



get ready for equality..

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The Decolonise IVS Newsletter

June-October 2023



Time flies, and it has been a year and a half since we embarked on the transformative journey of the *Decolonise IVS* project. As we pause to reflect on this remarkable journey, we find ourselves asking critical questions: What milestones have we reached? What lies ahead on our path to decolonizing the International Voluntary Service (IVS) community? Are we making the necessary strides to usher in a more inclusive, diverse, and environmentally sustainable era for our organisations and societies?

Welcome to the third instalment of the *Decolonise IVS* newsletter, where we delve into recent endeavours and milestones achieved under the *Decolonise IVS* project. From thought-provoking in-person gatherings to impactful online campaigns, this newsletter showcases the fruits of our collective labour. Moreover, we bring you insightful interviews with our project advocates and supporters and share inspiring stories of local activities from different regions.

Our goal is to not only showcase progress in meeting project deliverables, but to emphasise the efforts of the participating organisations towards the transformation of the IVS system—an authentic process of decolonisation. We are on a mission to dismantle old structures and foster an IVS environment that truly embodies inclusivity, diversity, and sustainability.

Through this newsletter, we hope to kindle a spark within you, inviting you to join hands with us on this journey towards a more equitable and just IVS community.

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Unveiling the "Food for Thought Laboratory" in Italy



From July 10th to July 16th, 2023, Ferrara, Italy, bore witness to a gathering of 21 participants dedicated to presenting the fruits of our *Decolonise IVS* Participatory Action Research (PAR). Together with Decolonise Youth advocates, this group embarked on an intensive journey, aimed at catalysing essential changes within the realm of International Voluntary Service (IVS).

The "Food for Thought Laboratory" served as a vibrant space for collaboration, exchange of ideas, and deep reflection on the journey of Decolonising IVS. It provided an opportunity for involved stakeholders to collectively analyse the progress made so far and strategize the next steps towards meaningful transformation. The goal was to reshape perspectives on volunteering and beyond, fostering an environment that acknowledges and addresses historical power imbalances and colonial legacies. While several SCI branches have been working on this topic and started developing tools to support branches in their decolonisation process, many of the IVS organisations still struggle with understanding the different values and mechanisms that influence our current IVS structures and practices. A wider conversation is needed to share knowledge and imagine a different future. "The Food for Thought Laboratory" was meant to

be such a space where participants could bring together different perspectives, embrace different cultures, dismantle hegemonic structures, and amplify marginalised voices. It envisioned a future where volunteering becomes a platform for true reciprocity, mutual learning, and regenerative practices.

Decolonise IVS receives crucial support from esteemed organisations, including the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, the Council of Europe (European Youth Foundation) and the Participation Programme of UNESCO, making it possible to include more participants from different regions and backgrounds. The project warmly welcomed Mara Georgescu, Senior educational support officer from the Council of Europe (COE). The visit fostered a sense of shared purpose, igniting enthusiasm for collaborative efforts in reshaping international volunteering practices and promoting inclusivity, laying the groundwork for a more equitable future. Looking at the world around us, we realise how important it is to understand global power dynamics and the way they influence our own functioning.

After a short presentation, highlighting the composition and role of the Council of Europe, Mara shared with the participants useful resources and possible avenues for future cooperation or support. The visit of the COE was well appreciated as it gave the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with one of the important stakeholders in Europe. In a video interview filmed in the meeting in Italy, Mara shares thoughts on the many frameworks and layers of the work of the Council of Europe and their relation to decolonisation. >> [Watch the interview of Mara Georgescu in YouTube](#)

Through targeted outreach and strategic partnerships, the *Decolonise IVS* team worked diligently to influence policies and practices on both local and international levels, advocating for the integration of decolonial principles within the IVS framework. Looking at the existing IVS networks and mapping how they could become more involved stakeholders was one of the concrete activities the participants engaged in. Two online sessions were held to give opportunity to those who couldn't make it to Ferrara to connect and share their work and input. The outcomes of the "Food for Thought Laboratory" were followed-up giving space to more PAR, more awareness raising and advocacy work, and of course laying the groundwork for the upcoming "Tools Lab" in Vienna from September 29th to October 5th 2023.

