GLOBAL SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

COMHLÁMH STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028
Comhláthógh
GLOBAL SOLIDARITY IN ACTION
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Comhlámh

As the Irish Association of Development Workers and Volunteers, and a membership-based organisation, COMHLÁMH has over 45 years’ experience of solidarity-based engagement that addresses the most pressing issues of our time.

We support people and organisations to mobilise for global justice, including through values-based volunteering, humanitarian responses, and active citizenship.

All Comhlámh’s work is underpinned by a commitment to Global Citizenship Education (GCE), which deepens understanding of the structural causes of inequality, ecological sustainability and the interconnections between local and global challenges.

Overall, Comhlámh provides a unique and vital space to work in solidarity with others towards a shared goal of a world beyond injustice.
The groups and movements with whom we work in partnership include:

- Volunteer Sending Agencies (VSAs) and organisations that support Comhlámh’s Code of Good Practice for VSAs;
- People who volunteer, work, or act in solidarity with communities in the Global South;
- Comhlámh members and member groups;
- Migrant solidarity responders and humanitarian responders;
- Irish national volunteering sector (Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland);
- Networks, educators, institutions and groups working to achieve local and global justice (see annex).

Together with others, we are committed to achieving local and global justice through cultivating:

- A solidarity-based movement that draws on our history to create new responses to the unprecedented challenges the world is facing;
- The skills, dispositions, and stamina to stay involved in generating opportunities for change at a time of deep uncertainty and challenge.

Comhlámh believes that by providing the space for people to come together to collaborate, learn and share ideas, possibilities for achieving common goals will emerge.
Our Achievements

Successes of our previous strategy ‘Mobilising for a Socially Just, Equitable and Sustainable World 2017–2022’ saw Comhlámh:

- Promote values-led international volunteering with 35+ volunteer sending organisations, through Comhlámh’s Code of Good Practice;
- Develop a Code of Good Practice supporter network whose 20 members endorsed Comhlámh’s messages on values-led international volunteering;
- Host over 50 public seminars engaging over 3000 people in global justice issues;
- Deepen its Global Citizenship Education approach leading to over 2500 learners engaging in critical global citizenship education;
- Serve nationally and internationally as valued providers of training and thought leadership;
- Serve as a leading independent voice and source of information on values-led international volunteering;
- Support members and member groups to undertake advocacy on a range of global justice issues.
Our Vision

People together imagining and activating new possibilities for a world beyond injustice.

To nurture and support the work for justice, locally and globally.

Our Mission
Our Values

RESPECT

Openness and flexibility in the way we think and act. It involves compassion, empathy, humility, with a reflective and critical awareness of ourselves and others and of structures and systems.

INTEGRITY

Honesty, fairness, transparency, and accountability in everything we do.

SOLIDARITY

Taking longer-term action in mutually supportive relationships on issues identified by those most affected. It is premised on interconnectedness and interdependence, and involves a critical voice, a recognition of power differentials and acting together for positive change.

ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

Understanding ourselves as integrated with and impacting on the environment while recognising and acting on our individual and collective responsibility.
THE CHANGING CONTEXT

SHAPE THINKING
Create the Space to Nurture and Support Transformative Thinking

SHAPE PRACTICE
Create the Space to Nurture and Support Transformative Practice

SHAPE ACTION
Create the Space to Nurture and Support Transformative Action

The current decade began with unprecedented global challenges. COVID-19, escalating wars, the climate emergency, and large-scale human migration have highlighted the uncertain, fragile, and complex nature of our interconnected world. No longer will the traditional development narrative of ‘us and them’, ‘global north and global south’, ‘developed and developing’ suffice for a world that is so evidently interdependent. Indeed, the scale of the challenges we are facing requires radically different ways of being and doing. In our efforts to rise to such challenges, it is vital that we dig into the root causes of global injustice, including colonialism and earth-harming economic models.

