



**UN
VOLUNTEERS**

STATE OF VOLUNTEERING

in Central Asia Review



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U-Report volunteers, UNICEF, Uzbekistan. *Source:* Dilnoza Sametdinova, 2024.

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 the 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 the 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.



Toily Kurbanov

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

2030 Agenda	the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States	MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
COVID-19	coronavirus disease	NGO	non-governmental organization
DHA	Department of Humanitarian Affairs	NPO	non-profit organization
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs	NRCS	National Red Crescent Society
DSS	Department of Safety and Security	NRCST	National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council	NVN	National Volunteer Network
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
GDP	gross domestic product	OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development	PAE	Public Association Enterprise
ILO	International Labour Organization	PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
IOM	International Organization for Migration	RCST	Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction	RK	Republic of Kazakhstan
KR	Kyrgyz Republic	RFO	Regional Front Office
MCI	Ministry of Culture and Information	RT	Republic of Tajikistan
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic	RUz	Republic of Uzbekistan
		SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
		SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
		UN	United Nations

UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women	UNICC	United Nations International Computing Centre
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS	UNISFA	United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan	UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq	UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNAMID	African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur	UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction	UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme	UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNV	United Nations Volunteers
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund	USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly	VNR	Voluntary National Review
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	WFP	World Food Programme
		WHO	World Health Organization



SUMMARY



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.

As shown in the *State of Volunteering in Central Asia Review*, existing laws and regulations create a solid foundation for further development of volunteer practices, organizations and public

interest groups in Central Asia. Somewhat uneven development of legislation on volunteering in the region opens up opportunities for a more effective system.

Integrating volunteerism into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will help understand the scale of people's participation and their desire to devise innovative solutions. The *Review* highlights how such integration of volunteerism features in many Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on the implementation of SDGs by the countries, as well as in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and country-specific programme documents of United Nations agencies. Those strategic documents demonstrate successful practices of integrating volunteerism in the implementation of SDGs. The *Review* proves that volunteering helps improve the lives of vulnerable groups of the population and bolsters local communities in areas such as education, healthcare, water supply, gender equality and environmental protection.

The lack of national statistics on volunteering in Central Asian countries currently renders information on the scope and characteristics of volunteering incomplete. However, a variety of types of volunteering are observed in large cities, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and youth organizations are especially active.

Volunteering in the region has been growing in many fields – environment, healthcare, education, public social services, search for missing persons, emergency response and corporate volunteering. This development includes various segments of the population, from young people to retirees.

Moreover, in recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of individuals and organizations participating in volunteerism, with an ever-expanding number of programmes and projects.

The *Review* also provides many examples of volunteering activities. Learning about them can be a good opportunity to share best practices and may serve as a starting point for building dialogue among people involved in volunteering. These examples prove that volunteering activity in the region is gradually becoming more systematic, informed and organized. It uses new communication technologies and is aimed at collaboration with other organizations from the non-profit sector, governmental agencies and businesses.

Volunteering in Central Asia is not a new phenomenon for the modern society. Traditional forms of volunteering have been preserved and are a source of pride for younger generations. Volunteering in the region is undergoing a revival. This is a fascinating, rapidly developing social phenomenon of our time. Methods for its implementation are characterized by a variety of types and forms. Its effectiveness, focus and significance for society have increased, and the range of opportunities for public participation has expanded exponentially.

Volunteering is a tool for achieving the SDGs in the region, mainly in social aspects such as inequality, demographic change, migration, youth unemployment and climate change.

An important practical result of the research conducted in the region is the development of guidelines with the input from volunteers, volunteering activists, experts and consultants. In its final part, the *Review* offers recommendations, based on the principles of intersectoral interaction that are aimed at volunteers, non-profit organizations (NPOs), governments and commercial companies.

Some key recommendations are listed below:

- Invite volunteers and volunteer organizations to get involved in governmental programmes and strategies for national development and engage volunteers at the planning stage of sectoral policies' development.
- Develop a system at the national level for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of volunteer projects to ensure their closer alignment with SDGs.
- Expand ways to encourage and facilitate volunteering activities by including their running costs in the national budget, as well as by attracting funding for these from the corporate sector.
- Promote regular interaction and sharing of best practices with volunteering communities from other countries.
- Create corporate volunteering programmes and invite more people to participate.
- Create centralized information platforms for support and development of volunteering.

With the right support for continued growth and success, volunteerism in the region holds truly unlimited potential.

PREFACE

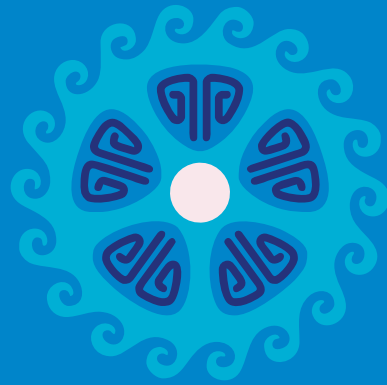
The idea to examine volunteering in Central Asia was presented by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and accepted for implementation at the International Volunteers Forum held in Astana in June 2023. This *Review* will provide new data on volunteering in the region ahead of the next State of the World's Volunteerism Report, scheduled for publication in 2026. When preparing the *Review*, particular attention was paid to achieving the following objectives:

- Research the legislative and regulatory framework on the topic of volunteering in the countries of the region; determine how they help promote the values of volunteering and integrate volunteering into all sectors of social development.
- Highlight the positive impact of volunteer efforts and their contribution to national priorities regarding development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- Recognize the unique skills of volunteers (including individuals, unregistered volunteer groups, charities, non-profit and other organizations), their personal time investment, and their cumulative contributions to community service.
- Identify and compare the best practices of the volunteer movement in the region.
- Share best practices in volunteering.
- Make recommendations for possible further improvement of measures to support volunteering initiatives.

This is the first time that a research study of this scale has been conducted on volunteering in the Central Asian region, which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The *Review* is a collaborative effort between UNV and its partners. The document draws upon the results of international missions and case studies conducted in each country, as well as a large number of face-to-face and virtual meetings, along with interviews and dialogues with volunteers and volunteering experts.

UNV and the *Review* authors express their deep gratitude to government officials and representatives of volunteer movements and organizations in all countries of the region, as well as academic researchers, independent experts and representatives of international organizations who actively participated in conducting research, collecting new data, discussing results, contributing to quantitative and qualitative data analysis and aggregation, and directly contributing to the preparation of the document content, its discussion and improvement.

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION



Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share cultural and historical roots, close ties that have fostered a history of mutually beneficial cooperation that today binds them into a single economic and geographical region¹. Charity, mercy and volunteering reflect cultural and religious traditions that characterize all peoples inhabiting Central Asia and supercharge the potential of volunteering and the potential civil society holds to benefit all of the countries of the region.

Although today these Central Asian countries are independent states, they collaborate closely with each other and with neighbouring countries on political, economic and cultural matters. All five Central Asian countries are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and are Member States of the United Nations.

Despite the continuing ripple effects from the coronavirus pandemic and the complex international geopolitical situation, Central Asian countries are united in their goal of ensuring sustainable development throughout the region. The negative impact of COVID-19 on economic development throughout the region has spurred governments, businesses, the non-profit sector and individuals to increase their charitable activities and volunteering, particularly in support of the health-care system and vulnerable population groups.

From age-old traditions to modern volunteering

The emergence of volunteering principles

In Central Asian countries, volunteering and charity can be considered as both a religious duty and a non-religious commitment to the principles of mutual aid, being a good neighbour and maintaining family values and respectful social relationships. Today, most people engage in volunteer activities periodically throughout their lives, most often informally.

Historically, whenever someone was in need of support, local community members tried to help them. Moreover, if the state did not support initiatives related to education, book publishing and places of worship, philanthropists effectively would step in and fund the construction and maintenance of a network of religious educational institutions. Over time, a new social phenomenon emerged in the Central Asian region — the practice of volunteering as a type of mutual support, which meant the voluntary, free-of-charge assistance provided to a person in need.

Table 1. Traditional and modern forms of mutual assistance, volunteering and charity among the peoples of Central Asia

Form	Description	Country
Algoo	Mutual assistance in agriculture, expressed in the provision of livestock for cultivating the land, labour or financial support. The tradition has been preserved in rural areas. See also <i>yushma</i> .	Kyrgyzstan
Asar Ashar Hashar	<i>Asar</i> (Kazakh), <i>Ashar</i> (Kyrg.), <i>Hashar</i> (Taj, Uzbek) is a unique charitable tradition of the region, consisting of voluntary, free-of-charge collective assistance to neighbours, relatives, colleagues and friends. In addition, non-locals living in the area either permanently or temporarily often take part in <i>Asar/Ashar/Hashar</i> . See also <i>Evar</i> .	Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan Uzbekistan
Dobrovolets	Same as “volunteer”. The Russian-language versions of the current laws of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on charity use the “free-will helper” term.	Whole region
Yowar	An ancient name for “joint charitable work”, this custom has always played an extremely important role in the life of the Turkmen people. Gathering together at the call of their hearts and honouring neighbours like family, village residents together helped each other build a new house or organize a wedding. Men cleared canals and planted orchards and vineyards. Women cooked food and served a large <i>dastarkhan</i> . It was a shared festivity for all. The main feature of <i>Yowar</i> is that it is based on free assistance to others. See also <i>Asar, Ashar, Hashar</i> .	Turkmenistan
Erikti	<i>Erikti</i> means “free-will helper” in the Kazakh language. The term is used to refer to patrons of the arts; members of political or religious organizations; helpers at social or entertainment events.	Kazakhstan
Zhurtshylyk, Zhurtchuluk	<i>Zhurtshylyk</i> (Kazakhstan), <i>Zhurtchuluk</i> (Kyrgyzstan) – an old custom where community members who found themselves in debt or bankrupt as a result of raids or loss of livestock, turned to their fellow tribesmen for help. Support from representatives of their clan was provided by decision of the council of village elders – the <i>Council of Aksakals</i> – in the form of financial assistance or free labour. The term comes from the word <i>zhurt</i> , which means “a sense of community and solidarity with members of the same community or clan”.	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan

Form	Description	Country
Zhylyu	The custom is also known as <i>zhylu zhinau</i> , which means “collecting heat” in Kazakh. Type of charity: helping people who find themselves in difficult financial situations due to loss of livestock, fire, loss of property or financial debts. Help was provided by relatives, close neighbours and fellow countrymen in the form of money, livestock and household and personal items. The <i>zhylu</i> was organized by a decision of elders or prominent members of society.	Kazakhstan
Zakat	Type of charity in Islam. Its origins lie in voluntary charity – the collective collection and distribution of alms by wealthy citizens for the benefit of the poor in the form of money, livestock, harvested crops.	Whole region
Ikhtiyori	This means “free-will helper” in Tajik language. Means a volunteer in government agencies and at events organized by authorities. Emphasizes a person’s own will to take part in activities that benefit society.	Tajikistan
Kori savob	Same as <i>savob</i> . In the Tajik language, <i>kor</i> means “work or action”, and <i>savob</i> means “good deed, benefit or reward for kindness”. <i>Kori savob</i> is a good deed or an intention to do a good deed for someone.	Tajikistan
Koshumcha	This means “voluntary assistance to people in certain circumstances”, for example, when organizing a wake, a wedding or another such event, or paying a dowry, a penalty, etc. This type of assistance is in place to this day, representing mutual help where close relatives provide material resources for major life events such as weddings and anniversaries, or for large expenses such as buying a house.	Kyrgyzstan
Kongilli	<i>Kongilli</i> translated from Uzbek means “free-will helper”.	Uzbekistan
Meiletinchi	<i>Meiletinchi</i> translated from Turkmen means “volunteer”.	Turkmenistan
Rizokor	<i>Rizo</i> translated from Tajik means “agreement, satisfaction”. Therefore, <i>rizokor</i> is “a person who tries to do something nice for someone in need of attention and help”. It is synonymous with the phrase “free-will helper”.	Tajikistan
Savob	Also known as <i>kori savob</i> , this is a common historical type of volunteering. Its main meaning is “selfless help with housework, caring for neighbours, most often elderly, childless or those who have lost their children”. In Tajik families, it is especially common among young, unmarried girls for whom it is customary to wash, clean, cook and care for lonely, infirm neighbours.	Tajikistan

Form	Description	Country
Subbotnik	A collective charitable labour action held on weekends or during other non-working hours. Represents socially useful work, most often cleaning the territory and planting of greenery. Performed free of charge by voluntary associations or labour collectives. The practice existed during the Soviet era. Not used officially, found in the media.	Whole region
Uyushma	<i>Uyushma</i> translated from Uzbek means “unification, community”. Collective mutual assistance in agriculture. Can be provided in the form of labour, land, tools, equipment, livestock, fertilizers and in other forms. Means the same as <i>Algoo</i> .	Kyrgyzstan
Yktyarchy	“Volunteer” in the Kyrgyz language.	Kyrgyzstan
Yntymak	“Friendship” in the Kyrgyz language. A type of tribal mutual assistance, this means “mutual supportiveness and help to the closest neighbours, relatives, and fellow villagers”. Its aim is to provide assistance to families both in <i>force majeure</i> circumstances, such as funerals or accidents, as well as during special celebratory events.	Kyrgyzstan



The common prototype of modern volunteering in Central Asia is the traditional form of collective mutual assistance called *Hashar*², a term of Arabic-Persian origin that was incorporated into the Tajik and Turkic languages. Over time, the term acquired different meanings.

In medieval Iran, for example, this concept meant helping to construct large buildings, city walls, irrigation canals and defence structures. During the era of the Mongol invasion in Central Asia, *Hashar* meant that captives from among the local population were divided into groups assigned to complete various large-scale military engineering tasks including digging tunnels, filling ditches and erecting ramparts during the sieges of cities and fortresses. This interpretation of *Hashar* has been preserved in dictionaries, although its main meaning, fortunately, has changed.

The painting, by contemporary artist Isufzon Sangov from Tajikistan, depicts a group of women cooking flatbread together outdoors; their collective efforts are a display of the principle of *Hashar*. Traditionally, women would gather on the eve of special family occasions or public holidays, funerals and other events; together, they would knead the dough and then form and bake large quantities of bread. The painting reflects the warmth of the home environment. The artist showed passion for the process of collective cooking, which created an atmosphere of unity, solidarity and joy from collective labour.

According to its modern meaning, the principle of *Hashar* means the joint work of people for charitable purposes. The custom originates from the need for mutual assistance in order to survive in the harsh natural and climatic conditions of the region. The translation of the term is “the whole world”, which implies the joint efforts of an entire community or several communities in voluntarily carrying out work that a person or family, especially if they are lonely and poor, is unable to do. Members of the local community also jointly assist with household errands and come together in preparation for important events, for example,

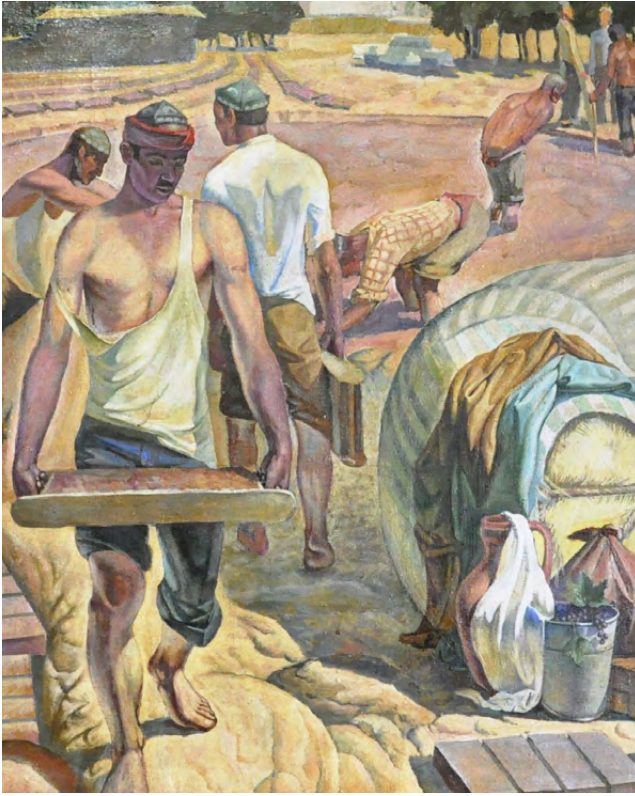


Painting by Isufzon Sangov, 2000, from Tajikistan, “Preparation for the holiday”.

to build a house or to organize a wedding or a celebration.

