



**UN  
VOLUNTEERS**

# **STATE OF VOLUNTEERING in Central Asia Review**

## **Summary**



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# FOREWORD

Due to the rapid development of volunteering for sustainable development, since 2011 the United Nations has been regularly publishing the State of the World's Volunteerism Report, which presents an overview of global data and trends. But it took an additional 13 years to produce a region-specific analysis, the first regional report that deeply examines volunteerism in Central Asia. The review extends well beyond world trends and global averages to illuminate the unique characteristics of volunteering in each country in Central Asia.

The second unique value of this review is that the modern history of volunteering in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan overlaps with the 30-year journey of independent nation-building in these countries. The two processes – the all-encompassing one of nation-building and the country-specific evolution of national volunteering – proceeded through an organic, symbiotic relationship. This has set the historic background for our review, which takes note of the preliminary results in the development of volunteering in the region while also offering recommendations for further consideration.

And, finally, the third unique feature of this review is that it brings to the fore not only volunteering as a dynamic process but also the volunteers themselves as the main protagonists. Central Asia is known to the world as a region of ancient history and open hearts, of a rich cultural tapestry and warm human connections. And this is exactly how the Central Asian volunteering is coming across in our study.



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Uzbekistan Volunteers Association

National Volunteer Network of Kazakhstan

ARGO Civil Society Development Association

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# INTRODUCTION



Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share rich historical and cultural ties that aid in fostering close cooperation in political and economic spheres. Central to this cooperation is the development of volunteering and charitable activities, deeply rooted in the centuries-old traditions of Central Asian peoples. Despite the challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, these countries remain committed to sustainable development.

Volunteering and charity in Central Asia have long-standing histories. Traditions of mutual aid – such as *Asar*, *Ashar*, *Hashar*, and *Yowar* – have been integral to local cultures. These traditions have evolved into modern volunteering practices that focus on providing voluntary assistance to those in need. Over time, the effectiveness, purpose and significance of volunteering for society have increased, along with the range of opportunities available for its realization.

Civil society plays a crucial role in fostering personal responsibility for sustainable development. It unites active citizens, groups and associations involved in local decision-making. The growth of civil society, including the non-profit sector, volunteering and informal civil initiatives, is vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Central Asia. This development enhances community participation and ensures a collective effort towards a more sustainable and equitable future for the region.

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Modern volunteering practices  
have evolved from historical  
traditions of mutual aid



# Chapter 1.

## LEGISLATION AND MEASURES TO SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING

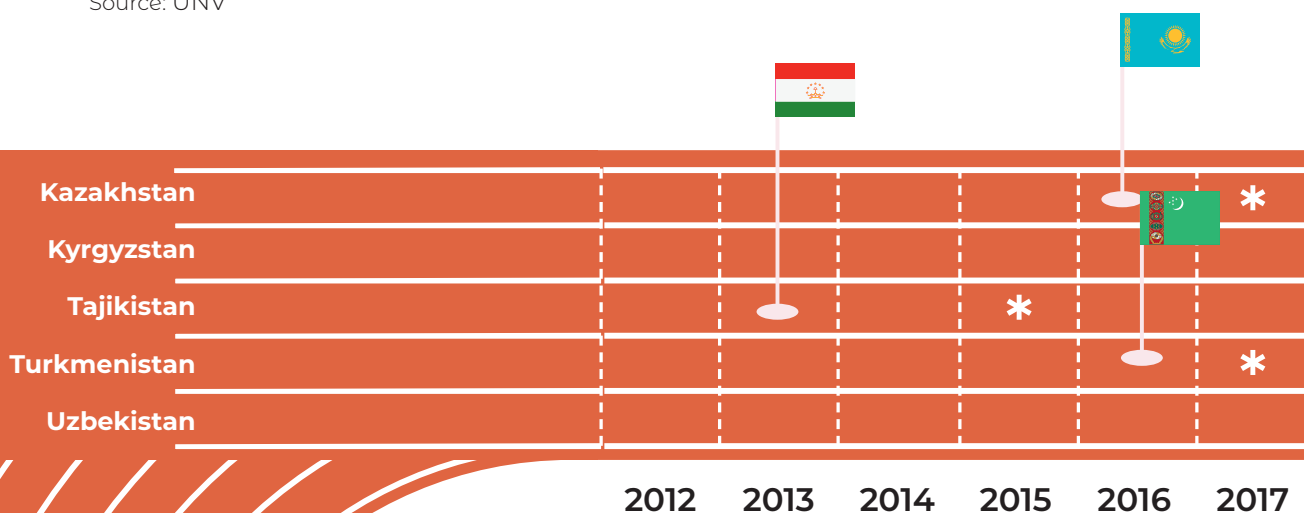
The development of volunteering in Central Asia since the 1990s has been built upon historical traditions of mutual assistance, providing a strong foundation for its growth. A key indicator of the institutionalization of volunteering in the countries is the establishment of regulatory and legal frameworks. Each of the five countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – has enacted

laws to support volunteering, with the evolution of this legislation spanning over a decade.

