

2026

**National Report
on Volunteering
in Korea**



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Foreword

The Transformation and Evolution of Volunteering

In the Republic of Korea, people frequently use the word “we.” The individual “I” is always connected to the collective “we” and acts accordingly. Even without being compelled or receiving any reward, people voluntarily carry out what they regard as responsibilities that ought to be fulfilled in order to live as part of “we.”

Volunteering is one of the ways this sense of “we” is put into practice. As an act through which individuals become “we,” volunteering is evolving in its forms as it intersects with socially significant moments, individual life stages, and broader policy and institutional frameworks. By examining how these changes are unfolding, we are able to anticipate its future direction. Currently, volunteering stands at a crossroads: it is moving beyond its traditional role of producing public goods for community maintenance and toward serving as a means of addressing the larger crises faced by individuals. Accordingly, this moment calls for insight – insight that reflects on the path volunteering has taken and anticipates the journey ahead.

Moreover, 2026 is the “International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development,” a year that seeks to establish a global milestone for volunteering and advance its values and goals in building a better world. In light of this historic moment, the 2026 National Report on Volunteering in the Republic of Korea was conceived to provide a multidimensional assessment of the past and present state of volunteering in Korea and to propose future strategies by reinterpreting the meaning and direction of volunteering within a rapidly changing society. This English edition presents a summary of the report’s principal findings and key insights.

Through the process of preparing this report, we confirmed that volunteering is both a principle of social development that places people at its center and one of the most proactive means of addressing the crises faced by individuals. Individual actions transform daily life, emotions, experiences, and relationships, ultimately reshaping attitudes toward life and personal values. The relationships formed by transformed individuals, in turn, generate change within communities, and such change becomes a driving force behind the evolution of civil society’s ecosystem, institutions, and public policies.

It is our hope that this report, which captures the journey of volunteering in Korea, will help connect diverse cultures and varied forms of volunteering and contribute to building shared knowledge through diverse volunteer experiences. We also wish to extend our deepest appreciation to the volunteers and stakeholders who are active in Korea and around the world.

Euiwook Kim
CEO
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Methodology

Volunteering is increasingly recognized as one of the most accessible ways for individuals to contribute to building a stronger foundation for the future. In this context, the 2026 National Report on Volunteering in Korea was developed to explore future directions for expanding participation and enhancing the impact of volunteering. To support this objective, a survey of approximately 3,000 individuals with varying levels of interest in and experience with volunteering was conducted to better understand how volunteering is perceived and experienced in everyday life. Drawing on these findings, the report presents practical insights for integrating volunteering more fully into daily life. To this end, three research methods were employed as outlined below.

1. Data Analysis

National trends in volunteer participation over the past decade (2015–2025) were analyzed using public data sources including Statistics Korea’s Social Survey.

2. In-depth Interviews

In addition to reviewing domestic academic research on volunteering in Korea, in-depth interviews were conducted with social welfare scholars and volunteer sector practitioners. Through these interviews, key turning points in the history of volunteering in Korea were identified, along with insights into changes in volunteer practice and practical recommendations for policy improvement.

3. Public Survey

A survey of 3,162 respondents was conducted to examine their experiences with and perceptions of volunteering. Based on these experiences and perceptions, the study sought to more clearly rearticulate the concept, value, and impact of volunteering. It also comparatively analyzed differences in perceptions according to levels of interest and prior experience, and carefully considered what strategies would be needed in the volunteer field to encourage broader public participation.

* A sample of 1,000 individuals aged 15–69 selected based on gender, age, and region of residence, and 2,162 users of the 1365 Volunteer Portal who had participated in volunteering within the past three years.

Chapter 1:

Historical Evolution

History of Volunteering in Korea: 1980s–2025

1980s Volunteering in Korea grew rapidly in the 1980s, expanding beyond its roots in religious and charitable organizations to engage the broader public. In preparation for major international events such as the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, large-scale citizen volunteer groups were mobilized. Through these efforts, many individuals developed a sense of civic efficacy and belonging, as they contributed to national goals as members of society.

1990s In the 1990s, private-sector actors, including media organizations, corporations, and universities, began organizing volunteer initiatives, expanding opportunities for public participation. JoongAng Ilbo, one of Korea's three major newspapers, launched a large-scale campaign to raise public awareness of volunteering, and Samsung established the country's first employee volunteer group.

In 1995, reforms to public education policy introduced a requirement for middle and high school students to participate in volunteer activities, helping to expand youth engagement. The following year, volunteer support centers were established within local governments nationwide, marking a shift toward more formal and systematic management of activities that had previously been carried out in a scattered manner within the private sector.