Empowering Change: Decolonise Tools Development in Austria



From September 30th until October 4th 2023, the Decolonise Tools Development Laboratory took place with 10 participants in Vienna, Austria. At the core of the LAB was to process and funnel research outcomes and lessons learned in the previous stages of the *Decolonise IVS* project into creating a self-assessment tool for organisations of international volunteering and an online training module for volunteers

Beyond crafting tools, the meeting also sought to strengthen the collaboration among the project's partner organisations and refine desired learning outcomes for different target groups of the project. The Decolonise Tools Development Laboratory was hosted by Grenzenlos.

The self-assessment tool aims at supporting organisations in looking critically at the way they work, encouraging structured bilateral dialogue with partner organisations towards decolonial mutual understanding. In this way we hope to see our networks follow to revise structures that inadvertently reinforce harmful power dynamics, and move towards global justice. The e-learning training module (MOOC) targets outgoing volunteers at their pre-departure training, so that they can question their assumptions and deconstruct mindsets that hold them back from participating reciprocally in IVS.

Thanks to all of the great participatory action research data we have compiled

over the course of this project and the relationships that we have built while working together, the Tools Lab participants had a lot to work with. Further, we made sure we modelled what we promote by openly and honestly talking through hard topics together – particularly colonial histories. In the end, we were able to develop most of the content during our successful Tools Lab! We will start a testing phase now before launching both tools – the organisational self-assessment and the e-learning module for potential volunteers – in March 2024.



The journey through the Decolonise Tools Development Laboratory has been nothing short of transformative.

As one of the participants, Hanna Sainio shares her thoughts and reflections

Could you briefly introduce yourself and your organisation?

I am Hanna Sainio from Finland. I was in Brazil as an exchange volunteer of ICYE in 2005–2006. Now I'm a board member in ICYE Finland, Maailmanvaihto, a non-governmental organisation that aims to build intercultural understanding. I do a lot of volunteer work at ICYE especially in sustainability and equality issues. I'm also part of the hosting team for volunteer training camps. In July 2022, I joined the Decolonise IVS project as participant and facilitator of the online dialogues. After that, I have attended three study sessions in Vienna, Austria and Ferrara, Italy. I'm actively promoting the project within my organisation and attending international meetings.

What's your personal interest in the Decolonise IVS project?

This project personally challenges me to reflect on decolonisation, which I find a sensitive topic given my identity as a white person from Scandinavia. However, I believe colonialism is a broader issue, reflecting power dynamics and oppression present wherever people gather. There are always some kinds of power hierarchies and people who try to abuse others and it's happening all the time, unfortunately.

Within our organisations, we hold diverse positions due to our unique histories. Finnish history is particularly intriguing, having experienced both colonisation and being a coloniser. This complexity continues in modern times, with economic factors, global trade agreements, and the European Union shaping our reality. The emotional baggage that I'm carrying along is different from others. Personally, I bring a distinct perspective, having studied this topic in university and closely following the situation of Sámi people in Finland and Northern Europe. They have recently gained the same human rights as others. We all live in different realities, whether within a single country or across European nations. It comes down to our individual perspectives and how we perceive the world.

What impact do the objectives of the project have on the work of your organisation and globally?

The main idea is to equalise those power imbalances and make volunteering more equal. This is the core mission of my organisation, which is why we're involved. In Finland, volunteering mainly involves a homogeneous, white demographic, with volunteers often being of similar age and socio-economic backgrounds. We want to explore different perspectives and narratives. Who's ready to volunteer? What other forms of volunteering could exist? Can we create a lasting societal impact that addresses broader community needs, beyond the few annual projects from Finland?

