

Comhlámh's Support Services to Returned Volunteers and Development Workers

- Have you worked overseas in a humanitarian, development or human rights capacity?
- Did you know that Comhlámh offers a broad range of support services to you now that you're home?



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"The individual whose vision encompasses the whole world often feels nowhere so hedged in and out of touch with his surroundings as in his native land"

- Emma Goldman

As a volunteer, development worker, humanitarian worker or missionary returning from overseas, Comhlámh can provide you with support and guidance to facilitate your return to Ireland, to assist you in settling back in and to help you overcome the 'reverse culture shock' associated with coming home.

The broad range of supports available to you includes extensive information and assistance in protecting your wellbeing and social welfare rights, invites to special events and social gatherings, information on careers and further studies and a whole host of ideas and opportunities to continue contributing to a more just and equitable world from home.

Additional services are available to those who have been overseas **for 3 months or longer**, including participation in our Coming Home Weekends and access to the personal debriefing service and counselling service. You are also entitled to **free membership** of Comhlámh for 12 months from the date of your return.

Comhlámh Support Services

Open to all who have worked overseas in a development or humanitarian capacity:

- Individual Support
- The Coming Home Book
- The What Next? Book
- Careers and Courses Leaflet
- Jobs Noticeboard
- Protecting your Social Welfare Rights
- Special Events
- Development Education and Campaigning Opportunities

Additional services available to those overseas for 3 months or more:

- Free Membership of Comhlámh
- Coming Home Weekends
- Personal Debriefing Service
- Counselling Service

See overleaf for more details on all the above mentioned services. Further information is available from the Support Services Project Officer on (0)1 478 3490 or email supportservices@comhlamh.org.

Comhlámh's Support Services to Returned Volunteers and Development Workers

Individual Support

Comhlámh's Support Services Project Officer is available to meet with you on a one-to-one basis to discuss any aspect of the return process. Contact us to arrange a one-to-one meeting where you can discuss your transition home, find out more about Comhlámh and the support services available to you or to reflect on what to do next.

The Coming Home Book

This booklet is a comprehensive guide to the process of returning home. It covers such topics as reverse culture shock, health, social welfare, careers, further studies, campaigning and development education. The booklet also contains personal stories and experiences of readjustment from a number of returnees. A must read for anyone coming back home!

The What Next? Book

This booklet provides a wealth of useful information and practical guidance on how you can continue to work for global justice and sustainable development from Ireland. The ideas in the booklet range from practical, everyday lifestyle changes, including tips on how we can shop and invest ethically, to information on more involved forms of engagement such as educating and campaigning for global justice and social entrepreneurship.

Careers and Courses Leaflet

The Comhlámh Careers and Courses Leaflet is a useful starting point for anyone considering a career in a development-related area or for those who are already looking for a job in the sector. It contains links to job sites for job seekers, references to useful publications and online resources, extensive listings of third-level courses in development-related areas in Ireland, contact details for many of the educational institutions and links also to information about shorter courses and workshops. Contact us on the details overleaf for a free hard copy or download it directly from our website.

Jobs Noticeboard

Comhlámh hosts a Jobs Noticeboard which is regularly updated with new positions in the development and voluntary sector. There is an option to upload vacancies to our noticeboard and lots of useful links to other job sites that specialise in the development, humanitarian and human rights sector. Go to www.comhlamh.org and click on 'Jobs Noticeboard'.

Protecting Your Social Welfare Rights

As a volunteer or development worker that has worked overseas it is important to protect your social welfare rights so that it remains possible for you to claim your entitlements when you return home. This could be crucially important if you wish to claim unemployment, dental, maternity or other benefits when you're back in Ireland. Comhlámh can advise you of your options including the Volunteer Development Worker Scheme (which can be applied for retrospectively), being retained on the Irish social insurance system or paying Voluntary Contributions. We administer the Public Service Pension Scheme for Volunteer Development Workers and can provide information about what to think about if you are leaving an occupational pension scheme. We also validate eligibility of development workers for the Free Fees Initiative for Higher Education Grants, Local Authority Grants and Allowances, maternity benefit and can issue supporting letters.

