

Newsletter

Europe & Middle East



Introduction

Dear friends, Presidents of Europe and the Middle East,

We are very happy to share this newsletter with you. It is the fruit of the exchanges we have had with each and every one of you over the last few weeks.

You will discover the challenges, successes, projects and dreams of each of the 15 national associations in our region.

You will see many common points and many things for which we can be grateful, as well as things that can inspire us for our future actions and fill us with hope so that we can move forward.

We take this opportunity to welcome 3 new presidents elected since our meeting in June 2019: Wioletta Timmermans (AIC Poland), Emilia Vlckova (AIC Slovakia) and Yana Krutsey (AIC Ukraine).

In this period where the pandemic is once again raging throughout our region, let us unite in prayer with Pope Francis:

"May our hearts be open to all the people and nations of the earth, so that we may recognize the goodness and the beauty that you have sown in each of them, and thus foster unity, common projects and shared hopes."

(from his 'Prayer to the Creator, 10/2020)

Tayde de Callataÿ,
AIC Coordinator for Europe and the Middle East



AIC Europe-Middle East 2019 Presidents' Meeting, Strasbourg, 19-21 June 2019



AIC Belgium

Challenges:

- Adaptation of activities to take into account sanitary measures and to meet new demands;
- Renewal of the national board and handover of team leaders while preserving the Vincentian identity.

Achievements:

- Each team sought to continue to serve and respond to new demands in its own way and in compliance with the measures imposed;
- Awareness of the importance of relationships with others;
- Links and collaborations that have been established with the support services.

Projects/dreams:

- To strengthen communication, the sense of belonging and Vincentian identity within the teams;



- To strengthen collaboration to learn from each other's experiences and to share support services;
- To create a website.



Dreams:

- To find solutions to be able to continue the services that have been interrupted due to the pandemic;
- To recruit new volunteers, if possible from outside the teaching staff, to be able to continue the actions when teachers are less available.

AIC Egypt

Challenges:

- The students that the volunteers accompany in their schooling do not have the necessary technological tools to be able to follow their classes, which are partially given online;
- Interruption of the income-generating activities of a group of mothers;
- Worsening of the economic situation in the country, which was beginning to recover from a terrible crisis that had created a great deal of poverty.

Achievements:

- A time of common prayer offered to all volunteers every evening via WhatsApp by the Daughter of Charity who is the association's Spiritual Advisor: a very meaningful moment of spiritual sharing that gives each volunteer renewed courage;
- The volunteers were able to continue to distribute bags of groceries to families for certain occasions, particularly at the beginning of the school year;
- Monthly bags of groceries could be given to mothers to compensate for the interruption of their income-generating activities.

AIC España (Spain)

Challenges:

- Age of the volunteers that does not allow them to continue offering their services (at least until Christmas);
- Interruption of all training or education projects due to health measures;
- Lack of renewal within the teams, which makes it difficult for new volunteers to join.

Achievements:

- The telephone communication developed between volunteers allowing them to keep in touch with each other;
- In various locations, young people came to offer their help, ensuring the continuity of services that would otherwise have had to be interrupted. Several of them became volunteers!
- The Association was allowed to issue certificates authorising the distribution of food despite the lockdown.

Dream:

- To set up new AIC projects to attract younger volunteers and make them want to join our association.



Project:

- Thanks to a beautiful collaboration between different branches of the Famvin, a hostel that was going to have to close because the president was too old is set to reopen to welcome homeless people.



Projects:

- To think about another type of training (online);
- To identify new needs;
- Opening in Paris of a new day centre for homeless women.

AIC France

Challenges:

- Recruitment of new volunteers to replace leaders who are reaching the end of their term of office, among others at the national level;
- Need to reinvent the training usually offered, particularly through digital training;
- The need for some volunteers to be trained in the use of IT tools.

Achievements:

- The volunteers quickly became very well organised to deal with the pandemic responsibly and efficiently;
- Reinforcement of the links between the national board and the local teams, greater proximity, etc. thanks to IT;
- Young people came temporarily to help the teams to ensure continuity of services.

Dreams:

- To find new volunteers to take on positions of responsibility;
- To create new teams to meet new needs.