On a global scale, we promote the equalisation of the system. We believe that knowledge, skills, and contributions from the Global South should be valued as much as those from the Global North. We raise questions about who controls knowledge and the economic feasibility of volunteering for everyone. We also consider the ease or difficulty of navigating global bureaucracy. Can we influence policies to make volunteering more accessible and equitable? These are the questions I ponder.

What was the focus of your attention throughout this laboratory? What are you working on?

We've been working on a self-assessment tool for organisations dealing with volunteering. We are a group of four people, where half of us work with short-term volunteering and half with long-term volunteering. Our experiences in organising volunteering differ greatly due to geographical, political, and economic factors, and the varying duration of volunteering assignments. Volunteer motivation varies widely as well.

The most interesting part has been our discussions about the struggles we face in our work routine. This exchange has been a valuable first-time experience for me. The self-assessment tool could serve as a practical way to connect with the examples it provides and apply them to our daily work.

Were these five days of the Tools LAB meeting more learning or creating according to the knowledge you have?

Quite clearly, both. I've been part of this project nearly from the start, so I've witnessed all its phases, giving me a deep understanding of its journey. However, I'm continually learning as we create these tools. Our goal is to keep refining our toolkit based on the input from organisations that use it.

Climate Justice and Decolonisation - the First Social Media Campaign



The social media campaigns of the *Decolonise IVS* project have kicked off in September to further spread awareness about the project, rallying individuals from different corners of the globe to join the movement. The campaigns aim at encouraging meaningful conversations, inspiring collective action, and generating support for a decolonised IVS.

Have you ever paused to consider the link between climate justice and decolonisation? The first campaign of the project invites people to discover how the enduring legacies of colonisation continue to impact land, natural resources, and Indigenous wisdom in today's world. It is filled with insights and thought-provoking questions for the IVS movement regarding climate justice, decolonisation within our organisations and territories, as well as engaging testimonies from IVS members. The campaign ran from 12th September until 17th October.

In the campaign, which was partly filmed in the project's Research Lab in Italy, researcher Filipe Alves shares insights to the intersections of climate justice, decolonisation, and international volunteering. Joelle Mignon from one of our participating organisations, SCI Belgium, shares that volunteers need to learn more about the colonial past of the countries that they are going to visit as well as of the countries they come from and to be motivated to explore the social and environmental impact of their presence.

Our campaign also casts a spotlight on the hidden costs of soy plantations in South America. [As globalforestwatch.com](https://globalforestwatch.com) clearly illustrates, while soy production fuels economies, it also exacts a heavy toll on the environment and local communities. Pesticides and herbicides used in these expansive plantations seep into water supplies, poison local ecosystems, and contribute to health issues among the marginalised populations. It's not just an ecological disaster; it's a glaring social injustice.

The next social media campaign of the *Decolonise IVS* project will address the narratives of international volunteering from a decolonial perspective. It will be built around insight from the participatory activity research and focus group discussions of the project, among other things. Don't miss out on any of the updates; follow the social media channels of CCIVS, ICYE Federation, and the other participating organisations!

**Anita Venanzi
(Member of the Decolonise Think Tank)**



Please provide a brief introduction about yourself and your role in IVS.

IVS was introduced to me in 2013 by a family friend suggesting I apply for a camp coordinators' training organised by the Italian branch of Service Civil International (SCI). From then, a couple of occasions came up for me to coordinate camps in Italy, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka, and to organise a coordinators' training in Hong Kong.

These experiences only deepened my long-standing fascination with understanding how radical solidarity could replace the system called "imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" (bell hooks, and we could add "speciesist" too).

In 2017, I embarked on an academic journey, enrolling as a critical-participatory PhD student in the sociology department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I studied IVS organisations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China, and the broader history and traditions of IVS. Fresh out of my PhD, my dream of being a nomadic "independent activist-researcher" is unexpectedly raining on me like an avalanche of candies and confetti showering down from a piñata. :)

What motivated your decision to participate in the Decolonise IVS project?