Development of charity and volunteering in the twentieth century

During the Soviet period, volunteerism in the form of *Hashar* as a method of collective free work was widely used in the construction of hydraulic structures. This type of labour was first used in 1930 in Tajikistan during the construction of an irrigation system in the Vakhsh River Valley in order to increase the agrarian and industrial potential of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. The large-scale irrigation project, called Vakhshstroy, was announced in 1931 as an all-union top-priority construction project in which several generations of the locals participated – men and women, old and young³. Volunteer groups from Tajikistan – joined by Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Germans, Russians, Tajiks, Tatars, Ukrainians and other nationalities – worked in concreting and excavating operations, and in mechanical workshops.



Painting by Ural Umarov, 2012, from Tajikistan, who was a student of the world-famous master of the brush Zukhur Nurjanovich Khabibullaev. This is stored at the Mirzorahmat Olimov Republican Art College, Dushanbe.*



Painting by Rustam Bazarov, 2015, from Uzbekistan. It depicts the process of mixing clay with straw as part of the house building performed jointly and free-of-charge by friends and relatives. The painting was displayed at the opening day event in the Ilkhom Theater in 2016.

At the same time in Tajikistan, *Hashar* was also used during the construction of the Varzob Cascade Hydroelectric Power Plant, a complex of three small hydroelectric power stations on the Varzob River, located on the northern outskirts of Dushanbe. The construction of the Cascade began in 1931, and the entire hydroelectric power station was completed in 1938. Abdullo Ashurov, the Soviet artist and one of the first Tajik painters, chose to depict this Tajik custom – the joint participation of people in construction work.

The nationwide construction method was also used from 1940 to 1942 to build the Great Gissar Canal, connecting the capital's Dushanbinka River with the Karatag River, which flows into Uzbekistan⁴.

Another vivid example is the construction of the Great Fergana Canal, which is vital to the socioeconomic life of the Fergana Valley. The canal is the main source of irrigation for agricultural areas and cotton fields. Construction of the canal through a nationwide *Hashar* began in August 1939. In just 45 days, 270 km of canal were dug across the territory of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic⁵, a feat made possible primarily by manual labour. The canal was extended 80 km into the territory of Tajikistan and connected to the Syrdarya River near the city of Khujand. In addition to 200,000 residents of Uzbekistan, people in the adjacent regions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joined in the effort. In a short period of time, representatives of the three nations created 18 million cubic metres' worth of earthworks, over



Volunteers from all over the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) participated in constructing the Vakhsh principal canal, an offshoot of the Vakhsh River. *Source:* Photo from 1933.



Painting by Abdullo Ashurov, 1952, Museum of Tajikistan, Dushanbe. "People's construction project, Varzob hydroelectric power station".



Construction of the Great Fergana Canal. Source: Max Vladimirovich Alpert, 1939.

By participating in volunteer activities, the population gradually becomes an active participant in the social and political life of society.

450 hydraulic structures, 38 bridges and a dam. The canal supplies water to 257,000 hectares of irrigated land.

There are many more examples testifying to this impressive practice of residents of Central Asian countries. For example in 1957 – as an alternative to using yurts to hold lessons for children⁶ – a rural school was built using the *Ashar* principle in the village of Kyzyl-Ozgorush, Toktogul district, Jalal-Abad region, Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, people in the Amu Darya River valley in Turkmenistan have the tradition of *Yowar*, a long-standing annual endeavour dedicated to the cleaning and deepening of canals and irrigation ditches.

The student movement and the All-Union Komsomol top-priority construction projects hold a significant place in the history of volunteering, primarily youth volunteering, in the second half of the twentieth century in the Soviet Union. In the Central Asian region, this led to the implementation of a large-scale project for the development of virgin and fallow lands in the steppe zone of the northern regions of Kazakhstan.

Transition to modern forms of volunteering

The difficult economic conditions following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 sparked a revival of the ancient *Hashar* tradition, especially in rural areas. *Hashar* is no longer as crucial for the survival of a family as it was in the past. However, this tradition has now been firmly re-established in lives of people throughout Central Asia.

Over the past three decades, the culture of volunteering in the region has been significantly transformed from one focused on widespread but partially mandatory group practices, such as street cleaning and planting trees, to one that targets the social and political life of a community. This shift is especially evident among young people who volunteer. Therefore, with the development of charity and volunteering, the population is gradually becoming an active participant in the social and political life of society through the practice of participating in volunteer activities. This is especially true of young people.



Painting by Vladimir Alexandrovich Popov, "Springtime in Kazakhstan". This depicts the development of virgin lands and the arrival of a team of volunteers in the steppe zone of Kazakhstan with machinery and building materials, ready to begin the work.

This shift is reflected in volunteer participation in facilitating major sporting events, such as the VII Asian Winter Games, which were held in 2011 in Astana and Almaty, and the V Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, held in 2017 in Ashgabat. The mobilization of volunteers for these large-scale events brought significant prestige and economic benefits, attracted the attention of governmental agencies, and contributed to the development of legislation and many other aspects of the volunteering infrastructure in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. For example, hundreds of centres for recruitment, training and support of volunteers have been created in Kazakhstan. These resource centres subsequently merged together to form the Association of Legal Entities National Volunteer Network (NVN).

In Uzbekistan, *Hashar* currently also means carrying out charitable events on a national

scale. Volunteers clean residential grounds and surrounding areas, improve mahallas and support vulnerable people. Such events are traditionally held twice a year in preparation for the celebration of the national holiday Navruz and the month of Ramadan, as well as on the eve of Independence Day in Uzbekistan. The Cabinet of Ministers passes relevant legislation, which is then approved by the President of the country⁷. According to the legislation, *Hashar* work can only be carried out on a voluntary basis and only at the site of the organizations where their participants volunteer. This can also be seen as an important corporate volunteering practice. "*Hashar* is a rich tradition of our people which reflects our national identity. It personifies the noble qualities of our ancestors, such as humanity, kindness, mutual understanding and love for the motherland", as explained by the organizers of volunteer activities⁸.



Civil society is an effective tool for encouraging people to take personal responsibility for sustainable development and to work together towards achieving this goal.



Thus, voluntary mutual assistance in harvesting – along with the construction of houses, mosques and schools – has become a tradition that has survived to this day. In modern Tajikistan, schools and residential homes in rural areas are still built using the *Hashar* principle. It should be noted that this practice is well known to the youth nowadays. For example, using the *Ashar* method, a Bishkek schoolgirl organized a social charity project that saw volunteer mentors provide free online English language training for their peers from rural areas of the republic⁹. In this example the mention of *Ashar* is a tribute to the traditions of mutual assistance. In addition, this is an example of online volunteering, which has only emerged in this century.

The role of civil society in the context of volunteering

All over the world, civil society is an effective tool for encouraging people to take personal responsibility for sustainable development and also is effective in uniting individuals, their groups their groups and their associations¹⁰ in working towards this goal. People care about what is happening in their street, village and town, which they demonstrate by participating in local decision-making processes and accepting responsibility for those decisions.

The continued development of civil society – namely non-profit organizations, volunteering and civic initiatives – is imperative to achieve sustainable development in Central Asian region. Civil society organizations in the region have gone

through their own period of establishment in each country. Volunteers were constantly involved in non-profit sector initiatives, actively collaborating with each other and establishing partnerships with various government agencies and businesses to solve critical socioeconomic problems and meet public needs.

According to the Association for the Development of Civil Society (ARGO) in Kazakhstan, further development of civil society in Central Asia is expected in the following roles¹¹:

- Partnership: Civil society organizations are capable of implementing many projects at different levels — local, national, regional and global.
- Advisory: new innovative tools and technologies are increasingly being used by civil society, such as crowdfunding, make-a-thons, innovation laboratories for social projects, and collaborations.
- Information: With the use of communication and digital technologies, civil society institutions engage in educational activities, disseminate knowledge and educate the population, including introducing the principles of volunteering.

For example, one of the main objectives of the civil sector is to raise awareness of the SDGs among the population and involve ordinary people in their achievement, such as through volunteering.

The development of volunteerism in Central Asia was facilitated by the efforts of various international organizations.

It should be noted that the development of volunteerism in recent years has been facilitated by the efforts of international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNV, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as well as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the non-governmental international medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). The year 2022 marked an important milestone for Central Asia after the first Central Asian Volunteer Forum was held in two regions and also in the capital of Kazakhstan. The event brought together over 200 volunteers from throughout the region and international experts to discuss the scale and scope of volunteering in Central Asia. The subsequent International Volunteer Forum in Astana in 2023 strengthened the spirit of cooperation between volunteers and experts in the region.

ARGO experts highlight the following trends in the development of volunteering in the region:

- Strengthening the understanding of the role of volunteers in society: Volunteers provide essential social services (Goals 1–4) to help all people achieve a minimum standard of living and lead a decent life. For example, in Kazakhstan, employees of the National Research Centre for Cardiac Surgery volunteer in the health-care provision programme for all patients in urgent need of surgical intervention¹¹.
- Strengthening the role of volunteers in environmental protection: Volunteers draw on extensive experience in environmental protection, and they are inspired to take action in this area. With their direct participation, measures are taken to mitigate the effects of climate change and adaptation (Goals 6, 7, 13, 14, 15). For example in Kyrgyzstan, volunteers help by collecting and recycling waste.
- Strengthening the perception of volunteerism by decision makers and politicians: Volunteers are seen as a resource for constructively engaging unemployed and underemployed youth and increasing their chances of employment (Goal 8).

CHAPTER 1

LEGISLATION AND MEASURES TO SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING



CHAPTER 1

LEGISLATION AND MEASURES TO SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING

Although they gained political and economic independence simultaneously in the early 1990s, the countries of Central Asia have subsequently experienced unique development trajectories. Each country – following its own timeline – recognized the need to introduce laws and regulations that support and govern voluntary activities.

Today, however, it is clear that the decisions and legislative framework improvements needed to allow the volunteer movement to flourish have been proceeding in parallel in all countries of the region. These processes began in the early 2000s and gained the greatest momentum in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Many factors influenced the development of legislation that allowed a stronger civil society to emerge; what resulted next was a growing trust and deepening interaction between parliamentarians and voters, along with the involvement of academics and experts, the gathering of additional research and record keeping and a greater willingness among countries to share information and experience. In general, the countries of the region required more than one decade to establish legislative processes in the field of volunteering. Because all Central Asian countries now have basic laws on volunteering (volunteer activities), a useful comparative analysis of the legal and regulatory framework of volunteer activities can be carried out.

The key sources of information used in preparing this analysis are the Law of Kazakhstan dated 30 December 2016 (No. 42-VI ZRK) “On Volunteer

Activities”¹²; the Law of Kyrgyzstan dated 31 March 2023 (No. 77) “On Volunteer Activities”¹³; the Law of Tajikistan dated 19 September 2013 (No. 1019) “On Volunteer Activities”¹⁴; the Law of Turkmenistan dated 12 January 2016 (No. 320-V) “On Volunteering”¹⁵; the Law of Uzbekistan dated 2 December 2019 (No. ZRU-585) “On Volunteer Activities”¹⁶. All of the above laws are taken from official sources of the relevant Central Asian countries and intergovernmental information resources of the member countries of the CIS. They are presented in the Russian language. In some cases, references are made to previous versions of laws on volunteer activities in these countries.

The analysis was carried out in accordance with the legislative structure while accounting for the need to identify similarities and differences in country-specific statutory regulations. For convenience, the full names of laws are not used when referring to the current version of the national law on volunteering in each country.

Basic concepts

Volunteer

All five relevant laws use the term “volunteer” to define a person engaged in volunteer activities. The Laws of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan give the shortest definition of a volunteer – “an individual engaged in volunteering activities”.

The equivalent of a volunteer, *dobrovolets*, a “free-will helper”, is not found in any relevant law. This

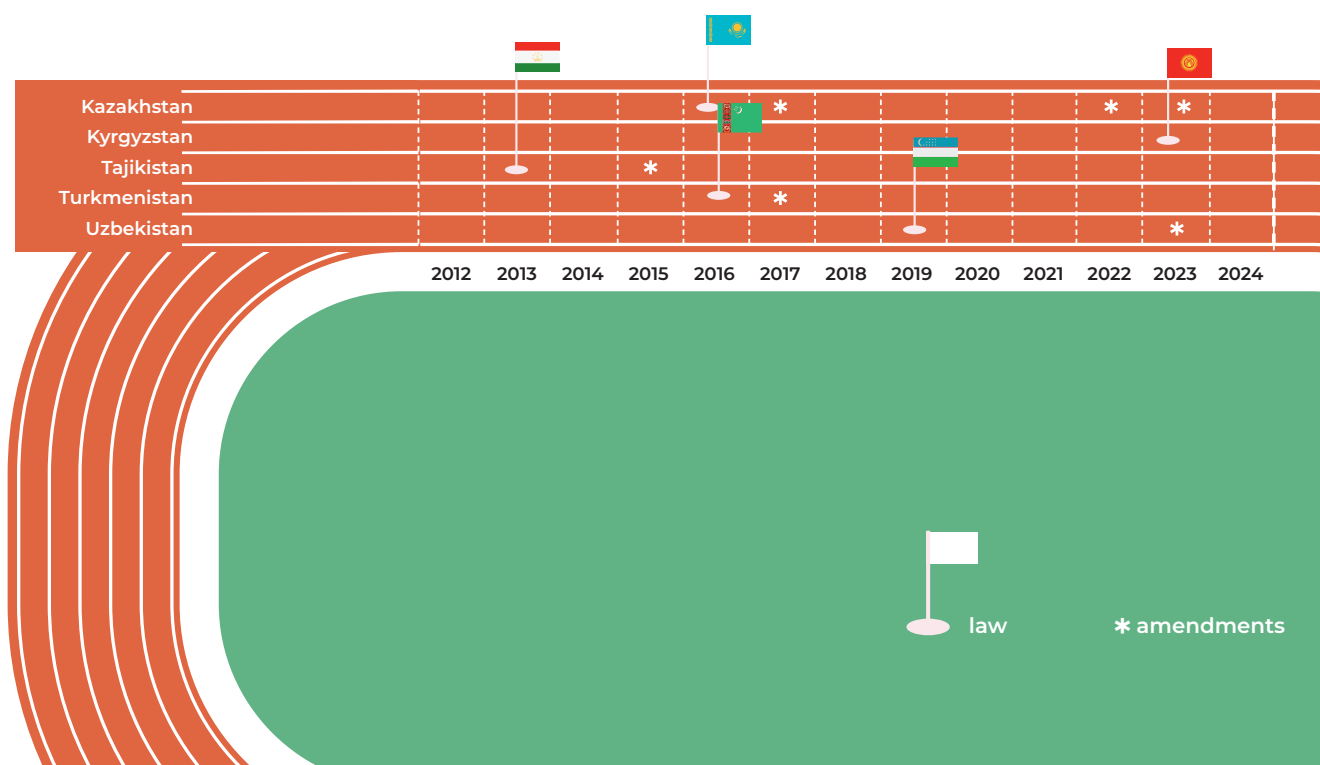


Figure 1. Evolution of legislation on volunteering in the Central Asian region.

word is used less frequently in society, especially in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, but it is recognized at the official intergovernmental level by all countries in the region. In the Model Law “On volunteerism (Volunteering)” No. 42–15 of 16 April 2015¹⁷, adopted at the forty-second plenary meeting of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States, both terms act as synonyms.

