



ACTIVITY REPORT 2017-2020

AIC, the International Association of Charities, is an international network that fights against poverty in 53 countries. It brings together more than 100,000 **volunteers**, mostly Christian **women**, who operate on a **local level**.

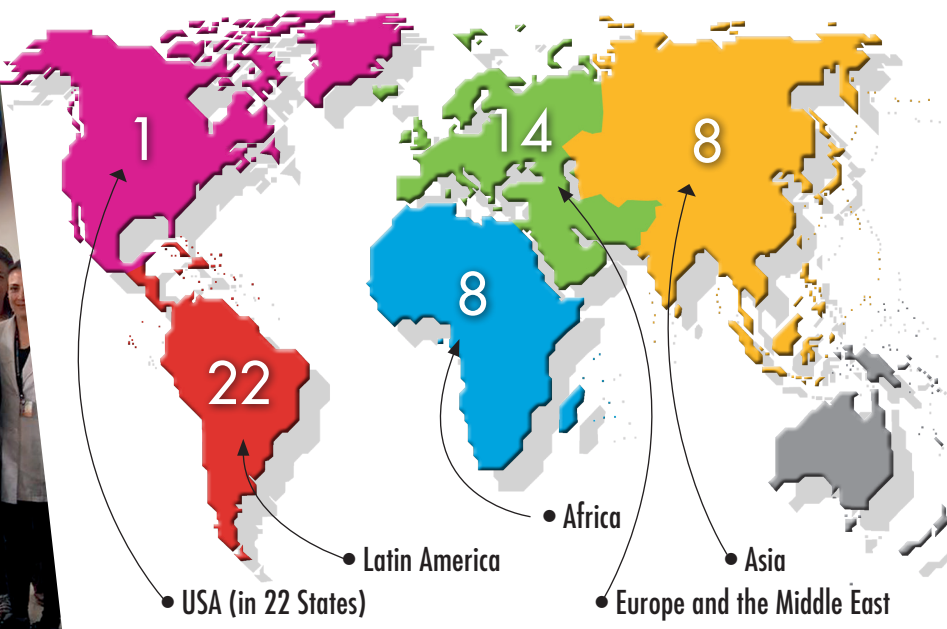
Through local actions adapted to each context, these volunteers work alongside the most disadvantaged people, especially women and their children. They are inspired by the charisma of their founder, Saint Vincent de Paul.

The objective is twofold: **making people living in poverty autonomous** and agents of change in their lives and **getting public authorities involved** in the fight against poverty.

At the International Assembly 2017, which took place in France on the 400th anniversary of the Association, more than 350 volunteers from all over the world defined the **common priorities** that guided the actions of the AIC network during the years 2017-2020:

- Promoting **holistic human development** through education
- Strengthening the **Vincentian identity**
- Encouraging responsibility and service in **leadership**

Number of National AIC Associations by region



AIC's Grassroots Actions - Around 12,000 projects

Currently around 12,000 projects to fight poverty are underway in the 53 associations of the AIC network. It is always the local volunteers, organised in AIC groups, who initiate these grassroots projects. This **local focus** means they are aware of the circumstances in which they work, allowing them to bring the most adapted responses to the situations of poverty they encounter. Their **know-how** is **recognised** by public authorities and local and international partners.

Being more vulnerable in the face of poverty, **women and their children** represent 70% of the target public of AIC projects. **Elderly people** are also often beneficiaries of AIC actions.

Education, a priority!

AIC is convinced that education is one of the keys to preventing and fighting against poverty. Seen as a two-way exchange, it allows each person to identify and value his or her skills and potential. This is why many AIC projects are centred on education and training.

For adults, this means projects about **literacy**, **professional training** aimed at regaining access to the job market, and educational activities in the form of workshops. Some training programmes end with the **creation of income-generating activities**, often in the informal sector, with the contribution of a small amount of starting capital.

In Madagascar, the AIC volunteers organise literacy programmes for adults, mostly women. At the end of their training, the beneficiaries are encouraged to start an income-generating activity with the help of a micro-credit.

Many projects focus on the **empowerment of women**. Some of them specifically aim to prevent and **tackle violence towards women**, especially by raising awareness in communities.



Amparo lived off the revenue of her farm in Colombia. Because of the armed conflicts, she had to leave everything behind and found herself alone with her children in Bogota, without work. In order to offer a better future to numerous people who find themselves in this situation, the AIC volunteers have set up various professional training programmes designed to make it easier to access the job market.