The opening chapter offers a comparative analysis of the legal frameworks governing volunteering in the five countries of the Review. The analysis identifies similarities and differences based on each country's specific context.

### Evolution of volunteering legislation in Central Asia

Source: UNV

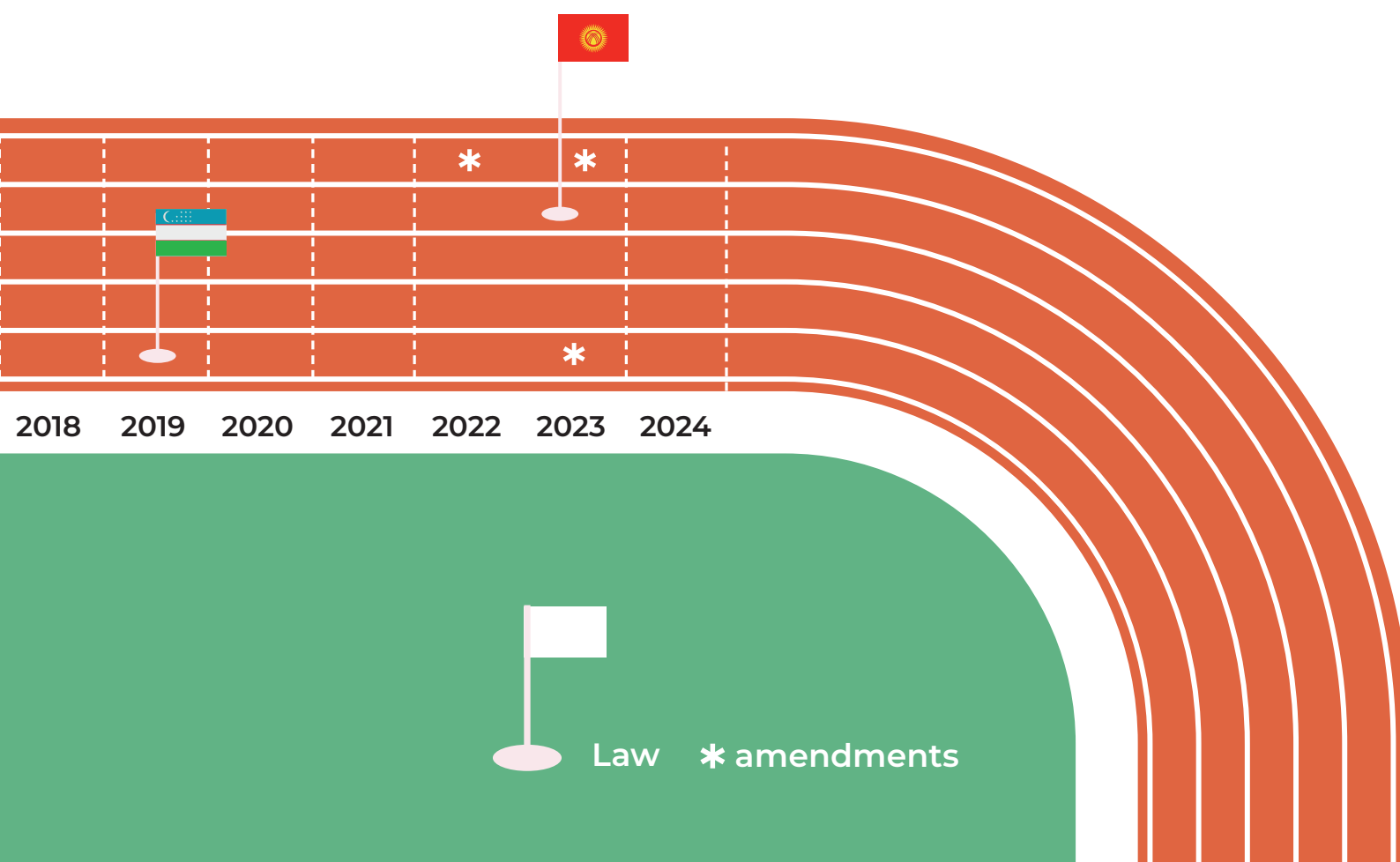


Relevant legal articles outlining the principles of volunteering, which vary significantly across the region, are also analyzed in this chapter. The analysis reveals that the existing laws and regulations provide a robust foundation for the further development of volunteer practices among individuals, organizations and civil society groups in Central Asia. Although there is some variety in the development of volunteering legislation across the region, this variability presents opportunities for creating a more effective system.