AIC Germany (Allemagne)

Challenge:

- Difficulty in finding volunteers who are willing to take on responsibilities.

Achievements:

- New feeling of togetherness, solidarity and mutual help among the volunteers;
- Volunteers have been active and committed. They have shown pragmatism and creativity to find solutions in order to continue to serve;
- Volunteers lost fear of using virtual means of communication;
- Virtual meetings allowed volunteers to develop better and more empathetic communication.

Projects:

- Development of a new digital programme for the volunteers to support and improve their visits to sick and elderly people in the context of the pandemic (with exchange of tips and ideas);
- Actions at the policy level to help people get a release from professional work with continued payment of wages to do volunteering work;



- Development of a new digital way to attract new volunteers (through the website);
- To keep several virtual meetings/year with all the leaders, in addition to the usual face-to face meetings.

Dream:

- To find more volunteers and financial means to be able to continue to carry out activities.



Project:

- To support the forming of a new group of young Vincentian women (past pupils) and to help them develop an expertise so that they could help disadvantaged women, especially in the field of suicide prevention.

AIC Ireland

Challenges:

- Several projects for which volunteers had dedicated a great deal of time and effort were cancelled, leading to great disappointment among the disadvantaged young girls involved in these projects.

Achievements:

- Commitment and creativity of the volunteers who get along very well and came up with many new ideas and projects;
- Lovely spiritual reflections, prayers and readings proposed by the sister assessor, incredibly uplifting and inspiring for every member.
- Wonderful mass followed by a lunch and conversations that allowed the volunteers to meet and exchange on new projects.

Dream:

- To collaborate with the VLM to assist some underprivileged students in taking part in a Schools Immersion programme in Ghana.

AIC Italy

Challenges:

- Need for training on bereavement work;
- Difficulty or impossibility to maintain certain services: educational support and visits to homes, prisons and hospitals;
- Great apprehension among volunteers over the age considered critical (65 years old);
- Essential need to listen, share and be close to the most disadvantaged people, which volunteers are sometimes no longer able to satisfy.

Achievements:

- Reinforced fraternal links and intergenerational solidarity between volunteers;
- Online meetings of the regional and national councils to continue the work;
- Contacts maintained with the families and people accompanied despite the closure of several services;
- Increase in the distribution of food and meals to meet the increased demand;
- Distribution of tablets to children to enable them to continue their schooling online, and to the elderly to allow them to communicate with their families;
- Setting up aid networks with other charities and municipalities, e.g. to build a better world that learns from the pandemic.



Project:

- A 2-year training programme will be offered to the volunteers in the form of a webinar on the role of the laity in the church, and on the role of women in particular, from the time of SVP to the present day.

Dreams:

- To create a house for disadvantaged young people wishing to become more open to the world and culture, as well as intergenerational meetings;
- Thanks to the combined strengths of the different teams, to set up a national project that promotes transformative actions in the field of education.

AIC Lebanon

Challenges:

- Recruitment of new younger volunteers to continue the actions and service;
- Severe economic and political crisis blocking access to bank accounts;
- Cancellation of the annual fundraising event that allowed the volunteers to fund their actions;
- Explosion on 4 August, which severely affected the neighbourhood where the families accompanied by the volunteers live.

Project: Support for the schooling of most disadvantaged children by providing them with computers to enable them to follow classes that are given online.

Dream: To see the association grow and to have more people and financial means to be able to help many more people.



Achievements:

- Unbelievable solidarity, mutual aid and collaboration which made it possible to reopen the 'Social Centre' and the 'Dispensary' barely one month after the explosion and to restart activities, in particular by offering entertainment for children in the afternoons.

AIC Madeira

Challenges:

- Greater poverty and increasing social and economic difficulties among people supported;
- Total interruption of all activities for 2 months;
- Difficulty for volunteers to meet together (all are of an age considered 'at risk').



Achievements:

- Good communication between volunteers;
- Volunteers found a way to meet at friends' homes or virtually.

Dreams:

- To be able to continue to support the 'social centre' and find new volunteers to help them;
- To have contacts with the AIC volunteers in Lisbon.

