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# REFLECTING VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

GUIDANCE NOTE FOR MEMBER STATES

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## PREPARING VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Each year in July, Member States opt to present Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) during the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development, which is convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The VNRs are a part of the follow-up and review mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The VNR process is supported by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), which provides intergovernmental support by facilitating major global conferences and summits, including the annual HLPF. DESA, in particular, facilitates knowledge-sharing and guidance on the VNRs by organizing annual [knowledge exchange workshops](#) for reporting Member States, United Nations entities and civil society groups. It also facilitates the sharing of various knowledge products such as the annual [knowledge exchange booklet](#) and the [handbook](#) for VNR preparations, [voluntary common reporting guidelines](#) and [VNR synthesis reports](#). The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme contributes to these knowledge-sharing activities by providing input on how to reflect the contribution of volunteers and volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in VNRs.

This note focuses on recognizing the importance of integrating volunteering into national development plans. As well, this note guides how to reflect such policy integration into VNRs.

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## VOLUNTEERISM IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND POLICIES

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that traditional means of implementation must be supplemented by participatory mechanisms that help the transition to more meaningful ownership by all people. Volunteers complement government efforts, enhance service delivery, promote community ownership and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. By integrating volunteerism into national development plans and policies, governments can create an environment that allows volunteerism to flourish. Data collected by volunteers can help to strengthen planning and resource allocation processes, particularly in relation to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Integration of volunteerism into sector strategies and policies can also provide a basis for dialogue and collaboration with volunteer groups at the national and subnational levels to address opportunities and bottlenecks.

Integrating volunteerism into national development plans and policies helps national governments in many ways:

- builds broad legitimacy and gathers voices of marginalized people, enhancing trust and ownership of the development plans and policies being developed
- widens skill sets, fills data gaps and applies innovative solutions based on community needs to the implementation of development plans and policies
- extends delivery of government services, implements programmes in underserved areas and addresses emerging needs, allowing more effective implementation of development plans and policies

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## WHY RECOGNIZE VOLUNTEERISM IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND POLICIES INTO VNRs?

Volunteer groups are helping implement plans suited to their local communities and reflective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup> Demonstrably all community-level development and humanitarian and peacebuilding interventions draw on some aspects of informal volunteerism that emerge naturally in response to a specific event, such as an earthquake. Volunteers are a critical element of community capacities and resources, demonstrating local solutions and engaging those often left furthest behind.<sup>2</sup>

United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/140 of 17 December 2018 encourages governments, in partnership with United Nations entities, volunteer-involving organizations and other stakeholders, to take several steps:

- integrate volunteerism into national development strategies, plans and policies
- include information on the scale, contribution and impact of volunteerism in VNRs
- engage volunteers to monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs at the national and subnational levels and as part of a wider citizen engagement effort

Incorporating information about volunteerism in national plans and policies into the VNRs is vital. Doing so ensures that the difference volunteers make to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is understood and capitalized upon. Governments can then determine the best means for implementing national development plans, including through engagement at the local level, and highlight gaps and opportunities for achieving the SDGs.

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1 <https://swvr2022.unv.org/>

2 [https://unv-swvr2018.org/files/51692\\_UNV\\_SWVR\\_2018\\_WEB.pdf](https://unv-swvr2018.org/files/51692_UNV_SWVR_2018_WEB.pdf)

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## HOW IS VOLUNTEERISM BEING INTEGRATED INTO VNRS?

For three years beginning in 2016, the proportion of VNRS reporting the positive contributions of volunteerism to the SDGs steadily increased, as reporting better reflected whole-of-society approaches to the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, the figure rose from 18 per cent of VNRS in 2016 to a peak of 65 per cent in 2018. Since then – and despite the increasing recognition of the roles and contributions of volunteers during the COVID 19 pandemic – the proportion of VNRS reflecting the positive contribution of volunteers has been decreasing. It dropped from 60 per cent in 2019 to 55 per cent in 2022.

**Reflecting volunteering integration in national plans and policies into the VNRS:** The integration of volunteering into national development plans and policies continues to evolve. In VNR, some Member States have targeted volunteer integration into national strategies regarding youth, health, and disaster management / emergency response. Additionally, some Member States have noted their intent to upgrade the capacity of volunteers, providing incentives to volunteers and creating an enabling environment for volunteerism.

**Reflecting contribution of volunteers to achieve SDGs:** Member States have recognized volunteers as critical partners for addressing development priorities at scale and supporting project implementation. Some VNRS also recognize that voluntary actions strengthen the ability to reach marginalized people and communities. Member States have also highlighted the role of volunteers in combating gender-based violence and increasing the empowerment of women.

