

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



How to find out more about volunteer placements overseas

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HUMANITARIAN VOLUNTEERING



Áine Lynch on the need for adaptive approaches that reflect the changing modes of humanitarianism

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COMHLÁMH'S CODE SIGNATORIES



Your super handy guide to volunteer sending agencies in Ireland who have signed up to our Code of Good Practice. Use it well!!!

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#VOLOPS

VOLUNTEERING FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE



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Comhlámh exhibition highlighting volunteers' engagement in humanitarian aid with Conor Dolan, Catherine Thomas, Laura Tarafas



AISSLINN HAYES & RACHEL BOHAN
Habitat for Humanity

In 2017, Aislinn Hayes & Rachel Bohan, technology consultants, travelled to the Philippines to volunteer on Habitat for Humanity's disaster response programme. They worked alongside families to rebuild their homes and communities after Typhoon Haiyan, which struck in 2013.

MARK CUMMING
Comhlámh
Welcome to this issue of #Volops - Volunteering for Global Justice.

As the pace of change seems inexorably to quicken up, and political uncertainty seems the norm, there are some constants and in case you are feeling pessimistic, there are lots of 'new shoots'.

We live in an increasingly connected and networked world, a world where images and stories about us, our fellow humans and the lives we live, move faster around the globe than at any previous point in our history.

And yet we also live in moments of history-to-come which see the first rise in global hunger this century, a rapid increase in extreme weather events relating to climate change, ecological collapse and more extreme inequalities of wealth and power both local and globally.

International volunteering has a potential to make significant impacts both in host communities - the places people visit to volunteer - and here in Ireland too. This is most evident, or if we are honest this is only evident, when international volunteering is approached thoughtfully and with purpose.

One constant is that it takes ordinary people to get involved! And this is where you come in. Get involved in thinking about what is going on in our world and how it may be possible to connect with others to work for change. This may sound clichéd but this lies at the core of genuine transformations for good. And Comhlámh is here to support you in this journey of change.

One example of 'new shoots' is to be found in the international community's adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), an ambitious global programme that seeks to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion. These goals are

'universal', that is, they apply as much to our communities here in Ireland as they do for communities across the globe. These global goals highlight the inter-connectedness of our world and they place volunteering at the heart of contributing to a changed world.

Volunteering, done well and with a responsible agency, strengthens civic engagement, promotes social inclusion, deepens solidarity, builds resilience and ensures widespread participation in development.

Comhlámh is here to help you think through your interests and motivations to get involved in international volunteering. We have a range of supports, from the time you think about it, right through to continuing your interest in global justice when you come home. Inside this issue, you will find those organisations that are part of the Comhlámh Code of Good

Practice, which are committed to working for good practice in international volunteering.

I hope you find in this issue something to inspire you to think critically about getting involved in working for global development.

This issue is full of people's stories and reflections on international volunteering and work for global justice. Some of these stories span decades and overlap backwards and forwards from Ireland to countries in the Global South, and home again.

Other stories demonstrate how the SDGs are truly global goals requiring action in Ireland on for example climate change.

Enjoy the read - remember the change starts with you.

"volunteering is not about charity, giving a hand-out or a hand-up but about working in partnership"

Together with teams from Japan and another Irish volunteer, we spent 3 weeks working with Habitat for Humanity to build homes on the small island of Bantayan, Cebu. Habitat rally teams of volunteers across the globe to help in areas of need. Their self-help model provides families and communities with a 'hand-up' to pull themselves out of poverty. Families invest hundreds of hours of their own time, 'sweat equity', building their homes and their communities. The vision is much more than bricks and mortar. It is about empowerment, opportunity and change for the benefit of an entire community for generations.

Swapping our desks jobs for manual labour, we did different activities each day, including painting, mixing cement (by hand!), digging foundations, laying blocks, and helping wherever we could. The term "power in numbers" was evident every day. With a large group of volunteers, families completing sweat equity, and local builders on hand all working together, jobs were completed quickly. The rate of progress was incredible, and there are 50 more homes due to be completed next month, ending the long wait for families living in temporary accommodation.

