



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

‘Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative’ Review

Summary and Next Steps

May 2022

Background

The [Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative](#) was approved by Cabinet in 2013 and aimed to strengthen support for volunteering at all stages of the process and promote diverse participation in quality programmes that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. The initiative also aimed to reflect local needs in developing countries and build on the principles of partnership, skill-sharing and mutual learning.

[Ireland's Policy for International Development: A Better World](#) includes a commitment to review the Volunteering Initiative. This commitment is also reflected in the [National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025](#) (NVS) as part of Strategic Objective Four which relates to the promotion of *“ethical and skills-based international volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries and to enhance Global Citizenship in Ireland”*. This review has now taken place. It was undertaken at a time of significant change for international volunteering. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that most overseas placements were not feasible. Simultaneously, demands for greater climate action and localisation of assistance have been growing.

Summary Findings

The review found that the Volunteering Initiative has contributed to increased quality of volunteering. It recognises that priority has been given to ensuring volunteering did no harm through investment in training, good practice codes and awareness-raising. The report notes that successful models have emerged. It found that energy and innovation are evident in active global citizenship education; in the expansion of expertise-based exchanges; and in institutional relationships in countries in which Ireland has a development cooperation programme

The review found that progress is thoughtful, authentic and sustainable. It recommends building upon and making more visible the emphasis on people and connections that runs through Irish international policies, through reciprocal partnerships and active global citizenship education. It notes the importance of doing so in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the universality of shared challenges and solutions.

Finally, to support the above approach, the review recommends investment in social inclusion and diversity, coherence with domestic volunteering and stronger linkages across government, with the diaspora and with groups such as the [Ireland Fellows Programme](#). It also suggests a shift in language from volunteering to exchange and engagement so as to signal the evolution of Ireland’s volunteering traditions.¹ It also recommends developing a people, exchange, engagement and reciprocity strategy.

¹ The report does not recommend abandoning the term “volunteer” but suggests that it should not be “the defining concept”.

Evolving Policy Context

The findings of the review are received in the context of a range of Department strategies that reflect Ireland's ongoing commitment to exchange and engagement. [Ireland's National Volunteering Strategy](#) (2021 to 2025) was published since the review and contains several commitments in relation to international volunteering.

The [Global Citizenship Education \(GCE\) Strategy \(2021 to 2025\)](#) was published since the Volunteering Initiative Review. It contains a commitment to work with volunteers and volunteer organisations and support programmes that provide GCE for international volunteers before, during and after placements so that they continue as active global citizens. There is also a specific commitment in the strategy to ensure coherence between our support for GCE in volunteering and Comhlámh's Code of Good Practice for Volunteer Sending Agencies.

[Ireland's Diaspora Strategy \(2020-2025\)](#) frames stronger links with the Emigrant Support Programme. [The Africa Strategy](#) commits to expanding the partnership with the UN Volunteers Programme to support placements for UN Volunteers in Africa. [Ireland's Strategy for Partnership with Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\) 2019](#) includes a commitment to support UN Volunteer placements in the Pacific and Caribbean, greater diaspora engagement and coherent Irish-SIDS institutional links.

Next Steps

Progress will be reported through the implementation and reporting processes associated with the National Volunteering Strategy. The Department will, at a minimum, undertake the following up to 2025, when both the [National Volunteering Strategy](#) and the [Global Citizenship Education Strategy](#) will conclude:

1. The Department will continue to engage proactively with relevant aspects of National Volunteering Strategy implementation including chairing the International Volunteering Sub-group and actively participating in the Implementation Group.
2. The Department will consider support to solidarity exchanges including online and virtual engagement, and diversity and inclusion in the Innovation Challenge Fund and new/updated Strategic Partnerships. We will also seek to identify, track, report and publish data on participation and diversity.
3. As part of its ongoing commitment to global citizenship, the Department will co-fund and promote a television series (working title "*The Hardest Harvest*") which explores the realities of climate change for farmers through exchange and engagement.
4. The Department will continue to support a range of multilateral volunteering initiatives including the United Nations Volunteer programme, UNICEF's GenU Global Volunteering Initiative and EU Junior Professionals. It will also seek to strengthen the ongoing links between those who have participated in such programmes.
5. Through strategic partnerships with relevant organisations, the Department will support the ongoing evolution and promotion of good practice for Volunteer Sending Agencies. Through these partnerships and the NVS Implementation Group, the Department will support links between local, national and international volunteers and volunteering opportunities.
6. The Department will ensure best practice in safeguarding is promoted through a) further promotion amongst partners and b) ongoing collaboration with An Garda Síochána on police certification and introduction of Criminal Records Certificates.

7. The Department will engage with like-minded government and non-government agencies to promote best practice in volunteering including through fora such as the [European Congress on Global Citizenship Education](#), the Advisory Committee of the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development and the [International Forum for Volunteering in Development](#).
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