Special Events

Comhlámh hosts a diverse variety of events throughout the year. These range from social events such as the Christmas party to more informative events such as the Bewley's First Wednesday Debates, the Annual Development Forum, Careers in Development Seminars and International Volunteer Day. These events are a great opportunity to stay involved and meet likeminded people. Keep an eye out for upcoming events at www.comhlamh.org and ensure you are signed up to our e-link newsletter. As always new ideas are most welcome!

Development Education and Campaigning Opportunities

As the Irish Association of Development Workers, Comhlámh believes that to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality globally, effective action needs to happen at home. Indeed many returned volunteers and development workers say that it is only when they return home that they can really start making a difference. We work with our members to increase and support their ability to engage, discuss, debate and take action on these issues. We educate and campaign on global justice issues with a focus on global trade justice, corporate accountability, development aid and co-operation and a range of other global justice issues.

We offer a wide range of training courses on different aspects of development and solidarity work, from one-day introduction workshops to ten-week trainings. Courses cover topics and skills such as global trade and sustainable development, how to work for a better world from Ireland, skills in development education, teaching about global justice, diversity through the arts, campaign and lobby skills and much more.

We also have a number of active member/supporter groups that you may be interested to get involved with, including the Trade Justice Group who campaign and educate on global trade justice issues, the Focus Magazine Group who write, produce and distribute the Focus magazine, and the Options and Issues in Development Group who co-facilitate workshops for potential volunteers. You are welcome to get involved and network with likeminded individuals, make use of your knowledge and experience and continue to learn more.

Talk About Development Online Forum

We have developed a new discussion forum – www.talkaboutdevelopment.org – which is an online space where you can share your opinions, experiences and ideas relating to development issues in a secure environment with other volunteers, development workers and activists. Make sure to check in regularly to www.talkaboutdevelopment.org to keep up to date on current debates and discussions.

Volunteering Overseas Again?

If you are thinking of volunteering overseas again it might be worth reflecting on your motivations and expectations and whether you are ready for another overseas assignment. Could it be the case that you are attempting to escape the challenges of resettling? Comhlámh's Volunteering Options aims to help individuals to consider some of these issues, to explore the options available to them and to promote good practice in volunteering overseas. Comhlámh hosts an excellent website and offer a comprehensive book, regular information sessions, group workshops and one-to-one advisory sessions. Please visit www.volunteeringoptions.org for further information.

Additional services open to those who have been overseas for 3 months or more

Coming Home Weekends

Coming Home Weekends are fun weekends away and present an opportunity for you to meet with other returned volunteers and development workers in a relaxed and open environment. The weekends provide a space to reflect on your experiences abroad, to get tips on resettling and overcoming 'reverse culture shock' and to think about how to plan your future now that you're back. The weekends are also a great opportunity to network with likeminded people and to gain ideas on how you can continue to be involved in working for global justice and sustainable development from Ireland.

Comhlámh run Coming Home Weekends throughout the year in different locations around Ireland and we heavily subsidise the cost for participants. Check out our website or contact us for details of the next Coming Home Weekend.

Debriefing Service

Comhlámh offers a personal debriefing service for individuals overseas for 3 months or longer. Research has shown that personal debriefings can be extremely beneficial to returned volunteers, missionaries, development and humanitarian workers post-assignment overseas. Personal debriefings are distinguishable from programme or operational debriefings, which are primarily concerned with the work done on assignment

and are conducted by the 'sending agency' at the end of a placement overseas. This type of debriefing is sometimes referred to as 'exit interviews'.

