at their own pace and also have fun. These courses take place a few times throughout the week in the evenings, and are organized mostly by the international volunteers.

Daily, Monthly and Annual Activities

Our activities are held in Brčko's Youth Centre, which is based in the central part of the town. A number of other community organizations and associations that are based within Brčko also use this facility, so we have to book in advance. Most of our classes cater for the age group 4-15, although we also work with older age groups, such as 16-20, 21-30 and 30-45. Whereas younger age categories tend to focus upon activities, older age categories instead tend to engage with language courses. Volunteers are free to work with whichever age group they are most comfortable with. They choose the age group they feel most comfortable with after their orientation week in Bosnia, based on their observations.

Daily program

The *Culture and Arts Diversity around the World* program helps participants to develop a sense of cultural and artistic diversity by helping them to engage with new cultural and artistic experiences. Activities as part of the daily program take place between 10:30am and 4:00pm in the local youth center, with a refreshment break taking place between 1pm and 2pm. The Daily program breaks down into two workshops, and roughly 30 children per day attend these workshops from Monday to Friday (sometimes there are more or less, depending on the time of year). The aim of these workshops is to introduce the participants, through a range of activities (such as arts and crafts, learning the alphabet, science lessons, music lessons, etc.) to other forms of art and culture from across the world. International volunteers are responsible for creating, running and supporting the activities with the youth, alongside the aid of the local staff through translation and resources.



The first workshop of the day caters for children aged between 4 and 7, and takes place every day from 11am to 1pm. In the first part of the workshop participants, engage with different activities, followed by a 15 minutes to enjoy a refreshment, and finally, the participants engage in socialization games and activities. Some examples of this downtime are freeze-tag, fire-water-storm, musical chairs and one-knee-two-knees are particularly popular games.



The second workshop takes place between 2pm and 3:30pm, and caters to children between the ages of 8 and 12. In contrast to the first class, the participants are instead school-aged children, and accordingly there is a greater emphasis upon educational activities. Although we do ensure 15-20 minutes of each workshop is set aside for activities and games, to encourage the importance of fun and distressing. In previous workshops, foreign language activities have proved to be particularly popular, and we therefore encourage volunteers to incorporate English and German into their drawing and painting activities.



Monthly projects

In addition to the daily program, the coordinators and volunteers will work together to schedule dates for monthly events/projects. Depending on the topic, the projects can be held at varying times (morning, afternoon or evening). This flexibility is particularly important because participant availability often varies in accordance with broader obligations (educational, personal and social). Monthly projects cover a wide range of activities – these include music (samba, guitar and music workshops), art (creative workshops and art projects) and language (English, German, French and Spanish) activities. Sometimes activities may be organized in collaboration with other organizations – for instance, international volunteers have previously worked with Brčko District primary and high schools in providing interactive English and German workshops. Volunteers are also encouraged to develop projects which reflect their own interests – for instance, previous volunteers have run film, photography, sports and dance projects.



Annual projects

Summer Camp

In instances where we manage to secure funding, we organize a summer music camp outside of Brčko, which is usually held in July and which takes place between 5-7 days. Annually, we also run Summer Camps for youth towards the end of August. There are three main sections of the camp throughout the week, including creative arts, sports and language. On the Friday, a short documentary film festival (*FutureShorts Film Festival*) is presented, followed by a culture presentation event, which is aimed at older youth and adults. On Saturday, a Children's Day is organized during which participants give presentations and

play different games. All of the subsequent projects, with the exception of the FutureShorts Film Festival (which began in 2012) and the daily workshops (which started in February 2015), have been running since 2007.



FutureShorts Film Festival

The FutureShorts film festival is held two times per year (usually in May and August). Since late 2012, Svitac has hosted 14 FutureShorts film festivals. FutureShorts is the world's biggest pop-up film festival, which promotes short films around the world, and which builds a global community through live events. For the community in Brčko, this provides a unique opportunity to watch movies from prestigious film festivals such as Sundance, Berlinale and Barcelona Visual Sound. The first four screenings were coordinated by international volunteer Sarah Bennett, before Svitac's local staff assumed responsibility for coordination in summer 2013. In the four years in which screenings have taken place in Brčko, local and international volunteers have promoted events, provided technical assistance and prepared promotional material.