2000s In the 2000s, volunteers played an increasingly visible role in major international events and disaster response efforts. These included the 2002 FIFA World Cup co-hosted by Korea and Japan, as well as responses to Typhoon Rusa (2002), Typhoon Maemi (2003), and the 2007 oil spill off Korea's west coast. Notably, 123,000 volunteers participated in cleanup efforts following the west coast oil spill - an effort often called the "Miracle of the West Coast." In its aftermath, the national volunteer participation rate rose to 19.3 percent in 2009, representing nearly one in five people.

In 2005, the Framework Act on Volunteer Service Activities was enacted, reinforcing the national framework for volunteering management. In 2008, the first National Basic Plan for the Promotion of Volunteer Service Activities was adopted to encourage participation at the national level. In 2010, the Korea Volunteer Center was established, followed by the launch of the 1365 Volunteer Portal, an integrated online platform for coordinating volunteer activities. These developments ultimately established a nationwide volunteer management network and a more systematic operational framework.

2010s – Present The 2014 Sewol ferry disaster, in which a ferry carrying high school students on a school trip sank, demonstrated the strength of volunteerism as a driving force in enhancing community resilience during a national crisis. However, following the end of mandatory volunteer service for students in 2019 and the introduction of social distancing measures in 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19, the national volunteer participation rate fell sharply to 8.4 percent in 2021.

In response to these societal changes, Korea's volunteer sector has introduced new forms of engagement, including online and remote volunteering and micro-volunteering that enables people to participate easily with a short time commitment. Through these efforts, the national volunteer participation rate rebounded to 14.4 percent in 2025 and is continuing to recover toward its pre-pandemic levels.

Chapter 2:

Participation Trends

Volunteer Participation Trends in Korea

Over the past decade, how deeply has volunteering become embedded in people's daily lives? How have public perceptions of and needs related to volunteering evolved? Drawing on Statistics Korea's Social Survey data from 2015 to 2025, this report examines trends in volunteer participation during that period.

Volunteer Participation

- The national volunteer participation rate declined from 18.2 percent in 2015 to 8.4 percent in 2021 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, before rebounding to 14.4 percent in 2025.
- On average, individuals who participate in volunteering do so about once every two months. In 2025, volunteers volunteered an average of 8.3 times and 24.4 hours per year.
- By age group, participation is highest among seniors aged 60 and over. In 2025, this group volunteered an average of 12.6 times and 38.4 hours per year – approximately three times the rate of teenagers (4.6 times and 10.1 hours).

Top 5 Volunteer Fields by Share of Volunteers (2025)

1	Daily Living Support for Vulnerable Populations	32.8%
2	Environmental Protection	23.8%
3	Cultural Events	14.7%
4	Education	12.0%
5	Housing and Living Environment Improvement	11.2%

Source: Statistics Korea, Social Survey, 2025

- In 2025, volunteer participation was highest in daily living support for vulnerable populations (32.8%), including assistance to older adults and persons with disabilities; environmental protection (23.8%), such as litter collection and tree planting; and cultural events (14.7%), including supporting exhibitions, performances, and sporting events.
- Participation in environmental protection rose from 19.5 percent in 2023 to 23.8 percent in 2025, an increase of 4.3 percentage points, reflecting growing public concern about the climate crisis.

Motivation for Volunteering

Top 5 Motivations for Volunteering (2025)

1	To participate in organized activities through one's school or workplace	35.0%
2	Because helping others brings a sense of happiness	21.2%
3	Out of interest in social issues	13.3%
4	To put religious beliefs into practice	9.8%
5	To enhance one's credentials for further education or employment	6.6%

Source: Statistics Korea, Social Survey, 2025

- In 2025, the most commonly cited reason for volunteering was to participate in organized activities within one's affiliated organizations such as schools or workplaces (35.0%), and the share of respondents citing this reason has increased steadily since 2021.
- The second most common reason was because helping others brings happiness (21.2%), although the share citing this motivation has kept declining since 2021.

Top 3 Reasons for Not Volunteering (2025)

1	Lack of time	47.4%
2	Lack of interest in volunteering	31.1%
3	Poor health	9.5%

Source: Statistics Korea, Social Survey, 2025

- A lack of time was the leading reason for not volunteering, with over 40 percent of respondents citing it each year since 2021.
- A lack of interest in volunteering was the second most cited reason (31.1%), and the share of respondents citing this reason has consistently remained above 30 percent over the past five years.