In the Philippines, the AIC volunteers offer emotional and school support to girls who have been victims of sexual abuse. They have also recently started offering them training in vegetable garden cultivation.

For children, the projects take the form of after-school activities, preschool centres, help with re-entering the school system, scholarships and homework support.

For a few years, some projects have been centred on **education about peace, citizenship and non-violence**.

Gloria goes to a primary school in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Panama. The AIC volunteers organise citizenship workshops there, in collaboration with firefighters, the police and psychologists.



New trend: sustainable development

Since 2017, this theme has emerged in AIC projects in response to the call made by the UN through the Sustainable Development Goals and by Pope Francis in his Encyclical "Laudato Si". An increasing number of volunteers are taking practical measures to include this dimension in their actions to fight against poverty.

In Brazil, Cecilia comes every week, like other vulnerable families, to collect organic vegetables from a community vegetable garden created by the AIC volunteers on land that was previously used by delinquents. Surplus production is sold at affordable prices to the community.

In Cameroon, the AIC volunteers have created a bananery with a double objective: fighting against soil erosion and selling their produce to raise funds to allow young people without schooling access to professional training and to help disabled people in the village.

On the invitation of a group of AIC volunteers from Italy, Alessandra participated in the creation of an organic vegetable garden with a social purpose alongside other people like her with disabilities. Thanks to collaboration with the local authorities and parishes, citizens of all ages support this project, which promotes the social reintegration and independence of disabled people.



Health and nutrition

The AIC volunteers often run **school canteens** for children, aware that malnutrition is an obstacle to education.

They also set up **public canteens** that are open to everyone or organise **social grocery stores**. Urgent assistance in the form of **food parcels** is also a key AIC action.

In Latin America, the volunteers operate **clinics** and **convalescent homes** for sick people coming from rural areas who need treatment in towns. Other volunteers, especially in Africa, create **health mutual groups** or provide medicines at affordable prices.

Sonia, who suffers from kidney problems, regularly attends an AIC centre in Bolivia, where she meets other people with the same condition. They also receive medicines that their disadvantaged families cannot afford, as well as adapted food support.

In Mexico, Lili suffers from visual impairment. Thanks to the workshops organised by the AIC volunteers, she has learned to get about with a cane and now dares to leave the house. She is also doing IT training with a talking computer.

Individual and group support

Individual or collective support for people in situations of poverty is present in all AIC projects. It allows **social links to be rebuilt** so that people **escape isolation**, and means all aspects of their situation can be considered.

Individual support projects are common and often involve visits to homes, hospitals or prisons. They are generally set up at the request of social services.



In Cuba, Rocio lives alone in unsanitary conditions. The AIC volunteers from her town come to do the cleaning and bring her a meal several times a week. Sometimes they also invite her to participate in an activity with other elderly people.

The group support projects often take the form of centres or **spaces for listening and exchanging**. People are welcomed and there is a friendly atmosphere.

In Europe and the USA, there are numerous clothes banks and **day centres** for unemployed people, migrants, drug addicts, homeless people and families of people in prison. In Latin America, several AIC groups have opened **retirement homes** and day centres for elderly people, as well as **temporary shelters**. In Africa, there are various **orphanages**.

Growing challenges: migration and homelessness

Whether it is for climatic, political or economic reasons, many people find themselves in exile. This large influx of **migrants** looking for a better future has encouraged AIC volunteers all over the world to offer various forms of support.

In France, to promote the social integration of migrants, AIC volunteers offer classes in French language or literacy, as well as training to learn about French culture. This is greatly appreciated by some women who otherwise would not dare to leave the house.

In the USA, in addition to English classes, the AIC volunteers offer migrant women classes that allow them to get a high school equivalency certificate. It is an opportunity for them to develop their self-confidence and discover the importance of a supportive community.



In many countries, the number of **homeless people** is constantly increasing. Taking care of these people and raising awareness in society about this worrying situation have become priorities for numerous AIC groups.

In Germany, volunteers have carried out awareness raising actions to draw attention to the lack of housing in the country, for example by setting up their camp beds in front of the town hall. Faced with an influx of refugees who lack basic essentials to live, another group of volunteers provides furniture and household items at affordable prices, in collaboration with the local authorities.

Stories from migrants...

"If I were to use a metaphor, I would say that this AIC association is like a boat that welcomes people in the street who need a light to find their path," says Pedro, a migrant being supported in France.

"I had to migrate to Bogota with my five children because of the armed conflicts," says Anna from Colombia. "After the anxiety, suffering and danger with which I had to live, the support that I've received from the AIC volunteers has been a blessing from God, a light along the dark path that this change has caused. Thanks to this support, I have had the strength to keep fighting. Now that I have received the machines and material to work from home, I hope to be able to support my children."