Halloween Party

The Halloween Party takes place in the last week of October (and is usually held on a Saturday because of school obligations). Both children and teenagers participate. It lasts for 2-3 hours, but staff and volunteers have to spend much longer preparing prior to this (making decorations, planning different activities and preparing different food).



New Year's Party

The New Year Party is organized between the 15th and 22nd of December (before the school holidays begin), and it caters for younger Svitac participants, who are allowed to bring one special guest with them. Staff and volunteers prepare games beforehand. Bingo is played at the end of the party, and the winners are provided with a small present.

Anti-Racism Day/Week

One day in March, or sometimes a whole week, is set aside for activities that engage with this theme. International volunteers, local staff and local volunteers arrange a series of creative workshops and discussion groups which enable children, teenagers and young people to engage with the complexities of racism.



Antifascism Day

In November, an antifascism day further develops themes which the antiracism day initially explored. International volunteers, with the assistance of local staff and volunteers, organize a series of workshops and discussion which will help children, teenagers and young people to explore the negative historical and contemporary consequences of fascism. Music and other forms of creative expression will further enable participants to explore this theme.



Our International and Local Volunteers

Volunteer Requirements

Svitac is particularly keen to engage with volunteers that have art, music and language skills, as these are our core focus areas. We do not require volunteers to be professionals or to hold formal qualifications, but we are interested in volunteers with general skills and who are capable of adapting to the challenges of working with different age groups and an unfamiliar working environment.



Volunteering Timeframes and Visa Requirements

Over the course of the year, Svitac normally hosts 4 long term (6-12 months) volunteers and between 6-10 short-term volunteers (1-3) months. Long-term volunteers are supported by the ERASMUS+ or 'Weltwärts' volunteering programs. Some short-term volunteers are also supported by ERASMUS+, whereas others are self-funded. Short term volunteers are usually with us between March-May, June-August and the middle of September-December. Long-term volunteers usually begin their placements in September/October or February/March.

Upon their arrival in Brčko, foreign volunteers will need to go through the registration and visa process. Upon completion, volunteers will receive a visa in their passport. Svitac will then receive a separate official permission card for each volunteer.

International Volunteer Responsibilities

Volunteers can assist with daily or monthly programs for the whole of their volunteering period. We encourage volunteers to submit personal project proposals, which we will then help them to develop (for example, evening language course or drama workshops). It is ultimately the volunteer's decision as to whether they continue to assist with daily and monthly projects solely, or if they also wish to coordinate their own projects. However all staff, including local volunteers, will help with the preparation and implementation of annual projects.

Every volunteer has a mentor, usually a member of Svitac's staff or an experienced local volunteer, who will help them to settle into their new environment, learn more about Svitac and begin their own project. Volunteers have a meeting with their mentor once a week, but volunteers are free, at any time, to contact their mentor with any concern or issue. All volunteers are required to submit a timesheet and monthly report. Template examples of monthly reports, time-sheets and project proposals are provided to the volunteer at the beginning of their volunteering period.



Local Volunteers

Our local volunteers are usually our former participants. They sometimes have attended activities since their early age and through contact with international volunteers they become interested to become volunteers themselves. They start volunteering in high school (16+) and continue until they leave to study outside Brčko, or move on to other opportunities. Every time they come for holidays they come to ask if we need any help, and we love seeing them again.

Other young people also come sometimes to ask if they can volunteer. Local volunteers help international volunteers to settle in the local community, show them around, introduce them to their friends, go out with them in their free time, and basically provide any help they need (especially during first weeks in Brčko). At the workshops they help with translation, workshop preparation, facilitating workshops and helping volunteers to put posters around town.