The wider development sector is beginning to grapple with this need for alternatives. With discussions emerging around unequal power dynamics, development trends are beginning to shift towards localisation, and development agencies are engaging with the concept of decolonising aid.

The GCE sector is also drawing upon decolonial perspectives which cast a light on the coloniality of existing GCE frames and approaches to teaching and facilitation.

Ecological sustainability is being given more prominence in different sectors, with increasing emphasis on the need to respond to the climate crisis through care for all living systems. This isn’t easy or comfortable work but it provides possibilities for truly transformative approaches.
As we grapple with this rapidly changing global context, there is a pressing need for transformative models that create space for inquiry, for exploration of the complex, interdependent and unequal world of which we are part, and for the envisaging of more just and sustainable futures. This has implications for all aspects of Comhlábh’s work.

Through the delivery of this strategy, we will strive to create the conditions within which different ways of being and doing can be nurtured and from which new possibilities for action can emerge.

We recognise that this will be challenging work requiring honesty and reflexivity. We commit to supporting our communities of engagement throughout the process.
Comhlámh’s work is guided by and contributes to national, EU and international policy in areas including volunteering, GCE, active citizenship, and ecological sustainability. We are actively involved in the implementation of the National Volunteering Strategy, and the Comhlámh Code of Good Practice for VSAs is referenced in Irish Aid’s GCE Strategy. Our Code of Good Practice additionally informed the development of Forum’s Global Volunteering Standard, and the standards and certification process for the European Volunteer Humanitarian Aid Corps. Over the past decade, we have contributed to and led European Union funded multiannual partnerships that have included organisations from more than 20 countries. These have helped to deepen our understanding and integration of international policies around GCE, active citizenship, anti-racism, and sustainability within our work. Our new strategy will continue to contribute to and shape relevant national and international policy.

RELEVANT NATIONAL POLICIES

Irish Aid’s Global Citizenship Education (GCE) Strategy 2021–2025 aims to ensure the Irish public have access to quality lifelong GCE, enabling them to become active global citizens. The strategy calls for GCE interventions at formal, non-formal and in-formal education levels, and it sets out its intention to work with sectors and institutions across Ireland to deepen a culture of global learning. The strategy notes the valuable role of international volunteering in fostering global citizenship, and the importance of GCE before, during and after volunteers’ placements. The Strategy outlines the need for coherence between its support for GCE in volunteering and Comhlámh’s Code of Good Practice.

National Volunteering Strategy 2021–2025 sets out a long-term vision for national and international volunteering and recognises the importance of volunteering for the overall wellbeing of Irish society. It calls for the promotion of ethical and skills-based volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries and enhance global citizenship in Ireland.

Comhlámh is uniquely positioned to add value to ‘Irish Aid’s GCE Strategy 2021-2025’ and the ‘National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025’, aiming to merge volunteering with GCE to mobilise global citizenship.

With our GCE approach rooted in transformative pedagogy, this also provides the means to respond to the call in the ‘Irish Aid’s Volunteering Initiative Review (May 2022)’ to explore the evolution of Ireland’s volunteering traditions in line with the changing development context.
The strategy recognises the importance of the Comhláthm Code of Good Practice as a key tool to support such an approach. Comhláthm is named as a stakeholder and will continue to participate in two sub-groups associated with the National Volunteering Strategy.

Comhláthm’s strategy is also informed by and contributes to A Better World: Ireland’s Policy for International Development (2019), which highlights the contribution of Irish volunteers to development cooperation and their importance to public engagement. The policy references the Review of Irish Aid’s Volunteering Initiative (2022), which 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’. The initiative aims to support the ongoing evolution and promotion of good practice for VSAs.

Our strategy is also aligned with:

- The Education for Sustainable Development to 2030 Implementation Plan 2022–2026 which focuses on transforming learning conditions, and empowering and mobilising for change.

- The Global Island: Ireland’s Foreign Policy for a Changing World which outlines the Government’s commitment to supporting international development, the Irish diaspora and citizens travelling and working abroad.

