



International FORUM on Development Service
FORUM International du Volontariat pour le Développement

European Conference Best Practice in International Volunteering



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Irish Aid Volunteer and Information Centre, Dublin

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*Cliff Allum,
President of
FORUM and
CEO of
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International*

In June 2008, a year on from our second European conference in Paris, we were delighted to hold another European conference of organisations involved in international volunteer co-operation in the new Irish Aid Volunteer and Information Centre in Dublin.

This conference was organised by the International FORUM on Development Service, hosted by Comhlámh and funded by Irish Aid.

Conference sessions took the form of presentations, group work, and panel discussions, all looking at areas of best practice in international volunteering. The variety of styles and content of the workshops added to the overall energy of the event.

We were pleased to welcome a wide range of delegates from Programme Coordinators to Directors and also including Southern partners and returned development workers.

I would like to extend my thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the conference, in particular to Comhlámh for hosting and to Irish Aid for the financial support that enabled it to happen. Also, thank you to everyone who provided feedback through our online survey. We will use this valuable information to help steer our future conferences.

Cliff Allum



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Welcome to 'Best Practice in International Volunteering'

President of International FORUM on Development Service, Cliff Allum, welcomed delegates to the conference on behalf of FORUM and thanked Irish Aid, Comhlámh and all the Irish agencies for their support for this event.

Frank Flood, Head of Volunteering Corps at Irish Aid, then welcomed all delegates to the new Irish Aid Volunteer and Information Centre. He stated: "it is vital to get public support for

international volunteering." He also expressed Irish Aid's pleasure to have funded the research on Codes of Practice conducted by Comhlámh, that was to be presented at the conference.

Director of Comhlámh, Deirdre Murray, introduced Comhlámh and said: "she was looking forward to learning from all the delegates experiences as Comhlámh shared theirs."

Codes of Practice and Legal Frameworks



Siobhan Sleeman, Comhlámh

The first session of the conference started with a presentation from Siobhan Sleeman on Comhlámh's code of Conduct, which is a code of good practice for volunteer sending organisations.

“The code is about bringing everyone up to the same level in a supportive way,” explained Siobhan.

Siobhan explained why the code came about, through the emergence of many new international volunteering organisations setting up and the worry that issues of development and the needs of all stakeholders can sometimes be eclipsed by organisational needs.

“These shared principles can guide our work, as we can commit ourselves to them, and be held accountable by them,” said Siobhan.

The process of how the code was developed and how it is being implemented was presented. Also, Siobhan talked about the next stage of the code, the self-audit process, which is being piloted.

This brought us on to a presentation of the research into FORUM members use of codes of practice. The research was carried out by Comhlámh and the results presented by Marie Therese Fanning.

This is the first stage of research FORUM is undertaking to address

the theme of partner perspectives and experiences of international volunteering. Further research will focus on the views and experiences of partner organisations on a case study basis, leading to an improved understanding by IVCOs and peer partner organisations of what constitutes good practice.

“A code is useful as a donor. If applications show organisations have identified need for resources through a self audit of their use of the code,” said Frank Flood, Irish Aid.



Marie-Therese Fanning, Comhlámh

The results showed that a high number of organisations (85%) were aware of codes of practice with a slightly lower percentage using codes of some description (77%). These codes are varied in content, application and some were voluntary whilst a few were mandatory.

The feedback received into the relevancy of codes of practice was very positive as was the reception to the idea of having a single code of practice as a common standard.

This idea of a common code did however throw up a few challenges such as agreeing content, recognising the cultural and geographical variety of member and partner organisations, and monitoring coherence.

The third presentation was from

Mae Chao from UNV. Mae spoke about research UNV are conducting into volunteerism policies and legislation.

The goal of this research is to provide an overview of different policy approaches in providing an enabling framework for volunteering and to analyse their effectiveness.

“Laws are a public affirmation for volunteering and how it benefits society and also the volunteer,” explained Mae.

