



ICYE

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

▶ ICYE Newsletter No. 61



"The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating." -John Schaar

ICYE celebrated its 34th General Assembly this past November 2025, on Lima Perú. As a result of deep preparation, dynamic discussions and decisions made we are able to share our Strategic Plan 2026-2030. The insights and resolutions from this assembly have set a course for our Federation, and this newsletter aims to illuminate that path for our community.

In this newsletter you'll find:

- Navigating a Changing World: An overview of our Strategic Plan
- LIVE Ex: A New Model of Youth Leadership and Climate Justice Emerging from Africa
- Volunteer Voices: Stories from our volunteer's experiences



NAVIGATING A CHANGING WORLD

by Sara Rodríguez

The aim of this newsletter is to provide clear, actionable insights into where ICYE is headed, fostering alignment and engagement across our global network.

This document distills the outcomes of our recent General Assembly, presenting ICYE's comprehensive strategy for 2026-2030. Developed through an intensive, participatory process involving our National Committees (NCs), the International Office (IO), and the Board of Managers (BoM), this plan is a robust response to the evolving global landscape. It is meticulously crafted to enhance ICYE's positioning, amplify its impact, and ensure its long-term financial viability.

Key Trends Driving Our Vision

The global environment is dynamic and ever-changing, and ICYE is committed to grow with it. This new strategy outlines the key transformations we will undertake between 2026 and 2030 to adapt proactively to current and emerging challenges.

Our ambitious, Federation-wide mandate for this period is:

"Strengthen the positioning, impact and financial sustainability of the ICYE Federation and its members."

This central ambition is informed by a deep analysis of critical external trends that significantly influence our mission and the communities we serve.

Key among these are:

- **Volunteering is evolving:** a shift towards flexible, virtual, and sometimes corporate-driven volunteering.
- **Digital Connectivity:** social media and smartphones influence young people's expectations.
- **Altered Travel Behaviors:** climate concerns and risk perceptions guide young people's travel choices.
- **Sustainability Demands:** growing environmental awareness drives expectations for sustainable travel.
- **Economic and Geopolitical Headwinds:** inflation, conflicts, and visa restrictions create international travel barriers.
- **Resurgent Nationalism:** rising nationalism impact global mobility and volunteering policies.
- **Youth Skills Gap:** persistent unemployment linked to mismatches between education and labor needs.
- **AI Integration:** rapid AI adoption automating processes and transforming industries.



ICYE's Strategic Response

The aforementioned global trends present distinct implications for ICYE:

- **Engagement Shifts:** reduced volunteer numbers seeking traditional ICYE engagement.
- **Heightened Expectations:** demands for faster, more tailored, and higher-quality experiences.
- **Enhancing Our Value Proposition:** the need to elevate our offerings from initial contact to post-experience support.
- **Programmatic Adaptation and Partnerships:** deepening participants' awareness, fostering partnerships, and navigating the voluntourism landscape.
- **Ensuring Equitable Access:** facilitating equitable exchanges between our National Committees is challenged by an increasing reliance on participants with greater financial means, potentially limiting opportunities for those from less affluent backgrounds.
- **Digital Optimization:** the critical need to invest in automation and digital tools for efficiency, particularly with stretched resources.



What Powers Us Forward



ICYE's resilience and capacity for growth are rooted in our collective strengths and significant achievements. Our long-standing expertise in intercultural volunteering, coupled with rigorous quality standards, forms a bedrock of trust and effectiveness. We are propelled by a dedicated global network of committed individuals and organizations, whose collaborative spirit has led to diversified funding and strengthened organizational credibility. The energetic input from our Youth Engagement Committee and the success of targeted projects underscore our ability to address pressing global issues and foster deeper connections with youth. This solid foundation, built on a shared vision and a track record of adaptability, positions us powerfully for the future.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

OBJECTIVES AND INITIATIVES

Our Strategy 2026-2030 is anchored by four core objectives, each supported by dedicated strategic initiatives

Objective 1: ICYE's Positioning



Focus: Effectively positioning our programmes and highlighting their volunteer and community-level contributions.

Key Initiatives: Forge a unified identity, strengthen stakeholder relations, enhance digital outreach, and refine impact assessment methodologies.