Personal debriefings are concerned with how the whole overseas experience was for the individual and how the process of readjusting back home is going for them. The purpose is to help the individual to reflect on and process their overseas experiences, to bring about a sense of closure and help the individual move on. The personal debriefing sessions are facilitated by a Comhlámh staff member who has received specialist debriefing training. The one-to-one sessions generally last between 2 and 3 hours, they are held in private and are totally confidential.

Tailored group debriefings may be available on request. Please contact the Support Services Project Officer for further details.

Counselling Service

The period after returning home from an overseas assignment can be a fruitful time to engage in counselling. Counselling provides an opportunity to work through some old issues, which may have come to the fore while overseas, or to talk out crises relating to the assignment, such as security problems, stress, trauma or illness. Counselling can be helpful in the process of re-adapting to life at home.

Comhlámh provides a strictly confidential counselling service, whereby we can provide a subsidy to cover the greater cost of counselling sessions with one of our approved counsellors located across the country. All of the counsellors we work with are fully insured and accredited by the Irish Association for Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP) or the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP). Contact the Support Services Project Officer in confidence for further information and the list of approved counsellors.

Contact Details

For further information on any of these services, free membership or to obtain copies of our publications and resources, please contact the Support Services Project Officer on (0)1 478 3490 or email supportservices@comhlamh.org.

If you are interested in getting involved or in learning more about our Development Education or Campaigns work please email developmenteducation@comhlamh.org or call us on (01) 4783490.

More information on our services and ways to get involved is also available on our website. Visit www.comhlamh.org and click on 'Support for Development Workers and Volunteers'.

Even More Reasons to Join Comhlámh!

Comhlámh was set up in 1975 by returned volunteers and development workers seeking to use their experience of global inequality to effect change in government policy and public understanding in Ireland. Today we are not just a returned development workers' organisation but a dynamic independent membership organisation committed to critical engagement on worldwide development.

So why should you join us?

- Comhlámh is a member and supporter organisation open to anyone interested in social justice, human rights and global development issues. We connect, inform, educate and campaign on these matters.
- Our mission is to challenge our society on the root causes of global poverty and inequality and empower people to demand equity in global relations.
- Comhlámh's voice for justice is strengthened by having people who have worked overseas amongst its membership. Advocacy and lobbying are given greater credibility when infused by real experience and passion.
- Comhlámh presents a wide variety of platforms through which you can use your overseas experience to inform and guide others, ranging from writing for our publications or websites, giving inputs in our workshops, courses and events, to taking an active role in our campaigning activities and getting involved in one of our volunteer groups.
- We provide training, support and information for those who wish to become more active on global justice issues, or just to learn more about them - from introductory one-day workshops to in-depth ten-week courses and resources. A broad range of skills and topics are covered. Members receive substantial discounts.
- We organise social events for members throughout the year, such as Christmas parties, International Volunteer Day and much more, providing you with an opportunity to meet like-minded people and have a bit of craic!
- Through our links with the Global South and with people from the South living in Ireland, we keep our work rooted in the demands of Southern movements for global justice and sustainable development.
- Comhlámh is always interested to hear from volunteers, missionaries, humanitarian and development workers with specific ideas or issues related to addressing global justice issues and welcomes you to discuss these with us.

Comhlámh is the Irish Association of Development Workers. We were set up in 1975 by returned volunteers and development workers seeking to use their experience of global inequality to effect change in government policy and public understanding in Ireland.

Since then, we have been supporting returned volunteers and development workers to readapt and reintegrate into Irish society on both a personal and professional level. Comhlámh also provides opportunities and support for returned volunteers and development workers to continue to engage with development issues and work towards a more just and equitable world from home.

Comhlámh's Support Services Project Officer can provide further information on Comhlámh's services for returned volunteers and development workers. You can contact the Project Officer on (01) 478 3490 or email supportservices@comhlamh.org.



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www.talkaboutdevelopment.org

The views expressed herein are those of Comhlámh and can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of Irish Aid.



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