



Cambridge Convoy Refugee Action Group

Convoys Volunteer Handbook

Updated March 2024

This handbook contains information and guidance for volunteers participating in CamCrag's convoys to France.

You must read this handbook before registering for a CamCrag convoy, especially our [Safeguarding Policy](#) and [Code of Conduct](#).

If you have any questions about this handbook, or suggestions for future versions, please email convoys@camcrag.org.uk

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About CamCrag and our convoys

Cambridge Convoy Refugee Action Group (CamCrag) is an entirely volunteer-run charity that does not employ any staff. Everyone involved with CamCrag is a volunteer, who gives their time and talents freely in support of CamCrag and its objectives.

Our convoys facilitate volunteers from the Cambridge region to work with NGOs who are directly supporting refugees in Northern France. We organise the car share, and reimburse the costs of the ferry or train crossing (up to £250), and the fuel costs (up to £55): Volunteers only pay for two nights in the hostel in Calais (usually less than £50), and their evening meals.

Convoys usually leave Cambridge on Friday afternoon/evenings and return Sunday late afternoon. Volunteers are expected to work two full days on Saturday and Sunday with whichever NGO needs our assistance. Usually this will be in one of the NGO warehouses in the Calais area, and will involve sorting clothes, checking tents, preparing food, chopping wood, or other tasks.

During the working day volunteers are the responsibility of the NGO they are working with, and must follow any procedures or rules the NGO prescribes. Volunteers come on our convoys entirely at their own risk, and the charity does not accept responsibility for loss or injury suffered by anyone on our convoys.

However, the wellbeing of volunteers is of paramount importance to us and we seek to support volunteers by

- Providing as much information as possible to volunteers, including this Guide, an online briefing session before the convoy, and a WhatsApp group where volunteers can ask questions.
- Always ensuring that each Convoy has a Convoy Leader, who is a member of the Charity's Executive Committee, a Trustee, or an experienced volunteer who has been on several previous convoys.
- Identifying in advance any French speakers in the group, in case a volunteer needs help with translation.
- Soliciting feedback from all convoy members after their return from a convoy.
- Holding timely reflective sessions after a convoy as required.
- Providing contact details of professionals when required who can provide further support.

The application process

To register for a convoy please fill in the online form on our website, which asks for your contact details, whether you intend to bring a vehicle, and other information we need to book accommodation (e.g. passport number). After the convoy we will delete this information, apart from your name and contact details, which we are required to retain for up to two years for safeguarding purposes.

Spaces on our convoys are limited, usually to approximately 30 volunteers: We attempt to include everyone who applies, but this is not always possible. Sometimes we also do not have enough cars and drivers for everyone who wants to go, so if you have a vehicle, please consider being a driver. We will confirm your attendance after the registration deadline. Please do not assume you are going until you receive confirmation from us.

After registration for the convoy has closed (usually about a fortnight before the convoy), you will receive the convoy plan which will include who is in whose car and confirmation that we have booked hostel

rooms for you. Drivers receive the names and contact details of their passengers, passengers receive the name and contact details of their driver, and drivers will contact their passengers to arrange suitable pick up times and places in the Cambridge area.

We ask drivers to book their own ferry or tunnel crossing, which CamCrag will reimburse after the convoy up to a maximum of £250.

Before the convoy there will also be a short online briefing meeting, to allow you to meet the other convoy participants and to ask any questions. We encourage all convoy participants to attend, but it is not compulsory.

Key requirements for joining a convoy

To join a CamCrag volunteer convoy you must

- Be at least 18 years old on the day the convoy leaves Cambridge
- Possess a valid passport issued in the last 10 years with at least 3 months unexpired from the last date of the convoy. If you are not a UK or EU citizen you must ensure that you have any other travel documents required for you to travel to France. It is the law in France that you must carry identification at all times including, if you are a foreigner, proof of your right to be in the country. This effectively means keeping your passport on you at all times.
- Be prepared to leave Cambridge early on the Friday evening (6pm at the latest) and return on Sunday evening (we usually leave Calais between 4 and 5pm, returning to Cambridge by 9pm).

