



Twinning for Midwives:

A Do-It-Yourself Guide



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How to Read this Guide



This guide is divided into two main sections:

In Part 1 you can **read about the theory** of what twinning is, why twinning is impactful, how you start a twinning project, how to keep the momentum going and when you need to do what.

This is exemplified by real-life experience of midwives and midwives' associations who have been involved in twinning and who share what twinning has meant to them, why they started twinning, and how they approached it. These are **stories to inspire!**

In Part 2 you will find the **Twinning Kit** which has all the logistical documents you need to start a twinning project. These are examples that are made to adapt to better suit your context. Tables are filled in with guiding examples, so please just see them as examples and add your own content as appropriate.



Part 1 Do-It-Your self Twinning



1.1 What is twinning?

Twinning is a cross-cultural, reciprocal process, where two groups of people work together to achieve joint goals (1). The method has been recognised as an effective way to improve the quality of care provided by midwives in health systems by building the leadership capacity of midwives involved in twinning and increasing their power to implement change (2, 3). Twinning requires equal bilateral investment and involves intercultural exchange and communication between partnered groups of midwives, such as midwives' associations from two countries, two midwives' associations within the same country, or between two regional groups of midwives, or even simply between two individual midwives.

Four Characteristics of Twinning (1)

- It is based on reciprocity. Even though midwives' associations may give and reciprocate different things, no one association gives more than the other, and no association takes more than the other. The exchange must be equal and reciprocal.
- 2 It entails the building of personal relationships. Project sustainability appears to be directly related to the relational investment made by both twins. There is a tri-partite system of giving, receiving, and returning which is a reflection of the relationship that is built.
- It is a dynamic process. Twinning is a process with room for flexibility and spontaneous development. Participants will experience unexpected things.



It's between two organisations across different cultures. Both associations or groups of midwives work together on a specific project or theme with the aim of exchanging information and skills. The period of interaction, the areas of exchange, and the actual processes are determined by the participants in collaboration with their midwives' association. The relationship is built upon both associations' acknowledgment of their differences and their willingness to learn. The process involves proactivity and creating common ground for sharing ideas and experiences.



From the beginning, starting with the proposal development, I believe this methodology is quite different from the usual way of working with projects and funding. Typically, we are given specific activities to carry out. Here, things are more intuitive, allowing for the development of creativity, integrating our interests, and listening to others' opinions to create the project collaboratively. This is one of the main differences of the twinning model compared to other team or peer work models.

Gabriela, Guatemala



Twinning principles

Equality

The core objective of twinning is to create an environment for midwives' associations to grow and learn from each other equally. This means that a process takes place whereby each midwife or midwives' association gives, receives, and gives back in an equal way. It is for this reason that matching midwives' associations from similar social and economic contexts works better because in this way you are better able to establish non-hierarchal, mutually beneficial relationships.



Autonomy

Twinning is as successful as the participants make it. This means that each set of twins determines the pace of their project in consideration of their existing professional and personal schedules. By making space for the twins to build trust and form relationships with each other and establish realistic project timelines and deliverables, they expect to achieve impactful project outcomes and long-lasting relationships between midwives' associations.



Attainability

Twinning goals are meant to be impactful by being realistic and achievable within the set timeframe. Twinning coordinators are encouraged to be vigilant yet also take a backseat as the process develops, guiding twins through providing workshops and progress check-ins. Twins share a realistic joint goal. This goal is related to the overall strategic priorities of the midwives' association and often relates to strengthening the midwives' association. Examples of goals the twins might aim to address through their activities include improving the financial sustainability of the midwives' associations, increasing the number of members, or increasing the visibility of the association.

Twinning is NOT a quick win!





Our primary aim was to maximise the benefits of our twinning partnership. I prioritised our associations over personal advantages and ensured that discussions were conducted on equal footing, free from feelings of superiority or inferiority. We approached our discussions with the understanding that we were in this together. All ideas were valued, and mutual respect was maintained. I used my experience wisely, acknowledging different opinions and respectfully presenting alternative perspectives. We sought a shared understanding, always considering each other's feelings before moving forward.

Annette, Uganda

Twinning has a beginning and an end

Twinning is a long-term exchange that usually lasts between two and four years. Even though the twinning relationship could last forever, the specific collaboration project is planned to have a start and a finish. This is important for managing participants' expectations and giving the twins a perspective of time spent on the project.



