

REFLECTING VOLUNTEERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SDGS IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme works with UN Member States and other stakeholders to support evidence on whole-of-society approaches in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

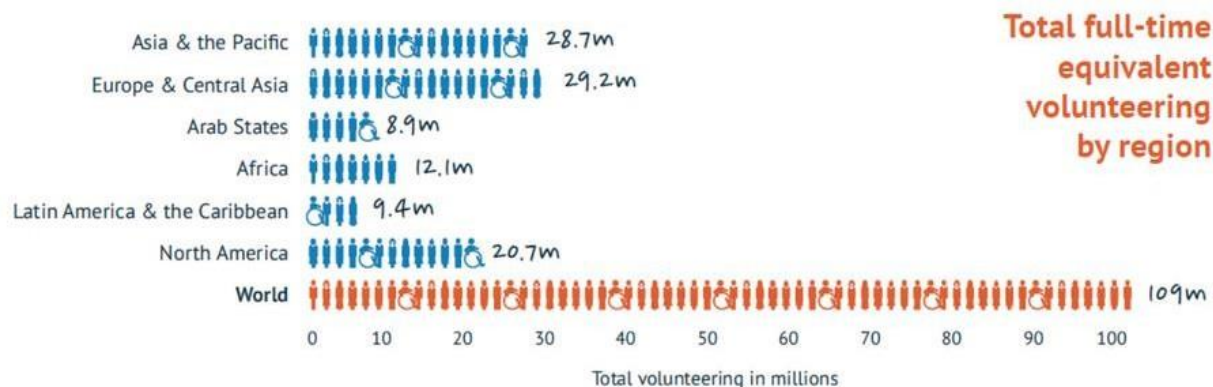
UNV continues to support countries preparing VNRs in several ways:

- Providing data and evidence on volunteering in the national context (including national statistics on volunteer work where available) at our Knowledge Portal – <http://knowledge.unv.org/>
- Providing additional information on national statistical data of volunteer work at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/volunteer-work/> and <https://ilostat.ilo.org/re-sources/concepts-and-definitions/indicator-description-volunteer-work/>
- Convening volunteering stakeholders at national level to collate and validate data and inputs for specific themes or Goals
- Facilitating volunteer-led data collection processes with target groups (e.g. youth or rural communities) to fill data gaps for the VNR processes.

WHY INCLUDE INFORMATION ON VOLUNTEERING IN VNRs?

The role of volunteers in delivering services, disseminating information and awareness and developing localized solutions has come to the fore in 2020 during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Globally there are an estimated one billion volunteers

carrying out a range of roles in their communities and societies for the greater good (2015 State of World's Volunteerism Report). Conservative estimates that tend to capture the most visible types of volunteers have shown that volunteering adds significant value to economies and societies, for example, 2.4% of global GDP (Human Development Report 2015).



Source: State of the World's Volunteerism Report: The Thread that Binds, UNV, 2018

Incorporating data on volunteer efforts can enable countries to report in line with the principles of the Voluntary National Reviews, including to:

- Integrate a multi-stakeholder perspective.
- Focus on engagement at the local level.
- Draw on existing national official statistics and other evidence sources.
- Analyse the means of implementation, highlighting gaps and opportunities for achieving SDGs.

WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CITIZENS THROUGH VOLUNTEERING?

The role of volunteerism in the implementation of SDGs is recognized and anchored in high level UN documents, including:

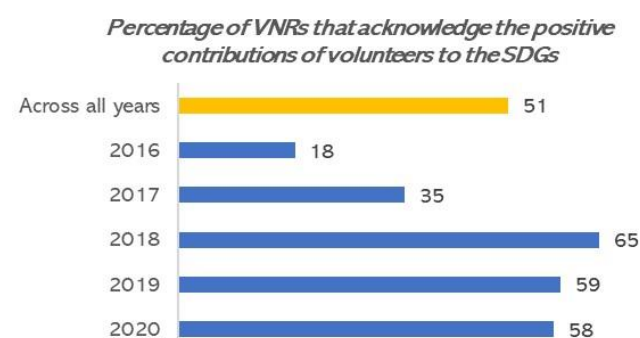
- The UN General Assembly Resolution that established the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (A/RES/67/290);
- Integrating volunteering into peace and development: the plan of action for the next decade and beyond (A/RES/70/129);
- The UN Secretary-General's synthesis report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (A/69/700).