- Global Ireland: Ireland’s Global Footprint to 2025 which includes a commitment to supporting citizens overseas and diaspora networks internationally, including Ireland’s returned diaspora.

RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN POLICIES

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out a global commitment to addressing issues of poverty and injustice by 2030. SDG 4.7 has significant relevance for Comhláthm’s GCE work, with its aim of ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to participate as global citizens. The European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 recognises the importance of embedding GCE across policy and practice. It calls for pedagogies to ensure the acquisition of necessary learning, critical thinking, skills and competencies, attitudes, and values to deal with complexity in an increasingly uncertain world. The importance of GCE is also echoed across European youth strategies and policies, including the EU Youth Strategy, the European Youth Goals, the Youth Participation Strategy, and the European Council Recommendation to stimulate learning for the green transition and sustainable development. All highlight the importance of active citizenship and of supporting the development of competencies needed to nurture critical thinking and the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to the transformation of our societies.
The Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development, adopted at the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in 2021, calls for ‘a fundamental transformation that sets us on the path of sustainable development based on more just, inclusive, caring, and peaceful relationships with each other and with nature’. UNESCO’s Reimagining our Futures Together Report (2021) states that ‘pedagogy should be organised around the principles of cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity. It should foster the intellectual, social, and moral capacities of students to work together and transform the world with empathy and compassion’.

PARTNERSHIPS

Comhláimh collaborates with many networks to develop and benchmark our governance and, most importantly, to strengthen and deepen solidarity-based movements for change.

We are an active member of:

- IDEA, the Irish Development Education Association
- Dóchas, the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations
- Forum, the International Forum for Volunteering in Development
- Coalition 2030
- Irish Network Against Racism
- The Irish Global Health Network
- Development Studies Association of Ireland
- Volunteurope
- The Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance

We are registered with the Charities Regulator and operate in compliance with the Charities Governance Code. Comhláimh is a signatory to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, and the IDEA Code of Good Practice for Development Education (2019).
STRATEGIC INTERVENTION 2023-2028

SHAPE THINKING
Create the Space to Nurture and Support Transformative Thinking

SHAPE PRACTICE
Create the Space to Nurture and Support Transformative Practice

SHAPE ACTION
Create the Space to Nurture and Support Transformative Action

OUR APPROACH

Global Citizenship Education

Partnerships, Networks & Collaboration

Campaigning, Advocacy, Public Discourse & Activism

NURTURING CHANGE BY

Supporting individual knowledge, skills, perspectives, and active engagement.

Supporting institutional, and organisational practice.

Supporting systemic change through campaigning and policy work.

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

To create containers for potentially difficult dialogue and discussion based on mutual trust and respect.

To practise resilience and wellbeing amongst staff and with others to sustain activism and solidarity and to nurture personal and collective growth.

To experiment with pedagogical approaches and ideas that facilitate deep learning, reflexivity and courage to face a rapidly changing context and uncertain future.

OUR ORGANISATION

Robust Governance, Safeguarding, Human Resource and Financial Management Systems

Diverse Funding and Healthy Reserves

Effective Results Based Management, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Systems and Procedures

Due Diligence and Strong Accountability Structures and Systems

Effective Communications rooted in our Vision, Mission, and Values

VALUING

RESPECT

INTEGRITY

SOLIDARITY

ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY
OUR APPROACH

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

For Comhlámh, GCE has always been central, and remains the basis for the work with our communities of engagement.

Through our GCE practice, we strive to create space for open inquiry, for exploration of the complex, interdependent and unequal world of which we are part, and for the envisaging of more just and sustainable futures. We encourage people to begin from a place of compassion and critical inquiry, focusing on the exploration of uncomfortable topics (colonialism, whiteness, privilege, unsustainability) and the building and sustaining of allyships, all in an effort to deepen the work for justice and planetary repair.