Moreover, the term free-will helper instead of volunteer is present in the texts of some socially oriented laws. Examples of such use can be found in the Law of Tajikistan dated 22 April 2003 (No. 18) “On Charitable Activities”¹⁸; the Law of Uzbekistan “On Charity” dated 2 May 2007 (No. ZRU-96)¹⁹; and the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Patronage and Charitable Activities” as amended by the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 10 May 2017 (No. 79)²⁰.

In the key pieces of legislation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the basic definition of a volunteer includes an indication that they act voluntarily (the Law of Tajikistan also says “with the right of free choice”) and free-of-charge (“not out of material or financial interest” in the Law of Kyrgyzstan; “for

the benefit of society” in the Law of Tajikistan). In fact, the definition of “volunteer” is supplemented by the principles of volunteer work, which are included further in point 1.1, article 4 of the Law of Kyrgyzstan and article 4 of the Law of Tajikistan.

Furthermore, the Law of Kyrgyzstan states that a volunteer acts “not ... under the influence of external social, economic or political pressure”. In an initial version of the draft, submitted for discussion in the Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2019²¹, a volunteer was more simply defined as “an individual engaged in volunteer activities”. Therefore, the transition from a simple and generally accepted definition of the “volunteer” concept to another, rather specific one, was accompanied by a wide-ranging discussion.

When defining a volunteer, the Law of Turkmenistan emphasizes citizenship: “a citizen of Turkmenistan, as well as a foreign citizen or stateless person”. All three types of the legal status of an individual are usually combined into the concept of “individual”. A subsequent review of the Law of Turkmenistan shows that there are certain



Volunteer Zhainagul Karmyshakova helps children in a drawing competition organized by the National Red Crescent Society of the Kyrgyz Republic as part of the Measles Emergency Response Fund Programme.

features of regulation of the activities of foreign volunteers that could require the term “volunteer” to be specified further.

Volunteer activities

All the laws under consideration contain a reference to “volunteer activity” or “volunteering” in their title.

In the Law of Turkmenistan, the term “volunteering” is defined in the first paragraph of article 1; further on in that same article, the concept of “volunteer activity” is defined – using generalizations such as “a type of social service” and “a set of social relations” while also twice mentioning “activity”.

The concept of volunteer activity in all laws is associated with activities for the benefit of society and the state.

The Law of Turkmenistan is called “On volunteering”, other laws are called “On Volunteer Activities”. The very definition of volunteer activity in the original version of the Law of Kazakhstan dated 30 December 2016 (No. 42-VI ZRK)²³ is a verbatim match with the current version of the Law of Uzbekistan¹⁶. The definition of “volunteer” is also identical in both laws. In the Law of Kyrgyzstan, the concepts of “volunteer activity” and “volunteering” are synonymous.

The laws covering volunteer activity in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan prioritize society as the beneficiary of volunteering (socially useful activity). The Law of Tajikistan prioritizes the “sphere of improving the socioeconomic and moral situation of the state”, while also mentioning society in the definition. In the Law of Kyrgyzstan, “state interests” are also mentioned, but they appear after societal ones in the sentence order.

The Law of Turkmenistan speaks of “activities in the field of public benefit” when defining the term “volunteering”.

It should be noted that the concept of volunteer activity in all laws is textually and semantically associated with activities for the benefit of society and the state.

Volunteer organization

The concept of a volunteer organization is present in the laws of all countries – except for Tajikistan, where it is called an “attracting organization” and defined as “a non-profit legal entity that attracts individuals to carry out volunteer activities”.

Clauses dedicated to the rights and responsibilities of volunteer organizations are included in all laws in the countries of the region.

All versions of the definition in all reviewed laws indicate that the organization must be non-profit or public, as in Turkmenistan, and it must be registered in accordance with the Law of Turkmenistan “On Public Associations”. But only the Law of Uzbekistan states that it must be non-governmental. The Law of Turkmenistan also states that a volunteer organization can be “an international non-governmental non-profit organization that is registered (has a head office) on the territory of Turkmenistan”.

All versions of the laws note that a volunteer organization must be registered in accordance with the law of a given country or act in accordance with the legislation. In the Law of Tajikistan, this aspect is addressed further in article 13, which states that volunteer (attracting) organizations “cooperate with governmental authorities, local executive authorities of state power, local municipal governments of towns and villages in the implementation of measures to develop volunteer activities”.

In the Law of Kazakhstan, the concept of “volunteer organizations” does not include “religious associations, consumer cooperatives, as well as public associations in the form of political parties or trade unions” (paragraph 9, article 1, chapter 1).

The Law of Turkmenistan has a separate article (number 15), dedicated to the status of volunteer organizations. The article outlines the procedure required for an organization to be granted volunteer status; there is no charge, but an application must be completed. If the organization

files unreliable or insufficient information or documents, volunteer status may be denied.

All laws have clauses on the rights and responsibilities of volunteer organizations, but those rights and responsibilities may be worded as the “activities” or “functions” of volunteer organizations.

In most cases, activities of volunteer organizations are described using the general concepts that are given in this section: “develops and implements volunteer programmes and runs volunteer events together with the organizer of volunteer activities or independently with the involvement of volunteers” (article 14 of the Law of Uzbekistan); “acts as an organizer of volunteer activities, recruits and trains volunteers ... independently implements volunteer programmes” (paragraph 1, article 13 of the Law of Kyrgyzstan); “develops and implements volunteer programmes (projects) and runs volunteer events together with the organizer of volunteer activities, other volunteer organizations or independently with the involvement of volunteers” (article 14 of the Law of Kazakhstan); “participates in the implementation of volunteer programmes and volunteer events and implements them independently” (part 2, paragraph 1, article 14 of the Law of Turkmenistan).

As a rule, separate articles of laws are dedicated to the rights and obligations (activities) of a volunteer organization. For the most part, these articles cover all aspects of the interaction between volunteer organizations and volunteers, from recruiting volunteers and providing them with special clothing and tools, if necessary, to setting up contracts and drawing up letters of recommendation. But in some cases, individual issues are stipulated in more detail.

For example, the Law of Tajikistan places a significant emphasis on the health and safety of volunteers: “to ensure that volunteers carry out volunteer activities in safe conditions, in compliance with hygiene and sanitary rules and other necessary conditions in order to fulfil their



Said, a volunteer with the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan (NRCST), plays chess with a man in a nursing home on 29 September, the International Day of Older Persons. NRCST volunteers provide support and social services to people with disabilities, lonely elderly people and orphaned children. *Source: Nazik Islamova, 2023.*

obligations...to prevent volunteers from being exposed to harmful or life- and health-threatening works...to provide the volunteer with medical care in case of an accident or illness due to the specific nature of the volunteer activity" (article 8).

In the same article of the law, a clause was added concerning the activities of volunteer organizations: "to ensure the protection of information about the private life of consumers of volunteer activity that the volunteer uses". This obligation, which is expressly imposed by law on voluntary organizations, appears to be a reasonable measure to ensure the security of sensitive information.

A similar approach is taken in paragraph 8, article 14 of the Law of Kazakhstan: "a volunteer

The concept of “organizer of volunteer activities” is broader than “volunteer organization”; it may include governmental authorities, commercial organizations and individuals.

organization shall develop and approve a Volunteer Code of Ethics". To fully understand how recipients of volunteer assistance are protected by such codes, Kazakh volunteer organizations must be studied separately.

Organizer of volunteer activities

Laws in each of the five countries differ somewhat in their interpretation of an “organizer of volunteer activities”.

The Laws of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are broad and may include government authorities, local municipal governments and other organizations as well as individuals who attract volunteers either independently or through volunteer organizations.

According to the Law of Turkmenistan, an organizer of volunteer activities is considered to be a volunteer organization, but there are no direct prohibitions for executive authorities or individuals to be an organizer of volunteer activities.

The Law of Tajikistan contains no such concept as “organizer of volunteer activities”. The powers of the organizer of volunteer activities are prescribed in the Law of Kyrgyzstan (article 15) and the Law of Uzbekistan (article 15) and have a meaning similar to the definition of activities of a volunteer organization.

In general, the concept of “organizer of volunteer activities” is broader than “volunteer organization” because it can include government authorities, commercial organizations and individuals.

In this regard, the term “volunteer organization” could be replaced with “organizer of volunteer activities” in the part that relates to rights, responsibilities and activities in general, or it specifies the rights and responsibilities for each category separately (volunteer organization, government authority, commercial organization, an individual).

This will clarify the legal status of all organizers of volunteer activities excluding volunteer organizations.

Volunteer coordinator

The concept of “volunteer coordinator” is present in all laws on volunteer activities, with the exception of the Law of Tajikistan.

A volunteer coordinator is an individual (volunteer, member of a volunteer organization) appointed by the organizer of volunteer activities or a volunteer organization. According to the Laws of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the volunteer coordinator may also be elected by

the volunteers who are part of the volunteer group. This probably means a group of volunteers for whom this coordinator will be assigned. In accordance with article 14, part 2, paragraph 7 of the Law of Turkmenistan, a volunteer organization has the right to appoint a volunteer coordinator.

The job description of the volunteer coordinator is similar across all the laws and calls for training volunteers, distributing work among them, determining the place and scope of work for each volunteer, monitoring their work, and interacting with authorities.

The job description in the Law of Kazakhstan goes further and “provides training for volunteers in safe methods and techniques for performing work and providing first aid to victims of accidents” (paragraph 4, article 13).

Volunteer event

The concept of a “volunteer event” is found in all laws on volunteer activities, except in Tajikistan. It generally is defined as a one-time event aimed at



Under the motto “Let’s give warmth to every home”, volunteers of the Insan-Leilek public foundation provide assistance to people affected by the conflict in the Batken Region of Kyrgyzstan. Source: Nursultan Karabaev, 2023.



addressing socially important issues and executed by volunteers. Minor nuances are found in the Laws of Kazakhstan (which does not restrict the definition to a one-time event) and Kyrgyzstan (“goals, objectives, methods and ways of executing such events should not contradict the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic”).

Volunteer programme

The concept of a “volunteer programme” is present in all laws on volunteer activities, except in Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, the term “volunteer programme” is not included among the basic concepts but instead has a separate, dedicated article (article 7).

The laws in Central Asian countries offer two definitions of a volunteer programme. In Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, a volunteer programme is defined as a set of activities aimed at addressing socially important issues and implemented through the coordinated efforts of volunteers. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, a volunteer programme is defined as a set of measures aimed at addressing socially important issues “indicating activities and expected results” (paragraph 4, article 1 of the Law of Kazakhstan and article 7 of the Law of Uzbekistan). The phrase “volunteer programme (project)” used in the Law of Kazakhstan, in our opinion, more accurately defines the project-based nature of a volunteer programme.

Additionally, the Law of Uzbekistan specifies the content of the programme, its aims and objectives as the “development of volunteer activities,” the “development of a system for stimulating volunteer activity of individuals and volunteer organizations,” etc.

Recipient of volunteer assistance

Neither Kazakhstan nor Uzbekistan mentions the recipients of volunteer assistance in their laws.

The law in Kyrgyzstan allows recipients of volunteer assistance to directly enter into

contracts with volunteers (see the section “Volunteer Agreement” of this study). While, for example, in the Law of Turkmenistan they are included in the list of subjects of law (article 3).

The Law of Tajikistan defines a recipient of volunteer assistance as a “consumer of volunteer activity” (paragraph 1, article 9), which appears to be a consistent linguistic structure”, but it is not a commonly used phrase. As we mentioned earlier, the Law of Tajikistan begins with the definition of the concept of “volunteer activity”.

At the same time, any definition of the beneficiary of volunteer activity must include the direct recipient as well as the state, society and volunteers themselves. Consequently, a recipient of volunteer assistance generally is defined as an individual or legal entity (social group, society as a whole) who benefits from volunteering activities.

Only in Turkmenistan does the law (article 16) spell out in sufficient detail the rights and obligations of the recipients of volunteer assistance. In particular, article 16 states that the recipient of volunteer assistance has the right to “respectful and humane treatment on the part of volunteers and volunteer organizations”, “choice of volunteers and volunteer organizations”, “ways of providing volunteer assistance”, and “compliance with the legal regime of information with restricted access”. The recipient’s responsibilities include providing volunteers with full and accurate information and compensation for direct losses caused by a refusal to receive volunteer assistance. In addition, the recipient of volunteer assistance is obliged “not to create additional risks to the life and health of volunteers during the provision of volunteer assistance”.

Except in Turkmenistan, the concept of “recipient of volunteer assistance” has not been thoroughly developed in the laws covering volunteer activities. Thus, it is not a legal matter in the field of volunteer activities.

Foreign volunteer and international volunteering

Only the laws of Turkmenistan include the concept of a “foreign volunteer”, where the term is defined as a volunteer who is a foreign citizen (or stateless person) staying in Turkmenistan for a continuous period of time (no more than 12 months) for the purpose of carrying out volunteer activities (part 7, article 1 of the Law of Turkmenistan). Such a volunteer must carry out their activities under a volunteering agreement with a volunteer organization in Turkmenistan. Article 7 (part 2) and article 25 (parts 5, 6) of the above law determine aspects of the activities of foreign volunteers on the territory of Turkmenistan.

The Law of Turkmenistan contains a separate article dedicated to international volunteering that distinguishes two concepts – a foreign volunteer (as defined above) and a participant in the international volunteer programme (that is, a citizen of Turkmenistan carrying out volunteer activities abroad).

The article “International volunteer activities” is included in the Law of Tajikistan, but it consists of only one sentence and does not put foreign volunteers into a separate category (article 16).

In the Laws of Kazakhstan (paragraph 2, article 3), Kyrgyzstan (article 6), Tajikistan (article 16), Turkmenistan (part 2, article 2) and Uzbekistan (article 2), there are references to international treaties that regulate volunteer activities on an equal basis (Kyrgyzstan) or as a priority (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan). The wording regarding the State’s participation in such treaties varies; for example, the Law of Kazakhstan talks about a ratified international treaty, whereas the Law of Tajikistan mentions recognized international legal acts.

Volunteer group

The concept of “volunteer group” is present in the Laws of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where

It is beneficial that each law on volunteer activity would include a list of subjects of relations in the field of volunteering activity.

it is defined as a voluntary group of individuals (a voluntary unregistered community of individuals) formed for the purpose of jointly carrying out volunteer activities. A group of volunteers is subject to the provisions of the law on volunteer activities. The Law of Uzbekistan limits the number of group members to 10 people.