AIC Poland

Challenges:

- To organize the Annual Meeting and the elections;
- To organize unit meetings;
- To keep the volunteers in good spirits;
- To find new volunteers.

Achievements:

- Holding of the Annual meeting and election of a new president and board;
- First contact between the new president and the volunteers during a Vincentian gathering and opportunity to reflect on how communication could be improved;
- All units were able to continue serving food.

Dreams:

- To find the necessary funding to complete the renovation of a single mothers' house;
- To keep AIC activities visible for the people in need and to have enough volunteers and time to serve them;
- To be able to organise the annual Christmas supper for the beneficiaries.





Achievements:

- Election by post of a new president and national board;
- Visits to patients could be maintained, some of the volunteers being doctors.

AIC Slovakia

AIC Slovakia

Challenges:

- Many volunteers are becoming too old to continue their activities;
- Organisation of elections during the pandemic;
- Interruption of certain activities during the lockdown periods.

Projects :

- Visit of the new president to all the AIC teams;
- To encourage and support the recruitment of new volunteers;
- To offer training courses that enable volunteers to visit the sick;
- To accompany and train the new group of volunteers that has just been set up.

Challenges:

- Lack of financial resources to cope with increasing poverty, especially in a big city like Geneva;
- Difficult conditions to obtain funding, as the activities usually planned to raise funds could not be organised;
- Finding new younger volunteers.

Achievements:

- Creativity of volunteers to continue serving those most in need;
- Numerous telephone calls that enabled the volunteers to keep in touch with the beneficiaries despite the lockdown;

- Many people who did not know the association came for the first time, either to ask for help or to offer it! A radio interview undoubtedly contributed to this.

Dreams :

- To reach an agreement with a Foundation so that they can continue to benefit from their help while respecting the spirit in which they work;
- To be able to organise the next meeting in person (face to face);
- To improve the collaboration between volunteers and Vincentian fathers through formation meetings by associating spiritual and practical themes.



AIC Syria

Challenges:

- Increased poverty due to rising unemployment and cost of living;
- Armed conflict for 10 years and economic embargo generating a lack of electricity, water, fuel and bread;
- The active volunteers are getting older and older, while the younger ones have very little involvement in the field;
- Many young people are leaving the country.



Achievements:

- Continuation of activities despite the pandemic (distribution of food and school supplies, accompaniment of autistic children and medical care);
- Organisation and commitment of a group of very active volunteers;
- Volunteers continued to see each other at monthly masses;
- New volunteers have joined the association and support its activities.

Projects:

- Mass and lunch for all the volunteers on the occasion of the association's feast day on December 9 with a large collection of donations;
- Mass with the beneficiaries and large distribution of food, sanitary products, blankets and shoes at Christmas.

Dreams :

- Peace in Syria;
- Finding new volunteers.



Dreams:

- To plan a 'Zoom retreat' to offer spiritual exercises and support;
- To get younger volunteers to participate and engage in the existing groups;
- To open new groups and engage priests to welcome them into their parishes.

AIC UK

Challenges:

- Substantial increase in demands for food requiring external funding;
- Several groups had to stop their activities because they involve contact with people;
- Integration of younger volunteers into existing groups while respecting each person's rhythm and availability.

Achievements:

- Some groups were able to continue their activities of food distribution and face the increase in demand;
- Thanks to new technologies, the volunteers were able to continue to:
 - o Meet virtually;
 - o Exchange ideas, suggestions and tips among all UK volunteers;
 - o Receive a monthly newsletter sharing news from each group.

AIC Ukraine

Challenges:

- Lack of financial means to face the increasing poverty;
- Activities had to be stopped during the lockdown;
- Loss of financial support for a project aimed at offering personalized support and organizing after-school activities for children in Kharkov.

Achievements:

- Willingness, experience and creativity of the volunteers to find a way to continue serving the most disadvantaged in spite of the pandemic, fear, etc.
- Discovery and use of new means of communication within units and among unit leaders.

Projects:

- To participate, for the third consecutive year, in the common project of the Vincentian Family by baking "gingerbread hearts" to be sold at the entrance/exit of the churches;
- To organise a virtual national meeting.

Dreams:

- To find new financial support for the after-school programme in Kharkov;
- Each unit has its own project.