It may be that the relationship becomes strong and stretches beyond the project. That should be a personal choice of the twins involved and is more likely to happen when it is not a requirement but something that grows organically. Groups engaged in twinning partnerships should allow for adequate time to discuss and understand cross cultural and contextual issues and how to best deal with them. Insights into these themes will help twins to culminate better understanding within their partnership.

Twinning involves tangible joint activities

Twins agree to work together to formulate joint goals and establish a specific and realistic project that addresses a shared issue, impacting both organisations.



Twinning involves personal interaction

Twinning moves beyond a professional relationship to having a genuine interest in each other, both professionally and personally. The way the interaction or relationship comes about can vary. It can involve in online conversations, live exchanges, on-site training, study tours or internships, always with the aim of reciprocal and equal learning. For example, an exchange between a few twins from midwives' association A to midwives' association B, may provide twins with the opportunity to work in another association and gain practical experience and exposure to different work methods. Learning may comprise of the host association's regular training procedures, or it may be specifically tailored to meet the needs of the visiting participants. This can then be reciprocated by an internship or exchange from midwives' association B to midwives' association A. The same principle applies to study tours, or technical exchanges that involve the visiting of several sites of work of the host association for the purpose of providing or receiving training and/or new insights.

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In determining our common objectives, we first decided that we needed to be more visible. That we should communicate regularly and monitor the objectives together too. No changes should be initiated without the agreement of both twins. We consult each other very often so that we can stick to the objectives and achieve them together. We believe that the Twin to Win partnership goes beyond what we are currently doing. We are twins today and twins for life. That's what Senegal and Mali decided.

Guindo, Mali



It's important to create a closer relationship of empathy. Bonding is not formed just by having a project or money, but by having empathy with the reality of each country and understanding why we work in a certain way. To strengthen the bond, we must understand the reality of each country. Without that empathy, there is only a noise of interests and not a true partnership.

Griselda, Costa Rica

Twinning is not about what you do, but how you do it!

In twinning there is NO big sister or little sister. If there is a clear hierarchical difference between you and the MA you want to twin with, it may well be that another form of collaboration suits your purpose better. For example, a large donor may want to support your midwives' association financially to create a website or automated member fee system.



This form of collaboration lies more in the line of development aid, as the basic principles of giving, accepting, and returning, called reciprocity, do not apply. However, that does not make it less appropriate. The same can count for collaborations such as an exchange, an alliance, a partnership, and networking. When these collaborations are based on reciprocity where two groups of people work together to achieve joint goals, we name it twinning.

1.2 Why twin?

Over the past decade, several ICM member associations have twinned with one another to share best practices and work collaboratively on shared organisational objectives aimed at strengthening their association and consequently midwifery with their respective countries. Examples of ICM midwives' associations that have twinned include Tanzania and Canada, Japan and Mongolia, the UK and Uganda, UK and Nepal, the Netherlands and Sierra Leone, the Netherlands and Iceland, Ghana and Sierra Leone, Mali and Senegal, Uganda and Burundi, and Costa Rica and Guatemala. Listening to the twinning journey of other twins and/or twinning experts can be very insightful and a good way to orientate yourself to the idea of twinning. For more information see Part 1.4 Potential support from an ICM Twinning expert.

Twinning makes a win-win of two different contexts / cultures

Allowing the participants of twinning adequate time to discuss and understand cross cultural and contextual issues and how to best deal with them will help twins to culminate better understanding for each other within their partnership. This can provide a platform for compassionate and meaningful exchange.



The project enabled us to understand that whatever the culture or country, there really isn't too much difference in midwifery practice. The values remain the same, and so does the philosophy of midwifery. Exchanging and seeing each other also created a feeling of belonging, of being part of a team, and of realising that together we can learn from each other, which has created an indestructible relationship between us.

Ndeye Bigue Ba, Senegal



The first time we met, I experienced the greatest cultural impact. Just the initial presentation of the situation in each country and each association was very striking. Seeing that in some African countries three women die every hour was shocking to me. Talking with twins about the health conditions and care during childbirth, how they managed a haemorrhage or a complication, was also very revealing. I believe that only face-to-face or in-person conversations can truly benefit these discussions and help us better understand those realities.