Objective 2: Participant's Experience



Focus: Ensuring optimal participant numbers and delivering exceptional programme quality.

Key Initiatives: Guaranteeing ICYE's exchange programme excellence through standardized support and developing adaptive approaches informed by target group insights.



Objective 3: Financial Sustainability

Focus: Ensuring robust financial health at both National Committee and International Office levels.

Key Initiatives: Bolster fundraising capabilities, reformulate our financial model, and optimize our quota system.



Objective 4: Federation Collaboration

Focus: Cultivating mutually supportive, efficient, and effective inter-NC working relationships that respect diversity.

Key Initiatives: Address power imbalances, strengthen internal support mechanisms, and advance process automation and digital tool utilization.

This strategic plan represents a unified commitment to ICYE's future. We are confident that by working collaboratively, we will achieve these objectives and continue to foster intercultural understanding and positive global impact.



LIVE

Living Earth Exchanges

A New Model of Youth Leadership and Climate Justice Emerging from Africa

by Nicolaus Mukasa



LIVE-Ex is an Erasmus+ funded initiative coordinated by ICYE and CCIVS with eight partner organizations across Sub-Saharan Africa in Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, south Africa, Tanzania, Togo and Zimbabwe. The programme strengthens digital skills, advocacy capacity, and intercultural learning, grounded in decolonial perspectives and a commitment to social and climate justice.

LIVE-Ex is the story of young people who refuse to wait for change. It is a powerful demonstration that youth in Africa are not merely “the future” of climate action, advocacy, or justice; they are already leading it.

By bringing together youth leaders, mentors, and partners from eight African and two European countries, the project supports meaningful youth-driven responses to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, creating pathways for young people to address the environmental challenges shaping their realities today.

“*I was able to see that meaningful change doesn't always require big resources; it starts with awareness, consistency, and people choosing to take responsibility for their actions.*”

Motunrayo Akande - Nigeria



LIVE-Ex is now a youth powered model that is growing and has a potential to be scaled up as a platform for stronger youth leadership, regional solidarity, community action and a louder, bolder collective voice for earth advocacy and climate justice, driving meaningful change through virtual exchanges as a complement for physical mobility.

The project's virtual exchange pathway acts as a bridge connecting young people across borders. Equipping young people with digital skills has enhanced their advocacy abilities and built their confidence through mentorship and peer-learning spaces. Alongside these experiences, LIVE-Ex has developed practical resources and toolkits, including handbooks, and quality standards to support youth workers and deepen the impact and role in supporting community actions.

The first and second exchange cohorts unfolded powerful scenes where youth Mentorship felt like part of real life with our cohort members exchanging honest conversations about burnout, courage, community, identity, and what it means to show up and working together. The virtual and online dialogues challenged climate colonialism, explored art as a tool for advocacy work that connected true local struggles among young people to global realities bringing about realisation for most that their stories are not small.

“*The mentorship cleared some of my frustration through guidance to what actions work for us with some strategy and ontime guidance to help my community.*”

— Farida, Tanzania

One of the most powerful components of the programme is the Earth Advocacy Mentorship Virtual Exchange. Here, mentors and youth workers guide young participants through an Earth Advocacy curriculum using a dedicated toolkit. So far, sixteen mentors have been trained, and two youth-friendly handbooks have been produced to help participants navigate climate justice work and virtual collaboration. The team has also built a Good Practice Map, sharing successful stories and models emerging across the continent.

Across eight African countries, cross-border action teams made up of four to ten young people have taken shape. More than five hundred and twenty mentees have already participated, designing their own climate-focused projects, whether virtual or implemented locally. Those

whose ideas stand out receive a €200 micro grant, giving them the momentum they need to bring their ideas to life.

As a result, in the last two cohorts we have seen youth-Led actions that changed communities. Young leaders launched campaigns on plastic pollution, biodiversity protection, environmental justice and community awareness with some receiving funding as a grant to kickstart their ideas. Others mobilized volunteers in their local community to participate in initiatives such as tree planting, community gardening, and or advocacy campaigns in their municipalities. With every action leaving a mark, LIVE-Ex has leveraged the experience within the consortium to conduct successful virtual exchanges.