Durbar Square, Katmandu: Photo credit /Flickr.

#VOLOPS

VOLUNTEERING FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

Comhlámh would like to thank everyone who contributed articles to this edition

If you would like to write an article for our next edition of this magazine, please email ruth@comhlamh.org or telephone 01 478 3490 for guidelines.



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HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

When the site is fully completed it will be its own community with 300 homes, a religious centre, community gardens, and day-care and school facilities.

While the work was sometimes tough in the hot conditions, it was extremely rewarding. Aislinn had volunteered at the same site two years ago, and it was amazing to meet the families again that had already moved into the homes she had worked on previously. We got to hear their stories, what it was like in the aftermath of the typhoon, how they have tried to rebuild their lives, and their hopes for the future and the future of their children.

Unfortunately it feels like forever since we were away! The experience of the trip definitely gave us some perspective on holidays and travelling to developing countries. We took a few days after the build to travel to a tourist destination (Boracay), and while it was beautiful and loads of fun, it felt as if we could have been anywhere.

The experience in Bantayan was much more genuine, and getting to know the local people was an amazing experience and insight into the culture of the Philippines. Hopefully we'll get to go back and do more development work with Habitat for Humanity again soon!

Learn about Habitat for Humanity Ireland's International Volunteering Programme at www.habitatireland.ie.

"Carry a candle in the dark, be a candle in the dark, know that you're a flame in the dark."

Ivan Illich



Ethical Volunteering

Thinking through your assumptions is crucial

ORLA BREDIN
The Umbrella Foundation

From September 2016 to April 2017 I lived in Nepal and volunteered with The Umbrella Foundation. I was in the middle of studying Social Science in UCC, and took 3rd year out to gain work experience. I had planned on doing this before beginning the course, as there was no built in work placement.

When choosing which organisation to volunteer with I was very careful knowing that there were potential dangers when volunteering abroad, and I wanted to make sure I was in no way promoting 'voluntourism.' Then I came across The Umbrella Foundation. An Irish NGO that are a family-first, children's charity which rescues vulnerable children and reintegrates them with their families and rural communities.

The Umbrella Foundation are firmly against 'voluntourism' and promote ethical volunteering programmes.

Finally, in September I packed my bags and left the comforts of home. I first arrived in Kathmandu to a kaleidoscope of colour and festivities. The spirit and life surrounding the city was outstanding. The Nepali people have this incredible warmth which I never saw fade. It didn't take me long to settle in to the relaxed pace of life.

A few days after I arrived I was welcomed into Umbrella. What hit me first was the atmosphere around the office. I had never been in such an open and friendly work environment.

The staff have so much respect for each other and this showed in how they treat each other and in the quality of their work. Quickly I began working on various projects, updating the preparation packs, proof reading articles, organising workshops and helping out around the office.

Over the past 12 years Umbrella have rescued 405 children from corrupt orphanages and reintegrated over 200 of them with their families. They are currently in the 3rd phase of implementing a UNICEF funded project in 2 districts which supports over 250 vulnerable children. Umbrella employ over 30 staff, only 2 of whom are international.

It was an honour to work alongside all of the staff there, learning from them everyday. People often think volunteering is about "giving back" or "helping" but in my experience the volunteer always gets more than they give. Working in the Umbrella office everyday I was learning from my environment and my colleagues. I got a first hand insight into the everyday running's of an NGO. The difficulties they face and the enormous amount of work that goes into every success.

While in Nepal, I also saw a darker side of volunteering. Although I was working with a very ethical organisation I did encounter other volunteers who admitted that they had worked with unethical organisations.

During my time in Nepal, I learned a lot about the risks of volunteering, especially in orphanages. Tourists and volunteers come over with the best intentions to "help" children in orphanages but as a result end up causing more harm by endorsing this corrupt industry. When done right, volunteering can be of benefit to a community and the volunteer. Education is key to solving the growing issue of voluntourism.

"you have the opportunity to support sustainable change and use your unique skills to positively impact lives"

I am forever grateful for the 6 months I spent in Nepal. I became immersed in a wonderful culture and met some of the most inspiring people. The work of The Umbrella Foundation continues to inspire me even now that I am home and I am very fortunate to have had this wonderful

opportunity.