Volunteers have also been designated as a stakeholder group within ECOSOC processes through the Volunteer Groups Alliance (VGA).

Most recently, in 2018 Member States adopted a resolution (A/Res/73/140) that encourages governments to increasingly co-operate with volunteer-involving and civil society organizations including reflecting the contribution and impact of volunteers in future VNRs.

HOW MANY COUNTRIES REFLECTED VOLUNTEERING IN PREVIOUS VNRs?

In 2020, 26 of the 45 submitted VNR reports (58%) mentioned volunteers and volunteering's actual and potential contribution to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. The following table shows the proportion of VNRs highlighting the contribution of the volunteers since 2016:



Reporting countries also document in which areas and to which SDGs volunteers contribute. As seen in the following figures, volunteers contribute to all 17 SDGs. However, volunteer contributions seem to particularly add value in health, education, sustainable cities and communities, partnerships, and decent work and economic growth.

Evidence of volunteer contributions to specific SDGs in VNRs 2016–2019:

Distribution of volunteer mentions in relation to specific SDGs:





HOW ARE VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS DOCUMENTED IN VNR REPORTS?

There are five principal ways in which governments have incorporated information on volunteer contributions over the years:

First, many countries recognize volunteers as a critical resource for addressing development priorities at scale, including responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Kenya 2020 VNR highlights the role of volunteers at community level, where 490,000 people have been supported to strengthen their immediate and long-term well-being and livelihoods. Estonia highlights the important role of community-based volunteer rescue teams that respond to traffic accidents, support national maritime and lake rescue teams, and support law enforcement institutions in communities. In its 2019 VNR, Mongolia estimates that volunteers contribute nearly 4 million hours of service, at a value of 5.5 billion Tugrik (2 million USD) per year.

In the Seychelles, NGOs and volunteers are helping the government amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in contact tracing including data collection and

input. In Brunei Darussalam, volunteers produced personal protective equipment and distributed food rations to nearly 3,000 households of families in need between April and May 2020. Uzbekistan reports that volunteer groups and citizens joined law-enforcement agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic in providing logistical support and care to vulnerable groups and assisting in disease detection. Volunteers in Panama helped through the Voluntario Solidario volunteerism scheme, providing access to food to families in need.

Second, governments recognize that voluntary actions strengthen the ability to reach the furthest behind. For example, the Russian Federation in 2020 reports on having introduced a Silver Volunteering programme as part of its Action Strategy for Senior Citizens. In Honduras, community volunteers also engaged in the Ficohsa Foundation's education programme on pre-primary education in marginalized urban areas. In 2019, Cambodia reported that a legal aid programme for poor women, with volunteer lawyer's costs covered by the Prime Minister's Office, has been established in the country, to address issues including land-grabbing and litigation by powerful individuals. In Timor-Leste, volunteer doctors and nurses traveled to remote and mountainous regions for one year to provide free medical support and resources to those areas not served by health facilities under the Saude Ba Ema Hotu (Health for all) initiative, the first long-term volunteer scheme established in the country.

Third, volunteering can provide leadership opportunities for women, and for marginalized groups, giving them greater voice and ownership in development processes. For example, in India, volunteers support and are trained as part of the Sweekruti Scheme, which seeks to strengthen equal opportunities to and protect the rights of the transgender community by providing scholarships, skill and capacity development, critical health care and group insurance, legal aid and counselling,

and awareness and sensitization campaigns on the rights of transgender persons. The Solomon Islands in their 2020 VNR present the West 'Are'Are Rokotani-keni Association, which is a women-led, volunteer-run savings club that gives women a place to learn about managing finances and store their savings safely all across the country. In its 2019 VNR report, Indonesia shared that the principle of 'no one left behind' in disaster management is pursued by involving persons with disabilities as actors in disaster mitigation. In 2019, Turkey reported that volunteer trainers have joined the My Sister project to socially and economically empower refugee women with knowledge and skills.

Fourth, governments see volunteers as innovators, bringing new perspectives and ideas to the table and strengthening social cohesion. For example, in its 2020 VNR report, Bangladesh reports to have trained 65,000 volunteers and prepared 25,000 communities to respond to disaster as part of a new and proactive risk reduction strategy, while Austria and Argentina highlight the significance of volunteer initiatives and community volunteerism to strengthen community engagement and social cohesion. Likewise, in 2018, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia and Togo documented volunteer-led innovations in education, employment and poverty reduction.