In addition, if you are volunteering to drive a vehicle, you must have

- A full and valid driving licence: If you do not have a photocard licence, then you should obtain an International Driving Permit, available over the counter at UK post offices for a small sum.
- The V5C vehicle registration document for the vehicle
- The vehicle insurance policy and any other associated documents. If you are driving someone else's vehicle, these documents should mention you as a named driver or, if covered by your own insurance, you should bring your own insurance documents as well as the vehicle's.
- Reflective ('hi vis') jackets for all passengers (i.e. usually five for most cars), which must be accessible from inside the car (i.e. not in the boot).
- Hazard warning triangle, which must be accessible from inside the car
- Headlamp beam deflectors
- A UK sticker displayed on the rear of the vehicle, unless your licence plate includes a UK identifier with the Union Flag.
- No speed camera detectors or sat nav systems with camera locations

CamCrag can provide drivers kits on loan on request: Ask us when applying.

What to bring

In addition to the requirements above, we also recommend that you bring the following:

- Some Euros

- A water bottle: Please stay hydrated!
- Practical shoes and clothing: The warehouse is an unheated and sometimes dusty space. It is also potentially an open space, so please respect the cultural sensitivities of others and dress modestly.
- Bumbag for your personal possessions.
- A euro plug adapter if you want to charge your phone or other electronic devices.
- A GHIC or EHIC card (see healthcare below). You may also want to consider your own travel insurance.
- Only one small suitcase or rucksack. We ask drivers to take physical donations (e.g. clothes and tents) from our donation hub in Cambridge, so we ask that you keep personal luggage to a minimum.
- A positive outlook and lots of enthusiasm!

Healthcare and insurance

The UK has a reciprocal healthcare scheme with the EU, which allows British travellers to get essential medical treatment either for free or at a much-reduced cost. European Health Insurance Cards (EHICs) are still valid, until their expiry date. If you do not have an EHIC, or if it has expired, we recommend that you apply for the new Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC), available for free from the NHS at www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/

Please note that it may take several weeks for your GHIC to arrive, so we recommend applying as early as possible.

The EHIC and GHIC schemes are not the same as travel insurance. CamCrag does not provide insurance for our volunteers outside of the UK, we are just facilitators who enable you to volunteer for NGOs in northern France.

We therefore recommend that you take out your own travel and health insurance. If you are not an EU citizen and not eligible for the GHIC scheme, then we highly recommend this.

The French emergency number (for all emergency services) is 112.

What you will do

The refugee situation across Europe is very dynamic and changeable. Despite the constant news of Channel crossings, the situation on the ground in Calais and Dunkirk has all but disappeared from the news agenda. Yet there are still hundreds of displaced people living rough or in makeshift temporary camps in and around the coastal towns.

CamCrag volunteers work with the NGOs that support these people, usually by providing manual labour at one of their warehouses. Most often we work at a warehouse run by the French association [L'Auberge des Migrants](#), which houses several NGOs, including [Collective Aid](#), [Refugee Community Kitchen](#) and [Calais Food Collective](#).

These NGOs are often run by a small team of long term volunteers, so CamCrag's volunteers provide a welcome energised workforce to ease the workload, and prepare for the week ahead (as there are usually fewer volunteers on weekdays).

On Saturday we usually leave the hostel at about 8.45am to get to the warehouse for 9am. There is a morning briefing at 9.15am, which will go over procedures for working in the warehouse and any updates, as well as some gentle group warm-up exercises. Tea and coffee are freely available in the warehouse throughout the day.

The work may involve chopping vegetables, prepping food, or cleaning in the kitchen. You may find yourself sorting donations, checking tents, or preparing aid packs for distribution. From November to May the woodyard prepares firewood, so you may be able to help chop wood.

Mechanically minded volunteers may be asked to help fix or service the vans used for distribution.

Sometimes we are asked to go litter picking at distribution sites or in the temporary camps.

Given the dynamic nature of the situation, we rarely know what we will be doing until we get there!

Lunch is provided at the warehouse from 1 to 2pm. All food is vegetarian, and a vegan option is always available. We usually finish work between 5 and 6pm, though this varies depending on the time of year and what work we are doing. On Saturdays the group usually goes out for a restaurant meal in Calais, and then on Sunday we go directly to the port or train terminus when we leave the warehouse.