Associations and unions of volunteer organizations

The concept of “association of volunteer organizations” is found only in the Law of Kyrgyzstan (article 14); association members “retain their independence and the rights of a legal entity,” and the association itself “is not responsible for the obligations of its members”. The law determines that associations can be created by volunteer organizations to “expand their capabilities in realizing their goals”.

Corporate volunteering

Only Kazakhstan recognizes “corporate volunteering” in its laws. There was no such concept in the original version of the law²³ but a later version defined corporate volunteering.

The law considers corporate volunteering as “the collective voluntary participation of an organization’s employees in various volunteer programmes (projects) and volunteer events with the support of their organization”. If an

A volunteer's personal record book is needed to confirm the activities of an individual acting as a volunteer and to record volunteering activities.

organization pursues corporate volunteering, it draws up internal documents – in accordance with the Law of Kazakhstan – that guide the implementation of volunteer activities.

Subjects of volunteer activities

A directly prescribed list of legal subjects in the field of volunteer activities, formulated in a separate article, is present in the laws of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. In Kyrgyzstan, recipients of volunteer assistance are not included in this list. Such a list, with the mandatory inclusion of recipients of volunteer assistance should, ideally, be contained in every law on volunteer activities. This would standardize who is considered the subject of legal relations.

Volunteering Information Network

The Volunteering Information Network is mentioned only in the Law of Turkmenistan (point 13, article 1). In this paragraph, it is only defined as an open information resource on the Internet that provides “mechanisms for promoting specific proposals and programmes to facilitate volunteer activities”. There may be more detailed by-laws in Turkmenistan regulating this issue, but there are no references to them in the law itself.

Media coverage

In the Law of Uzbekistan, a single sentence in article 20, “Media coverage of volunteer activities”, notes that volunteer activities “can be covered in the media, on the Internet”. The practical meaning of such an article, in contrast to the provision on the volunteering information network, is not

very clear. But perhaps even this single sentence encourages the media to highlight the activities of volunteers in the country.

Documenting volunteering

Volunteer personal book and volunteer ID

The concept of a “volunteer personal book (volunteer book)” is present in the laws of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, specific articles are dedicated to the volunteer's personal record book, article 11 and article 10 respectively. While in Kyrgyzstan a volunteer's personal book is issued voluntarily, Turkmenistan regards it as a controlled form “issued by the authorized executive body in the field of volunteering” and “at the request of the volunteer” (parts 2–3, article 10 of the Law of Turkmenistan). In the Law of Tajikistan, a volunteer's personal book is also called an official document.

A volunteer's personal record book is needed to confirm and record the activities of an individual acting as a volunteer. Turkmenistan references this topic in the greatest detail.

Unlike the laws of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, where a volunteer's personal book certifies their identity and records their volunteer activities, the Law of Tajikistan has the concept of a “volunteer ID” – a volunteer's official ID document.



(название организации, выдавшей книжку)

**ЛИЧНАЯ КНИЖКА
ДОБРОВОЛЬЦА (ВОЛОНТЁРА)**

Фамилия _____

Имя _____

Отчество _____

Дата рождения _____

Подпись волонтера _____

№ книжки (ID) _____

Дата выдачи _____

Руководитель организации _____

подпись

Ф.И.О. руководителя

И.П.

Сведения о добровольческой (волонтерской) деятельности

№	Дата	Название мероприятия, функция

Personal book of a volunteer at the NGO *Yenme* in Turkmenistan.

A volunteering agreement is an agreement on volunteer activities between a volunteer and a volunteer organization.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan make no mention of such documents in their laws.

Volunteering agreement

The concept of a “volunteering agreement” is present in all laws except those of Kazakhstan. In Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, specific articles are dedicated to it – article 9, article 5 and article 9, respectively. In the Law of Uzbekistan, the volunteering agreement is regulated by two articles – article 16, “Volunteering Agreement,” and article 17, “Content of the volunteering agreement”.

In all cases, a volunteering agreement is described as an agreement (written, concluded in the form of a civil contract) between a volunteer and a volunteer organization (attracting organization, organizer of volunteer activities) regarding volunteer activities. According to the Law of

Kyrgyzstan, a volunteer agreement can be entered into directly with the recipient of volunteer assistance.

The laws determine that agreements contain a description of the activities that the volunteer will carry out, their time frame, the rights and obligations of the parties, the parties’ liability for damage and other aspects typical of civil contracts.

The laws of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan specifically emphasize that it is prohibited to conclude an imaginary volunteering agreement in order to avoid entering into an individual employment contract or a civil contract for the provision of paid services.

Key documents used when working with volunteers

The concept of “key documents used when working with volunteers” is present only in the Law of Turkmenistan, where it is highlighted in article 8. The article contains a list of these documents: a volunteering agreement; a volunteer’s personal book; a letter of recommendation; and logs of volunteers’ personal data. No other clarifications are provided for this article.

The letter of recommendation and volunteers' personal data logs are considered in detail only in the Law of Turkmenistan, which will be discussed below.

Letter of recommendation

Article 11 of the Law of Turkmenistan “Letter of recommendation” states that this document is issued at the request of a volunteer by the head of a volunteer organization. A brief description of the typical content of a letter of recommendation is provided. It is noted that volunteer activity confirmed by a letter of recommendation “can be perceived by the employer as work experience in a certain field of activity, if the specified work experience is a selection criterion for employment”.

Volunteers' personal data logs

A description of the logbooks is contained in article 12 of the Law of Turkmenistan. A volunteer organization is required to keep several logs of personal data of volunteers including a log of volunteers, a log of volunteer agreements, a log of personal record books of volunteers and a log of letters of recommendation.

The law does not provide any details about the keeping of these logs, but it does say that they shall be “numbered in ascending order, with the year of the entries indicated on the cover, and they shall be kept in a secure location”. Volunteers' data is processed in accordance with the legislation of Turkmenistan in the field of personal data protection.

Characteristics of volunteering

Goals of volunteering activity

The goals are stipulated in all laws on volunteer activities. But in the Law of Tajikistan (article 1), they are worded as “areas of volunteering activity”. The goals usually include providing assistance to individuals, legal entities and society as a whole, protecting the health of citizens and protecting the environment. Important goals also include shaping the civil position, self-organization and a sense of social responsibility, solidarity, mutual assistance and kindness in society.

The Law of Turkmenistan contains a paragraph (part 1, paragraph 4, article 4) that explains the goal of volunteer activity as “providing an opportunity for people to express themselves, realize their potential and receive well-deserved recognition through their involvement in social activity”. This goal seems quite important, although similar phrases have not been found in other laws.

Objectives of volunteering activity

The “objectives of volunteering activity” concept is present in all laws – with the exception of Tajikistan.

The priority of the objectives is noteworthy. Assistance to society in solving socially important problems tops the list of priorities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan begin with assistance to the state.

Depending on the specific law, the list of objectives may include developing and supporting civil initiatives (Kazakhstan); helping people learn basic life safety skills, first aid skills, key principles of environmental protection and social work (Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan); providing professional career guidance and developing professional skills (Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan); developing healthy lifestyle habits among the population, instilling a sense of patriotism (Uzbekistan); and training a





A UNICEF volunteer from Kyrgyzstan helps children by creating a safe and inclusive space for them.
 Source: Akylai Seitbekova, 2023.

reserve personnel of volunteers (across the board).

For the most part, the objectives are described in a similar way and are aimed at helping to resolve social issues. Thus, in terms of objectives, the laws of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan repeat each other verbatim, with the exception of part 2, paragraph 7, article 4 of the Law of Turkmenistan, which added “the dissemination of ideas and principles of social service among the country’s population”.

The Law of Tajikistan focuses exclusively on the objectives of the law itself, so comparison with other laws in this part is not entirely correct.

Principles of volunteering

The principles of volunteering are described in all laws, in specific articles (article 5 of the Law of Kazakhstan; article 4 of the Law of Kyrgyzstan; article 4 of the Law of Tajikistan; article 5 of the Law of Turkmenistan; and article 5 of the Law of Uzbekistan). The Law of Turkmenistan contains the highest number of principles (12), whereas the laws of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have the shortest lists (5).

In the Law of Uzbekistan the principles of volunteering are allocated a specific article; however they are summarized in one sentence, “Volunteer activities are based on the principles of legality, humanity, equality, free will and gratuitousness.”

The basic principles for all laws are free will, equality (equity) and the legality of volunteer activities. Less commonly added are humanity, respect for human rights and freedoms, security and openness (*glasnost*).

The Law of Kazakhstan states in a specific paragraph that volunteer activities “do not replace the activities of governmental bodies and local municipal governments in exercising their powers” (paragraph 2, article 5).

A detailed comparative analysis of the principles of volunteer activity is presented in appendix B.

Forms and types of volunteering activities

All laws, except in Tajikistan where this issue is not covered, contain articles on the forms and types of volunteering activities. Usually they are combined into one article, but in the Law of Turkmenistan, types of volunteering activities are described in article 6, and the forms are described in article 7 (“Carrying out volunteering activities”).

Forms of volunteering activities include volunteering as an individual, as part of a group, and as part of an organization (volunteer or some



The list of legalized types of volunteering allows volunteer organizers to take a more flexible approach to planning activities.

The informal movement “Students of Kyrgyzstan for a Green Economy” organized a summer school to engage young volunteers in interactive discussions and collaborative group work on the topic of climate change. In the photo, summer camp participants study mountain plants together with climatologist Zoya Kretova at the Tien Shan Science Center.

Source: Elmira Dzhumalieva, 2023.

other type). The Law of Kazakhstan has been supplemented with additional forms of corporate volunteering (paragraph 2.1, article 6).

Kyrgyzstan stipulates the highest number of types of volunteering activities (25) in its law (paragraph 2, article 7). However, at the end of the list in each law in five countries there is a remark that other types of volunteering activity are acceptable where not prohibited by national legislation. Therefore, the lists of its types can be considered open.

The main types of volunteering activities that are detailed include providing assistance to people affected by emergency situations; offering social care for the elderly and people with disabilities; participating in environmental protection initiatives; promoting the development of education, science, culture and sports; assisting in finding missing persons; planting trees; and looking after monuments and places of burial.

There are also references to more specific types of activities: “participation in civil defence activities” (point 21, paragraph 2, article 7 of the Law of

Kyrgyzstan); “participation in archaeological, ethnographic and other scientific expeditions, restoration and repair work” (point 10, paragraph 2, article 7 of the Law of Kyrgyzstan and point 12, article 6 of the Law of Turkmenistan). Among the types of volunteer activities, caring for stray animals is mentioned only in the Law of Turkmenistan (paragraph 20, article 6).

The list of types of volunteer activities in the Law of Uzbekistan reveals an atypical wording, “providing volunteer assistance to the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan, other military departments, law enforcement agencies, local government authorities during a special period and legal regimes of a state of emergency” (article 6).

Having a list of types of volunteer activities set in law is primarily important for coordinated volunteering. It allows organizers of volunteer activities (organizations) to take a more flexible approach to planning their activities in various areas of volunteering. As a result, this expands the scope of volunteer activity, making it more diverse and versatile.

Restrictions in volunteering

There are few clearly defined restrictions in the laws on volunteer activities. They are usually distributed under various headings.

Thus, according to the Law of Kazakhstan, volunteering activities cannot aim “to support political parties and religious associations,” and volunteering activities “pursuing terrorism, extremism and separatism in any forms and manifestations” are prohibited (paragraphs 3–4, article 4). Here, evidently, it meant “pursuing for its own purposes”. In addition, Kazakhstan prohibits the creation of volunteer organizations that resemble “paramilitary organizations that have a paramilitary structure, uniform, special insignia, anthems, flags, pennants, special conditions of internal order and management, weapons, including imitation ones” (paragraph 5, article 4).

Kyrgyzstan prohibits volunteering activities aimed at supporting political parties or religious organizations. In addition, “commercial promotion of goods, works, services, commercial intermediation in order to achieve social or material benefits” through volunteer activities is prohibited (paragraph 2, article 4). The creation of volunteer organizations similar to paramilitary forces is also prohibited by the Law of Kyrgyzstan (paragraph 2, article 4). Separately, the Law of Kyrgyzstan indicates the requirement to recruit volunteers “on the basis of equal opportunities and without discrimination” (paragraph 6, article 4). In addition, volunteering activities are not regulated by the labour laws of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.

According to the Law of Turkmenistan, volunteering activities “cannot replace conscript military service or paid work,” and the use of volunteers “in order to prevent a shortage of workers in production (service)” is not allowed (paragraph 10, article 7). In general, this law does not allow volunteering for commercial purposes, and a person cannot engage in volunteering activity at their workplace. There is no mention

of the ban on paramilitary forces in the Law of Turkmenistan.

The laws of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan do not contain any express prohibitions on volunteer activities, taking into account the requirement to follow the letter of the law.

Rights and responsibilities of volunteers

Volunteers' rights

The rights of volunteers are specified in all laws on volunteer activities. In the laws of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, rights and responsibilities are included in separate articles: article 10, article 7 and article 13, respectively. In the Laws of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, they are part of a general article “Volunteer (Volunteer activities)” (article 12 in both laws).

The first point in all laws, except the Law of Tajikistan, is the right to freely choose one’s participation in volunteer activities (in the Law of Turkmenistan, it is worded as “measures and scope of one’s participation”).

The first paragraph of the Law of Tajikistan states that a volunteer has the right to “voluntarily choose the field and type of their activity”. This wording appears ambiguous where volunteers’ rights are concerned; it can be interpreted as an inability to avoid volunteering activities altogether and permission to choose only the type of activity to engage in.

The second clause in all laws (except for Tajikistan) is the right of a volunteer to freely terminate their activities. In the Law of Tajikistan, this is the last clause in the rights of volunteers and does not contain the word “free”; it states that a volunteer has the right “to terminate activities by notifying the head of the attracting organization in writing in accordance with the requirements of part 4 of article 6 of this Law”; this paragraph refers to the termination of a volunteering contract.

All laws, without exception, stipulate the right of a volunteer to receive reliable information about volunteering activities, volunteer organizations, etc. All laws stipulate a volunteer's right to receive protective clothing and reimbursement of expenses for travel, accommodation, food, purchase of necessary personal protective equipment, tools and other expenses. But the Law of Tajikistan words this as the right to demand compensation for expenses "related to the implementation of certain types of volunteer activities as set out in the contract on volunteering activities" (article 7).

Among other rights of volunteers, they also can access the following :

- life and health insurance (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan);
- organizations of education, healthcare, social protection, etc. for volunteering activities (Kazakhstan);
- a preferential process in a competition for educational grants and to enrol in educational institutions under governmental grants (Kazakhstan);
- time off (Turkmenistan);
- free use of public transport, with the exception of taxis (Tajikistan).

In general, there are distinct sets of basic rights (a free choice of participation in volunteering activities and its termination, the right to information, the right to compensation) and additional rights. Each country interprets the additional rights in its own way, and there are a variety of approaches.

Volunteer responsibilities

The first point in the section on volunteers' responsibilities in all laws (except for the Law of Tajikistan) is the obligation to conscientiously (and in a timely manner – the Law of Turkmenistan)

carry out tasks of the volunteer organization (volunteer coordinator).

In the Law of Tajikistan, the first paragraph of responsibilities is the functioning "within the framework of the rules for registration of interested persons to engage in volunteer activities in the Republic of Tajikistan". The implementation of assigned tasks is mentioned in the second paragraph, does not contain the word "in good faith", and is determined by contractual obligations.