Chapter 3:

Public Perceptions & Experiences

Public Perceptions and Experiences of Volunteering

What images come to mind when people think of volunteering? What changes do they experience through it? The following section presents key insights from a survey of approximately 3,000 respondents.

Q. What comes to mind when people think of volunteering?

Associations with “Volunteering”

* Respondents: 1,000 individuals aged 15–69

1	Emotions associated with volunteering	40.0%
2	Values associated with volunteering	19.2%
3	Specific examples of volunteer activities	18.7%
4	Specific scenes from volunteer activities	17.6%
5	Recipients of volunteer support	8.1%

- Four in ten respondents (40.0%) said the first thing they associate with volunteering is the emotions connected to it, most often positive feelings such as pride, warmth and happiness.
- Two in ten respondents (19.2%) said they most strongly associate volunteering with its values, including sharing, sacrifice and good deeds.
- Many respondents also associated volunteering with specific activities (18.7%), such as picking up litter or serving meals, and with specific scenes (17.6%), such as forests or yellow vests.

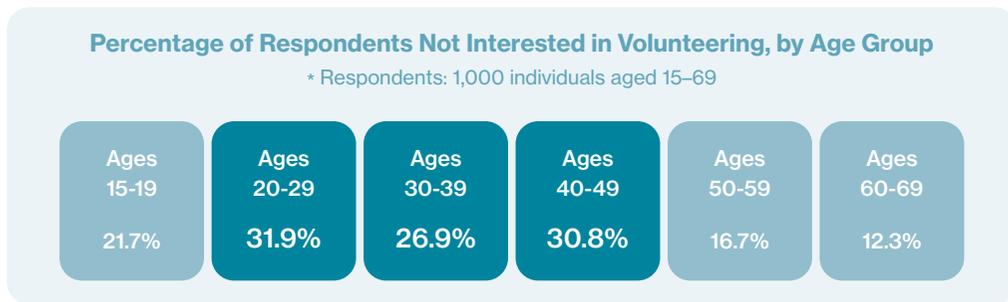
Top 3 Types of Volunteering People Are Most Familiar With

* Respondents: 1,000 individuals aged 15–69

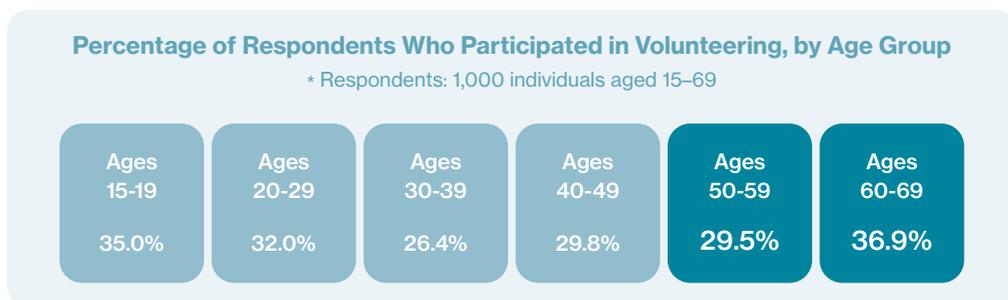
1	Daily living support for vulnerable populations	75.5%
2	Helping neighbors	61.7%
3	Pro bono services	61.4%

- The most familiar and widely recognized form of volunteering is support for vulnerable populations, including assisting older adults and persons with disabilities in their daily activities or helping improve their living conditions.
- This was followed by helping neighbors (61.7%), such as accompanying individuals with mobility limitations during outings or shopping for groceries on their behalf. This refers not to organization-based volunteering, but to personal and informal efforts to support people in one’s immediate surroundings.
- Awareness of pro bono service – widely known in Korea as “talent donation” – was also highly recognized.

Q. Which age group is least interested in volunteering?



- Of the 1,000 respondents, 22.8 percent reported having had no interest in volunteering over the past three years. By age group, the highest share was among those aged 20–29 (31.9%), followed by those aged 30–39 (26.9%) and 40–49 (30.8%).
- Across all age groups, lack of time was the most frequently cited reason (48.7%).
- Respondents in their 30s and 40s most frequently cited lack of time, followed by financial constraints (19.6% and 21.7%, respectively). Among respondents in their 20s, financial constraints and the perception that volunteering lacks personal value were cited at equal rates (17.4%).



- Of the 1,000 respondents, 31.2 percent reported having participated in volunteering over the past three years, with the highest rates among those aged 15–19 (35.0%) and 60–69 (36.9%).
- Volunteer participation tends to be lower among younger adults, who often have limited time due to economic activity, and higher among older adults, who generally have more available time following retirement.