Certain proposals by policymakers in support of volunteering would benefit from a more detailed explanation of how they could be developed and implemented. For example, both material and non-material incentives for volunteers, along with efforts

## Laws and regulations provide a solid basement for development of volunteering practices

to enhance the prestige of volunteering in society, could benefit from more detailed elaboration. Addressing these issues in a practical manner will enhance the contribution of volunteers to achieving the SDGs.



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# Chapter 2.

## THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERISM IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

United Nations entities and Member States recognize the crucial role of integrating volunteering into national development strategies as a means to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). This chapter examines how volunteerism is incorporated into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) in each of the five focus countries and how these countries reference volunteerism in their Voluntary National Reviews.

Central Asian countries regularly report their progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda through their Voluntary National Reviews. Notable examples from Kazakhstan (2019, 2022), Kyrgyzstan (2020), Tajikistan (2017, 2023), Turkmenistan (2019, 2023) and Uzbekistan (2020, 2023) highlight the contributions of volunteers to sustainable development, demonstrating an increasing degree of collaboration between volunteer movements and government agencies.

The UNSDCF is the primary tool for planning and implementing United Nations activities at the national level. This chapter outlines the relevant UNSDCFs, detailing the involvement of various United Nations entities and the extent of volunteer engagement in the national implementation of specific SDGs. The

provided examples illustrate how volunteer initiatives support governments in their efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Analysis of data from Voluntary National Reviews and UNSDCFs, along with existing volunteering practices, reveals that volunteers contribute to most of the SDGs. Volunteers enhance the lives of vulnerable groups and positively impact local communities in areas such as education, healthcare, gender equality, water supply and environmental protection.

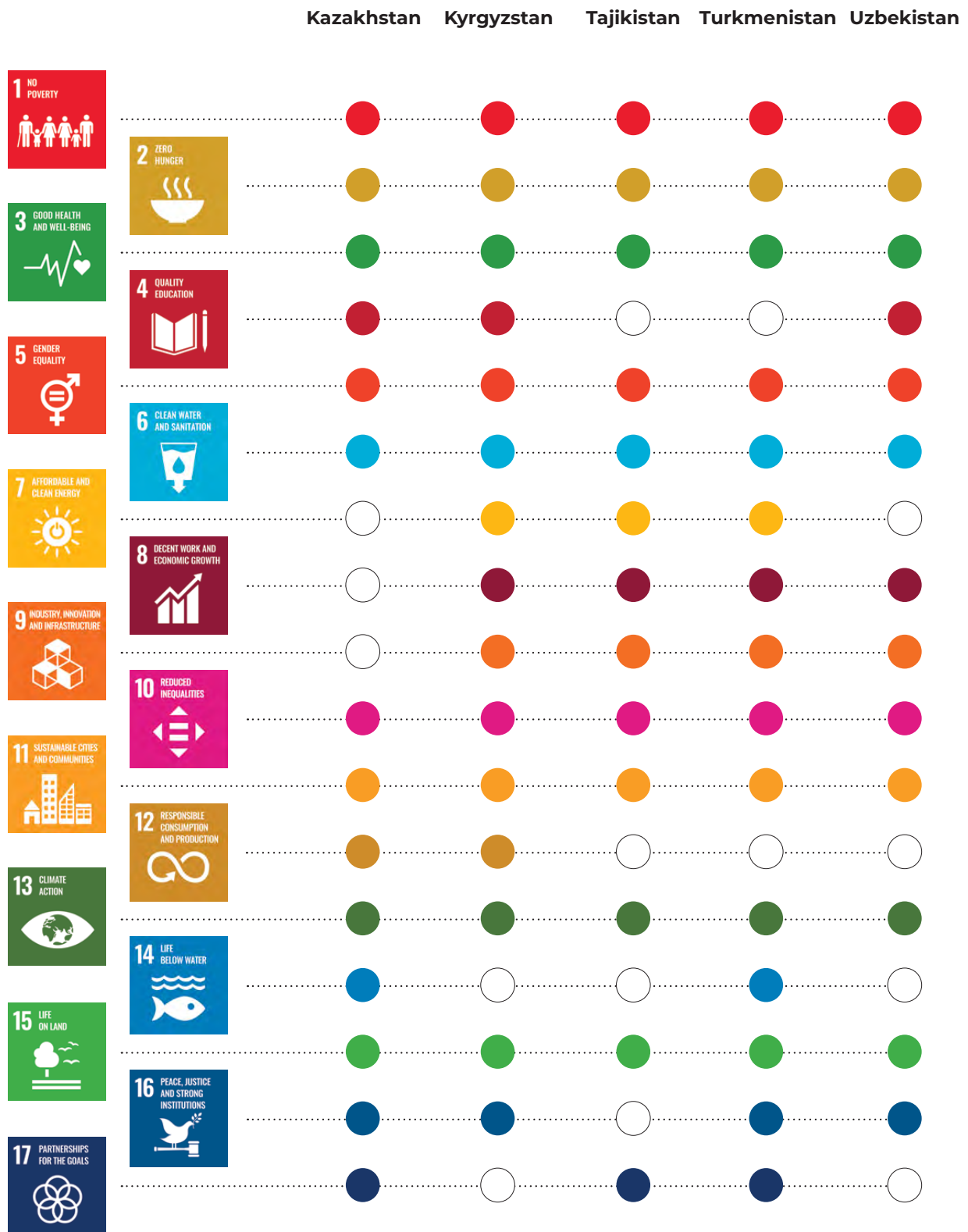
However, tracking the statistical contribution of volunteerism to specific development goals remains challenging due to a lack of systematic data collection and comparative statistics on volunteering.