Common requirements for volunteers include:

- maintain confidentiality of information
- prohibit the transfer of their duties to other persons
- manage carefully the material resources and equipment

Some of the specific responsibilities include: "not to interfere with the exercise of powers of officials of state authorities and local governments" (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan); "in cases specified in the volunteer agreement, to undergo a medical examination and provide a certificate of health" (Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan); "to master the knowledge, skills and abilities of conducting volunteer activities in the chosen area" (Tajikistan); "not to allow actions and deeds that could negatively affect their reputation" (Turkmenistan).

In general, duties of volunteers contain fewer clauses than rights, and in most cases appear to be quite moderate requirements.

Also, the Laws of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan mention that a volunteer may have (exercise) other rights and bear other responsibilities in accordance with the law.

Conditions for participation in volunteer activities

Age is the only condition for participation in volunteer activities that is more or less clearly

Table 2. Age requirements for volunteering

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Independently and without restrictions	> 18	> 18*	> 16*	> 18*	> 18*
Under additional conditions	14–18	14–18	no	no	16–18
Restrictions on certain types of activities	14–18	no	no	no	16–18
Parental consent required	14–18	14–18	no	< 18	no
Lower limit	14	14	no	no	16

*agreement signed (mandatory when volunteering more than 20 hours per month)

defined in all laws (see table 2).

The age for independent participation in volunteer activities in Tajikistan starts at 16 (paragraph 3, article 5), whereas in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan it starts at 18.

Individuals under 18 years of age can carry out volunteer activities on the basis of the consent of their legal representatives in Kazakhstan (from 14 years of age), Kyrgyzstan (from 14 years of age), Turkmenistan (lower age limit not specified) and Uzbekistan (from 16 years of age).

The Law of Kazakhstan states that volunteers who have not reached the age of adulthood cannot be involved in providing assistance to persons affected by natural disasters and catastrophes, social conflicts, accidents, and to those with a criminal record. Minors also cannot engage in heavy physical work and work in hazardous or dangerous conditions.

The Law of Uzbekistan states that only adult volunteers are allowed to carry out work to prevent

and eliminate the consequences of emergency situations. Persons under 18 years of age may carry out volunteer activities that “do not cause harm to their health and emotional development and do not disrupt their schooling” (article 12).

Government regulation of volunteering

Principles of public policy

National policy principles in the field of volunteer activities are directly stipulated only in the Law of Turkmenistan (article 17). The article consists of two parts: on the full promotion and support by the state of volunteer activities at all levels as a priority; and on the implementation by the state of a policy to support volunteer activities in compliance with the basic principles of this activity.

Measures to support volunteering

In most laws, support measures for volunteer activities are mentioned in several articles, but in the Law of Kazakhstan, they are described in

Compensation for volunteers' expenses is a way to support volunteering activities at the expense of individuals and legal entities, including volunteer organizations.

one article, "Support and financial provision for volunteer activities" (article 17).

In Turkmenistan, the measures that expressly indicate the direct involvement of the state in volunteer activities are divided into three articles in two chapters: article 18, "State measures to support volunteering"; article 19, "Measures for public recognition of volunteering"; and article 23, "Reimbursement of expenses associated with volunteer activities". Also, article 17 of the Law of Turkmenistan "On Volunteering" establishes that "the state fully promotes and supports volunteer activities at all levels as a priority...the state implements a policy of supporting volunteer activities, which is developed and implemented in compliance with the basic principles of volunteer activities...".

In the Law of Kyrgyzstan, measures to support volunteering are listed in one chapter, which contains several articles: "Measures to encourage volunteering" (article 19); "Support for volunteer activities" (article 20); "Funding and expenses for volunteer activities" (article 21).

A specific measure to support volunteer activities is compensation for volunteers' expenses. However, the laws indicate that funding for volunteer activities is carried out at the expense of individuals and legal entities (including volunteer organizations).

Only in Kazakhstan does the law mention financial support from the state for volunteering. The law notes, "the state provides support to volunteer

organizations in the form of providing communal property for trust management without the right of subsequent redemption on preferential terms" (paragraph 4, article 17).

Otherwise, issues of supporting volunteer activities are most often described in general phrases. But all laws contain a mention that participants in volunteer activities can be given state awards for merit. A number of laws mention various events aimed at recognizing the contributions made by volunteers.

In general, measures to support volunteerism are less specific on the subject of the government's obligations, despite the fact that they are sometimes mentioned in fairly short laws. In contrast, responsibilities of volunteers are substantially more detailed; they fit into several paragraphs and do not have a separate article.

Actually, laws on volunteer activities do not prohibit the state from funding or other material incentives for organizing volunteer activities. It may be possible to find such measures in specific financial terms in other national laws and regulations.

Measures for public recognition of volunteering

Public recognition in the form of a separate article is present only in the Law of Turkmenistan (article 19), which states that individuals and legal entities can receive awards for merits in the field of volunteer activities in accordance with the legislation of Turkmenistan. The same provision is made in the laws of all other countries (see "Measures to support volunteering"), where it is not included in a separate category of measures of public recognition.

Volunteer organizations of Turkmenistan, according to the law, independently determine a system for rewarding volunteers, which may include letters of gratitude, memorable gifts, payment for training courses, prizes from sponsors, etc. (paragraph 3, article 19).



During the “No to Drugs” campaign, volunteers raise awareness about consequences of drug use by distributing leaflets and hanging posters. In the photo, a volunteer attaches a flyer to a board on a residential building in Kokshetau, Kazakhstan.

Source: Medet Sharip, 2024.

Moreover, the authorized executive body of Turkmenistan in the field of volunteering joins with volunteer organizations to hold annual events to promote volunteering, recruit volunteers and recognize merit in the field of volunteering (paragraph 2, article 19).

Powers allocated to the highest bodies of state authority

All laws contain articles dedicated to the powers or mandate of the Government (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan) or the Cabinet of Ministers (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) in the area of volunteering. The first mandate in each of the laws is the implementation (development, determination) of state policy in the field of volunteer activities.

According to the Law of Kazakhstan, the Government develops national policy in the field of volunteer activities (article 7). The policy is

The powers of state authorities and local governments are allocated differently in various laws on volunteering.

implemented by the central executive bodies of the Republic (article 8) and the authorized body in the field of volunteer activities (article 9). In the Law of Kyrgyzstan, the Government works with an authorized state body in the field of volunteer activities in the development and implementation of national policy (article 16 and article 17). The implementation of national policy in the Law of Turkmenistan is fully transferred to an authorized body (article 21). In Uzbekistan, local government bodies implement national policy regarding volunteer activities (article 10).

Moreover, the Government is engaged in:

- approval of programmes (strategies, concepts) for the implementation and development of volunteer activities
- determination of the authorized state body in the field of volunteer activities
- approval of regulations governing volunteer activities

According to the Law of Uzbekistan, the Government also promotes “the development of international cooperation and the exchange of experience in the field of volunteer activities” (article 9).

In addition, all laws have a clause that creates the opportunity for the government to exercise other powers (without decoding) in accordance with national legislation.



In December 2023, volunteers of the National Red Crescent Society in Kyrgyzstan took part in a tree planting program. Approximately 850 seedlings were planted on the territory of the municipal enterprise “Bishkek Sanitary Landfill”. *Source: Amantay Baimbetov, 2023.*

Powers of other state bodies and local governments

Regarding the mandate of other state authorities, as well as local governments, it should be noted that in each of the laws, their powers are distributed differently, probably depending on national legal norms regulating the activities of the executive power at different levels.

Thus, in the Law of Kazakhstan, the mandates between them are distributed at three levels: central executive bodies (article 8); regional executive bodies, cities of republican significance and capital cities, districts, cities of regional significance (article 10); and local government

bodies (article 11).

A similar division is observed in the Law of Uzbekistan, but instead of local governmental bodies, there is the more expansive category, “Local government bodies, non-governmental non-profit organizations and individuals” (article 11). However, minimum competencies have been defined for this category – they have the right to participate in volunteer activities and support mass volunteer events.

Another feature of the Law of Kazakhstan is that almost all the powers are transferred to the central executive bodies of the Republic.

In the legislation of Kyrgyzstan, the powers of executive authorities and local government bodies are combined into one article (article 18); the same applies to the Laws of Turkmenistan (article 22) and Tajikistan (article 12).

In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, these powers are not stipulated in detail – only that these bodies are implementing measures to develop volunteer activities within the limits of their powers and in the manner established by national legislation.

The mandates authorizing these bodies are detailed in the Law of Turkmenistan. These bodies help implement state policy by supporting and promoting volunteer activities; developing programmes for various agencies; supporting volunteers and volunteer organizations; implementing educational programmes for volunteers; maintaining departmental registers; and evaluating local outcomes of volunteer activities.

To summarize, the mandate to implement policies on volunteering are usually transferred from the national level of government to lower levels of executive power at the local level.

Authorized body in the field of volunteer activities

All laws on volunteer activities note that a specific Government body has been authorized to oversee volunteer activities.

According to the Law of Kazakhstan, it is “the central executive body exercising leadership and intersectoral coordination in the field of volunteer activities”. And the Law of Tajikistan speaks of a central executive body of state power that implements state policy on volunteer activities and their development.

At the same time, in the Law of Kazakhstan, the first paragraph in the article on the competence of the authorized body in the field of volunteer activities (article 9) states that it “forms and

Some other laws focusing on youth policy, charity and philanthropy also regulate volunteer activities.

implements state policy in the field of volunteer activities”. This wording largely coincides with the definition given in the Law of Tajikistan.

In Uzbekistan, the powers of the state body in the field of volunteer activities are vested in the Agency for Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Youth Policy and Sports (article 9-1). In the previous edition dated 2 December 2019 (No. ZRU-58517), a specially authorized body was not mentioned; article 9-1 was introduced by the Law of Uzbekistan dated 18 August 2023 (No. ZRU-863).

These authorized bodies assist with a number of tasks including organizing volunteer activities, processing and summarizing information on volunteer activities, and developing draft programmes for the implementation and development of volunteer activities.

In addition, the authorized body of Tajikistan establishes the National Council and local councils for the development of volunteer activities, as well as organizes and coordinates international cooperation in the field of volunteer activities (article 11).

Record keeping for volunteer activities

All laws except those in Kyrgyzstan address keeping records of volunteer activities.

Kazakhstan clearly defines the records register as “a data register containing information about volunteers, groups of volunteers, volunteer organizations, coordinators and organizers of volunteer activities, volunteer programmes (projects), volunteer events, the place and

time of their holding, requirements for their conduct” (paragraph 7, article 1). The authorized body is responsible for maintaining the register (paragraph 3, article 9).

In the Law of Tajikistan, references to the register are found, but the authorized body is also responsible for recording the activities of volunteers. Therefore, a register likely exists, even if it is not spelled out in law.

In Turkmenistan, a state register of volunteers is maintained. In Uzbekistan, the Cabinet of Ministers determines how to organize the registration of volunteer activities, while the registration itself is a voluntary notification.

Accountability for law violations

All laws on volunteering contain an article noting that violating legislation on volunteering will result in liability in accordance with state laws. In Kazakhstan, it is article 18; in Kyrgyzstan, article 22; in Tajikistan, article 17; in Turkmenistan, article 26; and in Uzbekistan, article 22.

Results of the analysis

Every national law on volunteer activities in the Central Asian countries may contain wording that is both good and clear and other wording that requires clarification. It would not be useful to single out either the best or worst of the laws considered.

Other laws regulating the field of volunteering

Prior to the laws dedicated solely to volunteering, other sectoral laws and policies provided below have contained parts which were dedicated to volunteering. The following is the list of sectoral laws and policies that touch upon volunteering in one way or the other:

- charity, patronage, philanthropy
- governmental commissioning of social services
- youth policy
- non-profit, non-governmental organizations
- public associations
- social partnership
- social entrepreneurship

Thus, on 16 January 2001, Law No. 142 on non-profit organizations was adopted in Kazakhstan, where legislators referenced volunteer activities for the first time. The very concept of volunteering was not yet written in the law. However, the objectives of NPOs included charitable activities and activities aimed at achieving social goals, including volunteering.

In another Law of Kazakhstan dated 9 February 2015 (No. 285-V) “On State Youth Policy,”²² article 4 suggests that national youth policy include the development of volunteer activities for young people as a main focus. Article 29 of this law defines youth volunteer activities:

1. Volunteer activities of young people are voluntary, socially useful activities carried out free-of-charge in the interests of individuals and legal entities.



2. Volunteer activities of young people cannot be aimed at supporting political parties and religious associations.

After amendments dated 26 December 2022, No. 168-VII of the above law, article 29 was integrated into the Law of Kazakhstan “On Volunteer Activities” with the following addition: “measures to support youth volunteer activities are carried out in accordance with article 17 of the relevant law”.

In the same vein, article 11 in the Law of Turkmenistan “On State Youth Policy” dated 1 September 2022, says that local executive authorities and local governments will support young citizens engaged in volunteer activities.

The Law of Uzbekistan dated 14 September 2016 (No. ZRU-406) “On National Youth Policy,” establishes norms and rules regarding state youth policy; articles 7,⁷¹ and 8 direct the Cabinet of Ministers, the Agency for Youth Affairs, and government bodies to work with local non-governmental non-profit organizations, local governments and other civil society institutions to implement the national youth policy. Article 23 of this law on guaranteeing the social protection of young people describes volunteering as the voluntary work of students in their free time, outside of their studies; this work activity is allowed if there is a contract in accordance with labour or civil legislation.

Charity laws provide another source of support and regulation for volunteering. For example, the Law of Uzbekistan dated 2 May 2007 (No. ZRU-96) in article 3 on the basic concepts of charity mentions volunteers as individuals who carry out charitable activities in the form of gratuitous work, provision of services in the interests of a beneficiary or a charitable organization.

The Law of Tajikistan “On Charitable Activities”, as amended on 2 January 2018 (No. 1491) and 24 December 2022 (No. 1940), establishes the organizational and legal framework for

The development of modern volunteering practices has laid a solid foundation for the growth of volunteering in Central Asia as a social institution.

regulating charitable activities. According to the law, volunteers are individuals who carry out charitable activities in the form of unpaid labour in the interests of a beneficiary, including in the interests of a charitable organization. In this case, a charitable organization can directly pay the expenses of volunteers associated with their activities in this organization (travel expenses, transportation costs, etc.). This is fully consistent with the modern understanding of the organization of volunteer activities by non-profit organizations.

Similarly, the Law of the Kyrgyzstan “On Patronage and Charitable Activities” as amended on 10 May 2017, (No. 79) includes a description of volunteer activities. According to article 1 of this law, “charitable activities are the implementation by citizens and legal entities of voluntary activities for the unpaid (free-of-charge or on preferential terms) transfer of property to citizens or legal entities, including funds, unpaid work, provision of services, provision of other support”. In addition, according to article 9 of this law, volunteer work can be considered a property of a charitable organization. However, after the adoption of the relevant law in Kyrgyzstan, a regulatory norm appeared that clearly distinguished the concepts of volunteer and charitable activities. Therefore, paragraph 3, article 8 of the Law “On Volunteer Activities” of 31 March 2023, No. 77, states: “Volunteer activities differ from charitable activities because they do not entail any material or monetary reward.” Thus, currently, volunteer and charitable activities are separated from each

The development of practical governmental measures to support volunteering will help increase the volunteers' contribution to the achievement of the SDGs.

other and are regulated by two separate laws in Kyrgyzstan.

In the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 4 August 2023 (No. 157) "On Young People"²⁴, volunteering is one of the main activities of the authorized state body in the field of youth policy, and youth volunteering is recognized as a way in which the state can support young people as they develop their skills and reach their potential.