Find out more about The Umbrella Foundation at <http://umbrellanepal.org/>

Thinking about volunteering?

Wondering where to start?

Go to comhlamh.org/where

Women Led Emergency Response (WLER) groups from Lalua village on their way to carry out a needs assessment in their community after their village experienced heavy flooding. Action Aid Bangladesh are working closely with women to train them in psychosocial first aid to build community resilience against the frequent tidal surges, cyclones and floods that Bangladesh experiences every year.
Photo credit: Action Aid Bangladesh



Humanitarian Volunteering

ÁINE LYNCH

EU Aid Volunteering Project Officer, Comhlámh

Recently I read an article titled 'Embracing the complexity of the humanitarian sector' which was one of many pieces I have come across recognising the evolving nature and the difficulty of the multitude of actors involved in humanitarian response efforts around the globe.

However, this article was different to the others in the fact that it took a positive slant toward recognising the many stakeholders that operate within the humanitarian space; from volunteers' involvement on the ground to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and UN agencies. It reaffirmed the need for continual adaptation toward the nature in which people operate in the humanitarian space in an ever-changing world. It makes sense - responses should not be the same today as they were a decade ago, technology has advanced and so have social movements, perceptions and new ideas toward dealing with crises and emergencies.

Movement of volunteers

The recent 'refugee crisis' has awakened and mobilized people to get involved in humanitarian volunteering, which is adding another layer of actors to the mix. People are reading about catastrophes of war, the afflictions of natural disasters in the news and social media, and they want to act to best respond to those affected. Many are frustrated with current responses from states and large international NGOs and are mobilising to fill the gap, in services which they feel are not being provided sufficiently. This physical representation of solidarity through volunteerism is evident not only with people going to the Global South

but response efforts are increasing within European borders, e.g in Lesbos, Greece, and Calais, France. We hear stories of local and international volunteers alike who are working tirelessly and autonomously from established INGO's to preserve human life and dignity, of which are the values at the core of humanitarianism.

Do no Harm

Whilst it is a positive thing that people are engaged and feel an urge to respond, the ad hoc nature in which this is done can bring about its own problems for volunteers as well as the very people they aim to serve. Issues around child protection, poorly planned responses or duplication of efforts can arise if the placement is not structured. Anecdotal evidence of volunteer burnout due to lack of pre-departure preparation, or proper support during, or debriefing after their volunteer placement are just some of the many issues volunteers have faced.

Part of Comhlámh's work is to promote responsible, responsive volunteering among volunteer sending organisations in Ireland which send up to 2,000 volunteers overseas per year. We would encourage people to critically weigh up their enthusiasm and eagerness to volunteer against the best interest for the communities with which they intend to work.

Since 2015, our involvement in the EU Aid Initiative has broadened our learning and sharing of good practices with organisations working across Europe, South America, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa with regard to humanitarian volunteering.

So what is humanitarian volunteering?

According to the European Commission under the EU Aid

Volunteering Initiative (EUAVI), humanitarian volunteering focuses on the 'actions aimed at reinforcing disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction, and contributes towards strengthening resilience and capacity to cope with, and recover from, crises'.

The EU Aid Volunteer Initiative is one of the few volunteer programmes that engages European citizens in humanitarian volunteering in the Global South.

Currently, two Irish organisations, Concern Worldwide and Trocaire, are certified under the commission's high quality standards of practice, which means that they can send volunteers as part of the EUAVI. Unlike the many programmes offering volunteering opportunities in development settings, the EUAVI aims to engage volunteers in a type of humanitarian volunteering working in the areas of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) working on the prevention to mitigate disasters as well as preparedness and response measures in the case of humanitarian emergencies.