Accommodation

We stay in the hostel in Calais (see www.auberge-jeunesse-calais.com/en/). CamCrag books these rooms on your behalf, but you will need to pay for them on arrival, usually around €56.40 for two nights when sharing your room. If you choose single occupancy the rate will be higher. (credit and debit cards accepted).

The hostel is located near the beach and about ten minutes' walk from Calais town centre. There is usually plenty of car parking available on the street by the hostel. Reception is staffed 24 hours a day.

Each room has two single beds and by default we will arrange for you to share with someone of the same sex. There is one toilet and shower for every two rooms. Bed linen is provided but we advise you to bring your own towel. The hostel requests that you strip your bed on Sunday morning and leave your sheets in your room.

If you are travelling with a friend you can request that you share a room together when applying. If you would prefer to have a single room please let us know when applying (it usually costs about €20 more). If you don't request a single room, but we end up having to put you in one (e.g. because there are an odd number of volunteers), then you will not have to pay the additional cost.

A simple buffet breakfast is included and served from 7am, usually consisting of orange juice, tea, coffee, bread, butter, jam, cakes, fruit and pancakes.

Conduct and Safety

When at the warehouse:

- If someone comes off the street asking for assistance, ask them to wait outside and find the duty manager. It is illegal for the NGOs to distribute donations directly from the warehouse, but if someone needs other assistance or advice the long-term volunteers are best placed to offer this.

- Follow any health and safety protocols you are asked to observe, including the use of personal protective equipment such as gloves, goggles or ear plugs.
- Familiarise yourself with the policies and procedures of the NGO you are assisting.
- If in doubt, ask a long-term volunteer or the duty manager.

Distributions and other field work:

- CamCrag volunteers are not usually asked to help with distributions or other field work, and if they are it will only be after they have been on a few convoys. Working directly with refugees usually requires some field training, which the NGOs in Calais will provide if necessary.
- If you are asked to assist with a distribution or other field work (which is of course voluntary!), you will be given a briefing before setting out and you will be with long term, experienced, volunteers.

General conduct:

- We expect our volunteers to show respect to other volunteers, the coordinators, members of external organisations, and the people we support.
- We expect our volunteers to be polite, helpful and sensitive to others' individual needs and circumstances.
- We operate a zero-tolerance policy towards any aggressive, threatening or discriminatory behaviour, be this racism, ageism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, or any other forms of marginalization.
- If you have any concerns please talk to the Convoy Leader

Further information can be found in the [Code of Conduct](#) and [Safeguarding Policy](#) at the end of this handbook.

Fuel and train/ferry refunds

If you are a driver, CamCrag will refund the fuel and costs of the channel crossing up to £250 for the crossing and £55 for fuel. Please do not ask your passengers for contributions towards fuel costs.

You will need to keep hold of your channel crossing receipt in order to claim back this expense after the convoy.

Many drivers are happy not to claim their expenses which, of course, we very much appreciate. However, it is financially advantageous and better accounting procedure for the charity to refund these costs, after which you can donate the money back to us: This allows us to claim an extra 25% in gift aid on your donation (assuming you pay income tax in the UK).

Donations

We ask drivers to pick up some physical donations from our hub in Cambridge to transport with their passengers to Calais: Usually this will be clothing, tents or sleeping bags.

Please do not bring your own physical donations without first checking with the convoy coordinators: It may be that other items are a priority in Calais, or that your donations could be better used elsewhere in Europe, in which case we may ask you to leave them at our donation hub.

Lastly, CamCrag is an entirely volunteer-run charity: All the money we raise pays for our convoys or is distributed in grants to NGOs supporting refugees across Europe. If you are able to contribute, please donate through our website.

After you return

Post convoy support:

- Volunteering can be a thought-provoking and emotional experience, and it is often helpful to talk through that experience with others when you return.
- Our convoy coordinators can arrange sessions with professionals if requested, and if there is demand we can arrange group sessions for volunteers to discuss the feelings that arise from volunteering.
- We often hold social evenings, which is a great opportunity to talk to other volunteers, most of whom will have been on at least one convoy or otherwise spent time working with refugees: Details are published on our website.

We will retain your name and contact details, and the date of the convoy you attended, for up to two years for safeguarding reasons. All other personal information (e.g. passport number) will be removed from our records, unless you have asked us to keep this information for future convoys.