Fifth, the VNR reports also demonstrate how governments are working with volunteers to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda and improve participation for the SDGs, including with data collection, consultation and validation of results. Finland in 2020 reports that 500 volunteers are involved in the national follow-up system on sustainable development via a Citizen Panel, which assesses the state of sustainable development based on national indicators and interpretative text. In Zambia, Gambia and Brunei Darussalam, volunteers and civil society are actively engaged in SDG awareness campaigns, strengthening understanding of the 2030

Agenda. Furthermore, in 2019, the civil society integrated platform in Sierra Leone has raised the voice of volunteering and volunteers as critical partners for achieving the SDGs. Volunteers were able to reach distant communities and contribute to data collection, validation and consultation processes in local communities. In New Zealand, volunteers set up a competition on their SDG priorities to broaden the policy conversation.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO INTEGRATE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE VNRs?

Volunteer-involving organizations, including UNV, can support the VNR process through a range of activities, such as:

Data and evidence:

- Data and evidence on volunteering in the national context (including national statistics on volunteer work where available) can also be found at UNV's Knowledge Portal - <http://knowledge.unv.org/>
- Statistics on volunteer work can also be found at <https://ilo-stat.ilo.org/resources/concepts-and-definitions/indicator-description-volunteer-work/> and <https://ilo-stat.ilo.org/topics/volunteer-work/>
- UNV also often holds qualitative National Situation Analyses on volunteering, prepared by Member States under the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering;
- Volunteer sector and academic reports on volunteering

Data collection:

- Dissemination of online surveys via UNV's online volunteering roster of 600,000 persons, or other methods;
- On-the-ground surveys with remote communities to get feedback and inputs to VNRs facilitated through volunteer networks;
- additional information on national statistical data of volunteer work at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/volunteer-work/> and <https://ilostat.ilo.org/resources/concepts-and-definitions/indicator-description-volunteer-work/>

Consultation and validation:

- Stakeholder workshops with volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations, to document initiatives and approaches under specific SDGs;
- volunteer-led workshops with other target groups for example persons with disabilities, youth not in education and employment, or indigenous groups.

For example, in Kenya, UNV provided support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the VNR report writer. As part of these efforts, UNV partnered with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) to organize a one-day meeting for approximately 30 Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIOs), during which a data collection and reporting tool was developed. This tool helped VIOs across the country identify the specific SDGs their volunteers primarily work on as well as their impact in terms of beneficiaries reached. UNV then submitted the consolidated evidence on volunteers' main areas of contribution and reach to the ministry and report writer. These activities informed the volunteering-related parts of Kenya's 2020 VNR report, which highlights volunteers' contributions to particular SDGs, their involvement in specific projects and the extent of beneficiaries reached.

WHAT ABOUT OVER THE LONGER TERM?

HOW CAN UN MEMBER STATES WORK WITH UNV TO BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND EVIDENCE IN THIS AREA?

UNV provides advisory services to UN Member States to support volunteering for national development priorities. Services include:

- Design, development and implementation support for national and sub-national volunteer schemes to address specific development challenges.
- Development and review of policies and legislation around volunteering and integration of volunteering into relevant national policies e.g. on youth, social inclusion, peace and economic development.
- Design of other types of volunteer infrastructure and incentives including digital solutions, platforms, umbrella bodies, innovation hubs on volunteering, volunteer certification and other benefits.
- Creation of volunteer-led reporting mechanisms for the SDGs.
- Research and evidence on volunteering, including capacity support in partnership with ILO to National Statistical Offices to systematically gather data on volunteer work.
- Convening for knowledge sharing and peer learning through collation of good practices and lessons learned at the regional and global level and creation of an online knowledge portal.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

- [UNV Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism](#) (UNV, 2020)
- [Measuring Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda: Toolbox of Principles, Tools and Practices](#) (POA Secretariat, 2020)

- Global Synthesis Report: Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda (POA Secretariat, 2020)
- Flourishing in the New Normal – Reimagining Volunteering: 2030 and Beyond (POA Secretariat, 2020)
- Volunteering Practices in the 21st Century (POA Secretariat 2020)
- National practices in measuring volunteer work: A Critical Review (ILO, 2018)
- Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer work: (ILO, 2011)
- State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018: (UNV, 2018)
- Volunteer Contributions to the SDGs in Voluntary National Reviews: (UNV, 2018)

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