Alex, Costa Rica

Twinning creates opportunities for all

Twinning creates and presents opportunities for all involved. These opportunities include:

- Organisational capacity building: Twinning strengthens midwives' associations through working towards joint goals and transferring skills and knowledge on midwives' association strengthening.
- Midwifery skills capacity building: Through exchange of best practices, twinning provides involved parties with the opportunity to identify and exchange effective policies, techniques, and evidence-based practise.
- Improved outcomes: Twinning that involves collaborating on a chosen initiative results in stronger and more sustainable programme outcomes. This is because both twins will have a vested interest.
- Relationship building: Twinning can help build stronger relationships and friendships, which enhances unity among midwives and their associations. These relationships are crucial in developing a shared sense of professional identity, support, and community of practice that spans beyond borders.
- **Networking:** Twinning provides networking opportunities as both associations are exposed to and develop relationships with each other's existing local, regional, and international networks.
- **Solidarity:** Twinning helps to create a feeling of belonging to a larger national, regional or global community. Associations involved in twinning are often inspired by the work of their partners.

The potential impact that has been observed in midwives and midwives' associations who participated in twinning is that it has enhanced leadership capacity, increased the knowledge and skills of participants, and increased the visibility of the association both in society as well as at the national ministry of health. The most recent ICM Twin to Win project showed a significant growth in the membership of participating associations (e.g. increased number of members joining).

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Thanks to this project, the association has been tested. The board now has a logo, and we are achieving recognition at the ministerial level, something we learned from our counterparts in the twinning. We now have a phone and someone supporting us with accounting. Additionally, we had 11 members who were initially registered, we now have 104, thanks to the meetings with our colleagues.

Griselda, Costa Rica



The first key takeaway was their organizational skills and priorities. The Uganda Midwives' Association places significant emphasis on capacity building and relationship management. For instance, they informed us that they would be unavailable in April due to preparations for the IDM event in May. They allocate time well in advance for such planning, whereas we tend to think about such events only when they are imminent. This advance planning is something I learned from them.

Augustin, Burundi



1.3 How to set up your twinning project



Creating an environment for midwives' associations to grow and learn from each other in a reciprocal way is a core objective of twinning. For this reason, **midwives' associations** from similar social and economic contexts should be matched to establish non-hierarchal, mutually beneficial relationships between sets of twins.

The project is premised on self-direction and feminist models of collaboration and communication. This means that **each twin determines the pace of their project** in consideration of their already busy professional and personal schedules. By making space for the twins to build trust and form relationships with each other and establish realistic project timelines and deliverables, we expect to achieve impactful project outcomes and long-lasting relationships between midwives' associations.



TIP: Allow water to pass under the bridge... That is, it takes time to bond. Experiencing different things together will solidify your relationship.

Each midwives' association selects at least one representative to coordinate the project and may decide to involve more members at a later stage.

The project coordinator supports the twins to determine a concrete and realistic project that is achievable within the set timeframe, taking a backseat role by facilitating workshops and progress check-ins. Examples of the goals the twins might aim to address through their projects include improving the financial sustainability of the association, increasing the associations' member count, increasing their fundraising capacity, getting a seat at the table at the Ministry of health when policies and strategies are being developed as well as promoting diversity and gender equity within the association.



The Four Twinning Phases



Phase 1: Preparation (up to 6 months)

Deliverables:

The midwives' association has found a twinning partner

Two groups of midwives participating in the twinning project have been defined

Individual twins have been matched

A twinning project coordinator has been appointed for both twinning groups (see Figure 1)

The length and overall goal of the project have been determined

A commitment charter has been developed and agreed to by the participants

Main activities



Hold learning sessions, either online or face-to-face for potential participating twins, to explore the concept of twinning and the possibility of starting a twinning collaboration. This could potentially be all your members and may be a session after a regular membership meeting.



At the end of our first meeting in Morocco, we returned to Burundi and organised a feedback workshop. Almost 200 midwives responded to this invitation and took part in the workshop. We took the opportunity to present the Twin to Win project to them and they quickly took to the idea. They embraced the idea, and the fact that we have become much more visible both internationally and nationally has a lot to do with that. We're grateful for the Twin to Win project.

Muriella, Burundi

Decide which two groups will be twinned. These can be:

- Two midwives' associations from two similar countries. This can be determined by income category, language, geography etc.
- Two national midwives' associations (with the aim to become one association!)
- Two regional branches of one association

- Hospital and community midwives
- Rural and urban midwives
- Midwives with different expertise
- Indigenous and non-indigenous midwives
- Any other distinction relevant in your context

3 Appoint two twinning coordinators, one for each twinning group.

The steps described in the four phases of twinning are managed by the two twinning coordinators. It is therefore important that the twinning coordinators have enough time (an average of two days a month) to dedicate to this role. Consider the following skills when appointing a twinning coordinator:

- Management
- Facilitation
- Financial, including fundraising skills (unless you have someone else doing this aspect of the work)
- Communication
- Finally, the person should have enthusiasm for the role.