To find out more about how your organisation can avail of technical assistance or capacity building funding to build good practice within your organisation or how to send volunteers as part of the EUAVI check out: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/echo/eu-aid-volunteers_en/how-certify-my-organisation_en

If you would like to become an EU Aid volunteer, check out the current vacancies at: <http://bit.ly/2aFd4qM>

"The recent 'refugee crisis' has awakened and mobilized people to get involved in humanitarian volunteering"

Comhlámh's 'Code of Good Practice'

The Comhlámh Code of Good Practice for Volunteer Sending Agencies is a set of standards for organisations involved in facilitating international volunteer placements in the Global South. Right now there are 44 organisations committed to implementing good practice through the Code. The organisations are either a signatory, have core indicator status or comprehensive compliance status. This shows the different levels of complying with the standards of the Code.

Action Lesotho	Signatory
Agape Adventures	Signatory
AIESEC	Signatory
Chernobyl Children's Project International	Signatory
Christina Noble Children's Foundation	Signatory
Development Perspectives	Signatory
NUIG Draiocht	Signatory
EAPPI	Core Indicator
Edith Wilkins	Signatory
EIL Intercultural Learning	Comprehensive Compliance
Friends of Africa	Signatory
Brighter Communitites (Friends of Londiani Ireland)	Comprehensive Compliance
GIVE Ireland	Core Indicator
Global Schoolroom	Comprehensive Compliance
Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland	Signatory
Habitat for Humanity, Ireland	Comprehensive Compliance
Haven	Signatory
Hope Foundation	Comprehensive Compliance
Immunisation 4 Life	Signatory
Irish League of Credit Unions Foundation	Signatory
Irish Rule of Law International	Core Indicator
Lámha Suas	Signatory
Maintain Hope	Signatory
Mellon Educate	Signatory
Missonaries of the Sacred Heart	Signatory
VSA NUIG	Signatory
Nurture Africa	Core Indicator
Operation Smile	Signatory
Pemba	Signatory
Salesians Ireland (SAVIO)	Signatory
Scouting Ireland	Signatory
SERVE	Comprehensive Compliance
Suas Educational Development	Comprehensive Compliance
Surgeon Noonan	Signatory
Tearfund	Comprehensive Compliance
Umbrella Foundation	Comprehensive Compliance
University College Dublin Volunteers Overseas (UCDVO)	Comprehensive Compliance
Viatores Christi	Comprehensive Compliance
VIDES	Signatory
Vincentian Lay Missionaries (VLM)	Comprehensive Compliance
Voluntary Service International (VSI)	Signatory
Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)	Comprehensive Compliance
Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM)	Comprehensive Compliance
Zamda	Signatory

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Supports & Services For Overseas Volunteers & Development Workers



As the Irish Association of Volunteers and Development Workers, our vision is of volunteers and development workers working in solidarity for a just, equitable and sustainable world. We work to promote responsible,

responsive international volunteering. This leaflet highlights how we can support you before, during and after the volunteering experience, drawing on our 40 years of experience.



40 years
of solidarity

COMHLÁMH MEMBERSHIP GROUPS



Continue your volunteering journey when you come back to Ireland, connect up with other returned volunteers and continue your work for global development.



The Palestine & Israel Development Education group have come together to research and learn about the conflict in this region. The membership of the group includes those who have worked in the region as volunteers and those who have not but who have an interest to learn. The group is keen to raise awareness about the history and current situation of the conflict



The Ireland Says Welcome group have come together to share news, information and refugee solidarity initiatives in Ireland and across Europe. The vision of the group is of a welcoming, inclusive and participatory Ireland for those escaping war, persecution and poverty.



The Comhlámh Belfast group has aimed to raise awareness about existing work that's going on in Northern Ireland around global justice and solidarity issues, as well as developing new activities and resources. The group uses development education methodologies and a grassroots, participative approach to developing their activities.

COMHLÁMH MEMBERSHIP GROUPS



The Trade Justice group raises awareness of how unfair trade rules prevent some of the poorest countries in the world from moving out of poverty. This year the group has been active raising awareness of damaging trade deals that threaten environmental and food standards while undermining public policy making.



The Focus Magazine group produce Ireland's leading magazine on global development issues. Since 1978, Focus has been making links between the situation in Ireland and in the South, with a view to challenging assumptions, and promoting understanding, interest in and action on development issues among a broad public.



