

## Overview

# COMPARATIVE FINDINGS ON VOLUNTEERISM: INSIGHTS FROM EIGHT COUNTRIES

This report presents findings from a comparative cross-national survey of volunteerism in eight countries across the Global South: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, China, India, Jordan, Iraq and Bolivia. Commissioned by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) to fill critical data gaps on short-term and informal sector volunteering, the study was implemented by GeoPoll using a harmonized, culturally adapted questionnaire developed in collaboration with UNV and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Data was collected through Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) among nationally representative samples of 1,000 respondents per country. In collaboration with UNV and ILO, GeoPoll managed the entire research cycle – from instrument design and translation to enumerator training, pilot testing and quality-controlled fieldwork – resulting in one of the most robust and comparable data sets on volunteer action across low- and middle-income countries to date.

This survey was instrumental in calculating the new global estimates of volunteer work for the 2026 State of the World's Volunteerism Report "Volunteerism and its measurements". More sophisticated measurement approach was used and specifically designed to fill critical data gaps in the Global South with large populations. Because the new estimates rely on population-weighted averages from these key countries, the results

strongly influenced the overall figures, leading to a substantial increase in the estimated global rate.

## Key findings

### ► **Volunteerism<sup>1</sup> is widespread across the Global South.**

In all eight countries surveyed, a significant share of adults had engaged in volunteering in the past 30 days. Participation was especially high in Nigeria (77%), Uganda (72%) and China (58%), where caregiving and community-based support were most common. Even in lower-engagement contexts such as Jordan (28%) and India (31%), nearly one in three adults reported volunteering.

### ► **The predominance of informal sector volunteering.**

Over 88% of volunteers organized their activities independently or through community-based groups, rather than through formal institutions. Formal sector volunteering – through organizations or public institutions – was most common in Bolivia (20.8%) and Jordan (17.6%) but remains a minority pathway overall.

### ► **Young people are the primary drivers of volunteerism.**

Individuals aged 15–24 account for nearly one-third of all volunteers, with youth participation

<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term "volunteering" refers to "volunteer work" defined as any voluntary production of goods or provision of services for others, in which people engage without asking expecting to receive remuneration. This concept does not include other voluntary activities such as civic engagement or blood or financial donations, which are not work activities. This definition aligns with the international standards on work statistics applied in the UN system. More details are provided in Annex I.

being particularly high in Ethiopia (39%), Uganda (36%) and Nigeria (33%). China is a notable outlier, with over 34% of volunteers there being aged 55 and older. This is the highest senior engagement rate in the study.

► **Volunteerism is gender-balanced.**

Participation in volunteering was nearly equal across men and women overall (50.5% male, 49.5% female). India (56.2%), Iraq (55.5%) and Bolivia (55.3%) showed slightly higher male participation, while China had the highest proportion of female volunteers (54.8%).

► **Caregiving is the most common activity.**

The majority of volunteers – especially in Uganda (79.5%), Ethiopia (75.8%) and Iraq (73%) – provided care to individuals outside their households or family. Other major areas included religious service, environmental work and advocacy.

► **Volunteering intensity differs by type of activity.**

Nearly half (48%) of respondents volunteered 1–5 hours in the past month and 17% gave 6–10 hours. However, in Ethiopia, Uganda and Jordan more than one in ten contributed over 40 hours. Caregiving and healthcare volunteering were typically short-term, while civic, legal and arts activities required longer commitments. Only 11% received compensation – mostly food or transport – although demand for financial support was higher.

► **Motivation is largely altruistic.**

Nearly 95.3% of volunteers said they were motivated by a desire to help others. While altruism was the most oft-cited motivating factor in all countries, a slightly higher proportion of volunteers cited career-related motivation, such as gaining work experience or meeting school obligations in Bolivia (6.4%), India (2.8%) and Uganda (2.4%).

► **Barriers to volunteering are persistent.**

A lack of time (30.5%) and financial constraints

(30.4%) were the most frequently cited barriers to participation in all countries, with Uganda, Ethiopia and Bolivia reporting the highest levels. Other common barriers included transport, lack of information and negative social perceptions – particularly in Uganda (15.4%) and Nigeria (11.8%).

► **Compensation<sup>2</sup> is limited.**

Only 10.9% of volunteers reported receiving compensation – mostly in the form of food, transport or small gifts – and there was a demand for financial support. Compensation was most common in Bolivia (21%), Uganda (13%), China (12%) and Jordan (11%).

► **Education levels among volunteers vary markedly by country.**

Post-secondary education was most common among volunteers in China (67%), Jordan (48%) and Bolivia (45%), suggesting that higher educational attainment may be a key driver of volunteering in these contexts. In contrast, many volunteers in Uganda (42%), Ethiopia (39%) and Iraq (48%) had only primary education or none at all. These differences suggest that in some countries, volunteering is associated with higher education, while in others, it is driven by broader community participation regardless of schooling level.

► **Future intentions to volunteer are high but conditional.**

Many respondents expressed a willingness to continue volunteering, particularly if structural barriers are reduced. The most frequently cited enablers included financial support (35.4%), flexible scheduling (22%) and opportunities which are aligned with personal interests (20.2%).

**Scan the QR code to read the full report.**

<https://knowledge.unv.org/evidence-library/comparative-findings-on-volunteerism-insights-from-eight-countries>



<sup>2</sup> “Compensation” refers to cash and goods or services offered to volunteers to enable their participation in volunteering activities. It does not represent remuneration for the work they do. For example, volunteers can receive money to cover costs related to travel, meals and accommodation or they could cover these using their own money then be reimbursed. Volunteers could also be provided goods or services directly – such as transportation to and from the place where they work, meals, accommodation, souvenirs or small gifts.

<sup>3</sup> Demand for compensation (as explained above) to make it easier for people to engage in volunteering activities and provide unpaid work. While some people would like to provide free services to others, they are not able to do so because they cannot afford to cover the costs mentioned in the preceding footnote.