

ACTIVITY REPORT 2020-2023

AIC, the International Association of Charities, is an international network that fights against poverty in 55 countries. It brings together more than 100,000 **volunteers**, mostly Christian **women**, who work 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.

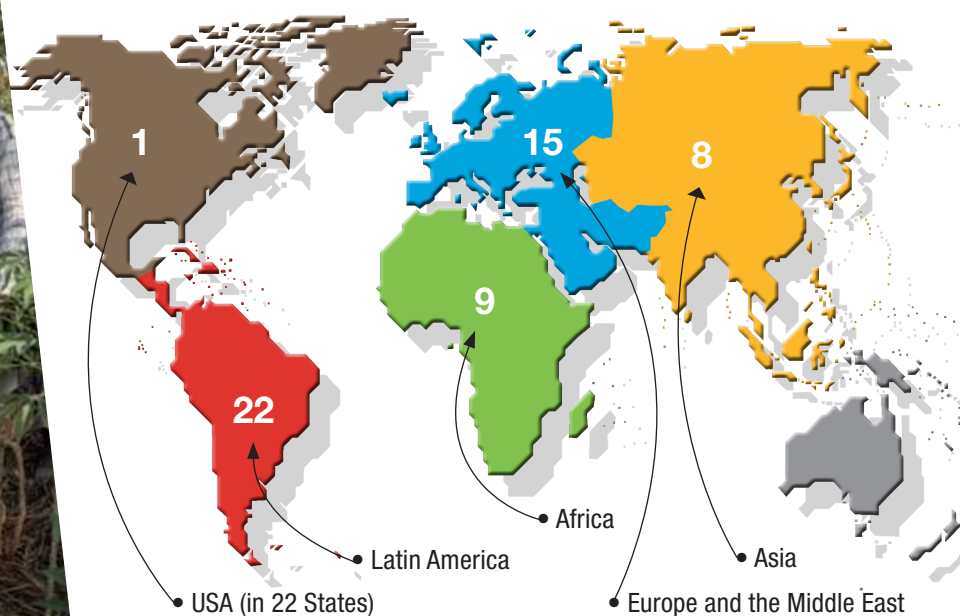
In 2020-2023, volunteers mobilised to address the consequences of the successive crises that shook the world. With **inventiveness**, they have succeeded in staying in touch with the beneficiaries, particularly to help them respond to food and health insecurity, difficulties in accessing schooling, and increased violence and migratory flows.

The AIC Priority Lines of Action 2020-2023 were the following:

In this time of crisis, with attention to **sustainable development**, AIC sets the following priorities:

- To promote **creativity and solidarity** in facing contemporary poverty
- To implement **educational and transformative projects** based on Vincentian charisma
- To strengthen **networking and partnerships**

Number of national AIC Associations by region:



AIC's Grassroots Actions - Around 12,000 AIC projects in 2020-2023

Around 12,000 projects tackling poverty are currently underway in the 55 associations of the AIC network. It is always the local volunteers, organised in AIC groups, who initiate and implement these grassroots projects. This **local focus** means the volunteers 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!

Whether it is through the acquisition of skills, experience or knowledge, the majority of AIC projects focus 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, 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.

In Colombia, a vast training project for people displaced by armed conflict, run in partnership with a government agency, offers various training courses to help these people reintegrate into the job market in order to provide a better life for their families.

For **women and girls**, AIC projects often include a component aiming at **empowerment**. Some projects have the specific goal of preventing and fighting against the violence of which these women and girls are victims.

The activities proposed by AIC volunteers are therefore often oriented towards raising awareness. Entire communities are thus made aware of the problem of gender-based violence.



Income-generating activities (raising livestock, growing crops, sewing, baking, etc.) are generally proposed in parallel in order to promote the empowerment of these women.

In Peru and Colombia, volunteers have set up prevention workshops for parents and young people.

In Burundi, the local radio station broadcasts awareness campaigns for the entire community.

In the Philippines, emotional and psycho-social support is provided to young girls who are victims of sexual abuse.

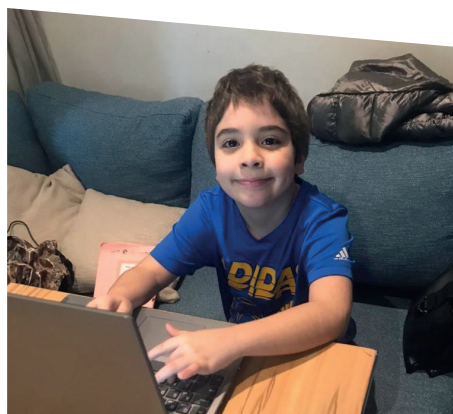
In Italy, various activities have been set up to promote the integration and empowerment of women of foreign origin.

Every two years, AIC rewards projects that fight violence towards women with the **Delva Prize**.

For children, educational projects take the form of after-school activities, preschool centres, help with re-entering the school system, scholarships and support with homework or the purchase of school supplies. The pandemic has also highlighted and reinforced inequalities in access to modern technology. **New** projects have therefore been created to try to reduce the **digital divide**.