The preliminary findings show that at least 73 countries have adopted or introduced new laws or policies to promote volunteerism since 2001.

These policies promote awareness, legitimacy and status of volunteering, change regulations which discourage volunteering, show government commitment for the establishment of a volunteer participation or promotion schemes and define the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

The full findings and published report from this research is expected to be published early next year.

“It is difficult not having a law in Ireland because it's hard to facilitate people to take up internships e.g. getting visas for non EU applicants,” explained Siobhan.



Mae Chao, UNV

Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection

Southern partner perspective

Phesheya Vilakazi, Programme Manager of the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA), started the second workshop with a presentation looking at the issue of protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse from many sources including from development workers.

First Phesheya discussed the prevalence of abuse in Swaziland. Approximately one in three women experienced some form of sexual violence as a child; nearly one in four women have experienced physical violence as a child; and approximately three in ten women have experienced emotional abuse as a child.

Phesheya then went on to talk about his organisation SWAGAA and how they work with victims of abuse in Swaziland with therapeutic counselling and also the preventative education programmes they run.

He talked about the development workers SWAGAA works with and the processes of recruitment and ongoing support and monitoring they have alongside their partner organisations in the North.

Phesheya then went on to present his recommendations for reducing the risk of abuse from development workers including the need for police clearance of development workers and a code of conduct ensuring the protection of children and vulnerable adults that the development workers must sign up to.

Sending organisation perspective

Elaine Stevenson, International Programme Manager - Development Workers at Skillshare International, partner organisation of SWAGAA, presented the safeguards Skillshare uses to reduce the risk of abuse by development workers.

The Child Protection Policy

is a tool that Skillshare uses and they obligate all development workers they recruit to sign up to the policy before they depart for their placement.

The policy sets out what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour and also the procedures to follow if abuse is suspected.



Phesheya Vilakazi, Programme Manager of the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA)

Break Away Discussion



“With police checks for example, sending organisations can show that they have taken reasonable steps so it protects their reputation but is it effective in protecting vulnerable people?” Cliff Allum, FORUM.

“It can be difficult for young people to understand what constitutes abuse, e.g. physical punishment. There are cultural differences in perception of what is considered abuse. Volunteers reporting what they see as abuse – there is a power imbalance there.” Malte Warburg, MS.

“People could work collaboratively in the field to tackle the problem of volunteers being isolated. When volunteers go overseas there is a new power imbalance (they have new power) that they are not used to and don’t understand – they need training.” Heather Harding, Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Coalition.

“You can’t capture everything in pre-departure training. You can’t fully define unacceptable behaviour. One case going wrong can destroy an agency, and a person.” Marie-Therese Fanning, Comhlámh.

Experiences of Returned Development Workers

The third workshop of the conference was a chance for the delegates to hear from returned development workers about their experiences of support pre-placement, while in placement and on their return.

The workshop was held in café style. Delegates were split into three groups and placed with two returned development workers, after short presentations and questions the groups moved around until all groups had seen all the development workers.

Emer Kerrigan

Emer volunteered for two years in South Sudan at the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), assisted by the Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM).

She talked about her pre-placement training which included a training week and courses on conflict transformation and management in emergency situations. Emer's placement was in a very remote area but she says the in-placement support was good and included radio communications. After her placement Comhlámh provided a lot of support and she is involved in pre-departure training for new development workers.

Orla McCarthy

Orla volunteered for two years in Ethiopia, assisted by VSO.

The pre-departure support from VSO included financial help, opportunity to talk to returned volunteers and intensive training. In-country Orla had a lot of support including regular meetings with other volunteers, an annual conference and 2-3 visits from VSO staff a year. When she

returned support included careers advice, events to attend and a resettlement grant.

Aidan Leavy

Aidan volunteered for four years in Honduras, assisted by the Agency for Personnel Services Overseas (APSO).