If you have comments, positive or negative, on the practical aspects of how the convoy was organised and managed, we would love to hear your feedback, either in person or by emailing convoys@camcrag.org.uk. Your suggestions will help us improve future convoys.

Further volunteering with CamCrag

- There are plenty of opportunities to support the charity in Cambridge, be it by fundraising, helping our communications team, our events team, our volunteer team, or collecting and sorting donations. We have volunteers who support us with a few hours a year, and others who give several hours each week, so however much time you can spare we can find a way for you to help.
- Sign up to receive our monthly (ish) e-newsletter, which highlights recent activities and future events, at camcrag.org.uk/NewsletterSubscription
- Join our volunteer database at camcrag.org.uk/JoinOurVolunteers – this allows you to tell us a bit about yourself and your skills so we can contact you with relevant volunteering opportunities.
- Email volunteer@camcrag.org.uk if you have any questions or ideas about volunteering

Frequently asked questions

Is it possible to come for only one day?

Usually, no. However, we sometimes have drivers who are going to Calais for just one day, or returning early on the Sunday. In the first instance please email convoys@camcrag.org.uk before applying.

I have a car but I can't afford the up front payment of the channel crossing, can I still come?

Please email convoys@camcrag.org.uk before applying, we can usually arrange this.

I have a van, can I help?

Please apply as normal and also email convoys@camcrag.org.uk – we sometimes have large donations that need taking to the warehouse. If you are heading to France for your own purposes (e.g. on holiday), please email donations@camcrag.org.uk to see if there is anything you can drop off in Calais en route.

I would like to go but can't afford the accommodation

We have a limited number of subsidised places available on our convoys. If you would like to volunteer for a convoy but are unable to afford it, please email convoys@camcrag.org.uk. You will need to show evidence that you are in receipt of benefits.

I have a disability or health problem, can I still come?

People of all abilities are welcome. If you are physically restricted, please discuss this with convoy coordinators after applying so that plans can be made to identify work that suits your requirements. Much of the work in the warehouse can be physically demanding, requiring lifting, bending and standing for long periods of time. However, there are sometimes tasks that can be done sitting down, or which don't involve lifting.

I'm not 100% sure I can come, can I still register?

If you are unsure of your availability please DO NOT register. Ferry tickets and accommodation have to be booked as soon as the convoy plan is made, so there is no time to make changes at that stage.

What should I do if my information or availability changes after I've applied?

Please email the convoy coordinators at convoys@camcrag.org.uk. Please DO NOT SUBMIT A SECOND FORM. If you are no longer able to come please email us immediately so that we can offer your space to others. Last minute cancellations create a lot of extra work for our volunteers, so please consider this before cancelling.

Do you need a visa to enter France?

If you are from the UK then, currently, no. The EU is planning to introduce a travel authorisation scheme for most non-EU countries which will require travellers to fill in an online form a few weeks prior to departure. Originally scheduled to be introduced in November 2023, the EU has now postponed introduction until sometime in 2024: You can find out more about ETIAS at travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en

Safeguarding Policy

This safeguarding policy relates specifically to CamCrag volunteer convoys, usually to Northern France, in which the charity takes volunteers who are not necessarily members of the charity to work with other NGOs serving refugees.

It applies to all those volunteering on a CamCrag convoy, regardless of whether or not they are members of the Charity, Executive Committee members or Charity trustees. Its purpose is to protect children (defined as anyone under 18 years old) and vulnerable adults in refugee camps and on convoys.

CamCrag believes that nobody should ever experience abuse of any kind. We recognise that children and vulnerable adults are more at risk of abuse and that we have a responsibility to safeguard these groups in particular.

We recognise that:

- The welfare of the child, or vulnerable adult, is paramount.
- Every person, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, nationality, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, has a right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse.
- Some people are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous traumatic experiences, their level of dependency on others, communication needs or other issues (e.g. substance misuse, mental or physical illness).