The Law of Kazakhstan dated 15 November 2015 (No. 402-V) "On Charity" with amendments and additions as of 1 July 2023²⁵ does not directly address the topic of volunteering, but it introduces the concept of a charity volunteer. They must be an individual over 18 years of age, with the exception of government employees, who has the right to raise funds in favour of a charitable organization or other person receiving charitable assistance in order to solve social issues.

Conclusions to the chapter

Modern volunteering practices in Central Asia have been built upon the region's historical forms of mutual assistance. After the 1990s, volunteering developed as a social institution; the legal and regulatory framework in support of volunteering that all five countries have today is evidence of that shift.

In addition to the specialized and other laws detailed in this report, the legislation on volunteer activities in the region encompasses additional regulations that were not discussed in detail. In general, laws and regulations create a solid basis for further development of volunteer practices of the population, organizations and initiative groups in the Central Asian states.

At the same time, legislation on volunteering is developing unevenly across the region. Some measures by government officials to support volunteering deserve more attention in order to be consolidated into practice. The issues that can benefit from clarifying details include how authorities in the field can assist in creating an infrastructure for volunteer activities; measures of material and non-material incentives for volunteers; and increasing the prestige of volunteer activities in society. Practical solutions to these issues will lead to a strengthening of the contribution of volunteers in the achievement of the SDGs.



CHAPTER 2

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





CHAPTER 2

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

The United Nations recognizes that integrating volunteerism into national strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda is one of the keys to achieving the SDGs²⁶. To understand the overall progress towards the SDGs, it is useful to assess the extent to which volunteering is currently integrated into the 2030 Agenda. This will be of interest to all stakeholders involved – the United Nations, governments, civil society organizations and volunteers.

Such an assessment will help to reveal the extent to which people are participating in this process and how committed they are both to offering innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs and to involving as many people as possible in this process.

However, assessing or measuring the degree of integration of volunteer activities into the implementation of the SDGs in quantitative terms, as well as specifying the contribution of volunteering to the achievement of specific national development goals, is challenging; systematic data collection and comparative statistics on volunteering is lacking.

Nevertheless, the diversity of volunteer practices in the region makes it possible to discuss qualitative data, assess the overall contribution of volunteer activities in specific areas of the SDGs, and identify existing ways to achieve the Goals.

National policies and strategies for SDG implementation and volunteering

From the early days of independence, the countries of Central Asia have been working systemically on the path to sustainable development. As a result of the progress achieved, 193 United Nations Member States – including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – reaffirmed their commitment to the SDGs and approved the 2030 Agenda by adopting a corresponding resolution at the seventieth United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015²⁷.

In all countries of the region, achieving the SDGs is included in governmental policy priorities. Each country has adopted its own documents, differing in form and content (such as long-term strategies and development programmes), that lay out a path towards achieving the SDGs and integrating and including them in public policy. Below are illustrative examples.

Since 2020, **Kazakhstan** has adopted an annual Action Plan for the Implementation of the SDGs and a framework for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs. Since 2021, this activity has been carried out by the SDG Monitoring Committee, a consultative and advisory body under the Ministry of National Economy. The Ministry, in turn, is a working body of the Coordination Council for SDGs, created on 11 October 2022 by resolution No.



Khanum Rakhmanova participated in cleaning the shores of Lake Geokdepe in Turkmenistan during the “Green Games” organized by the European Union Delegation, the Turkmenistan Nature Conservation Society and the local mountaineering club. *Source: Isabel Balasanova, 2024.*

167-r²⁸ of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan on 11 October 2022.

The United Nations and the Government continually monitor the process of implementing and achieving the SDGs. To effectively achieve the SDGs, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators compiled a list containing 205 global and 75 national indicators.

Kyrgyzstan adopted the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018–2040²⁹, the development programme of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018–2022 “Unity, Trust, Creation”³⁰, and the National Development Programme of the Kyrgyz Republic until 2026³¹. The “Unity, Trust, Creation” programme calls for strengthening volunteering at the local and national levels. Volunteering is seen as a shared value uniting people and as a basic behavioural norm, as is civic

The achievement of the SDGs is included in the government policy priorities of all countries of the region.

consciousness and engagement, the institute of family, and traditions of good neighbourliness and mutual assistance. The National Development Strategy indicates support for the volunteer movement, and the National Development Programme calls to “legislate the activities of volunteers and charitable organizations, understanding the importance of consolidating the efforts of the whole society in a crisis, providing motivational mechanisms for the development of these areas”. Among the priorities is the “development of (a) youth volunteer movement”. In addition to the National Council for Sustainable Development, chaired by the President of

Kyrgyzstan, a new Coordination Committee for Adaptation, Implementation and Monitoring of SDGs³² was established in 2016 under the direct leadership of the Prime Minister.

In 2016 **Tajikistan** adopted a National Development Strategy until 2030³³, which identifies the main directions for achieving sustainable development. Improving living standards and the well-being of the population is the most important objective for the country's long-term development, according to the Strategy. To do that, the plan sets out four national strategic development goals through 2030:

- ensuring energy security and the efficient use of electricity
- breaking the communication impasse and becoming a transit country
- ensuring an adequate food supply and access to quality nutrition
- increasing productive employment and developing human capital

To strengthen the country's institutional capacity, government institutions should be bolstered and their interactions with the private sector, civil society institutions and development partners should be improved.

Turkmenistan became the first country in the region and one of the few states to integrate SDG indicators into National Socioeconomic Development Programmes. This became possible thanks to the active work of the Government with the broad participation of volunteer organizations, experts and representatives of business and civil society, as well as support from international development partners. In 2016, Turkmenistan adopted 17 SDGs, 148 objectives and 187 indicators. To fulfil the obligations undertaken by the state, a road map for achieving the SDGs³⁴ was developed. Turkmenistan was also among the first in the region to host the United Nations High-level

Mission to Integrate, Accelerate and Support the Implementation of SDGs³⁵. Goals and objectives in the field of sustainable development have been introduced into national, sectoral and regional development programmes of Turkmenistan.

In **Uzbekistan**, the Government, civil society and other partners are also working to achieve sustainable development. This area of work began when the President of Uzbekistan, by his Decree on 7 February 2017, approved the Strategy of Action for the further development of the Republic in five priority areas for 2017–2021³⁶. In October 2018, the Government endorsed and adopted a resolution on the 2030 Agenda, which reinforced the commitment to aligning the SDGs with national policies and programmes. The updated Development Strategy of the new Uzbekistan for 2022–2026³⁷ further facilitates the integration of volunteerism into the SDGs, highlighting the importance of increasing the role of civil society institutions and strengthening interaction between the state and non-governmental non-profit organizations. As an example, the voluntary fire and rescue units in the Strategy aim to achieve Objective 92, "Creating an effective system for alerting about and preventing emergency situations".

All countries in the region monitor and report on achievement of the SDGs. At the same time, governmental agencies are trying to improve the effectiveness of government policies designed to implement the SDGs. For example in January 2024, following the seventh meeting of the Coordination Council for SDGs of Kazakhstan, the group proposed revising the list of national SDG indicators, since having too many complicates the monitoring process.



The United Nations Framework Documents are important planning and implementation documents for United Nations activities in support of realizing the 2030 Agenda. **Table 3** presents a list of United Nations Sustainable Development

Cooperation Frameworks and selected Country Programme Documents of United Nations entities, as well as a description of mechanisms and practices for integrating and involving volunteers in the implementation of the SDGs.

Table 3. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and Country Programme Documents of selected United Nations Agencies in Central Asia

Name	Time period	Contributions of volunteering
Kazakhstan		
UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ³⁸	2021–2025	Building an inclusive dialogue with different social groups, supporting youth organizations and volunteers, providing them with opportunities for civic participation and volunteer work within the partnership framework (SDG 17).
UNFPA Country Programme Document ³⁹	2021–2025	Empowering civil society leaders to influence public behaviour and social norms related to gender issues.
Kyrgyzstan		
UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ⁴⁰	2023–2027	The government's cooperation with volunteers, young people, civil society institutions, opinion leaders and the media in order to improve healthcare, education, employment and social security issues, support for women and girls.
UNICEF Country Programme Document ⁴¹	2023–2027	Strengthening cooperation, expanding opportunities for teenagers and young people through digital platforms, internships and volunteer programs.
UNFPA Country Programme Document ⁴²	2023–2027	Building an inclusive dialogue with volunteers, young people and civil society to promote gender-equitable norms and health.
Tajikistan		
UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ⁴³	2023–2026	Supporting inclusive partnerships with civil society organizations, volunteers, academic institutions, media, businesses and international partners. Community-based emergency risk reduction.
UNICEF Country Programme Document ⁴⁴	2023–2026	Using new technologies, social media, and volunteering to encourage civic participation among adolescents as agents of change in their communities.

Name	Time period	Contributions of volunteering
Turkmenistan		
UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ⁴⁵	2021–2025	Provision of privileges and benefits by the state to UN Volunteers.
Uzbekistan		
UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ⁴⁶	2021–2025	Employment of young people, creation of jobs, advanced training in accordance with the needs of the labour market, encouraging participation in volunteering. Developing partnerships to improve the business environment and developing labour markets, supporting start-ups, growing tourism and culture and encouraging volunteerism. The state provides privileges and benefits to UN Volunteers.
UNICEF Country Programme ⁴⁷	2021–2025	Developing partnerships among government, civil society organizations and businesses to promote social innovation, social entrepreneurship and volunteerism.



Voluntary National Review reports indicate increasing interaction between the volunteer movement and government agencies.

Voluntary National Reviews and volunteers' contributions to SDGs

Under the 2030 Agenda, United Nations Member States are given an opportunity to present Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on achieving the SDGs at the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development held annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Central Asia countries have repeatedly taken advantage of this opportunity⁴⁸. Thus, Kazakhstan presented its VNRs on the international platform in 2019 and 2022; Kyrgyzstan in 2020; Tajikistan in 2017 and 2023; Turkmenistan in 2019 and 2023; and Uzbekistan in 2020 and 2023.

A number of the above VNRs highlight how volunteers contribute to achieving the SDGs, underlining the increased interaction between the volunteer movement and governmental agencies.

Kazakhstan (VNR, 2022⁴⁹) provided the following examples of volunteer contributions to the SDGs:

- Goal 8. Decent work and economic growth: At the Centre for Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, created by UNDP in Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kazakhstan, volunteers supported its activities in providing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- Goal 10. Reduced inequalities: Since the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, volunteers have assisted over 1,258,000 people in difficult life situations (war and

labour veterans, lonely elderly people, vulnerable social groups, and large and low-income families). Volunteers and activists created the “Public Control” group.

- Goal 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions: The Anti-Corruption Agency of Kazakhstan launched the “Adal komek” volunteer project. Measures were taken to improve legal literacy, and socially vulnerable people were offered legal assistance to help in resolving legal challenges.
- Goal 17. Partnerships for the goals: Mobilizing Volunteering for Development. In order to implement the initiative of the President of Kazakhstan to proclaim the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development United Nations General Assembly, the concept of the International Year has been drafted, preparatory work for its implementation has begun, and a resolution of the year has been developed.

Uzbekistan (VNR, 2023⁵⁰) recognized that volunteering has seen further development with the adoption of the new law On Amendments and Additions to the Law of Uzbekistan “On Volunteering”. Some notable changes include collaboration between volunteers and governmental agencies, and the inclusion of volunteers in public councils under each governmental authority.

Turkmenistan (VNR, 2019⁵¹; VNR, 2023⁵²) described in detail the contribution of youth volunteering to two SDGs:

- Goal 10. Reduced inequalities: Young people proposed a plan to create a volunteer network that would disseminate knowledge on the SDGs not only among young people, but also among entire communities⁵¹.



Young SDG ambassadors visit the Home for Children with Disabilities in Ashgabat. Source: Maral Allaberdyeva, 2024.

- Goal 17. Partnerships for the goals: In 2021, as part of the Social and Economic Response Plan to the Pandemic of Acute Infectious Diseases adopted in July 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)⁵³, working through a joint programme between the United Nations and the Government of Turkmenistan, trained over 40 young volunteers in the Lebap and Dashoguz *velayats* (regions)⁵².

Due to the lack of a clear classification system and generally accepted methodology for examining the link between volunteering and the SDGs, it is difficult to detail or quantify how volunteering contributes to the achievement of specific national development goals and SDGs. As a result, this *Review* focuses mainly on qualitative results and offers an overall assessment of volunteering's contribution.

Numerous examples of the contributions made by volunteers to the SDGs have not yet been fully noted in the VNR texts. But they could be reflected in subsequent VNRs of respective states.

Indicators of volunteers' contribution to the SDGs could be reflected in subsequent Voluntary National Reviews of countries in the region.

In **Kazakhstan**, an analysis of existing volunteering practices revealed their contribution to most SDGs. The most popular areas for the country's volunteering community are Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 10 (reduced inequalities).

In **Kyrgyzstan**, non-profit organizations and volunteer groups contribute to almost all SDGs. Young people are one of the key groups among stakeholders aiming to achieve the SDGs, and they make up the largest group in the population (35 per cent). According to UNFPA, 12 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's young people participate in volunteering⁵⁴. Since about a third of the 169 objectives linked to the implementation of the SDGs in Kyrgyzstan are directly associated with young people, encouraging the participation of youth and empowering them should be given special attention where the implementation of the SDGs is concerned.

In **Tajikistan**, volunteers contribute to various SDGs, for example, the implementation of Goal 1 (no poverty). An example is volunteers' work in the public charitable organization "Peshraft" and the public association "Khatbar". These organizations help families who find themselves in difficult life situations. Endeavours of the "Muzaffar" charitable foundation are directly related to the implementation of Goals 3, 7, 8, 13; this is detailed in chapter 4, which describes best volunteering practices in the region.