In Argentina, Lebanon and Egypt, following the closure of schools, volunteers provided computers or tablets to the most disadvantaged students to enable them to continue their education.

In Brazil, the Philippines and Ukraine, AIC volunteers organize extracurricular activities in the most underprivileged areas of large cities.



Sustainable development and protection of our "Common Home"

Since 2017, volunteers have been encouraged to implement projects on this theme, in order to respond to the call launched by the **UN** through the Sustainable Development Goals and by **Pope Francis** in his Encyclical "Laudato Si".

A growing number of AIC projects have therefore been initiated to reduce energy consumption and pollution and **leave a viable world to future generations**.

Every two years, AIC rewards some of these projects with the **Dominique Prize**.

In Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Italy and France, several AIC groups have set up organic or agroecological urban vegetable gardens, where the produce is redistributed to vulnerable local communities. These projects help fight against food insecurity and raise awareness about the protection of biodiversity and health.

In Nigeria, an AIC group is trying to improve the cultivation of cassava.

In the Philippines and Madagascar, volunteers are trying to promote reforestation.

In Laos, a project facilitates access to drinking water in isolated villages.

In Mexico and Vietnam, awareness campaigns on recycling and the reduction of plastic and waste are run by AIC volunteers.



Nutrition

AIC volunteers often run **school canteens** for children, conscious that malnutrition is an obstacle to education. They also organise **meal distributions** open to a wide public, which are sometimes associated with a social grocery store or a second-hand store. Emergency aid in the form of **food parcels** is also an important part of the work of AIC groups.

In Belgium, as in other countries, volunteers work in partnership with local farms or markets to provide beneficiaries with fresh fruit and vegetables. In some cases, cooking classes and awareness-raising about healthy, local products are offered to improve the quality of menus among vulnerable populations. Beneficiaries also exchange recipes spontaneously.

In Madagascar, all projects include a canteen component because malnutrition is wreaking havoc in this country.

Health

In Latin America, volunteers run **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**.

In Lebanon and Italy, some AIC groups offer free or reduced-cost health care.

In Colombia, AIC volunteers organise training and various activities for children with disabilities and their parents.

In Mexico, an AIC group offers adapted training to visually impaired people.

In Honduras, young women suffering from high-risk pregnancies are welcomed and have their condition monitored in a centre run by AIC volunteers and located close to a hospital.

In Bolivia, a local AIC association provides specific medicines to people suffering from kidney disease.

In Burundi, during the pandemic, volunteers made soap and distributed it to vulnerable elderly people.



Individual and group support

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

Individual support projects are common and frequently involve visits to hospitals, prisons or homes. Beneficiaries are often elderly people. These projects are generally set up at the request of social services, sometimes in partnership with the Daughters of Charity.

In Cuba, AIC volunteers bring meals several times a week to isolated elderly people.

Group support projects are usually day centres for very diverse segments of the population.

*In Great Britain, Italy and France, many AIC projects provide **spaces for listening and exchange**, where people can meet in a warm atmosphere and conversations can take place over a cup of coffee. They often also have access to showers and laundry facilities.*

*In the USA, as in Europe, there are many second-hand stores, **day centres** for unemployed people, migrants, drug addicts, and homeless people, and spaces for families of prisoners. In Latin America, several AIC groups have opened **retirement homes** for elderly people. In Africa, **orphanages** are more common.*

Migration, homelessness and human trafficking

Whether it is for climatic, political or economic reasons, many people are forced to leave their homes. Contrary to popular belief, these movements are not necessarily international but mainly within a single country.

This increasing influx of migrants in search of a better and more secure future has prompted AIC volunteers to offer them support in various forms.

In France, courses in literacy and French culture are offered to immigrants.

In Spain and Italy, several projects aim at welcoming the continual flow of migrants coming mainly from Africa and the Middle East.

In Poland and Slovakia, AIC volunteers are mobilised to welcome people fleeing the armed conflict in Ukraine.



In Ukraine and Syria, volunteers have come to the aid of their fellow citizens forced to leave besieged cities.

In the USA, degree equivalency courses are offered to newcomers.

Several AIC groups have created day centres for the increasing number of **homeless people** who find themselves isolated in the insecurity of the street.

In Brazil, AIC volunteers offer food parcels to homeless drug addicts and try to rebuild family ties.

In the Philippines, volunteers have undertaken the reconstruction of houses that were completely destroyed by violent typhoons.

In France, there is a day centre specifically for homeless women.

Migration and conflicts have led to an increase in **human trafficking**.

In Laos, AIC volunteers organise workshops to raise awareness about this issue in isolated villages.

In Italy and Spain, some AIC groups have made houses available for young migrant women who are victims of human trafficking.