Language support

The volunteers will work with young people with a diverse range of language abilities. Some may have a good standard of spoken English or German, whereas some may only have a limited grasp of either language. While international volunteers will have the support of local staff and volunteers for translation and communication aid, we encourage international volunteers to try to attain a basic knowledge of the local language that is used in Brčko District. Having even just the basics will allow you to easier acclimatize to your new environment, and build relationships with the program participants and locals. Unless volunteers are already proficient, Svitac will offer a short language course. The course usually will run once a week for 1.5 hours, and depending on other volunteers at the time, can be done in small groups.



Getting to Brčko and Settling In

Travel Planning

There are airports in Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo and Belgrade, all of which have a direct bus connection to and from Brčko (note that Zagreb and Belgrade are the closest). Most volunteers arrive via the Sarajevo (Bosnia) or Belgrade (Serbia) airports, and then take a bus to Brčko. It takes five hours to travel via bus from Sarajevo and three-and-a-half hours to travel from Belgrade. We recommend coming from Belgrade as it is close, and the bus ticket is cheaper as well (€13-15 from Belgrade, as opposed to €18-20 from Sarajevo). If you encounter





any difficulties on your trip from either location, then please contact the staff member assigned as your emergency contact.

If the bus is scheduled to arrive in Brčko any later than 8pm, it is better to stay overnight in your place of arrival. New arrivals in Belgrade often spend the night at the Double Door Hostel (<http://doubledoorhostel.com/how/>). Volunteers from Germany also have the option of travelling to Bosnia directly via bus – there are several private companies that provide transport (usually once or twice per week) to Bosnia.

Accommodation

Svitac's volunteers live in a shared apartment or house, which is rented by Svitac. There is a house where three volunteers can stay, and a flat where two can be. Both locations have internet access and volunteers are also more than welcome to use the internet connection in Svitac's office or at the youth center. Each volunteer has their own bedroom and a shared kitchen, living room and bathroom. Two-week volunteers may sometimes sleep on a sofa-bed in the living room or in the available spare room. Sheets and towels are provided, unless volunteers want to bring their own. Brčko landlords usually charge per person (not per room) - if volunteers have guests to stay, their guests may have to stay in separate rented accommodation or pay extra to their landlord. Volunteers must inform their Svitac mentor in advance (as the police registration department has to be informed about visitors staying with volunteers). The accommodation is self-catered. There are numerous shops, bars, and restaurants in the town, along with supermarkets and shops.

Local transport

Local staff will help to arrange transportation if necessary (either bus or their own cars), although nearly all of Svitac's activities are within walking distance of Svitac's office, the youth center and the volunteers' flat. Brčko is a small town and most areas are accessible on foot. If volunteers need to use public transport and wish to be reimbursed, this must be agreed in advance with Svitac's office staff. The same applies if the volunteer's project requires them to travel to other places in Bosnia, Croatia or Serbia, meaning details must be agreed in advance and all travel tickets and receipts must be retained and handed onto Svitac's office staff.

General Tips

Life in Brčko is generally calm and pleasant and we anticipate that you will have few difficulties while settling in. However, there are a few things that it is useful to know:

- Tap-water is not drinkable. Water should either be bought from the supermarket or be taken from communal wells
- While English is taught in the local schools, it is not widely spoken by adults. German is more widely spoken – however, it would be useful to try to learn a few local phrases.
- Mines remain a real danger – do not walk through wild countryside or venture into disused houses.
- In January the average temperature is between -2°C and -15°C , while in August it is between 32°C and 35°C .
- Brčko has a modern and well-resourced hospital, should you ever need to seek medical attention.