The commitment to continue and expand this journey of collective learning, unlearning, building, and dismantling. Only two ways of living seemed possible - i.e. complete denial or full engagement - after participating in IVS and other forms of transnational activism while pursuing "Asian" and "intercultural" studies in Europe as a first generation graduate, and then while earning a PhD in "East-Asia" as a Southern Italian, queer-female researcher who is engaged in Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR).

I believed there was no way to stay sane while denying the privileges that are randomly assigned by European citizenship as birthright, privileges that have been built and are still protected on the grounds of exclusion, exploitation and endless forms of oppression against "every-Other-else". Also, no denial on the disadvantages of being a Southern Italian queer woman, which are also well linked to coloniality and the system that enforces it. Taking every chance to resist and protest this logic through collective actions of deconstruction and reconstruction - of thoughts, narratives, habits, practices, structures, etc - is a moral imperative that Decolonise IVS makes space for.

Could you discuss the specific ways you have been actively involved in the project?

Being the naughty little goblin of the team, I guess! But from a soft place of curiosity, and in the spirit of pro-active participation. This can take the form of joyfully disturbing, agitating, and stirring up our interactions with questions such as: why? Or, how can this be more radical and fun while also being accurate, coherent, deep, intersectional, inclusive, and thoughtful? Regarding events or activities, this answer has been written on a train to Wien, and excitedly so! After the whole pandemic interacting online - for example designing a questionnaire and discussing the responses it received - we are now meeting in person for a Decolonise LAB for the second time, and it's going to be the first for me. Looking forward to building tools for learning together about how to decolonise IVS, its organisation, language, and most of all, practices!

Among the various project initiatives you've taken part in, do you have a favourite? If so, what makes it stand out to you?

The envisioning and design of a questionnaire distributed to IVS organisations to investigate their familiarity, knowledge, discourse, and practices with decolonial topics was the first hands-on activity for me. The learning curve was steep for all of us, and our common language - that is always in progress - needed to be made clear and functional for people to engage in the conversation. Complexities started to emerge and gave us a chance to go on a whole other level!

What makes the Decolonise IVS project significant?

Its urgency, and its capacity to create safe spaces where uncomfortable issues can come up and be dealt with. This project is openly enmeshed in coloniality itself, which says it all. We are aware that participants are still mostly holding a diverse set of privileged and Eurocentric identities. We are also aware that the

European funding structure keeps functioning according to a Eurocentric and logic that hinders non-European inclusive participation - think arbitrary "Europeans-only" calls for participation, travel reimbursements confined to the European borders, or the difficulty that non-European participants can face in having visa granted. This uncomfortable reality has to be made visible, so that advocacy can be deployed from within and beyond.

What are your hopes for the future of decolonising IVS?

Let's talk about commitments rather than hope: let's be committed to making this project obsolete and useless as soon as possible. We can all be looking forward to the day colonial thinking and practices will be received by startling and baffled faces, as if one was talking about or delivering a handwritten newsletter by snail mail.

News From The Field



Decolonising Dialogues in Latin America: Exploring Indigenous Realities

In a bold and transformative initiative, the volunteers of Subir al Sur dedicated one of their weekly seminars to delve into the profound world of Argentina's indigenous communities. This endeavour aimed to leave behind or at least question the conventional, North-centric, hegemonic perspective on volunteering, shifting the focus to localised experiences and understanding of native communities.

The objectives set for this gathering were as follows:

- Know the field of meaning implied by the term "original peoples."
- Establish relationships between ways of producing life and territorial conflicts and how these concepts can be linked to neocolonialism.
- "Go through the body" the experience of a type of production detached from or different from the logic of consumption.