The chapter also highlights examples of national digital platforms that facilitate the integration of volunteering into the SDGs. These platforms play a crucial role in promoting volunteering for sustainable development, although they are not operational in all countries of the region.



# Contribution of volunteering to the SDGs

Source: UNV



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# Chapter 3.

## **SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTRIBUTION OF VOLUNTEERING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY**

The lack of comprehensive nationwide statistics on volunteering in Central Asian countries makes it challenging to fully understand the scale and characteristics of volunteering activities. But it is clear that various forms of volunteering thrive, particularly in large cities and through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and youth organizations.

Chapter 3 delves into the development of volunteering in the region across diverse sectors such as environment, health, education, social services, search for missing persons, emergency response and corporate volunteering. These volunteer efforts engage a broad spectrum of the population, from young people to retirees. In recent years, the number of citizens and organizations participating in volunteer activities has increased markedly, and the scale of programmes and projects involving volunteers has expanded significantly.

Kazakhstan uses state channels to maintain a register of volunteer organizations, and this chapter presents the key statistics that have been collected. The country classifies its volunteers along many parameters. These include age group (teens, students, older adults); type (health, education, environment); form (physical, online, car); scale (local, regional, republican,

international); and duration (one-time events, long-term projects). The detailed data collection system serves as a valuable model for the entire region.

Support of the non-governmental sector and its collaboration with government has been crucial in the development of volunteering in Central Asia. For instance, the Association of Volunteers of Uzbekistan is the country's primary public volunteering platform, uniting more than 100,000 volunteers between 16 and 80 years of age and more than 200 public volunteer initiatives targeted at socioeconomic issues around the country. Volunteer movement is also observed in Tajikistan where the NGO «Followers of the Leader of the Nation», in partnership with the government, acts as a nationwide volunteer network. In Kazakhstan, the non-profit sector and large NGOs are key government partners, leading the National Volunteer Network. Kyrgyzstan's National Red Crescent Society is a major player in the development of volunteering, while in Turkmenistan, the National Red Crescent Society's Youth Movement unites 4,000 volunteers.

International organizations – particularly United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, UNV, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United



Khanum Rakhmanova participated in the clean up of the Geyokdepe lake in Turkmenistan during “Green games”. Isabel Balasanova, 2024.

Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction – have significantly contributed to the growth of volunteering in the region.

The chapter concludes with a collection of photos of contemporary art pieces dedicated to volunteers. In 2021, for example, a mural (artistic painting on the wall of a building) in Bishkek honored the efforts of doctors and volunteers in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Other cities in the region have also showcased graffiti art and paintings inspired by volunteer stories, using art to honor the contributions made by volunteers.

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## Collaboration with the government played a crucial role in the development of volunteering





UNICEF volunteer is helping children in Kyrgyzstan by creating a safe and inclusive environment. Akylai Seitbekova, 2023.