The coordinators were more than just guides; they were mentors and coaches who helped me explore and develop my skills. Their support and patience were instrumental in my personal growth throughout the project. We truly had the best coordinators, who played a crucial role in our success.

Ritah, Uganda

The twinning coordinators from each group lead the project jointly on behalf of the midwives' association from now on. Recognising their work either financially or in some other way will support the coordinators to sustain the work they have committed themselves to. Consider the following things when appointing the twinning coordinators:

- Formulate a contract that stipulates expectations as well as reimbursement.
- Formulate how long the twinning coordinator will be appointed for and under what circumstances the contract can be terminated, and how.
- Agree to regular check in meetings with your twinning coordinator.
- Make sure to get regular updates from your twinning coordinator.

Twinning coordinators meet monthly to discuss the progress of the project and prior to every twinning event.



TIP: All is well that ends well. Determine and keep to your project end-date.



Determine the duration of your twinning project.



The timespan is generally between two and four years.

Contextual differences matter - think of language, geography, culture, maternity care system, and income – and determine the length of the project. A big gap and greater complexity generally need a longer time span.



Determine the overall goal of your twinning project. Some examples are:

- Improve the public image of midwives and midwifery
- Increase the visibility of the midwives' association at the ministry of health or health authorities
- Influence national policy on sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and adolescent health (SRMNAH)
- Influence the transition to continuity of midwife models of care
- Increase the quality of care provided by midwives
- Influence more respectful care for women

- Increase the membership of your association
- Increase your associations' fundraising capacity
- Strengthen your leadership skills
- Become more influential on social media
- Promote the role of midwives in humanitarian settings
- Become prepared for humanitarian crises
- Become more climate resilient



Determine the size of each twin group.

Generally, a group functions best when there are between 8 and 12 participants. Remember that each participant will have a twin, so 8 twin pairs will mean 16 twins! A 10% drop out rate is normal, so consider adding a few more participants initially.





Formulate criteria

by which individual twins can be chosen to participate in each of the two twinning groups. Determine beforehand how you will include twins. This makes the process transparent and supports expectation management on all sides. Matching twins is challenging, do you match because people are different or the same? For what they can offer each other or because they will have much in common? There is no right or wrong. Our experience is that it remains an intelligent guess. Experience shows that 1/3 of twins really like each other and can remain friends for life, 1/3 treat each other as respectful colleagues and 1/3 are not a natural match and glad when the project is over!

When formulating your criteria think of combining twins who:

- Have a similar context (geographical/type of work/age/language etc.)
- Are willing and able to give and take (equality)
- Able and willing to embrace equity (recognise and accept each other's differences)
- Willing to formulate a joint goal (want to work together proactively)
- Willing and able to invest time (be realistic!)
- Committed to try to raise funds
- B Determine the method you will use to select individual twins. This can be by interview, online form, lottery, first come first serve etc.
- 9 Select the twin participants for each group of your twinning project.
- Organise (online) workshops for twins to get acquainted with each other and brainstorm potential project ideas.
- Develop a Commitment Charter for all twins in which you determine by which jointly agreed rules you will interact together. For more information, [see the Commitment Charter in the Twinning Kit].

By the end of the preparation phase, you will be able to distinguish four distinctive groups within a twinning project:

- The total project group two groups of midwives with a total of between 16 and 24 twins.
- Midwives' association One 8 to 12 twins plus a coordinator from one midwives' association, region etc.
- Midwives' association Two 8 to 12 twins plus a coordinator from one midwives' association, region etc.
- Between 8 to 12 twin pairs who collaborate while also being part of their twin group as well as the twinning project as a whole.

These four groups may meet up in their different compositions for different activities throughout the twinning project (see Figure 1).