The territorial claims of indigenous communities acted as a catalyst, driving volunteers to scrutinise history and contemporary existence through the lens of these conflicts. What emerged from this exploration was a conceptual framework, with the right to land serving as its foundational pillar. This paradigm shift allowed the volunteers to unravel how the production of life is intricately linked to land rights. Consequently, they identified similar processes in their territories such as gypsies and the search for identity detached from territorial definitions.

At its core, the right to land is synonymous with the right to identity. Denying this right equates to rendering individuals invisible, withholding recognition, and delegitimizing their place in the eyes of states, policies, and societies. However, this encounter was not just a meeting of words; it was a multi-sensory journey. As the volunteers engaged in reflection and exchanged ideas, they moulded clay with their hands—a material deeply rooted in the traditions of indigenous peoples. With this ancient medium, they crafted objects by hand, establishing a profound connection not only with indigenous cultures but also with the tactile, transformative power of their actions.

This unique space served as a "pause" in the hustle and bustle of the contemporary world, an opportunity to identify the causes and struggles of an 'other' and reflect on the current ways of producing and consuming.

In these exchanges, volunteers didn't just gain knowledge; they constructed bridges, fostered connections, and deepened their comprehension of Argentina's indigenous communities. This is the essence of our *Decolonise IVS* project - dismantling barriers and championing a world where diverse voices and cultures are cherished and respected.

Permaculture and Decolonisation: Cultivating Sustainable Communities in South Asia



In line with the principles of decolonisation, Volunteers Initiative Nepal (VIN) is leading the way in environmental conservation, embracing permaculture as a means to create self-sufficient ecosystems that respect both the land and the people. This initiative is a cornerstone of *Decolonise IVS*, aimed at restoring balance and harmony to communities.

VIN volunteers actively participate in environmental conservation by immersing themselves in the vibrant community learning centre's garden and local farmers' fields. Their approach is holistic, deeply embedded in decolonisation:

- **Seeds of Sovereignty:** In the community garden, volunteers take the lead in cultivating a diverse range of seasonal vegetables, including cauliflower, carrots, tomatoes, chillies, leafy greens, cucumbers, cabbages, and more. They begin with the vital step of preparing the soil, laying the foundation for a self-sustaining food source that respects indigenous knowledge and land.
- **The Cycles of Connection:** Following the bountiful harvest, the volunteers clear and prepare the garden beds for the next planting cycle. This process not only ensures a continuous supply of fresh produce but also maintains the symbiotic relationship between the land and its stewards.
- **Environmental Awareness:** VIN extends its support to local farmers in Okhaldhunga, collaborating with various communities through a decolonising lens. The first step is to raise awareness among farmers about the interconnectedness of climate and their environment, emphasising the importance of indigenous perspectives.
- **The Power of Organic Sovereignty:** Farmers are encouraged to integrate composting into their kitchen garden practices, aligning with indigenous principles of respecting the earth and its resources. This practice leads to not only organic vegetables but also an ecosystem where nature and human activity coexist harmoniously.

At VIN, one core philosophy is grounded in decolonisation: "Decolonising for a Sustainable Tomorrow." By incorporating permaculture and environmental conservation into their mission, they are sowing the seeds of resilience and sovereignty among local communities and the planet.



Deconstructing and Reconstructing Exchange Guidelines in Africa

In our pursuit of a decolonised International Voluntary Service (IVS) in Africa, we are embarking on a journey that redefines the very fabric of exchange. Our vision extends to strengthening integration, fostering south-to-south cooperation, and facilitating exchanges that empower. Youth-driven voluntary organisations across the continent are poised to assume a pivotal role, investing in networks such as the Network of African Voluntary Organisations and regional platforms like East Africa Voluntary Services, Southern Africa Workcamps Cooperation, and West Africa Voluntary Association Network. Through the Network of African Voluntary Organisations (NAVO), member organisations are poised to create diverse funding streams within the continent, drawing upon the African Union Volunteer linkage platform's ambition to recruit one million volunteers by 2030.