The role of the Executive Board is to strengthen links and synergies between the national associations that are members of the AIC network to optimise the practices used to fight against poverty, in line with the priorities established.

The Executive Board elected in 2017 is composed of 10 members of 8 different nationalities. They share the geographical and crosscutting responsibilities (regional and network coordination, training, communication and visibility, representation, and fundraising).

Training

Continental seminars

- **Training for Lay Advisors**, in 2018: in **Latin America**, 64 participants from 18 countries.
- **Training on responsibility and service in leadership**, in 2019:
 - In **Europe**, 30 participants from 9 countries,
 - In **Asia**, 47 participants from 9 countries,
 - In **Africa**, 47 participants from 9 countries.

Training visits to national AIC associations

Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroun, Cuba, Curacao, Ecuador, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Ireland, Japan, Laos, Madagascar, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, the Philippines, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, the USA and Vietnam.

Publication of training documents

30 monthly or bimonthly training documents linked to AIC's priorities were sent electronically to the whole of the AIC network.

Online training

- **AIC Diploma**: Originally written in Spanish, it was translated into English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese and adapted to the cultures of the different continents. 199 volunteers from Latin America, Asia and Europe were able to follow this training programme.
- **Training for Lay Advisors**: 42 volunteers from Latin America started a three-year training programme. In the USA, 33 volunteers followed a yearlong semi-virtual programme.

Communication and visibility

Within the AIC network, frequent contact with the national presidents and visits to associations helped to strengthen links and promote exchanges between the national AIC associations.

Our **website** was to give better visibility to grassroots actions and the work of representatives, as well as various initiatives linked to the AIC network. Thanks to the **Facebook** page, relevant news about events and actions in the associations was published regularly.

Within international organisations (ECOSOC, UNESCO, Council of Europe, Dicastery for Integral Human Development, CRESCENDO), the AIC representatives denounce situations of poverty by giving testimonies of AIC's actions. They also participate in global forums of Catholic-inspired INGOs and engage in advocacy.

Within the Vincentian Family, with whom there is collaboration at every level, AIC is a member of three commissions: 'Commission for Promoting Systemic Change', 'Collaboration Commission' and 'Haiti Initiative'.

Fundraising

There was regular contact with private or public organisations and an ongoing search for new donors.

AIC Solidarité organises an **annual fundraising event** for the Belgian public to support AIC projects in developing countries.

In July 2019, a **Friends of AIC Fund** was created with the King Baudouin Foundation to raise funds in Belgium and other countries like France and Luxembourg.

Through **Transnational Giving Europe**, it is possible to get tax relief from donations made by donors living in European countries.

Coordination and management of the AIC network

The **International Secretariat** is at the centre of the information exchanged among the different stakeholders in the AIC network. Working in close collaboration with the Permanent Committee, it supports the Executive Board with the **coordination of communication and international meetings** between these different stakeholders. The team is made up of four permanent part-time staff members and three volunteers.

In collaboration with the Treasurer, it ensures the **proper management of funds and the Solidarity Fund**. Fed by the member associations, this Fund allows urgent support to be provided to associations confronted with difficult situations such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, etc. In 2017-2020, this Fund allowed support to be given to the AIC associations in Cuba, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela.

Support to AIC projects

In 2017-2020, the **AIC Solidarité Projects Service** supported and funded 36 projects in developing countries.

AIC also promotes **twinings and exchanges of best practices** between AIC groups in different countries.

AIC Prizes

The **Dominique Prize for Sustainable Development** was created to encourage AIC volunteers to take practical measures to promote sustainable development in their actions to fight against poverty. A first call for projects was launched in June 2018 and a second in September 2019.

In order to encourage AIC initiatives aiming to prevent and tackle violence against women, the eighth edition of the **Claire and Jean Delva Prize** was launched in September 2019.

The different projects received from four continents for these two prizes showed remarkable awareness and a lot of creativity among AIC volunteers. These projects were shared with the whole AIC network to inspire other groups. Eight projects in total received prizes (in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Italy and Nigeria).

AIC's prospects

In **March 2020**, the XXI International Assembly of Delegates will take place in Bogota, Colombia, on the theme **"Peace and liberty in a sustainable world"**. It will be an opportunity for volunteers to get training and exchange experiences on the response that can be brought to contemporary forms of poverty (migration, human trafficking and homelessness), as well as to evaluate AIC projects focused on integral ecology.