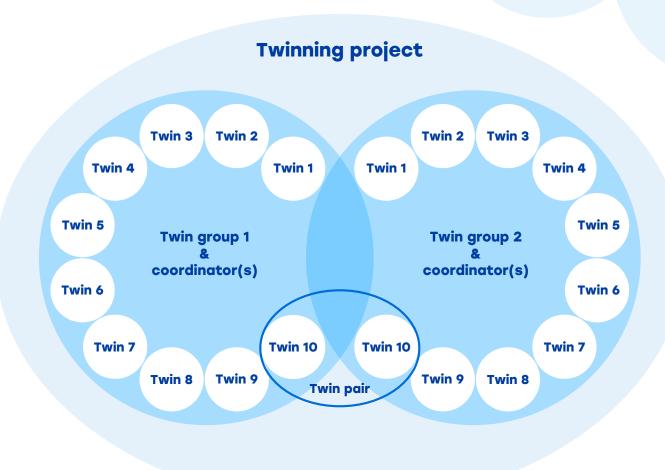


Figure 1: Four different groups within one twinning project.

- Twinning project -Twin Group 1 and Coordinator(s) -Twin Group 2 and Coordinator(s) -Twin Pair

Phase 2: Consolidation (usually 3 to 6 months)

Deliverables:

An overall project plan, budget, and resource mobilisation plan have been finalised

A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan are agreed to.

The project has had a baseline evaluation.

Workshops have been held to guide the twins in the project planning/roll out process.

Identified participant twin pairs have met (online or face to face) and chosen their small & concrete project goal.

A community of practice has been set up.

Main activities

Write overall project plan, budget, and resource mobilisation strategy [see Twinning Kit]. This is led by the twinning coordinators with support from the treasurer of the Board of each midwives' association. Be realistic regarding costs and realise that some activities can be done Pro Bono by an interested stakeholder, partner or one of the participating twins.



TIP: Take your time to plan ahead. A well-planned project determines your success!

- Create a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan.
 [see the Twinning Kit]
- 3 Do a baseline evaluation [see Twinning Kit]



Support twins with project planning to determine their shared and individual goals. This can be achieved by:

- First determining the overall aim of twinning that the twins will contribute to. This can be decided by the leadership of each midwives' associations.
- Holding a brainstorming session between the twins to generate ideas.
- Discussing the topics in the group and determining what each midwives' association can do to contribute.
- Let twin pairs ascertain their different and complementary skills, so how each can play their part.
- Let twins begin to formulate their joint goal, support them to keep it SMARTI (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound and Inspirational).



One of the lessons we have learned is to avoid setting goals that are too large or ambitious, as they are more likely to go unmet if communication is lost or if the relationship with collaborators is not solid. When we drafted these goals, they made sense, but perhaps they were too pretentious, aiming to achieve more than was realistic."

Gabriela, Guatemala

- **5 Do a stakeholder mapping** exercise to identify potential partners as well as funders for your twinning project. [see Twinning Kit]
- 6 Decide upon a series of workshops for the twins on specific topics that are in line with your overall goals.



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Connect twins digitally by creating a community of practice. This can be either a WhatsApp or other type of platform with the aim of supporting twins to exchange experiences. Make sure this group is facilitated for a clear focus and to keep the momentum of the group going. The facilitator does not have to be one of the twinning coordinators, it can be a participating twin and even rotate between twins. However, make sure the facilitators role is well described and keep close contact between the twinning coordinators and Community of Practice facilitator to align well to the needs of the participating twins.



The first strategy is communication. We have WhatsApp groups, where we talk to each other. We don't go a week without saying hello to each other, catching up on each other's news, and making sure the atmosphere is always lively.

Muriella, Burundi



TIP: Appoint a Community of Practice facilitator (by rotation) and support the role with clear expectation guidelines.



Phase 3: Implementation (1 to 2 years)

Deliverables:

Workshops (online as well as face to face) have taken place to support twins in their activities to attain their goals.

The project has had a mid-term evaluation

Main activities



Support twins to formulate joint action plans.

These plans need to be small and attainable. All action plans by twin pairs must contribute in a tangible way to the overall project goals that were determined in the consolidation phase. The outcome of the project is important, yet even more important is the relationship that is built between the twins and that has the potential of outliving the twinning project. Idea for activities twins could do together are:

- A specific midwifery skill that they want to learn from the other.
- Getting acquainted with social media.
- Creating a poster to raise attention for a midwifery topic.



TIP: Make sure the joint plans by twins are achievable.

Generally, this means you will need to reduce their expectations!



Support twins to write and roll-out a joint activity plan and give feedback throughout the process. Organise problem solving meetings where twins can ask questions and share challenges with other twins. Let them present their progress to the group regularly.

- 3 Monitor your overall twinning project budget.
- **Commence fundraising** and actively identify pro bono support. Remember that your twin may have the skills you are looking for!



TIP: Remember twins are adults and need to solve their own issues, especially when it comes to friction between twins.