The Dymyna Meaney Women's Leadership Development Fund was established by a group of Comhlámh members who wanted to connect women leaders from the global south with skills building opportunities to strengthen their contribution to global human rights. In two years, the fund has raised over €20,000 and provided bursaries for over 30 women leaders.

To connect with any of these groups, check out our website www.comhlamh.org or our Facebook page. Lots of information on various upcoming events.

You can also email info@comhlamh.org for further information.



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Thinking through what matters



Climate action photoshoot on Dollymount Strand, Dublin. Image credit- Trócaire

TONY DEVLIN

Volunteering Quality Project Officer, Trócaire

Tony Devlin is a volunteer with Trócaire here in Ireland. Below he explains how volunteering at home, can and does support overseas volunteering and development work.

When, in 2015, I thought about giving some of my free time to volunteering, I was immediately attracted to Trócaire, whose mandate is not only to support the most vulnerable people in the developing world, but also to raise awareness of injustice and global poverty at home.

In the two years since I've received my basic training, I've had the opportunity to do so many different things; things which are often challenging, but always rewarding.

My story as a Trócaire volunteer begins in the cold and rain of November. I'm part of the team conducting our annual Climate Challenge weekend. In a carefully planned "refugee experience", a cohort of Transition Year students from schools around the country, divided into "family" groups, must navigate the rain-lashed open spaces and tangled undergrowth of Castletown, Co. Kildare.

A river crossing, a transit through a long stretch of rough terrain, an enforced halt to build a shelter from the elements and a search for a supply of drinkable water have all been set up as tough exercises for the simulation participants. I'm at an intricately constructed rope maze, my role that of a grim, unwelcoming Border Guard, turning back anyone who can't navigate the maze.

Later I'm back at the tented Refugee Reception Centre, in the guise of an Aid Worker, handing out water bottles and food as the final dramas of document and medical

inspections are played out, and a privileged few are allowed into the shelter of the tents.

Afterwards, all retire to the warm basement of Castletown House, where clothes can be changed and a debrief conducted, to talk about the experience, and how it connects to Trócaire's humanitarian work in locations as far apart as Kenya and Honduras.

Before the year is out, there are several more activities. I especially enjoy a morning photo-shoot on Dollymount Strand, where, to the bemusement of the walkers along the Bull Wall, six of us carry a table and chairs out into the water and hold a mock UN Climate Conference with the tide washing around our freezing feet, raising champagne flutes filled with sea water in ironic salute to the prevailing governmental double-think on this issue.

The New Year brings a change of direction with the approach of the Lenten program of School and Mass speaking. This is the trigger for more training and my introduction to the hugely rewarding business of telling Primary School children about Trócaire's work.

If you want to grow young again, if you're tired of the cynicism and grim negativity that surrounds us these days then the remedy is simple: spend a morning in a Primary School talking to kids. They are incorrigibly optimistic, always ready for fun, with short attention spans, a penchant for mischief, but a boundless curiosity and an openness to hearing and seeing new things. Most importantly, they have a simple goodness and a naïve idealism, which tired old adults can only envy.

Speaking at Masses is another new challenge, and it's inspiring to be able to make linkages to the message of the Gospel and to share with Mass-goers the truth that

all are our brothers and sisters to whom we owe a duty of solidarity and support.

During the summer, I'm at the Trócaire tent at Africa Day at Farmleigh, where we offer visitors information, storytelling and drum-making sessions.

Then it's Autumn 2016, and the whole cycle begins again.

There's another Climate Challenge, this time focusing on the plight of communities in low-lying and flood prone areas; there are demonstrations and vigils, and petitions, lobbying our politicians to work harder at trying to help solve the root causes of mass migration and the refugee crisis, and pushing for Fossil Fuel Divestment here at home.

Speaking in secondary schools is a new and invigorating experience for me and I also get to do a small amount of research work at the main Trócaire office in Maynooth. There's no shortage of variety in the opportunities I continue to be offered, to increase my experience and capability and that keeps everything fresh and interesting.

How to sum up?