Comhlámh believes in the importance of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as a key process for engaging its target groups with global justice issues.
Against the backdrop of intersecting global crises and heightened uncertainty about what the future holds, Comhlámh believes that the kind of GCE approaches that we practise matter.

In recent years, through our courses, trainings, and public events, we have been seeking out questions and approaches that:

- Move away from the urge for quick-fix solutions, creating space for acknowledgement of the scale, complexity, and depth of the problems we face;
- Examine complicity in systems of harm, including models of development that are driving inequalities;
- Encourage ways of relating that are based in care and reciprocity;
- Invite the envisaging of more just and Earth-centred futures.

For Comhlámh, supporting individuals and organisations to find direction on this basis feels increasingly important, with critical and creative pedagogies encouraging the necessary depth and accountability. In these times of intensifying and interlocking crises, GCE is emerging as a meaningful way to generate and sustain much needed solidarity.

PARTNERSHIP, NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION

Comhlámh believes that partnerships, networks, and collaboration are premised on sharing values, vision, and a commitment to reciprocal learning. No one organisation can achieve impact alone: we need to harness agency across a range of global north and global south actors. Through the delivery of this strategy, we will strive to deepen and extend our partnerships, networks, and collaboration. This will enable mutually beneficial sharing of skills and resources, and strong and effective engagement with civil society networks and social movements at national and international levels.
CAMPAIGNING, ADVOCACY, PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND ACTIVISM

Through this strategy, Comhlámh will continue to support campaigning, advocacy, public discourse, and activism. We commit to supporting public discourse that is critical and dialogical, and to facilitating learning spaces where generative discussions can emerge on questions of global injustice and unsustainability. Our overall approach will be inclusive, engaging, and creative, and will contribute to strategic campaigning at local, national, and international levels.
OBJECTIVE 1: Shape Thinking

Nurture and Support Transformative Thinking
WHAT WE AIM TO ACHIEVE

An engaged and resilient values-based movement providing thought leadership.

A diverse and inclusive body of knowledge shaping and contributing to transformative thinking.

Exploratory and collective initiatives working to influence policy and key decision makers.

WHAT WE WILL WE DO

Recognising that a change in one place affects change elsewhere and that our ethical obligations are boundless, we will continually reflect upon the feedback and learning that comes through our GCE and volunteering practice.

Share emergent thinking and support ongoing critical reflection within GCE and volunteer-involving organisations.

Collaborate with national and international organisations and networks interested in GCE, volunteering, active citizenship, and development to broaden and deepen thinking.

Participate in strategic networking spaces, deepening key partnerships and influencing policy at national and international levels to both gain and share experience.

HOW WE WILL WE DO IT

Across our communities of engagement, host reflexive spaces that support creative learning and engagement on a range of issues.

Participate in, contribute to, and learn from networks, conferences, and discussions about emergent thinking on GCE and volunteering at local, national, and international levels.

Develop, co-create, and deliver workshops with diverse partners from the global south.

In collaboration with others, generate think-pieces, research, case studies, resources, and publications that support new thinking and approaches within the field of GCE, volunteering and beyond.
OBJECTIVE 2: Shape Practice

Nurture and Support
Transformative Practice
WHAT WE AIM TO ACHIEVE

Practice that supports transformative change is embedded across the volunteering sector.

GCE is recognised as crucial to establishing conditions for learning and transformation, and is applied across practice.

An active and critically engaged volunteering sector with the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and stamina to respond to injustices and unsustainability in ways that are rooted in solidarity.

WHAT WE WILL WE DO

We will support and encourage VSAs and organisations that champion the Comhláimh Code of Good Practice to nurture transformative models of engagement that are rooted in GCE and reflect the complex, interdependent and unequal world of which we are part.

We will host a mutually supportive community of practice for returned volunteers, development workers, humanitarian responders and others with an interest in continuing their solidarity-based work for global justice.

We will build and strengthen connections with the Irish national volunteering sector, and be open to embracing new opportunities with volunteering organisations to make our GCE pedagogies, approaches, and practice accessible and available.