Q. Where do people obtain information about volunteering?

Channels Used to Search for Information on Volunteering

* Respondents: 425 individuals who searched for volunteering information within the past three years

Affiliated organizations (e.g., school or workplace)	37.6%
Online volunteer platforms	29.6%
Portal websites	26.8%
Personal contacts (friends, family, colleagues)	24.5%
Social media	16.2%
Volunteer Involving Organisations	14.8%
Traditional media (radio, TV, newspapers)	6.4%
AI Chatbots	2.1%
Others	1.4%

- Of the 1,000 survey respondents, 425 who had searched for volunteering information within the past three years were asked which channels they used. The largest share reported obtaining information through their affiliated organizations such as schools or workplaces (37.6%).
- This was followed by online channels, including online volunteer platforms (29.6%) such as the 1365 Volunteer Portal and portal websites (26.8%).
- A small share of respondents (2.1%) also reported using AI-based chatbots to find volunteering opportunities.

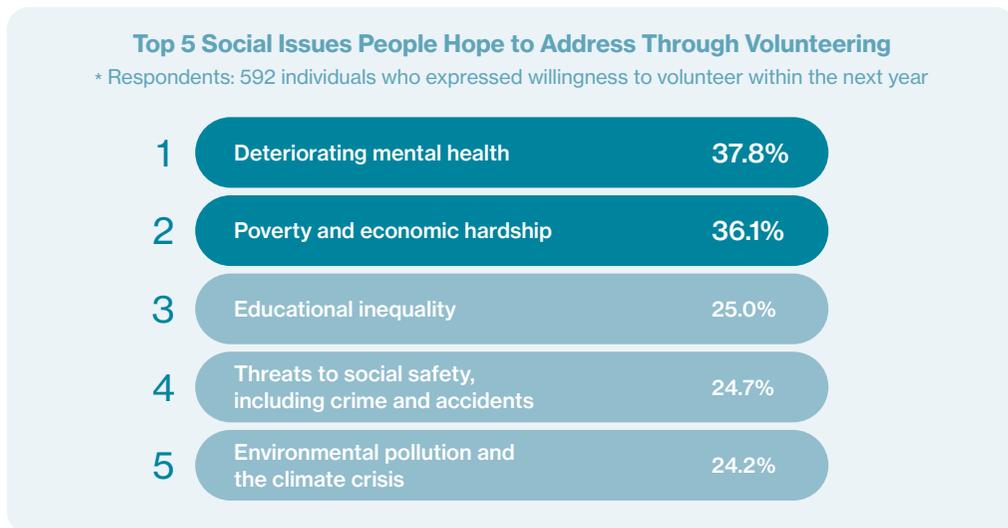
Ease of Finding Volunteering Information, by Channel (Score Ranking)

* Respondents: 425 individuals who searched for volunteering information within the past three years

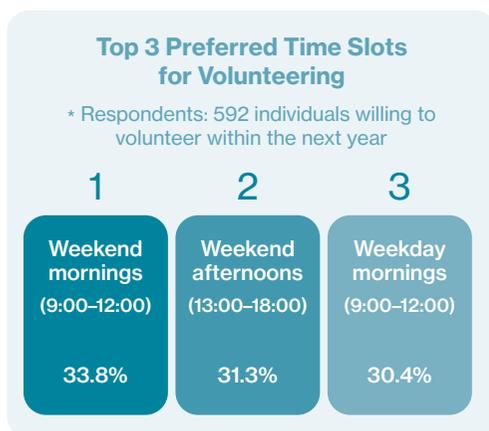
1	Online volunteer platforms	69.0 points
2	Affiliated organizations (e.g., school or workplace)	65.6 points
3	Volunteer Involving Organisations	58.8 points
4	Portal websites	57.0 points
5	Social media	54.8 points
6	Personal contacts (friends, family, colleagues)	54.5 points

- Among the channels most commonly used, online volunteer platforms were rated as the easiest for finding desired information, receiving 69.0 out of 100 on the information accessibility scale. Affiliated organizations, such as schools and workplaces, followed with a score of 65.6.
- By contrast, portal websites scored 57.0, indicating that their ease of finding information was relatively low compared with their level of use.

Q. What do people expect volunteering to address?



- Among the 592 respondents who expressed willingness to volunteer within the next year, deteriorating mental health (37.8%) was the most frequently cited issue they hoped to address through volunteering, followed by poverty and economic hardship (36.1%).
- These findings suggest that volunteering to support people experiencing emotional difficulties, such as depression and anxiety, and volunteering to improve the living and educational conditions of economically vulnerable populations are regarded as the most needed and urgent forms of engagement.