Well, it's been a revelation really. An opportunity to give practical support to causes I feel strongly about and to spend time with like-minded and committed people working for justice, in ways which are life-affirming and positive.

There are so many good things I could say about Trócaire and about the people who work there, but two particular aspects are important to me about how they handle volunteers.

First, they always train you and second, they always thank you. Neither of these simple practices is a 'given' in today's world, but together they bind the volunteer into a real sense of belonging

Unaccompanied Children

Volunteers responding as states fail to protect the most vulnerable kids

KAREN MOYNIHAN

Graduate of Kimmage Development Studies Centre

As the refugee crisis unfolded, it came to a point in the summer of 2015 when I could no longer just stand by and watch what was happening to people arriving in Europe seeking refuge. I first joined a solidarity group in July 2015 and it started with a small group of people that were going to collect supplies and drive them to the Calais camp.



Kids space in 'The Jungle' refugee camp, Calais

By the following month there were volunteers in nearly every county collecting clothes and hygiene products. I went to the Calais camp for the first time in October 2015 with 51 other volunteers. I went another three times over the next few months and then moved to Calais in February 2016. I started volunteering with children living outside of state protection in the Calais camp known as 'The Jungle', an unofficial refugee camp in the north of France.

In November 2016, before it was demolished there were over 10,

000 residents including 1,500 unaccompanied children who were as young as 8 years old. There was extremely limited state involvement in the camp.

My background is in youth work and I studied International Development with Kimmage Development Studies Centre. I felt that my skills would be best used working with the unaccompanied minors in the camp. There were a few other volunteers running a small safe space for the unaccompanied minors so after some discussion I joined their team. The project grew at a rapid pace. It became the Refugee Youth Service.

In March, I started a child protection team with one other volunteer and this was to try and raise awareness about safeguarding and child protection within our service and with other volunteers and residents on the camp.

There is an ongoing argument about the role of volunteers i.e. that NGOs should not take over the role of States in service provision. But if volunteers had not come in solidarity and support of the people living in the Calais camp... what would have happened?

Volunteers distributed food, clothes, built shelters, there were medical teams and legal support all delivered by volunteers.

Our Refugee Youth Services had a school, a safe space, child protection team and a monitoring services that was run by volunteers. The monitoring programme is still the only one we know of in Europe and it monitors some of the most vulnerable children moving through Europe and tries to ensure their safety. This

"We met a lot of resistance from the police to take missing children's reports. Every child that was in this camp was legally entitled to protection."

should never be the role of volunteers. As a basic minimum, states should be taking on its responsibilities with regards protection.

Through our work we engaged with the French state on a regular basis and tried to get support systems and services for these children. We met a lot of resistance from the police to take missing children's reports. Every child that was in this camp was legally entitled to protection but it was volunteers who tried to ensure that their rights were met and when this did not happen we advocated for these children and constantly highlighted the dangers that these children were facing every day.

There is truly amazing work being done with refugees and displaced people by volunteers all over Europe. But people are stretched so thin that it is very hard to be collective in our approach. I believe strongly in people power and what volunteers have achieved across Europe is outstanding. But because so much vital work is being done by volunteers, people feel that they cannot leave and end up stretching themselves to the point where they are no longer doing what is best for them or the people they are there to support.

This crisis is not going to change anytime soon and unaccompanied minors will still fall outside of state protection and I believe that one of the only ways that we can support this highly at-risk group is to create a more collective approach across Europe. Within this context the debate about the role of volunteers continues. Currently I am involved in trying to create a network of services that can support these children as they move through Europe. It is from here that we can advocate on a wide scale and create real and positive change within Europe.

The Guardian wrote an article earlier this summer on the pressures volunteers were facing in North France. Check it out here <http://bit.ly/2tKLM44>

Becoming an active citizen

SHANE OWENS

VSI Ireland

The world faces a huge, often seemingly insurmountable range of problems. Whether these be economic, social or otherwise, people with the fewest resources and opportunities always bear the brunt of their impact. Values such as solidarity, inter-culturalism and active citizenship are of paramount importance in solving these issues, building peace, prosperity and making the future brighter for everyone.