Pre-departure Aidan received three weeks training and also language training, contact with the partner organisation and access to a library. During his placement Aidan said that the two month in-country orientation worked well, as well as exchange visits between other development workers. After placement he received support from Comhlámh and was encouraged to engage with the press.

Ronan Moore

Ronan volunteered six years ago, assisted by an Irish NGO - Voluntary Services International (V.S.I.).

He talked about his short training pre-departure, two weekends and an information day. In-country Ronan said that support was the responsibility of the receiving organisation and he had orientation upon arrival. Upon return there was a weekend gathering and evaluation. Ronan said a challenge was that the organisation was too small to provide comprehensive support.

Wanja Muguongo

Wanja volunteered as part of the VSO South-South volunteer programme. She is a Kenyan who volunteered in India as a Programme Manager for two years. Wanja said the pre-departure training was very good and prepared her psychologically for

her placement. She also liked the info packs and website. In-country there were 6-8 weeks orientation and language training. She talked about the benefits of the volunteer committee for processing issues. On return Wanja found the volunteer liaison group to be good and she received a resettlement grant.

Cushle O'Donovan

Cushle volunteered in India, assisted by SUAS.

For Cushle important preparation before going was that she got to know the people she was going with. She thought the teamwork and conflict resolution training was also useful preparation. In-country she thought it was great to have the chance to take part in development lectures and debates because it situated what she was doing within the wider context of development issues. The weekend after coming home was very important for her to adjust to coming home and the power point presentation she made there was a great way to remember and value all she had done.



Orla McCarthy on placement



Emer Kerrigan on placement

Funding Panel

Cliff Allum, President of FORUM, chaired the funding panel and began by talking about the results of a recent survey of the funding of FORUM members based in Europe. The survey showed that most FORUM members receive a majority of their funding from the government. It also showed that FORUM members predicted that in five years time the percentage of their overall funding received from non-government sources would increase.

Frank Flood, Irish Aid, made a presentation on why governments fund international volunteering NGOs.

He said there is a desire by governments to harness public interest in development and there were many different things that attracted donors to international volunteering including the development outcome, development education, public ownership, career entry points and global active citizenship.

Jurgen Deile, from EED, presented the challenges of governmental funding in relation to the new German volunteering initiative for getting 10,000 young people involved in international volunteering.

He talked about the control the government has in this programme, the complex approval process for volunteer placements and the impact state politics can have on the programme.

Malcolm Quigley, from VSO Ireland, talked about the corporate partnerships VSO Ireland have forged.

He gave case studies of the different types of partnerships they have including partnerships for human resources, funding, advocacy, brand awareness and business facilitation.

He talked about the challenges that can be faced when dealing with corporates, including the effort you must put into the relationship often for small returns.

Finally Urska Harman, from Zavod Volontariat - SCI Slovenia, talked about the

challenges of funding international volunteer sending in new member states. She talked about the lack of government funding and the challenges associated with getting government funding in Slovenia, for example, the funding is often only available after a project is completed.

Urska explained the impact of joining the EU on funding and how lack of funding often limits the amount of volunteers they can send internationally.



Open Space

Experience of AFVP

The open space session opened with a presentation from Gérard Ventre from AFVP. This presentation followed on from the workshop on children and vulnerable adults protection.

Gérard focussed on the measures AFVP put in place to protect their young volunteers who go overseas. The most important factor to AFVP in this aspect is the ratio of staff to development workers. The maximum ratio for AFVP being 80 staff to 500 volunteers.

The following three presentations took place at the same time with delegates choosing which they would like to attend.

Engaged for Life

Live Bjørge made her presentation on how FK Norway works with development workers after they return to their home country.

“Follow up activities are a way of spreading out the benefits of the exchange programme from beyond the individual.” Live Bjørge.

FK Norway engage returned development workers in information sharing on North-South issues through a variety of methods such as drama, exhibitions, school visits and engagement with media.