- Of the 1,000 respondents, 592 who expressed willingness to volunteer within the next year were asked about their preferred time to participate. The largest share selected weekend mornings (33.8%).
- Weekend afternoons (31.3%) and weekday mornings (30.4%) were also widely preferred, indicating that many people favor volunteering on weekends or in the morning.
- Regarding preferred duration, 2 hours ranked first (43.8%), followed by 1 hour (27.5%), suggesting that most people prefer volunteer activities lasting between one and two hours.

Q. What Is the Perceived Impact of Volunteering?

Expected Impacts of Volunteering (Ranked)

* Respondents: 688 individuals who had not volunteered in the past three years

1	Increased self-efficacy	73.7%
2	Positive social change	69.9%
3	Strengthened social solidarity	68.8%
4	Greater awareness of social issues	64.3%
5	Increased vitality in daily life	60.5%
6	Enhanced personal capabilities	55.3%

- Among the 1,000 survey respondents, 688 who had not participated in volunteering over the past three years were asked what change they would most expect if they were to volunteer. The findings indicate that many expected volunteering to bring about positive social change (69.9%) and, through experiencing such change firsthand, to experience a sense of efficacy from contributing to society (73.7%).
- By contrast, expectations regarding volunteering's positive impact on individuals' quality of life – such as increased vitality in daily life (60.5%) and enhanced personal capabilities (55.3%) – were comparatively lower. Expectations for its public value appear to outweigh those for its positive impact on individual participants.

Ranking of Impacts Experienced Through Volunteering

* Respondents: 2,162 individuals who had participated in volunteering within the past three years

1	Increased vitality in daily life	93.4%
2	Increased self-efficacy	89.9%
3	Strengthened social solidarity	85.9%
4	Greater awareness of social issues	85.8%
5	Positive social change	82.2%
6	Enhanced personal capabilities	79.6%

- Meanwhile, respondents who had participated in volunteering within the past three years (n=2,162) were asked which impacts they had experienced most strongly. Nine in ten (93.4%) said their “daily lives became more vibrant,” and nearly eight in ten (79.6%) reported that their “personal capabilities were strengthened” through volunteering.
- These findings suggest that participants experience not only the social impact of volunteering but also its meaningful impact on their own daily lives and personal capacities.

Conclusion

Volunteering in the Republic of Korea has developed alongside the nation's historical trajectory of overcoming social crises and achieving growth. What began to take root as a form of civic culture in the 1980s, when citizens volunteered to support the successful hosting of major international events, now underpins the safety of society across diverse areas, from services for vulnerable populations to disaster recovery.

The national volunteer participation rate fell sharply in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but has since shown an upward trend. However, while participation is strong among seniors aged 60 and older, increasing engagement among adolescents and young adults remains a challenge for the future.

In public perception, volunteering is associated with a "rewarding and fulfilling activity" and with "good deeds involving sacrifice and sharing for others." Supporting neighbors in need with daily life and improving the well-being of socially vulnerable groups, including those who are economically or physically disadvantaged, are recognized as the most representative forms of volunteering.

Many respondents preferred volunteering on weekends rather than weekdays and favored activities lasting one to two hours over those requiring three hours or more. They also sought to improve their psychological well-being or support those facing economic hardship through volunteering.

Those who have participated in volunteering reported experiencing not only its "public value and social impact," but also its significant positive effects on their personal capabilities and life satisfaction. For them, volunteering is an activity that makes daily life more dynamic and healthy and provides opportunities for growth that broaden their perspective on the world through diverse experiences. This multi-layered impact on individual volunteers underscores why volunteering should be integrated more fully into everyday life as a means of enriching both individuals and society.

Appendix

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About Author



Since its establishment in 2010, the Korea Volunteer Center has served as the national hub that keeps a network of 245 volunteer centers across Korea operating smoothly. The Center supports the effective coordination of volunteer activities nationwide and promotes the safe participation of volunteers, while conducting research and advancing policy proposals to strengthen and develop volunteering. It also supports the operation of the 1365 Volunteer Portal, an integrated digital platform that enables individuals to easily explore volunteer opportunities, apply to participate, and manage their volunteer records in one place.

Explore Korea's Volunteer Infrastructure | <https://www.v1365.or.kr/en>



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2026 National Report on Volunteering in Korea

Published in December 2025

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04519, Rep. of KOREA

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Volunteer Archives Identifier
v1365-800620638