Alongside project implementation, a series of virtual dialogues and hybrid exchanges has brought together youth voices in creative and reflective spaces. These include dialogues on Climate Change and Culture, two sessions exploring Art as a Mirror for Climate Change, mentor check-ins, and a collaborative advocacy discussion with universities. The launches of Cohorts 1 and 2 have further strengthened bonds among participants, allowing them to share insights and build solidarity across borders.

Progress Towards Our Goals



Four major rounds of virtual exchange anchor the multi-year work of LIVE-Ex, culminating in public sharing events in June and December of 2025, June 2026, and November 2026. These gatherings serve as milestones for youth to showcase their learning, present their actions, and reflect on their individual and collective growth.

The impact so far is both promising and inspiring. More than eighty percent of mentees report improved advocacy skills and stronger cross-border collaboration. Participants are gaining digital competencies that support their employability and open new opportunities. The project is also strengthening partnerships between African and European organisations, laying the groundwork for long lasting cooperation beyond the project cycle.



Half way through, the ICYE International Office, CCIVS, and implementing partners, remain dedicated to steering the project. Looking ahead, LIVE-Ex is preparing for deeper engagement and expanded reach. The coming year will bring more mentorship, more action teams, more regional dialogues, and even stronger focus on inclusion and diversity through languages, cultures and ecosystems. The project aims to continue building leadership pathways, supporting and working with youth to engage in global climate justice spaces with confidence and impact.



Resources Empowering Change



Earth
Advocacy
Toolkit



Good
Practice
Map



Moodle
Platform

All resources available at: ccivs.org/live-ex/resource-hub-and-certification

VOLUNTEER

by Yi Yue Chen from Taiwan

After arriving in New Zealand, the biggest challenge I faced was communication. Although I had learned English at school, I still needed to improve my English skills, so I sometimes had difficulties understanding others and expressing my own ideas.

To deal with this challenge, when I encounter unfamiliar words or do not fully understand a conversation, I actively ask questions. I first try to understand the meaning in English and then use translation tools to check whether my understanding is correct. Through this process, I gradually improve my communication skills.

At the beginning of the volunteer exchange, my main goal was to find out whether I truly wanted to work in forest conservation and whether I was capable of doing this kind of work. However, after the exchange started, I realized that I had grown in many areas, especially in communication, confidence, and adaptability.

At first, because of my limited English ability, I was afraid to express my thoughts. Now, even though I know I am not perfect and may still make mistakes, I am willing to try to communicate. Through interacting and working with people from different cultural backgrounds,



VOICES



I have learned to be more open-minded, understanding, and accepting of others. I have also become more independent. This experience not only helped me understand the practical work involved in forest conservation but also allowed me to better recognize my own abilities and gain clearer direction for my future.

One important lesson I learned from New Zealand and this project is that making mistakes is a natural and essential part of learning. By living and working with people from different cultural backgrounds, I came to realize that effort and attitude during the process are more important than achieving perfect results.

The values I gained during this period have had a deep impact on me, encouraging me to continue learning and to bravely try new things and face new challenges in the future.

VOLUNTEER

by Misaki Miyamoto from Japan

Hola and こんにちは(Konnichiwa), I'm Misaki Miyamoto from Japan. I stayed with my host family and did volunteer work in San José, Costa Rica from August 2025 to February 2026. I worked at Centro Integral Infantil Manos Amigas, a daycare center for children aged 0 to 6 years, aimed at families living in poverty and extreme poverty in San José. In the daycare, there are 3 different classes divided by age and each class has two local staff members. I was the only volunteer at the center, so I supported the classes that needed help, depending on the situation. The volunteer work at the daycare is not easy work but, I love this project with the lovely children and the fantastic local staffs.

Before I came to Costa Rica, I had never studied Spanish. So, I struggled with the language a lot during the project especially during the first few weeks. Spanish words spoken by little kids were very difficult for me to catch. I couldn't understand what they were saying, and what they wanted me to do, but also they didn't understand that I couldn't understand Spanish. So, I had a lot of miscommunication with them and some children started avoiding me.