Dilnoza, Aziza, Mukhayo and Maruf, volunteers of the youth environmental project “Little Earth”, discuss ideas for sustainable environmental solutions in Dushanbe. *Source: Maruf Avgonov, 2024.*

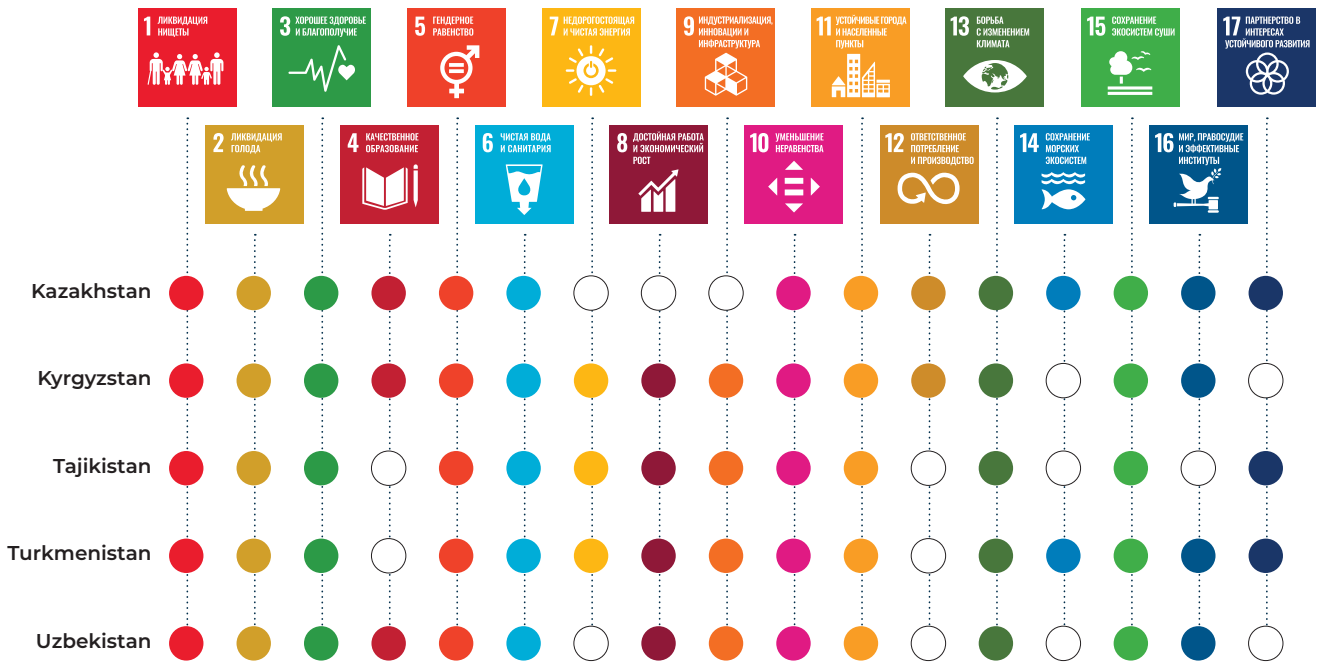
In **Turkmenistan**, the United Nations Young Ambassadors SDG Programme contributes to the achievement of national development goals and all 17 SDGs. Being a joint initiative between the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRCO), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the programme mobilizes young people to raise awareness and improve understanding of the SDGs in the country. It involves young activists of local communities from all over Turkmenistan. Each ambassador is responsible for one global Goal and for disseminating information among young people about the values of sustainable development. Since 2019, over 100 enthusiasts have taken part in the competition.

In **Uzbekistan**, activities of public and volunteer associations contribute to the achievement of many SDGs. For example, the first children’s hospice, “Taskin”, is a charity project organized jointly with people’s deputies of the Almazar District Council, the Association of Volunteers of Uzbekistan and the Ezgu Amal Foundation with the support of the Ministry of Health to support

children undergoing treatment for cancer. The Association of Oncologists of Uzbekistan coordinates the scientific and practical activities of its members in the field of oncology (Goal 3). Since 2023, a network of state social service centres known as “Inson” has been operating in the country (Goals 1 and 2), with the active participation of volunteers. The volunteer initiative “Call Umida” aims to fight gender inequality (Goal 5), and the NGO Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan helps protect the environment (Goals 13 and 15).

The list of examples given above is just a sample and is not exhaustive in terms of types and areas of activity. The full picture is shown in the diagram, compiled based on the analysis and synthesis of collected volunteer practices, information from VNRs and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. It is evident that volunteering improves the lives of vulnerable people, and it also stimulates the development of local communities in areas such as education, health, gender equality, water supply and environmental protection.

Figure 2. Contribution of volunteering to the implementation of the SDGs, by country.



Additional measures to integrate volunteering into implementation of the SDGs – the role of quantitative indicators

Because volunteering is recognized in the world community as an effective tool for achieving the SDGs, the question of quantitative, including econometric, measurements of the efforts of volunteers has become ever more relevant. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has taken important practical steps in this direction, acknowledging volunteer efforts as key to addressing social and environmental problems worldwide and as a resource for improving the quality of life. The ILO has also developed a guide to measure volunteer work⁵⁵. According to the guide, volunteer records provide valuable information about the number and characteristics of people who are engaged in helping others. This data can also be used to identify areas of development where many people rely on others for help. Such information can contribute to more

The issue of quantitative measurement of volunteer work and efforts, including econometric indicators, is becoming more relevant.

effective planning of the state's socioeconomic policy.

Following this, in 2013 the nineteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians recognized and developed an international statistical definition of volunteer work. This became the starting point for ensuring the regular collection and comparison of volunteering data within an established workforce measurement framework. Subsequently, the issue of evaluating the impact of volunteering on achieving the SDGs in the region was raised on 20 March 2019 in Geneva at a session on the

integration of volunteering into the 2030 Agenda at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. The issue was also addressed in the work of the CIS Intergovernmental Statistical Committee. In particular in 2021, a meeting of the Working Group of the ILO Department of Statistics was held with the purpose of revising statistical standards in relation to the informal sector of the economy, which included representatives of national statistical services of the countries of the region. At that meeting, a draft resolution of the twenty-first International Conference of Labour Statisticians on statistics of the informal market economy, which takes into account the volunteer work, was discussed.

Although methodological work has been focused on collecting statistical information on the number of volunteers and assessing the contribution of volunteer efforts in the implementation of the SDGs, to date there has been no data-collection system in the countries of the region. For example, the statistical book *Population, employment and living conditions in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2022*, published by the CIS Intergovernmental Statistical Committee in 2023, does not mention volunteering. Also, target indicators for assessing the impact of volunteering on the achievement of national development goals and SDGs have not been defined. This is an important strategic problem that remains to be solved.

Thus, at the time of this *Review* preparation, statistics on volunteer work presented on the ILO website as part of the labour force survey⁵⁶ module are available for Kazakhstan (2017–2021). The data shows that in 2017, 0.6 per cent of the population surveyed worked as volunteers; in 2021, this figure dropped to 0.3 per cent. Similar data are available for Tajikistan (2016); according to ILO, 2 per cent of the population was involved in volunteer work.



Volunteers with the Marathon of Good Deeds clear the snow around a house. Doing daily work for the elderly, they maintain connections between generations.
Source: Abzal Serik, 2024.

Data from other countries in the region are not available⁵⁷.

This data varies significantly from the data from projects and programmes in which volunteers are involved, since most efforts to measure volunteering focus on numbers of volunteers registered with organizations that attract volunteers, rather than on informal volunteers. UNV estimates that informal volunteers account for an average of 70 per cent of all volunteers worldwide⁵⁸. More detailed quantitative data on the scale of volunteering will be presented in the next chapter of the *Review*.

In addition to the SDGs, another important issue for each country in the region is to understand the impact of volunteering on the development of the national economy. An emerging trend is to evaluate the contribution of the non-profit sector and its components to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), namely the contribution of NPOs, volunteerism and philanthropy.

Using Kyrgyzstan as an example, a well-known way of assessing the economic impact of volunteering





Almaty University of Management organized an event in the Kyzylorda region of Kazakhstan to plant saxaul (*Haloxylon ammodendron*) seedlings at the bottom of the Aral Sea to restore the ecosystem. Gulnara Nasyrbekova, among 80 volunteers from different regions and countries, participated in the first eco-volunteer initiative, which took place in March 2024. Source: Alikhan Sariev, 2024.

can be used to calculate its contribution to the country's GDP. The assessment is based on the perception of volunteer activities as work. To make the calculation, a common approach based on assessing the economic effect of labour, known as the replacement cost approach⁵⁹, can be applied. The basis of a replacement cost assessment is to equate the cost of a service provided by a volunteer for free to the market price that the recipient would have to pay to hire a paid worker to provide the same or comparable service. In this example, the rate at which the cost of volunteer labour is assessed – the minimum wage in Kyrgyzstan – is used.

According to the Law "On the Republican Budget of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2023 and the planning period 2024–2025"⁶⁰, the minimum wage for 2024 was set at 2,460 soms. The standard working week is 40 hours, which means 160 working hours per month. The calculation of man-hours per volunteer in 2024 is as follows: 2,460 soms / 160 hours per month = 15.375 soms per hour.

According to the survey results⁶¹, volunteers report that they devote an average of five hours a week to volunteer work. The average contribution of volunteers in monetary terms is: 15.375 soms per hour x 5 hours per week x 4 weeks per month =

307.5 soms per month. The number of volunteers in Kyrgyzstan is estimated, according to various sources^{61,62}, at 12 per cent – 33 per cent of young people as per available data. Thus, the estimated number of volunteers in Kyrgyzstan ranges from 200,000 to 550,000.

To calculate the contribution of volunteers to Kyrgyzstan's GDP, use the average of the estimated number of volunteers – 375,000 people. The following result is obtained: 307.5 (soms per month) x 375,000 (people) = 115,312,500 soms monthly (equivalent to US\$1,306,500), which is over US\$15,600,000 per year. Since Kyrgyzstan's

GDP was US\$13.98 billion in 2023, the estimated contribution of volunteering to GDP is US\$15.6 million /US\$ 13.980 billion = 0.11 per cent (one-ninth of a per cent). The figure turned out to be small. But it aligns with the results from a project by John Hopkins University⁶³ that measured the economic parameters of volunteer activity; researchers said the contributions by volunteers to Kyrgyzstan's GDP amounted to 0.1 per cent. That project also found that when calculating an average for a group of 16 countries with different cultural and historical traditions, the contribution of volunteering to the GDP was 0.9 per cent.



Digitalization and volunteering

Modern digital platforms play an important role in integrating volunteering into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



In **Kazakhstan**, there is a platform – **qazvolunteer.kz** – that helps evaluate the contribution of volunteers to the implementation of specific SDGs. The project was developed by the Ministry of Information and Social Development of Kazakhstan together with the NVN, and it was supported by a grant from the non-profit Joint Stock Company Centre for Support of Civil Initiatives. The platform was presented in 2019 at the Central Communications Service under the President of Kazakhstan. The platform is designed to unite volunteers and volunteer organizations from all over the country for the purpose of sustainable development and popularization of the volunteer movement. Although not all projects and volunteer events are registered on this platform, the idea itself and the implemented mechanism of record keeping are quite valuable. However, additional efforts will be required for broad coverage.

In **Tajikistan**, the portal of civil society organizations of Tajikistan – **ngo.tj** – acts as a digital platform for volunteering. It is administered and maintained by volunteers qualified in information technology. Moreover, this resource has been supplemented by a group of the same name on the social network Meta.

In **Turkmenistan**, the initiative to develop a unified national digital platform for volunteering was taken by the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan (NRCST) with the support of the Capacity Building Fund of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.



VOLUNTEER.KG
Волонтерство в Кыргызстане

In 2018 in **Kyrgyzstan**, a national online platform for volunteer and youth organizations – **volunteer.kg** – was created at the initiative of the National Communist Party of the Kyrgyz Republic, with the support of the State Agency for Youth Policy, Physical Culture and Sports (later reformed) under the President of Kyrgyzstan. Volunteers, projects and organizations are registered on it, announcements are published, and measures to promote volunteering are taken.

In 2019 in **Uzbekistan**, the Association of Volunteers of Uzbekistan with the support of the Agency for Youth Affairs created a platform – **volontyor.uz** – that contains information about events involving volunteers. It features an electronic system for registering volunteers participating in events.

Volunteering acts as a catalyst for social innovation and promotes collaboration between different sectors.

Conclusions to the chapter

Volunteering as a sustainable civil society practice impacts all SDGs, with diversity across countries. But in each of the five countries, volunteerism has proven to be a valid tool for accelerating and transforming the economy in terms of achieving the SDGs, while also serving as a reliable partner and resource for social development and progress for the state.

In addition, volunteering acts as a catalyst for social innovation, leading to high social cohesion, and contributes to increased cooperation among the different sectors working towards sustainable development.

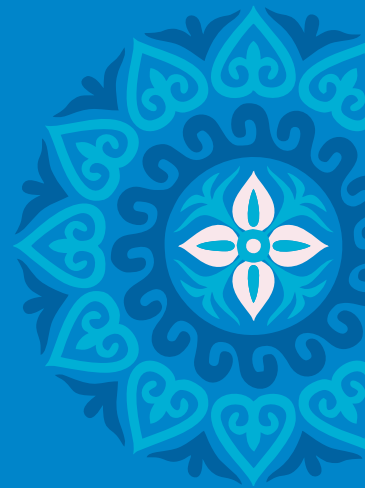
In every country in the region, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation frameworks are essential documents for action in support of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Since key indicators for each SDG are integrated into national development programmes and other national strategic documents, volunteer activities help the government and public authorities in achieving the SDGs, which is reflected in half of the VNRs of countries in the region.

Although the region has not developed standardized methods for collecting and processing data on the quantitative contribution of volunteering to the economy, examples using GDP and SDGs are given of how such evaluation can be made.



CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Volunteering in Central Asia has been developing in various areas including ecology, medicine, education, social services, search and rescue and emergency response. This movement covers various segments of the population, from young people to retirees. Moreover, in recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of individuals and organizations participating in volunteerism, with the ever-expanding number of programmes and projects.

Volunteering as a civil society practice

United Nations General Assembly resolution 78/127, adopted on 18 December 2023, “International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development, 2026”⁶⁴, calls for recognizing and appreciating the contribution of formal and informal volunteers and volunteerism to achieving the SDGs; it also calls for promoting the creation of knowledge and information platforms for the development and promotion of new forms of volunteerism.

Although detailed data on the types of volunteering (formal and informal, regular and occasional, sponsored by an employer and self-funded) and the number of volunteers is often lacking in Central Asia, anecdotal data on volunteer participation can be found in information about specific programmes or by region. For example, in large cities of Kazakhstan, such as Almaty and Astana, volunteering takes a variety of forms. Since most NGOs and youth

organizations are located there, this indirectly confirms the conclusions about the role of education and type of settlement as factors influencing volunteer participation.

However, as noted in the previous chapter, the available information is not comprehensive due to a lack of national statistics on volunteering. The situation in Kazakhstan deserves attention. The Government maintains a register of volunteer organizations, although there are some shortcomings of the register (in accordance with the law, volunteer organizations themselves decide whether to provide information about their activities). This example prompts consideration of different approaches to the classification of volunteer activities that can be useful for the entire region.

So far, this classification is not set in the Law on Volunteer Activity of Kazakhstan or other legal measures. But since 2021 it has been used in methodological documents and teaching materials. It is also used to collect statistics on volunteering. The classification is not universal, but it appears helpful and detailed enough. Currently, types of volunteering in Kazakhstan are divided according to six criteria.

1. Volunteering organized into eight categories by the composition of participants:

1. General: composition without special features or mixed composition of participants.



Kazakhstan's approaches to maintaining a register of volunteer organizations and classifying volunteer activities can be useful for the entire region.

2. Children: teenagers between 14 and 18 years of age.
3. Student: college and university students.
4. Silver: people over 55 years of age.
5. Inclusive: volunteers with special needs.
6. Corporate: employees within one organization.
7. Pro-bono: providing free professional assistance to NPOs.
8. International: volunteers from other countries.
5. Public space improvement: organizing "clean street" days (*subbotnik*) in towns; promoting the development of an inclusive environment; cleaning parks, alleys and streets; planting flowers and trees in populated areas; maintaining and reconstructing parks, courtyards, playgrounds and other residential areas.
6. Art: attracting interest in art, exhibitions, and classical concerts as well as hosting entertainment events and concerts of contemporary performers.
7. Sports and healthy lifestyle practices: ensuring accessibility and popularization of various sports, active lifestyle practices, healthy eating and mental well-being.