In our quest to create a decolonised IVS in Africa, we recognize the paramount importance of new knowledge production, documentation, and publication. Research and knowledge generation from an Afrocentric perspective have been a long-standing need, as it provides a fertile ground for incorporating the voices and perspectives of host communities, especially minority and marginalised groups. The aspiration is clear: to integrate these voices into the decision-

making processes of international voluntary service projects.

In summary, the envisioned IVS in Africa will lay the foundation for robust local structures across the continent, cultivating a landscape that nurtures equitable, diverse, and environmentally sustainable international voluntary service. This paradigm shift will reverse the agency, dignity, and culture of the host communities, setting a new standard for IVS in Africa and beyond. Together, we embark on this transformative journey towards a more inclusive and decolonised future.

Announcements



HYBRID CONFERENCE

DECOLONIZING VOLUNTEERING:
HOW CAN DONORS CONTRIBUTE TO
AN EQUITATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE
VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME?

THURSDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2023

2.30 PM - 5.15 PM

ONLINE REGISTRATION

WITH INVITED EXPERTS:

HELKE ESPE (NORWAY, NOREC)
CECILIA MILESI (ARGENTINA, GLOBAL CHANGE)
HELEN PEROLD (SOUTH AFRICA, INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT)
RATHERFORD MWARUTA (ZIMBABWE, CCIVS VICE PRESIDENT
FOR THE AFRICAN REGION)

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Resources

At *Decolonise IVS*, we value knowledge-sharing and co-learning. We've curated a list of insightful resources that we believe are particularly reflective within the context of decolonisation. We encourage you to explore these materials to enhance your understanding and contribute to our shared journey. Moreover, if you have additional resources that you would like to share with us, please do not hesitate to send us a link or a copy of your resource at secretariat@ccivs.org

- [Visit the Decolonise website for more resources and project updates:](https://ccivs.org/decolonise/) <https://ccivs.org/decolonise/>
- [Updated Guidelines for Participatory Action Research \(PAR\):](#) After the Food for Thought Laboratory, the guidelines for participatory action research were revised based on the outcomes from the first experiences in PAR. The updated guidelines for the Participatory Action research are now available on the Decolonise website. They are a useful tool for those who would like to experiment with this methodology.
- [ICVO 2023 Blog Series:](#) In preparation of the 2023 IVCO (International Forum for Volunteering in Development) conference, a number of blogs have been written to stir debate on current volunteering issues. We especially welcome blog post from Dr. Amjad Mohamed Saleem which focusses on reimagining volunteering through a decolonisation lens.
- [Decolonise. Now! Practical inspiration guide for equitable international cooperation:](#) This guide from the Flemish federation of NGO's gives useful tips on how to start working on decolonisation.

- **The Racial Equity Tools:** Designed to support individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity. It offers tools, research, tips, curricula, and ideas for people who want to increase their understanding and to help those working for racial justice at every level.
- Other resources:
 - <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyB5UAnI-9y/>
 - <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/international-development/63350/the-end-of-the-ngo>
 - https://www.millennialhr.com/_files/ugd/896bfe_6e5691981bb94b969077dbf091540d70.pdf
 - <http://www.peacedirect.org/transforming-partnerships>
 - <https://www.goethe.de/ins/es/es/m/sta/mad/ver.cfm>
 - <https://scich.org/participate-in-the-seminar-walking-against-colonialism-in-bern/>
 - <https://youtu.be/pCV3vkyKsYk>
 - <https://blackfeministlac.org/>

CONTRIBUTORS:

Anita Venanzi, Courtney Kelner, Dinesh Khatiwada, Donna Mae Ocmeja, Glorria Dzugkoeva, Hamza Al-Shayeb, Hanna Sainio, Ingrid Danckaerts, Julieta Blanco, Mara Georgescu, Mariela Ortiz Suarez, Micaela Herbon, Minna Räisänen, Rutherford Mwaruta

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