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# Chapter 4.

## GOOD PRACTICES OF VOLUNTEERING

This chapter showcases exemplary volunteering activities, representing good practices that can build dialogue among stakeholders involved in volunteering.

Each selected practice has been recognized by experts as relevant, successfully implemented, well-managed, replicable, economically feasible, resource-accessible, effective, innovative and sustainable. These practices include:

- Volunteer Movement «28 Loops Club», Kazakhstan and other countries
- Public Foundation «Petroglyph Hunters», Kazakhstan
- Volunteer movement «LIDER.KZ», Kazakhstan
- Hour of Cleanliness Project – Eco Demi Public Foundation, Kyrgyzstan
- Workshop of Cancer Patients «Together for Life», Kyrgyzstan
- “Muzaffar” Charitable Foundation, Tajikistan
- National Tuberculosis Elimination Project, Tajikistan
- NGO “Keyik Okara”, Turkmenistan
- Public Organization “Yenme”, Turkmenistan
- Public Organization «Tebigi Kuwat», Turkmenistan
- Public Foundation «Ezgu amal», Uzbekistan
- Legal Clinic of Tashkent State University of Law, Uzbekistan
- Charity Fair «Time of Miracles», Uzbekistan



БЛАГОТВОРИТЕЛЬНЫЙ ФОНД  
“МУЗАФФАР”

БЛАГОТВОРИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЯРМАКА  
ВРЕМЯ ЧУДЕС  
*Сделаем мир лучше!*



The collected examples demonstrate that volunteering in the region is becoming increasingly systematic, cognizant and organized, and is leveraging new communication technologies. These volunteering practices also highlight the multisectoral cooperation between the state and the non-profit and corporate sectors. Familiarizing with these practices reaffirms that volunteering is deeply linked with humanity, compassion and the selfless desire to help others, especially toward those experiencing difficult life situations.

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# Chapter 5.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



U-Report volunteers from Uzbekistan are not indifferent to what is going on around them and want to have dialogue with the Government. Dilnoza Sametdinova, 2024.

Volunteering in Central Asia is deeply rooted in tradition and serves as a source of pride for the current generation. However, modern volunteering in the region is experiencing a renaissance emerging as a rapidly developing social phenomenon. Today, volunteering takes new and diverse forms that increase its effectiveness and sharpen its purpose. These changes expand the range of opportunities for public participation.

Volunteering can be a powerful tool for achieving the 2030 Agenda in the region, particularly in addressing issues such as inequality, demographic shifts, migration, youth unemployment and climate change.

The research conducted in Central Asia has yielded a set of recommendations developed jointly with volunteers, organizers of volunteer activities and experts. These constructive ideas and proposals, which are outlined below, are intended for a wide audience, including local representatives of governments, ministries and other state bodies involved in supporting and coordinating volunteer activities, as well as politicians, public figures and, of course, volunteers and representatives of non-profit and volunteering organizations.

The implementation of these recommendations is grounded in the principles of intersectoral collaboration, addressing state entities, volunteers and the non-profit, public and corporate sectors simultaneously. Key recommendations include:



## 1. For state agencies

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Involve volunteers and volunteer organizations in implementing state programmes and national development strategies and integrate volunteerism into sectoral policy documents at the planning stage.

Expand opportunities for volunteering by allocating the implementation costs in the state budget, as well as through funding from the corporate sector.

Develop a system for monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of volunteer projects at the state level to ensure their closer alignment with the SDGs.

Keep statistical records of volunteers through national statistical offices and conduct regular volunteer surveys as an additional measure.

Provide insurance for volunteers or compensation if they face health issues or are injured while volunteering.

Involve volunteer organizations as focal points for the development of local communities.

Promote the inclusion of volunteers in decision-making mechanisms at the local level.

Develop humanitarian diplomacy and intersectoral collaboration jointly through volunteering initiatives.

## 2. For NGOs

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Jointly with government, promote regular interactions with volunteer communities in other countries to share experiences.

Organize national and regional resource centers for the development of volunteering.

Create centralized information platforms for the support and development of volunteering among a broad range of volunteering stakeholders.

## 3. For businesses

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Create corporate volunteering programmes in order to attract more volunteers.

Provide corporate funding to support the volunteer efforts of employees and local communities.

By adopting these recommendations and expanding their reach among volunteering stakeholders, Central Asian countries can harness the full potential of volunteering to drive social, economic and cultural development, contributing significantly to achieving the SDGs.



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