**Evidence of the far-reaching benefits of volunteerism:** Member States have evidence showing that the benefits of volunteering extend beyond any single, specific programme. As an example, volunteering highlights and strengthens international cooperation, including South-South cooperation. Evidence also revealed the vital roles volunteers played during the COVID-19 pandemic recovery and response.

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## HOW TO INTEGRATE VOLUNTEERISM IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

To integrate volunteerism into national development plans and policies, Member States can take a variety of steps:

- emphasize contributions of volunteers to various sectors, such as education, health care, environment, disaster management and community-building in national plans
- include specific goals, targets, and indicators related to volunteerism within national plan
- Integrate volunteers into strategies for public service delivery, complementing the efforts of government agencies
- include goals specific to volunteerism in sectoral policies, and develop mechanisms to recruit, train and use volunteers to provide an array of services
- establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of volunteerism within national plans and sectoral strategies or policies
- collect data on volunteer contributions, measure the outcomes, and communicate the positive stories and results to inspire others and mobilize broader participation

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## HOW TO DOCUMENT VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS IN VNRs

The VNR process can catalyse the engagement of volunteer-involving organizations in SDG follow-up and review. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to documenting volunteer contributions, the following steps can provide some guidance for the VNR drafting team:

1. **Coordinate with your line ministries to assess national plans and policies under specific SDGs that integrate volunteerism and include those assessments in the VNR reporting.**
2. **Coordinate with your country's volunteering line ministry or agency to identify available information, gaps and needs, and thematic priorities for documenting volunteer contributions to the SDGs in the VNR report.** For example, you might want to include:
  - facts and figures that demonstrate volunteer contributions under specific SDGs and targets
  - examples of volunteer activities and good practices that contribute to specific SDGs
  - volunteer data and statistics, if available
3. **Reach out to your UNV focal point or regional office and express your interest in receiving support.** You can find out more [here](#).
4. **Discuss your needs with regards to documenting volunteer contributions with the VNR focal point in a UNV regional office and agree on the procedure for collaborating.**
5. **Engage other national and international volunteer-involving organizations that can offer input,** such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), France Volontaires, and others. This can be done, for example, via workshops, online consultations and surveys, or in a direct exchange.
6. **Collate and incorporate input on volunteer contributions to the SDGs in the VNR report as you see fit.**

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## HOW UNV CAN SUPPORT VNR PREPARATIONS

Support is offered in several ways:

1. **Data and evidence can be collected and analysed on volunteering's contribution to SDGs in the national context.** For example, upon the request of the governmental Sustainable Development Council in Sri Lanka, UNV provided youth-focused inputs for the VNR through surveys and data analysis. The collated information helped inform the parts of Sri Lanka's 2022 VNR report that relate to volunteering.
2. **Data and evidence on volunteering in the national context is provided via** our [Knowledge Portal](#), especially the [Volunteering Database](#), which provides information on [volunteering laws, policies and schemes](#), [measurement work](#), and [VNR reporting](#); the [Evidence Library](#), which provides information on volunteerism and the SDGs; and [knowledge products](#) like the [Global Synthesis Report](#).

3. **Additional information on national statistical data of volunteer work is provided** at ILOSTAT: [statistics on volunteer work](#).
4. **Stakeholders in volunteerism at a national level can be convened to collate and validate data and inputs for specific themes or goals.** For example, in Cameroon, UNV partnered with the Ministry of Youth, and Platform of Actor Working in Volunteering Cameroon to prepare a situation analysis on volunteerism's contribution to achieving SDGs 4, 5, 14, 16 and 17. The collated information helped inform the parts of Cameroon's 2022 VNR report that relate to volunteering.
5. **Good practices on volunteering for the SDGs can be collated** from governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, United Nations entities and volunteers at the UNV Knowledge Portal. In Tuvalu, for example, UNV drafted two case studies from partner volunteer-involving organizations and verified them with the Tuvalu Red Cross and Tuvalu Women for Change; then, they submitted those case studies to the VNR Report writing team.

### Key resources for integrating volunteerism into VNRs

UNV [Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism](#)

[Volunteering Database](#): country data on volunteering laws & policies, measurement work, VNR reporting

[Evidence Library](#): Volunteerism and the SDGs

[Knowledge Products](#): [Global Synthesis Report](#), [Regional Synthesis Reports](#)

[Volunteering Practices in the 21st Century](#)

[Good practices on volunteering from around the world](#)

ILOSTATS: [statistics on volunteer work](#) and [indicator description](#) for volunteer work

Measurement resources: [Measuring Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda toolbox](#) and [ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work](#)

Surveys: [Kenya 2020](#) and [Ecuador 2020](#)

[State of the World's Volunteerism Report \(SWVR\)](#)

[UNV's approach on Volunteerism and SDGs](#)

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