The advancement of these values is the aim of European Voluntary Service (EVS), and having long had a deep interest in the world, and a desire to see its development into a more equal, just place.

EVS was a natural step for me. I am based in Tirana, Albania, naturally a vastly different society than what I am used to, being

from Ireland. The scale of the problems faced by the Albanian people is daunting, with the frustration at the lack of opportunities being ever present among young people. Discrimination and racism are widespread, particularly towards women and the Roma community.

Attitudes remain deeply conservative regarding women's rights, with women often still being expected to do as they are told by their fathers and husbands. The education system is woefully underfunded, leaving a huge number of children in substandard classroom conditions with a poor education when compared with European standards. Naturally, my activities as an EVS volunteer in Albania target these problems and I work closely with other volunteers, Albanian and international. Our main activities were visiting schools and a Roma youth centre, in the Tirana region, in which we hold workshops on topics such as human rights, bullying, non-violent communication and English language.

In addition, we host training events for university-age participants to develop their knowledge of human rights issues and instruct them in dealing with instances of racism and

discrimination that they experience or witness. It is incredible to see how much it means to these young people to meet people from other places, and their commitment to making their country a better place. Taken one at a time, these activities may seem like they could have only a marginal impact, but bit-by-bit, they contribute to changing mentalities that keep women and minority communities, like the Roma people, as second-class citizens. This increases the future prospects for so many here in Albania, who want to see their country as a place where they can live happily, free from discrimination.

For me, the EVS programme has allowed me to become a truly active European citizen. In addition, I have been able to experience the benefits of interculturalism, and contribute to that experience for others. Cooperation and solidarity between the different nationalities is the way forward for the world as a whole. We all have so much to learn from each other.

Find out more about Voluntary Service International Ireland at <https://www.vsi.ie/>

UCD VO stand at the Irish Aid Volunteer Fair 2016. PhotoCredit : Comhlámh



SEAN LYONS

GIVE

Mici MacGabhán wrote an influential book called *Rotha Mór an tSaoil*, plotting his life from the Donegal Gaeltacht to the gold-fields of the Klondike.

The title translates as The Great Wheel of Life. For me, this particular rotation of the wheel has taken nearly forty years. In 1981, I returned from a few years teaching in Zambia. I contacted Comhlámh and was delighted to become part of a supportive community of likeminded people.

I was living in Dublin five years later when the workers in Dunne's stores in Henry Street took their principled stand against apartheid. I spent many hours on the picket line in support and one of my regular companions was Kader Asmal, founder of the Irish Anti Apartheid movement. He was an articulate and passionate man. I often observed him, in the chill winds and pouring rain, cogently and calmly engaging with anyone who cared to listen. And many who did not.

I spent some more years living overseas before returning to Ireland and settling in Tralee. I was delighted to find an active development education NGO here, Kerry Action for Development Education, KADE. I became chair and was always pleased to work again with Comhlámh. I particularly enjoyed organising options weekends in Kerry.

In 2002, I was selected as a Development Education sector delegate to attend the UN Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. I was pleasantly surprised to enter a restaurant one day to see Kader Asmal at the counter. I introduced myself and he said it was lovely to see me but did I have a table.

We sat together and were joined by his former colleague at Trinity, Mary Robinson. It was, by any standards, powerful company. I have never felt as proud as when I strolled regally out of the restaurant that day, flanked by the South African Minister for Education and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Conversely, I have never felt as embarrassed as when a waiter called me back to ask who was paying for lunch. The Minister and Commissioner continued to stroll regally while I had to cough up.

A few years later, KADE was actively involved in the cheekily named 'Twinning of the Kingdoms', a linking of various groups in Kerry and Lesotho. It is now more appropriately called Action Lesotho and recently celebrated ten successful years.

The most recent turn of the wheel brought me to Gambia, as programme director for Gambia Ireland Volunteers in Education. GIVE facilitates Irish teachers who wish to work alongside their Gambian colleagues. We work with Comhlámh particularly in pre-departure training and debriefing.

Looking back over almost four decades of involvement with Comhlámh, I reflect on the lines of T.S. Eliot.