HOW WE WILL WE DO IT

Reimagine the Comhláimh Code of Good Practice and its compliance functions, pilot innovations, and share case studies of emerging shifts in volunteering. This will embed a framework for transformative practice across VSAs.

Strengthen and grow the VSA/Code Network community of practice through peer support and capacity building that is rooted in GCE methodologies.

Develop and deliver online and in-person GCE training and resources that support VSAs and the national network of Volunteering Centres to nurture active global citizenship.

Provide tailored GCE training of trainers, and training/education that targets decision-makers (boards, emerging leaders, international partners, and networks).

Engage with returned volunteers, humanitarian responders and development workers to support their ongoing learning, reflection, and solidarity-based work for global justice.
OBJECTIVE 3: Shape Action

Nurture and Support Transformative Action through Solidarity Based Movements for Change
WHAT WE AIM TO ACHIEVE

Diverse, active, and sustained Comhlámh membership and member groups thriving, learning, and acting for change.

A critical and reflexive public discourse engaging target groups, social change movements, and their audiences.

An ecosystem of care directly and indirectly nurturing and supporting new expressions of global solidarity.

WHAT WE WILL DO

We will harness the energy of our communities of engagement and wider public to build skills, capacities, and dispositions to engage in long-term action on global justice issues.

We will build and diversify our membership, and support the campaigning and advocacy efforts of member groups, partnering with them to conduct research, engage in GCE, and build networks.

We will facilitate wider public GCE learning spaces which are critical and dialogical, where generative discussions can emerge on global justice issues and ecological sustainability, and where new ideas for continued learning and action on these issues are seeded.

HOW WE WILL WE DO IT

Develop and maintain our website and active social media channels, and disseminate information to the public about all aspects of values-based transformative volunteering.

Develop a strategic programme of wider GCE interventions, including a suite of pedagogies, tools, methods, analyses and approaches. We will implement GCE workshops and programmes around critical thinking, power, and social change to engage identified target groups in taking transformative action.

Develop a guide and tools to nurture and support Comhlámh member groups and communities of practice.

Develop and implement a strategy to grow our online reach and promote transformative actions, including scaling the reach of campaigns that promote accountability, challenge global injustice and highlight alternatives.
We will strengthen organisational resilience and cohesion through:

  
  In line with legal requirements and good practice, Comhlámh will continue to implement and build upon its governance, safeguarding, human resource, financial, and risk management structures ensuring to meet the highest standards of regulation and compliance.

- **Diverse Funding and Healthy Reserves**
  
  Comhlámh will develop a fundraising strategy and work to diversify income streams, implement a cost-recovery approach, and secure new funding opportunities to support the delivery of this strategy.

- **Effective Results Based Management, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Systems and Procedures**
  
  Comhlámh will implement the strategy through a results-based management approach, ensuring ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning. This will ensure that all resources and capacity are continually responsive to context and directed towards achieving envisaged impact.
Due Diligence and Strong Accountability Structures and Systems

Comhlámh will operate in compliance with the Charities Governance Code, and will continue to improve upon our monitoring, evaluation, evidence use, learning, transparency, and accountability mechanisms.

Effective Communications Rooted in our Vision, Mission, and Values

Efficient and effective communication systems and processes will fuel this strategy. We will employ an integrated system approach to communication, administrative, and financial management, and we will develop a communications strategy to reflect the needs of our communities of engagement as well as the ongoing learning from our work.
PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS AND COLLABORATIONS

Comhláthmh has well-established partnerships, networks and collaborations with national and international organisations and institutions, which we plan to deepen and strengthen over the course of this strategy.