New challenges: post-pandemic poverty and climate change

The **pandemic** has widened inequalities and the most vulnerable are often those who have been most affected. Despite quarantine restrictions, volunteers mobilised with energy and creativity to face the consequences of this unprecedented crisis: emergency food aid, support for schooling, contact with isolated elderly people, hygiene training, help with reintegration into the job market, prevention and fighting against domestic violence. A great wave of solidarity was created and often young people came to help.

In several parts of the world, volunteers were called upon to set up actions to deal with the consequences of **climate change**: rebuilding houses following floods and typhoons, and providing emergency food aid to deal with famine caused by drought.



The role of the Executive Board is to coordinate AIC network, and to strengthen links and synergies between the national member associations to optimise the practices used to fight against poverty, in line with the current Priority Lines of Action.

The **Executive Board** elected in 2020 had 10 members of 9 different nationalities and 5 permanent guests. They shared geographical responsibilities (coordination of continents) and transversal responsibilities (coordination of the AIC network, training, communication and visibility, representation, finance and fundraising, contact with the Vincentian Family, projects).

Training

International meetings

- The **International Assembly of Delegates 2020** was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the statutory meeting took place remotely.
- **Continental seminars in Asia and Europe/Middle East** were held remotely.

Training visits to AIC national associations: Belgium, Colombia, Ecuador, Spain, France, Italy, Madagascar, Mexico, Thailand.

Training documents

13 training reflections were disseminated across the AIC network and published on the website. The last three were intended for the preparation of the International Assembly 2023.

New: For the first time, **videos** on the life of St. Vincent and St. Louise were proposed as material for **spiritual reflection**.

Online training

- **AIC Diploma:** this online training available in six languages has been followed successfully by 110 Peruvian, UK volunteers and a group composed of volunteers from several AIC associations in Asia.
- **Shared training in Latin America:** in response to the pandemic, several associations have set up new training courses, which they have opened up to associations in their region (Colombia, Mexico, Peru).
- **Training for Lay Spiritual Advisors:** 33 volunteers from 4 countries in Latin America have successfully completed the three-year course.

Communication and visibility

The continental coordinators have maintained frequent contact with the national presidents of their region in order to strengthen the links, the sense of belonging and the synergies between the national associations of the AIC network.

Regular publications on the website and the Facebook page, as well as a biannual digital newsletter, have made it possible to share news within the network and give visibility to the activities of the local volunteers and the AIC representatives.

AIC is present within several large international organisations: ECOSOC, UNESCO, Human Rights Council, Council of Europe, International Catholic Center of Geneva, CRESCENDO, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development).

The AIC representatives **denounce situations of poverty by giving testimonies of AIC's actions.** Through advocacy, they create links between the local and international level.

AIC works in close collaboration with the **Vincenian Family**. AIC is a member of the Communication and Formation Commissions.

Fundraising

Regular contacts are established with private or public organisations, and there is an ongoing search for new donors.

AIC Solidarité **raises funds** in Belgium to support AIC projects in developing countries.

The **Friends of AIC Fund** created within the King Baudouin Foundation in Belgium allows donations for specific projects to be collected. Donors from certain neighbouring countries can benefit from tax relief on their donations via this Fund. And for donors from other European countries, tax relief on donations is possible via «**Transnational Giving Europe**» (TGE).

New: Possibility to make **online donations** via the AIC website, including via PayPal.

Coordination and management of the AIC network

The **International Secretariat** is at the centre of the information exchanged within the AIC network. The team is made up of four permanent part-time staff members and two permanent volunteers.

Working in close collaboration with the Permanent Committee, the Secretariat supports the Executive Board in implementing decisions, **coordinating communication and organising international meetings between the different stakeholders of the AIC network.**

In collaboration with the Treasurer, the Secretariat ensures the **proper management of finances** and the **Solidarity Fund**. Fed by the member associations, this Fund allows urgent support to be provided to associations facing difficult situations such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, etc. In 2020-2023, this Fund allowed support to be given to the AIC associations in Colombia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Madagascar, and Ukraine.

Support to AIC projects

In 2020-2023, the **AIC Solidarité** Projects Service supported about 20 projects each year and funded 56 projects over the three years.

The Projects Service also promotes **twinning** and **exchanges of best practices** between AIC groups in different countries.

New: A database of the projects within the AIC network is currently being developed.

AIC Prizes

In 2020, the «**Dominique Prize for Sustainable Development**» supported four projects: in Nigeria (improved cultivation of cassava), Italy (bio-recycling and firewood for all) and Argentina (manufacture of solar-heated water tanks). In 2022, two projects were awarded the prize: in Cameroon (community orchard) and Peru (organic vegetable gardens).

In 2021, the «**Claire and Jean Delva Prize**» was awarded to projects in Burundi (income-generating activities for young girls who are victims of violence) and Peru (raising awareness of respect for women and gender equality).

AIC's prospects

In **March 2023**, the **International Assembly of Delegates** will take place in Italy on the theme «**Citizens of the world, walking united in hope**». After six years without meetings, this will be a much-awaited opportunity to exchange experiences in person on sustainable development, current forms of poverty in the post-pandemic world, migration, homelessness and the synodal approach.