As a coordinator you are not a relationship therapist!





Hold regular workshops based on the twins' needs.

You can invite experts you know to speak on different topics. These workshops could be about:

- How to write a project plan
- How to make a budget
- How to perform stakeholder mapping
- How to organise a stakeholder meeting
- Leadership skills

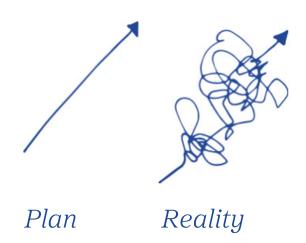
- Cross-cultural collaboration/ communication
- · Grant writing skills
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Use of midwifery data (via Midwives' Data Hub)
- Event management and social media



Do a mid-term evaluation and act on the results by adjusting your workshops and support to the twins' expectations. [see Twinning Kit]



TIP: Expect regular changes of plans and go with the flow of the complexity of twinning!





Phase 4: Wrapping Up (3 to 6 months)

Deliverables:

The project has had a final evaluation.

An event was held to share and celebrate the results with stakeholders.

The results have been monitored and evaluated and incorporated into a final report.



TIP: Celebrate your achievements with your twins and other stakeholders. It is a great way to showcase your results as well as have a rite of passage to close your project formally.

Main activities

- 1 Do a final evaluation [see Twinning Kit] and share the results.
- Plan an online or in person final event with stakeholders to share the results of the project and celebrate its completion. Let the twins present their own projects.
- Analyse the baseline, midterm and final evaluation and incorporate your results into a final report.
- 4 Share your results with ICM.
- Hold a final event with the twins alone to close the project. The project will officially close at the end of this period. However, some twins may well continue their collaboration voluntarily.



Despite the project nearing its end, we believe the relationship we've built with our twins should continue. Ongoing support and collaboration are essential as new issues arise within our associations. In summary, continuous communication has been a cornerstone of our partnership.

Ritah, Uganda

Timeline



Phase 1: Preparation (up to 6 months)

- · Hold learning sessions
- · Decide which two groups will be twinned.
- Appoint two twinning coordinators
- Determine the duration of your twinning project
- Determine the overall goal of your twinning project
- · Determine the size of each twin group

- Formulate criteria
- Determine the method to select individual twins
- Select the twin participants
- Organise (online) workshops
- Develop a Commitment Charter



Phase 2: Consolidation (usually 3 to 6 months)

- Write overall plan, budget, and resource mobilisation strategy
- Create a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan
- Do a baseline evaluation

- Support twins with project planning
- Do a stakeholder mapping
- Decide upon a series of workshops
- Connect twins digitally by creating a community of practice



Phase 3: Implementation (1 to 2 years)

- Support twins to formulate joint action plans.
- Support twins to write and roll-out a joint activity plan
- Monitor your overall twinning project budget
- Commence fundraising
- Hold regular workshops based on the twins' needs
- Do a mid-term evaluation



Phase 4: Wrapping Up (3 to 6 months)

- Do a final evaluation
- Plan an online or in person final event
- Analyse the baseline, midterm and final evaluation
- Share your results with ICM
- Hold a final event with the twins alone to close the project

1.4 Support from an ICM Twinning Expert

Over the years ICM has expanded its twinning expertise to include ICM staff, member associations as well as twinning experts. This expansion was possible because of specific funding provided to ICM to build its twinning expertise.

During the 2022-2024 Twin to Win Pilot Project, ICM had the opportunity to train four twinning experts who speak English, French and Spanish. ICM may be able to facilitate these contacts, to support you on your twinning journey.

For more information contact ICM via membership@internationalmidwives.org to find out if there are opportunities to provide contacts with:

- 1. An ICM staff member with twinning expertise
- 2. An ICM member association that has twinning experience
- 3. An ICM twinning expert





Part 2 Twinning Kit



Twinning Kit

The **Twinning Kit** has all the logistical documents you need to start a twinning project. These are examples that are made to adapt to better suit your context. Tables are filled in with guiding examples, so please just see them as examples and add your own content as appropriate.

- **Twinning Commitment Charter**
- Project Proposal Template
- **Simple Budget & Reporting Template**
- Resource Mobilisation Plan Template
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Template Sample
- **Baseline Evaluation Twinning Project Sample**
- Twin to Win Stakeholder Mapping Exercise
- Midterm Evaluation Twinning Project Sample
- Final Evaluation Twinning Project Sample

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