

Ireland's Policy for International Development *One World, One Future*, which was launched in May 2013, includes a commitment to introduce a new Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative.

The Initiative is being introduced in recognition of the huge contribution Irish volunteers have long made, and will continue to make, to the achievement of sustainable development globally.

The specific aims of the Volunteering Initiative are to strengthen support for volunteering at each stage of the volunteering process – from the information stage to the volunteer's return. In particular, Irish Aid aims to strengthen support for volunteering and promote civilian participation in high quality volunteer programmes that contribute to the achievement of clear sustainable development goals. The Initiative will reflect local needs in developing countries and build on the principles of partnership, skill-sharing and mutual learning. It will modernise support for volunteering, encourage innovation and seek to attract interest from a diverse group of skilled volunteers.

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The Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative

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Building on the experience of the aid programme to date, the key elements of the Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative will be as follows:



John Ryan and Daniel relax together in a home they have built together, Habitat for Humanity, Chile. Source: Habitat for Humanity

New NGO Funding for Volunteering

Irish Aid will encourage Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to increase volunteering opportunities for Irish citizens. In 2013, Irish Aid will issue a call for proposals to fund innovative volunteer programmes through the Irish Aid Civil Society Fund. During the pilot phase in 2014, there will be a particular focus on placements that may attract retirees with skills in areas such as education, health and governance. Funding will be allocated on a competitive basis and funding decisions will be made using objective criteria and standards in line with best practice.

New Volunteering programme

Irish Aid will support new programmes of cooperation to send skilled volunteers to share their experience in developing countries where their particular skills are required. Volunteers will be placed in sub-Saharan Africa, which is the geographic focus of Ireland's aid programme. In the first such programme, Irish Aid will work closely with Irish Embassies in developing countries and with the Irish branch of the international volunteer-sending organisation, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO). We will avail of VSO's significant experience in recruiting education, health and other professionals for placement in the developing world. This Irish Aid funded programme will reflect development needs in Ireland's Partner Countries in Africa where Ireland has a commitment to long term strategic assistance.



Maeve Bracken gives Yves a helping hand during her art therapy class, Viatores Christi, Haiti. Source: Viatores Christi

Volunteer Support and Good Practice

Irish Aid is the main funder of the Irish volunteer association Comhlámh. Comhlámh provides a comprehensive programme of support and training for volunteers and volunteer-sending agencies. This support includes providing PRSI credits and/or PRSI top-ups to Irish residents while they volunteer in developing countries for up to five years. With Irish Aid support, Comhlámh developed the Code of Good Practice on Volunteering in 2008. This Code sets out quality standards on volunteering practice, including the need to have appropriate policies in place to protect vulnerable adults and children.

In the next phase of the Irish Aid supported programme, Comhlámh will focus on targeting additional organisations to adopt and implement the Code. Comhlámh's role in monitoring adherence to the Code will be enhanced. Organisations receiving Irish Aid support for volunteering interventions will be required to adhere to standards of best practice on volunteering, which will protect the Irish volunteer serving overseas in often difficult environments.

Enhanced Information on Volunteering

Irish Aid's website has been enhanced to include dedicated volunteer-related information. Volunteering content will be updated regularly and will aim to promote broad participation in volunteering including by retired public servants, especially those who have taken early retirement, skilled jobseekers, people from new communities living in Ireland and others. The Irish Aid website will also

include links to other online volunteering websites. Each year, Irish Aid will fund volunteer events aimed at raising awareness and engagement with a wide variety of volunteering opportunities.

Register of Interest for Volunteers

An easily accessible platform will be made available to enable volunteers find information on volunteering opportunities and to register their interest in volunteering. Volunteers will have the option to upload profiles which can be used to match volunteers to volunteering opportunities overseas. This registration platform will be linked to the Irish Aid website and other relevant volunteering websites in order to maximise volunteering opportunities for Irish citizens.

Strengthen Ireland's partnership with the UN Volunteer Programme

Irish Aid has developed a strong partnership with the UN Volunteer (UNV) programme. UNV places volunteers and interns to work within the UN agencies and programmes globally. It hosts a roster where professionals can upload their profile and signal their interest in volunteering abroad: (<http://www.unv.org/how-to-volunteer/register-to-be-a-un-volunteer.html>)

As part of Irish Aid's communications approach, we will undertake an active campaign to raise the profile of the UNV Roster and encourage increased participation by Irish citizens. Irish Aid will also continue to sponsor a UNV Youth internship programme which is aimed at recent graduates, supporting some

10-15 interns annually to work with the UN in developing countries for a one year assignment. UNV Youth Internship positions sponsored by Irish Aid will be advertised on the Irish Aid Website in August/September each year.

Promote on-line volunteering

Irish Aid funded UNV to develop and host an on-line volunteering service in 2008 (www.onlinevolunteering.org). Through this service, development organisations advertise volunteering opportunities online and interested individuals identify suitable assignments that match their interests, expertise, and skills. There are now more than 10,000 volunteers registered globally who engage in and deliver projects online on a daily basis. Irish Aid is working to actively promote the website among Irish NGOs and encourage them to register suitable projects for volunteer engagement.

As part of the Volunteering Initiative, Irish Aid will intensify its profiling of the volunteer opportunities available to Irish people to engage in on-line mentoring and skill-sharing. This is a cost-effective and inclusive method of sharing skills with the developing world, which is highly attractive to a range of volunteers including highly-skilled retired public servants, people with disabilities, ICT professionals and other skilled volunteers who may not be in a position to travel overseas. Specifically, Irish Aid will raise awareness of the benefits of on-line volunteering through the Irish Aid website and during key volunteering events.

EU Aid Volunteers

Ireland, during our EU Presidency in 2013, played a central role in securing agreement in the Council on a new draft regulation for the establishment of an EU Aid Volunteers initiative, as provided for in the Lisbon Treaty. Ireland worked to ensure that the draft regulation reflects the need for this initiative to be demand-driven and cost-effective, adding value to the overall EU humanitarian effort and responding to humanitarian need. We will continue to support negotiations on the establishment of this initiative. Information on ongoing pilot projects can be found on:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/euaidvolunteers/pilot_projects_en.htm.

Share Volunteering Stories

Irish Aid, working with NGOs and the UN, will ensure regular profiling of Irish international volunteering to build greater public ownership of volunteering. Specifically, we will profile the experience and contribution of volunteers to achieving development results through traditional and social media.



Nurses Jenny, Ruth and Shaunna on placement with Nurture Africa at the Health Centre in Wakiso town, Uganda. Source: Nurture Africa