NATIONALLY, WE WILL WORK WITH:

- **Comhláthmh Code of Good Practice Members**: we will continue to coordinate, build capacity, strengthen, and deepen this network of VSAs.
- **Comhláthmh Code of Good Practice Supporter Network**: Engaging organisations whose audiences include people interested in international volunteering and global citizenship, we will build their capacity to engage in wider solidarity-based movements of change, whilst also acting as multipliers for messaging about the Code. Supporters to date include unions, health sector bodies, student groups, and youth networks.
- **Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland**: Since 2022, in line with Objective 4 of the National Volunteering Strategy, Comhláthmh has strengthened relationships with the national volunteer sector. We will continue our collaborations with Volunteer Ireland and national Volunteer Centres on information, training, public engagement, and policy development work. This will support the national and international volunteering sectors to work closely on mainstreaming and promoting global citizenship.
- **Strategic Global Citizenship Education (GCE) Partners**: Partnerships and collaborations with IDEA, Dóchas, University College Dublin Volunteers Overseas (UCDVO), Suas, and Centre for Global Education will support our collective work on active citizenship (including research, training, and knowledge sharing).
- **Academic Partners**: Building on the collaborations and relationships we’ve developed in recent years, we will work with partners at Maynooth University (Department of International Development, Department of Sociology), University College Dublin (UCDVO, School of Social Policy), Galway University (UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre), Institute of Art, Design and Technology (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Department), Technological University Dublin (School of Tourism), and Dublin City University School of Human Development. These partnerships will involve research, training modules, and workshops.
**Health/Medical Sector:** We will work with partners in the Irish Global Health Network and Children’s Health Ireland’s newly established Global Health initiative to bring our training and education programme to a wider audience across this sector, and to support the mainstreaming of good practice from the Comhláthm Code.

**Comhláthm Member Groups and Members:** Comhláthm has several active member groups[1]. They are made up of Comhláthm members coming together and organising around social and economic change through campaigning, education, and advocacy. Throughout this strategy, we will continue to support our member groups in their advocacy efforts and seek to expand and grow overall membership.

**Migrant Solidarity Responders and Humanitarian Responders:** We will strengthen our established collaboration with partners, including The Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI), NASC (The Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre), Doras, Crosscare, Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA), the Equal Right to Refuge campaign, Spirasi, Irish Network Against Racism (INAR), and the Open Community. Through work on psychosocial support provision, we will grow our coalitions with partners across Europe and the global south who support the vital work of humanitarian responders.

**INTERNATIONALLY, WE WILL WORK WITH:**

- **International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum):** Through participation in working groups, the development of research and think-pieces, and training/knowledge sharing, we will engage with the 140+ Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) involved in the network. This will strengthen our international reach, share and embed emerging good practice from Ireland with partners across the global north and South, and bring learning from other organisations to the community of practice in Ireland.

- **Global Volunteering Standard:** As advisors to the Global Standard’s Working Group, we will support the development of accreditation, mentoring and certification processes for VIOs based around the world, and share the group’s thinking with Irish partners and networks.

- **EU GCE and Volunteering Partners[2]:** We will build and deepen existing strategic partnerships with organisations across the EU. This will include sharing knowledge, developing learning resources and collective policy positions, and participating in training/learning events.

- **Experts from the Global South:** Throughout the Comhláthm Code revision process, we will involve experts from the global south to build capacity and knowledge around ecological sustainability, global citizenship, and decolonising international development. In support of our End Orphanage Volunteering work, we will involve and be guided by experts from the Global South with lived experience in residential institutions. Their contributions will inform all aspects of our campaigning, education, and information work.

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[1] Member groups include Justice for Palestine; Access to Medicine Ireland; Trade Justice Ireland; the Dymphna Meaney Women’s Leadership Development Fund and Ireland Says Welcome

[2] These include Action Aid Helias (Greece), CESIE & FOCSIV (Italy), finip (Germany), Zavod Volontariat & Humanitas (Slovenia), France Volontaires & La Guild (France), NOREC (Norway), Ulex & Alianza por la Solidaridad (Spain), Inex-SDA (Czech Rep), VolontEurope (Belgium), FEC (Portugal), HVSF (Hungary), ESI-labs (Latvia)