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time."

Irish Aid Volunteering Fair

And other ways to find volunteering placements

RUTH POWELL

Information and Support Officer, Comhlámh

Comhlámh's Ruth Powell explains why attending this year's Irish Aid Volunteering Fair may be the best way to find a suitable volunteering placement. However, if you miss it, there are other ways too.

Over 400 people attended the Irish Aid Volunteering Fair last year, on 01 October at Dublin Castle in 2016. 35 volunteer sending organisations, and other interested groups were present to discuss volunteering options and experiences with those who attended.

There was a key-note speech from the Minister of State for Diaspora and International Development, Joe McHugh T.D, a panel discussion with returned volunteers and interactive participatory workshops on volunteer self-care and fundraising. Something for everyone, a little for all.

This year's fair will also take place at Dublin Castle on Saturday 07 October 2017, and the line-up is going to be equally as lively and impressive.

Volunteer sending agencies will be available to discuss the placements they offer in an informal atmosphere where attendees can ask as many questions as they like, and representatives from the organisations will be able to answer those questions. There will also be panel discussions, workshops and plenty of leaflets and information

about volunteering long term, short term, in skilled or unskilled placements, in groups or alone. So bring a bag to collect all that information! But what if you can't make the date, due to a prior commitment or other plans?

Here at Comhlámh we have a number of ways of helping you find the right overseas volunteering placement for you. We have a dedicated Facebook page, Twitter account and LinkedIn area called #VolOps, where we try to highlight three or four placements per week.

You can join in our FREE pre-decision, online course, entitled "Where do I start?" in order to think about your volunteering options in more detail. You can telephone or email the office here in Parliament Street and make an appointment for a one-to-one meeting, to go through the available volunteering options for you. Or you can chat to us at one of our many outreach events throughout the year.

We are delighted to be assisting Irish Aid with their annual Volunteering Fair again this year, but we offer information and support on your volunteering options, all year through.

"we have a number of ways of helping you find the right overseas volunteering placement for you"

FIND OUT MORE

Email us at info@comhlamh.org or telephone 01 478 3490 to arrange a time and date, and let your volunteering experience begin

WHAT NEXT?

What happens between the 'wake up call' and the bit where people start doing things differently?

Date: 20th – 22nd October 2017
Location: Eolas Soileir, Wellington, Co Wexford

What we hope you get out of it:
– Space for exchange and reflection on international volunteering and your role as a multiplier for global justice on returning to Ireland;
– Recognition for your participation in the course through the Global Citizen Award;
– Opportunity to practically put these skills into practice through an Action Project.

Application:
The places for the training are limited to 15.
Book online here <http://bit.ly/2vLg3XP>

Fee: Comhlámh members €30; Non-members €50, people seeking asylum or with refugee status/leave to remain €1.
This includes all accommodation and food for the weekend.

For more information on how to register
Contact Gráinne grainne@comhlamh.org or call 01-4783490

Have you returned home from development/volunteering/humanitarian or missionary work?

Feeling a bit lost or unsure of next steps? Comhlámh warmly invites you to attend our next Coming home weekend.

Come spend the weekend sharing experiences with other returned development workers & volunteers...

These informal and relaxed weekends provide an opportunity

- to reflect on their experiences overseas
- to share mutual experiences (successes and challenges) of being overseas
- to explore opportunities to use the vast skills that you have developed and stay involved in development issues from Ireland
- to help you through the transitions from work and experience overseas to your life back in Ireland
- to have great networking opportunities
- And of course, to meet fellow returnees and have a bit of fun!

Sat 4th & Sun 5th
November 2017

"It's harder returning than preparing to go"

"Excellent, thanks, it was brilliant"

Where: Ennmann Centre, Swords, Co. Dublin
Cost: €50 for members/€100 for non members; includes accommodation and all meals included (No charge for UN Volunteers Rapid Response Corps)
Note: Places restricted to 12 on book early to avoid disappointment. Questions? Contact grainne@comhlamh.org
Book online at www.comhlamh.org/our-coming-home-course/

Comhlámh
COMING HOME WEEKEND

