

REFLECTING VOLUNTEERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SDGS IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Background Paper

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).

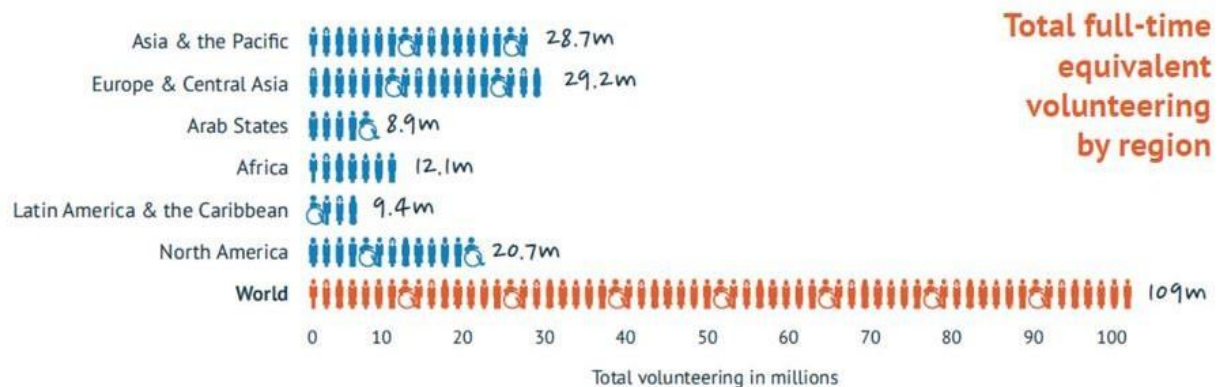
UNV continues to support countries preparing VNRs in several ways:

- Providing practical guidance on how to reflect volunteer contributions to the SDGs in VNRs for [Member States](#) and [UN entities](#)
- 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:

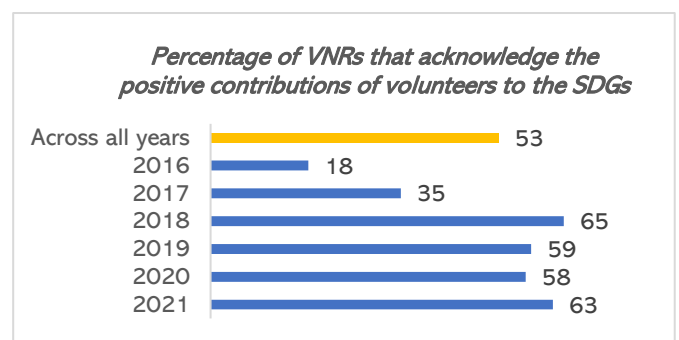
- The UN General Assembly Resolution that established the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (A/RES/67/290);
- Integrating volunteering into peace and development: the plan of action for the next decade and beyond (A/RES/70/129);
- The UN Secretary-General's synthesis report on the 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 2021, 26 of the 41 submitted VNR reports (63%) 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 figure, volunteers contribute to all 17 SDGs. However, volunteer contributions seem to particularly add value in health, education, sustainable cities and communities, partnerships, and reduced inequalities.

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. Under the integrated policy framework in Cyprus, volunteering plays a pivotal role in SDG implementation. For example, volunteers and organizations registered under the “Volunteer Management Protocol in Times of Crisis” contributed to combating the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, supporting vulnerable groups. In Cuba, volunteers from work centres and communities supported the newly created COVID-19 isolation centres for epidemiological prevention and control. Lao PDR documents in its 2021 VNR that youth volunteer activities contribute to reducing hunger, promoting health, education, women’s empowerment, inclusion and employability, and supporting environmental action and sustainability. Madagascar reports a 15% increase in reforestation in 2020 thanks to the efforts of an average of 12,000 volunteers per year. In Niger, volunteers have helped improve indicators on childbirth and reproductive health. In areas of volunteer intervention, over 60% of childbirths are medically assisted.

Second, governments recognize that voluntary actions strengthen the ability to reach the furthest behind. For example, in its 2021 VNR Namibia recognizes volunteering as a transformative strategy for the Decade of Action and its importance for the principles of inclusion, equality and leaving no one behind. In Tunisia, volunteers of the Tunisian Red Crescent distributed 85,000 dishes and 2,678 food goods

to vulnerable migrant and other groups as part of the COVID-19 response. In 2020, the Russian Federation 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.

Third, volunteering can provide leadership opportunities for women, and for marginalized groups, giving them greater voice and ownership in development processes. For example, in Denmark the Rate Adjustment Pool Agreement for 2018-2022 allocates DKK 96.6 million for a civil society strategy that promotes community participation of vulnerable children adults, senior citizens and persons with disabilities through volunteering. In Thailand, Women’s Development Committees address inequality and violence against women and children. Volunteers in the committees promote activities that empower women, including through root cause analysis and data collection. The Solomon Islands in their 2020 VNR present the West ‘Are’Are Rokotanikeni 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 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, Iraq’s 2021 VNR highlights that volunteer groups used innovative means to conduct humanitarian aid activities and reach vulnerable groups. In Norway, private, public and voluntary actors establish and run so-called neighbourhood incubators that serve as workplaces, resource centres, and learning communities for residents with ideas on how to solve

local challenges through social entrepreneurship. 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.

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. In Mexico, the 20,000 volunteers mobilized MYWorld Mexico help to promote awareness of the 2030 Agenda and participate in deliberative spaces. In Paraguay, WWF-Paraguay and the SDG Commission established a partnership in 2020 to promote youth volunteering and internalization of the SDGs around environmental issues. 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.

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://ilostat.ilo.org/resources/concepts-and-definitions/indicator-description-volunteer-work/> and <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/volunteer-work/>

- 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 Indonesia, UNV together with IndoRelawan carried out a survey covering 129 volunteer organizations and 351 volunteers across the country and conducted online consultations. The survey report highlights contributions of volunteering to the SDGs in Indonesia that are of relevance to the 2021 VNR and showcases whole of society efforts to achieve the SDGs. It also presents remarkable examples of volunteers responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and elaborates on the support needed from the government to fully leverage the potential of volunteering in Indonesia to further advance the SDGs. This report was shared with the VNR drafting team at the Ministry of National

Development Planning of Indonesia and informed volunteer-related content of Indonesia's 2021 VNR, especially the data around volunteering rates, time spent on volunteering, as well as distinctive contributions of volunteers during the pandemic.

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)
- [Reflecting Volunteer Contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals in Voluntary National Reviews – Guidance Note for UN Member States](#)
- [Reflecting Volunteer Contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals in Voluntary National Reviews – Note for UN System](#)
- [Volunteer Work Measurement Guide: Guidance on implementing the ILO-recommended add-on module on volunteer work in national labour force surveys](#)
- [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)