But I kept working hard for the daycare and tried to have small conversations with the children so that I can show I was caring about them. Then the local staff started to bring them together with me to make better relationships. I also made effort to understand Spanish better. By looking up meanings of the words that I heard in the project, I came to under-

VOICES



stand conversations between local staffs and what they say to the children. I also tried to observe the children carefully and tried to know their favorite things. In this way, I became able to guess what they want and came to understand what they say which used to be very difficult for me.

After a while, children were nice to me and came for a hug every time I left the daycare. I learned that even if we don't speak the same language, we can make good relationships and build trust by being diligent and trying to understand. This lesson, which I gained through my exchange experience, is a valuable asset to me.

What I miss most about Costa Rica is not the nature or the food, but the children and the local staff from my project. I'm deeply honored to have been in the wonderful project in Costa Rica and have learnt many things in this exchange experience. Thank you so much, muchas gracias.

VOLUNTEER

by Go Sakuma from Japan

Hello, this is Go Sakuma, a volunteer from Japan in the 2025-26 term. I work at Centro Juvenil Ingrid Chawner in Maputo, which offers social protection and reintegration support for vulnerable children aged eight to seventeen.

My main task at the centre is supporting the children's daily lives, such as supervising their activities, preparing breakfast, and helping them get ready for school. Additionally, I organised an English programme to pursue my interest in addressing educational inequality.

I gathered children who were curious to learn. While I was grateful to have many enthusiastic children, I faced some challenges in the programme. The challenges were not only from language barriers but also from gaps in educational backgrounds. I found that some of the children lacked literacy skills and were copying letters as if they were drawing pictures.

This reality led me to make a crucial decision. I decided not to teach English to those who did not have literacy skills, but to teach them to read in Portuguese. This decision was significant for two reasons. First, children, especially children who used to live on the streets and are trying to reintegrate into society, need to experience small successes to build confidence. I had to admit that my English programme might have done more harm than good for them because it could reinforce experiences of failure. Second, literacy skills are much more important than English

VOICES



skills for them to have equal opportunities in their future.

From this experience, I learnt two things. First is the importance of understanding their background deeply and carefully considering what I do for them. Second is the necessity of being cautious about simply applying values from my background. The same goes for daily conversations with the children. I had the opportunity to attend a meeting in the centre to discuss the children's backgrounds and trauma. Most of the children at the centre carry trauma from being separated from their families. I noticed that I should be extremely sensitive when talking with children about their family or their past, to avoid triggering trauma and keeping the centre a safe place for them.

As I near the end of my one-year project in Mozambique, I am delighted to see the children's growth over the past year.

VOLUNTEER

For example, some of them can now communicate in basic English. Although my Portuguese level is limited, children also act as my Portuguese teachers, and they support me and the English programme. I, a university student without any specific proficiency or experience, had many difficulties during my project. But I am blessed to feel the warmth of the mutual support between myself and the local community.



Volunteer Voices

by Nicolás Rodríguez from Ecuador

My volunteer work in Buenos Aires has been a deeply meaningful experience. Arriving from Quito and adapting to such an intense yet friendly city allowed me to grow not only as a volunteer, but also as a person. One of the most important lessons I learned was understanding the value of collective commitment. In my life, I felt that I understood that getting involved, expressing opinions and participating is also a way of caring for others. But seeing

VOICES



so many people truly committed to social causes made me more aware of my own role and the responsibility we have as young people. I also understood that commitment to others is not an extraordinary gesture, but an everyday practice. In the project, I met people who, even in difficult contexts, take care of others with consistency and responsibility. That changed the way I see volunteering: no longer as a one-off help, but as a way to get involved in a real and sustainable way. This experience reaffirmed my decision to continue working for the common good. Finally, Buenos Aires taught me to adapt, to trust myself and to value diversity. This experience strengthened my social consciousness and confirmed my desire to continue contributing, through work and commitment, to a more just society.



icye.org

ICYE International Office

Große Hamburger Straße 30
D-10115 Berlin
Germany



+49-30-28 39 05 51



icye@icye.org



facebook.com/icyeio



instagram.com/icye.federation



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Erasmus+. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.