CamCrag convoys are organised in adherence to the following:

- We do not send volunteers directly to work with children or vulnerable adults, instead we introduce convoy participants to our partner NGOs in France, to register and work under their guidance and under their safeguarding policies. CamCrag requires that volunteers on CamCrag convoys only work with recognised organisations that have their own safeguarding policies and procedures.
- We will not introduce volunteers to any organisation unless we are aware that the organisation to whom we introduce them has a safeguarding policy, however we will not be responsible for examining or approving their safeguarding policy.
- Volunteers are forewarned not to engage in any volunteering activity outside of the CamCrag safeguarding policy while on CamCrag convoys and to do so is a breach of our volunteering terms.
- All CamCrag convoy volunteers will receive a copy of this safeguarding policy and our code of conduct in advance of going on a convoy and by participating in the convoy they are agreeing to adhere to these.
- CamCrag will promote the welfare and safety of volunteers on a CamCrag convoy by: providing each volunteer with a handbook prior to the convoy; promoting an ethos of support for each other; booking group accommodation and providing contact details of other members; arranging debrief sessions if requested, which anyone can attend.

Abuse can take different forms such as physical, psychological, sexual, or discrimination. If a volunteer witnesses any abuse then the following rules apply:

- If it is believed that an offence has been, or may be, committed then you should immediately contact the appropriate authority.

- If the abuse is by or against CamCrag volunteers it should be reported to the CamCrag convoy leader, to the Convoy coordinators, or to safeguarding@camcrag.org.uk: These emails go to the Chair of the Executive Committee (Catharine Walston), the Chair of Trustees (Ian Tod), and the Safeguarding Officer (Elliot Harris). If the abuse is by or to anyone from a different organisation then the CamCrag volunteer should also report their concerns to that organisation.

This policy notes that, during CamCrag convoys, CamCrag volunteers are likely to carry out volunteering work with refugee aid organisations other than CamCrag. CamCrag will not monitor such activities and it is the responsibility of the volunteer to familiarise themselves with the relevant safeguarding policies of that organisation.

Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct aims to provide guidance on what we expect of all volunteers on CamCrag convoys in terms of conduct, and how we define conduct that is considered unacceptable.

Our Code of Conduct is binding for all CamCrag volunteers on our convoys: If a volunteer fails to meet the standards set out below they risk being asked to leave a convoy and/or being barred from future convoys. We may also report serious infractions to any relevant professional organisations or legal authorities.

By attending a CamCrag convoy, volunteers agree to the following:

1. To have read and understood CamCrag's convoy handbook, including the safeguarding policy and code of conduct, and to agree to adhere to its contents.
2. To safeguard others, in particular children and vulnerable adults, and immediately report any suspected cases of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation, to the CamCrag convoy leader, convoy coordinators, a trustee of the Charity, or a member of the Charity's Executive Committee.
3. To maintain the highest standards of conduct, including:
 - a. Obeying national laws, including laws prohibiting the illegal transportation of people and goods across borders.
 - b. Behaving in accordance with the objectives and values of the charity, including refraining from distributing religious or political materials.
 - c. Behaving appropriately with refugees, remembering the power imbalance that exists between such people and those providing them aid.
 - d. Avoiding taking, distributing or publicising photographs of other volunteers without their consent.
 - e. Avoiding taking photographs of refugees, regardless of whether you believe that consent has been given. CamCrag has a policy of not publishing photographs which identify refugees. The convoy leader may arrange for photographs to be taken if these are deemed to benefit the refugees and they do not identify individuals.
4. To contribute to an environment free from discrimination or harassment based on age, disability, gender, nationality, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity.
5. To protect and promote their own health, safety and security, and the health, safety and security of others.
6. To not enter any refugee camp or informal settlement unless agreed as part of the convoy's activities or otherwise approved by the convoy leader.
7. To inform the convoy leader or convoy coordinators as soon as possible if they witness conduct by other CamCrag volunteers that they think is abusive or otherwise inappropriate. Inappropriate conduct by the convoy leader should be reported to the convoy coordinators, or to safeguarding@camcrag.org.uk: These emails go to the Chair of the Executive Committee (Catharine Walston), the Chair of Trustees (Ian Tod), and the Safeguarding Officer (Elliot Harris)
8. To inform the relevant person in any organisation that they are working with if they witness conduct by non-CamCrag volunteers that they think is abusive or otherwise inappropriate, in accordance with that organisation's safeguarding policies, and to also report such conduct to CamCrag as in 7 above.