Brčko: Food, Drink and Places to Visit

Brčko: Places of Interest

- “Omladinski Centar” – This is the youth club where Svitac hold most of their workshops and activities.
- “Svitac Centar” – Svitac bought this center in August 2010, with financial assistance from Firefly UK and Firefly International. Svitac’s workshops are held here during the week, on public holidays and whenever Omladinski Centar is shut.
- Brčko Library — Has a collection of English and German books, along with a collection of old photos of Brčko – it charges an annual membership fee of €2.5. Brčko also has a university library.
- Ficibajer – This is a beautiful location on the banks of the river Sava. It is a great place for barbeques, walking or just admiring the views. If you are feeling active, there will also probably be a chance to join in group sports like football, basketball and volleyball.
- Stadion “Jedinstvo” – here you can go jogging, meet up with friends or just sit on the stands and enjoy the view.
- Brčko swimming pool, which is next to Ficibajer, is only open during the summer. During the winter you might instead want to try ice skating at the town’s ice rink.
- There are numerous coffee shops and pubs and clubs. In the latter you might come across turbo-folk, a popular musical genre within all of the former Yugoslav Republics.
- The sports hall can be booked very cheaply during the winter.

- ❑ Brčko also has a games room which comes complete with pool tables, computer games and a PlayStation.
- ❑ Volunteers can join the Brčko District choir (three of our volunteers were members), and traditional dancing groups (folklore). There are also opportunities to engage with yoga, belly dancing and kick-boxing.
- ❑ There are also various gyms and opportunities to engage with handball, volleyball and basketball.
- ❑ For those with an interest in bargains, there is a second hand market – it is only 15 minutes away (on foot) from town center. It mainly sells second-hand clothes and organic food that has been grown in the countryside.

Food

There are two main supermarkets in Brčko, Konzum and Bingo, which you can find in the city center. There are also a large number of smaller and medium-sized shops (similar to convenience stores) where volunteers can buy food and other necessities. There is also a fresh food market which is open every day until noon that sells fruits, vegetables, honey and other organic foods from the local region. Equally, there are bakeries on almost every corner, and some are open for 24 hours.

Bosnian Food and Drink

- Ćevapi – mincemeat sausages cooked on a barbeque, usually served with homemade bread and onions
- Burek – mincemeat and onion pie
- Sirnica – similar to burek, but with cheese
- Zeljanica – similar again, this time with cheese and spinach
- Sarma - meat, rice, various spices wrapped in cabbage rolls
- Janjetina sa raznja – lamb cooked on a spit
- Satrica – salad with spring onion and sour cream
- Rakija – plum brandy
- Bosnian coffee – be warned, it is very strong!

Places to visit

- Belgrade.* There are several daily buses which travel from Brčko (the journey takes around three-and-a-half hours). You won't have any problems finding somewhere to stay - there are many youth hostels.
- Sarajevo.* There are several daily buses – the journey takes about five hours. There are a range of youth hostels.
- Mostar.* There is a direct bus connection from Brčko. It takes around seven hours. There are some youth hostels, as well as opportunities to stay with local people.
- Gradacac.* There are no direct buses which drive there. You will need somebody with a car to give you a lift (the journey takes around one hour).
- Tuzla.* This is the nearest big town, with regular bus service which takes about 2 hours.
- Bijeljina.* A town which is a 30 minute bus-ride away from Brčko.

- Novi Sad.* The second largest city in Serbia, after Belgrade. It is around two-and-a-half hours away – you might like to visit the EXIT festival.
- Zagreb.* The capital of Croatia, and is around three hours away.





Contact Names and Details

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Edina Vosanovic, Volunteer Coordinator

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Tel: +387 65 660 872

Nearest Clinic:

Centar porodične medicine (Center of family medicine), Trg pravde 16. Brčko 76100

Tel: +387 49 230 980

Nearest Hospital:

Bolnica Brčko Distrikt (Brčko District Hospital), Banjalučka 3, Brčko 76100

Tel: +38749217422

Nearest Police Department:

Address: Trg mladih 10, Brčko 76100

Tel: +38749233200

General number for calling police/authorities:

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If you like to work with children and young people,

....if you are fun and creative,

...and if you would like to meet and work with people from all over the world.



**We are looking
forward to seeing you
in Brčko!**