They also engage the returned development workers in institutional development through transfer of professional competence by sharing experiences, new knowledge, ideas and methods.

Platform 2

Cliff Allum, president of FORUM and CEO of Skillshare International, introduced delegates to Platform 2, the new UK programme for young volunteers. The programme has similarities to the German model Jurgen talked about during the funding panel.

This is a £10 million project, funded by DFID, implemented by Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and BUNAC, which will enable young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to have the opportunity to volunteer internationally.

It is a three year project which offers the possibility for around 800 young people (18-25 years old) a year to go overseas for a period of 10 weeks. These volunteers are selected individually but go in groups of between 10 and 15 and stay together to work on a project.

Cliff explained that there is a “strong public engagement focus,” to this project, it hopes to enable young global citizens and hopes they will influence others and encourage them to do the same.

Research Methodology

Mae Chao, from UNV, gave an update on the methodology, that was jointly developed with FORUM members, to look at the impact of international volunteering.

The methodology is based on bringing together development workers, partner organisations and other stakeholders workshops aimed at getting qualitative information about placements.

This method has been piloted and feedback pointed to the materials such as the manual being long and quite complex, so it was agreed that IVCOs should adapt the methodology to fit their needs.

UNV have now adapted the methodology. They have simplified the materials and have also brought resource people into the regional workshops on thematic areas to validate what is being said and add their expertise.

The handbook has been reduced from 100 to 60 pages and the templates have also been moved onto CD format. The handbook will also be translated into French and Spanish and will then be available from the UNV website for public use.



Presenters and Participants

Cliff Allum, President, International FORUM on Development Service

Live Bjørge, Head of Programmes, Fredskorpset

Fons Burcksen, Personnel Officer Overseas, PSO

Laurie Chambon, Coordinator, CLONG-Volontariat

Mae Chao, Volunteer Infrastructure Specialist, UNV

Maria Christensen, Project manager, MS

Jürgen Deile, Head of Department of seconded personnel, Church Development Service

Marie-Therese Fanning, Programme Manager, Membership and Support Services, Comhlámh

Tara Finglas, Volunteering Unit, Irish Aid

Frank Flood, Head of Volunteering Corps, Irish Aid

Fran Flood, Director, Skillshare International Ireland

Heather Harding, Campaigner, Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Coalition

Urska Hartman, Programme Coordinator, Zavod Volontariat - SCI Slovenia

Andree Kearney, Volunteering Unit, Irish Aid

Karen Kennedy, Global Village Programme Manager, Habitat for Humanity Ireland

Deirdre Kettlewell, Support Services for Returned Development Workers Officer, Comhlámh

Jennifer Keyes, Overseas Projects Officer, VMM

Dervla King, Research Coordinator, Irish Missionary Resource Service

Alison Leahy, Development Education Officer, Comhlámh

Aidan Leavy, Director, International Service Ireland

Claire Lewis-Armes, European Conference Coordinator, FORUM

Sergio Marelli, Director General, Volontari nel mondo - FOCSIV

Wanja Muguongo, VSOJ - Ufadhili Trust

Giselle Murphy, Global Village Programme Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity Ireland

Deirdre Murray, Director, Comhlámh

Malcolm Quigley, Director, VSO Ireland

Tom Ryder, Coordinator, Voluntary Service International

Siobhan Sleeman, Project Manager, Volunteering Options, Comhlámh

Elaine Stevenson, International Programme Manager - Development Workers, Skillshare International

Lorraine Tansey, Student Volunteer Coordinator, NUI Galway

Gérard Ventre, Partnership Department, Association Française des Volontaires du Progrès

Pshesheya Ndumiso Vilakazi, Programme Manager, Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse

Malte Warburg, Programme Coordinator, MS

Many thanks to Comhlámh for hosting this year's European conference and to Irish Aid and their employees for all their support.

For further information about FORUM, please contact: info@forum-ids.org

Background documents from the conference can be found at www.forum-ids.org