2. Volunteering organized into 13 categories by type of volunteer activity performed⁶⁵:

1. Medicine: working in medical institutions; caring for patients at home; donating blood.
2. Education: training to transfer knowledge and develop skills; exam preparations.
3. Environmental protection: looking after the environment; cleaning riverbeds and banks, forests and other natural areas; carrying out activities to reduce the carbon footprint; teaching how to recycle; raising awareness on environmental issues.
4. Ethno-cultural preservation: preservation of historical and national heritage and cultural monuments; participation in archaeological excavations, volunteer work in ethno-cultural associations and Houses of Friendship.
8. Emergency response: serving in disaster risk reduction and emergency response roles; promoting a culture of safety among the population.
9. Animal care: helping wildlife and stray animals, livestock and pets; volunteering in animal shelters.
10. Media: creating original content to highlight volunteer activities; popularizing volunteering; and covering socially significant topics without any commercial purpose.
11. Event volunteering: volunteering at socially significant events, including charity concerts and events aimed at supporting vulnerable population groups; participating in entertainment, commercial, promotional and leisure events.

12. Intellectual volunteering: providing expert assistance, consultancy or professional advice in implementing activities, development of people and organizations and resolving problems.
13. Social volunteering: helping socially vulnerable groups and people in difficult life situations and living conditions.

3. Volunteering organized into three categories according to the form of implementation:

1. Traditional: face-to-face, physical participation.
2. Online volunteering: on the Internet.
3. Auto-volunteering: transporting people or things.

4. Volunteering organized into four categories based on the scale of activity:

1. Local: within the territory of one locality.
2. Regional: within the territory of one region.
3. National: in several regions or throughout the country.
4. International: coverage in several countries.

5. Volunteering organized into three categories based on the duration of actions:

1. One-time promotions and events.
2. Projects.
3. Ongoing activity.

6. Volunteering organized into three categories based on form:

1. Registered organizations.
2. Initiative groups.
3. Individuals.

In addition to the criteria described above, it should be added that in global practice, it is customary to distinguish between formal and informal types of volunteering.

Formal is carried out through public organizations, NGOs and foundations. Informal is carried out independently, i.e. when a person voluntarily helps. Modern studies indicate that informal volunteering in all countries significantly prevails over organized (formal) volunteering, on average in the ratio of 70 per cent to 30 per cent⁵⁸. One way or another, regardless of the type and form

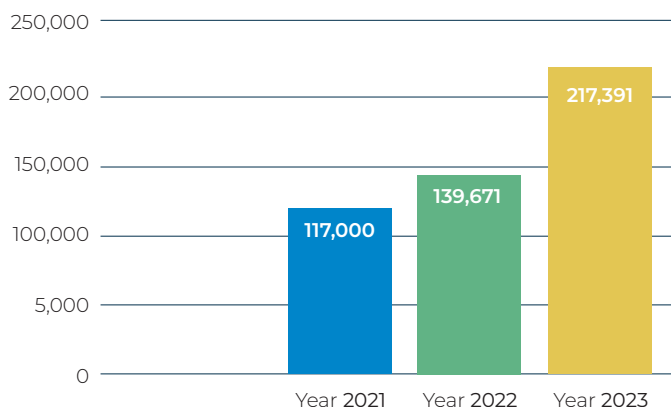


The “Green Space” event, held in Nukus, Uzbekistan, was dedicated to raising awareness among young people about climate action. Its participants had the opportunity to plant tree seedlings. Source: Sarvar Kosimov, 2023.



Analytical report on the state of volunteering was prepared by the National Volunteer Network and serves as the main source of information on volunteering in Kazakhstan.

Number of volunteers in Kazakhstan over the past three years



of volunteering, it is designed to resolve social problems of society.

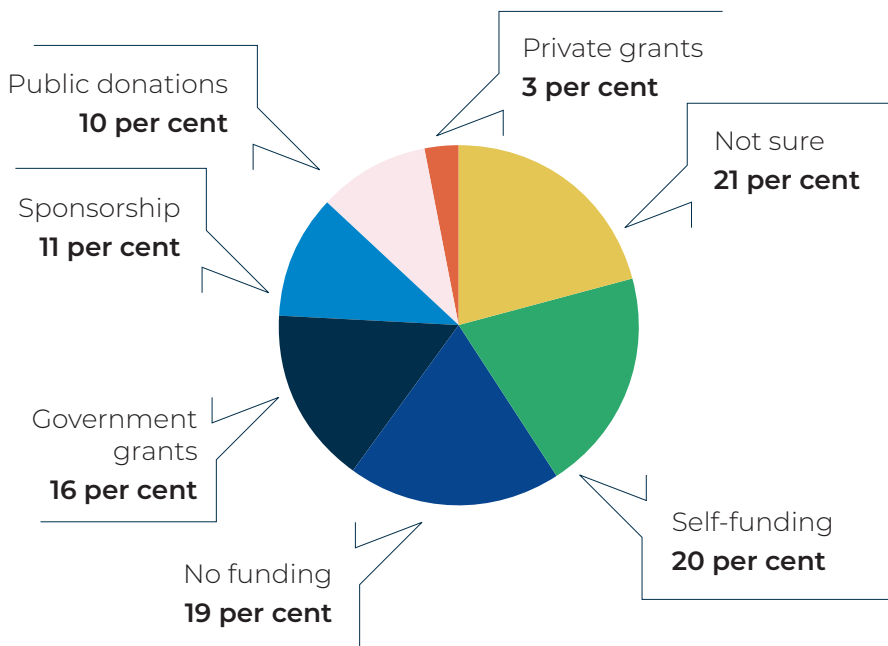
Data on the scope and characteristics of volunteering

In Kazakhstan, official statistics and data collection on volunteering have been carried out since 2020 as part of the implementation of the national project *Birgemiz, áreket jáqyty* ("Together: Action Begins"). The project is being implemented by the NVN, which has successfully built systematic work in the field of developing volunteerism in the Republic.

Every year, an analytical report on the state of volunteering in Kazakhstan is provided⁶⁶ based on the data received by the front office of the Republic. Key sources of information for collecting and analysing data on volunteering include:

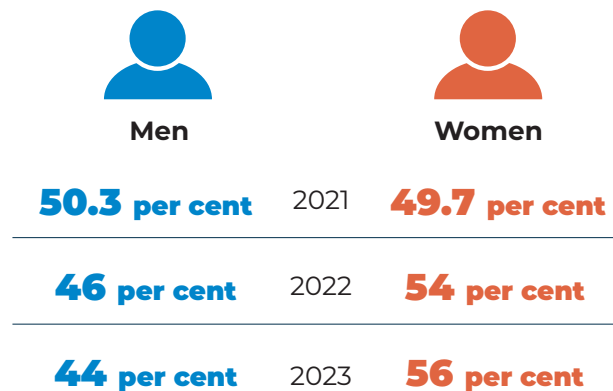
1. Statistics from regional volunteer offices): In operation since January 2020, RFOs collect monthly statistical information from volunteer organizations (NGOs), initiative groups and government agencies involved in volunteer activities.
2. Data from NVN members: The NVN is a voluntary association of citizens and legal entities, established in 2010 with the aim of creating, supporting and developing a culture of volunteering, volunteer initiatives and activities among citizens, civil society institutions, the business sector and government agencies. In 2012, it was officially registered as an association. NVN has 29 network members (registered organizations) and 17 partners (initiative groups) in 36 cities of Kazakhstan, i.e. NVN is represented in every region.
3. Data from surveys conducted by NVN experts and field studies by representatives of the volunteer community, including NGOs, initiative groups, individuals and local executive authorities. From time to time, NVN conducts voluntary independent online surveys among representatives of the volunteer community of Kazakhstan on certain areas of volunteer activity.
4. Statistics from the Bureau of National Statistics: This government agency is authorized to collect data on certain markers. To date, volunteering is not included in the list of areas for which official data is collected.

Sources of funding for the activities of volunteers and volunteer organizations in Kazakhstan according to the NVN survey



National Red Crescent Societies pay special attention to the development of volunteerism as one of the integral parts of their charitable activities.

Kazakhstan volunteers by gender



However, in recognizing the importance of volunteer activities for the country, since 2020 the supervising ministry – the Ministry of Culture and Information of Kazakhstan (MCI) – has been collecting quantitative and qualitative data through national channels of local executive authorities, i.e. *akimats*.

217,391 volunteers. In 2022, there were 139,671 volunteers, and in 2001 there were 117,000.

The increase in the estimated number of volunteers in Kazakhstan, according to the RFO, indicates both an improvement in the quality of work of the RFO network and a real increase in the number of Kazakh volunteers.

A comparison of the data obtained provides a snapshot of the state of volunteering in the country. As of December 2023⁶⁶, Kazakhstan had

According to the Kazakhstan MCI, 240,000 volunteers have been identified by 2024.

The distribution of volunteers by **gender** remained unchanged over the past three years.

Examining the distribution by **type of organization** of volunteer activities reveals that the number of unregistered self-help groups in Kazakhstan throughout the entire monitoring period exceeds the number of registered volunteer organizations by at least three times, according to the RFO.

According to MCI, there were over 680 registered volunteer organizations in Kazakhstan in 2023. The RFO network consisted of only 609. Still, according to the network of RFOs of volunteers, the number of self-help volunteer groups still exceeds this number – 1,882 groups are estimated. At the same time, the duration of existence and activity is not related to the type of organization of volunteer activities. Both registered volunteer NGOs and initiative groups can have extensive experience – more than 15 years.

Data received from the network of RFOs in monthly statistics, in comparison with data from a voluntary survey of volunteers and

volunteer organizations collected by NVN in 2023, present varying pictures of the composition of Kazakhstani volunteer community. According to an independent survey, actual volunteer teams are much more diverse and inclusive than monthly regional statistics suggest.

Funding sources of volunteer initiatives

According to a survey of volunteers and volunteer organizations, about 40 per cent of initiatives were financed by contributions from volunteers themselves or they had no funding at all. Another 21 per cent came from sponsorship or donor support, as well as public donations. Government funding was 16 per cent.

Support for the non-governmental sector and international organizations

It is evident from the Kazakhstan example that the non-profit sector and large NPOs, such as the NVN, act as an important partner in the development of volunteerism. But there are few such organizations. For this reason, Kyrgyzstan is another example of an NPO. One of the largest organizations with which the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy of Kyrgyzstan



A volunteer with the NRCS KR provides assistance to a beneficiary.
Source: Nurila Duysheeva, 2024.

closely cooperates in the implementation of programmes to support the youth volunteer movement is the National Red Crescent Society of the Kyrgyz Republic (NRCS KR). In general National Societies, as part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, have a strong influence on the development of volunteerism in the region, so their activities should be considered separately, as well as the volunteer programmes of the United Nations system.

The Association of Volunteers of Uzbekistan, which is the country's only public platform that matches volunteers and over 200 public volunteer initiatives, has been operating since 2020. The Association creates a favourable environment for the development of volunteerism, being an intermediary on the path to the implementation of social projects and creative ideas. It unites over 100,000 country citizens between 16 and 80 years of age. In order to improve the level of volunteering culture, a decision was made to train volunteers. Volunteer schools have been opened in 14 regions of Uzbekistan. Each of them has an office equipped with material and technical resources. Work is also under way to create 30 volunteer centres at universities. Thanks to such schools, 10,200 young volunteers have been trained and a mentor training programme has been implemented. More than 50,000 families in need of social protection (these are households that include disabled and low-income people as well as single, elderly people) received assistance from these volunteers.

In January 2023, at the "Time of Miracles" charity fair (a showcase of creative work by children with disabilities together with their tutors and mentors), a memorandum of cooperation was signed between the Association of Volunteers of Uzbekistan and the Uzbekistan Ministry of Culture. This cooperation opened up opportunities for official participation of volunteers in events and projects in the field of culture and art based on the plan throughout the Republic. Subsequently, a similar memorandum was concluded at the regional level in the Surkhandarya region.

The association holds an annual competition to support volunteer projects. Thus, in 2023, the Agency for Youth Affairs received 218 applications for projects in the fields of ecology, education, medicine, media and tourism⁶⁷. National authorities are mandated to compile a list of tasks and functions in which volunteers will be involved and to offer incentives for active volunteers.

The development of a nationwide volunteer network in Tajikistan has a fascinating history. The first volunteer organizations in the country appeared in 2000. Their initial endeavours were aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle for young people; subsequently, volunteers continued their activities in other areas of society, such as teaching about disease prevention, family planning and environmental protection.

The development of volunteering led to the creation of the National Association of Volunteers in Tajikistan. It was established on 20 February 2014 by the initiative of the Union of Youth Organizations of Tajikistan, which at the time included 117 member organizations and seven public organizations working with young people. The mission of the association was to mobilize efforts to develop volunteerism, create opportunities for the proper implementation of the Law of Tajikistan "On Volunteer Activities," and improve the social situation in the Republic by providing vulnerable people with access to employment, education, information and legal support.

Three years later, this association was replaced by another nationwide network — the public organization "Followers of the Leader of the Nation". In 2017, it was registered with the Ministry of Justice and began its activities in Tajikistan. Today there are 68 representative offices in various cities and regions. The organization works closely with the Committee on Youth and Sports, which ensures effective collaborations in various projects. The movement's activities are supported by government grants, international organizations and membership fees. The organization is actively



Volunteers with the NRCS KR during an exercise, 2023. *Source: Nurila Duysheeva, 2023.*

developing the volunteer movement, mainly focusing on the massive participation of young people in it.

Contribution of National Red Crescent Societies to the development of volunteering

The NRCS KR, created in 1926, is a public organization that operates in accordance with its charter and national legislation only within the framework of its state. NRCS KR assists the Government in providing humanitarian relief during times of peace, war and natural disasters. The Society has regional offices in all seven regions of Kyrgyzstan.

The main areas of concentration for the NRCS KR are healthcare, social programmes, emergency response management and organizational development. The Society acts as an auxiliary element of the government in solving various social problems of the population. In 2012, the Red Crescent Youth Movement of Kyrgyzstan

was created, which has over 1,500 volunteers throughout the country.

In 2014, at the initiative of the National Communist Society of the Kyrgyz Republic, a common online platform for volunteer and youth organizations – **www.volunteer.kg** – was created. Together with partners, events to develop volunteerism in Kyrgyzstan are held regularly. Every year the Ministry, together with the Society, recognizes the contribution of volunteers; the most distinguished among them are awarded “Volunteer of the Year” certificates.

The National Nomad Games of the Kyrgyz Republic provided assistance to the Secretariat for the World Nomad Games; over 550 volunteers were selected and trained in the basics of volunteering and first aid. Sixty volunteer first aid instructors were also provided. Every year, volunteers are involved as councillors in the youth forum camp “Zhash-Bulak” and other large-scale events. For example during 2019, the Ministry

attracted over a thousand volunteers to youth and sports events.

The NRCST – which, like the NRCS KR was created in 1926 – also relies in its activities on its main assistants – volunteers. The development of the volunteer movement of the NRCST began in 1998, when volunteer clubs appeared in *velayats* (provinces), followed by volunteer centres at regional (the *velayats*) and local branches of the Society.

Now the Youth Movement of the NRCST has about 5,000 volunteers. Volunteer centres, an auxiliary element of the NRCST, participate in all areas of the Society's activities, participating in the implementation of both traditional programmes and special projects organized for volunteers and carried out by them. Today, there are 17 volunteer centres in Turkmenistan. The number of volunteers is constantly increasing, which indicates not only the growing status of the Red Crescent but also a deep interest in the values of mercy and humanism among the younger generation. Volunteer centres are fitted with necessary equipment and computer technologies, which allows volunteers to carry out their activities more professionally.

In accordance with regulatory documents, volunteers provide comprehensive support and social services to people with disabilities, lonely elderly people, children from large families and those who have lost one of their legal guardians. Volunteers of the movement participate in programmes that promote a healthy lifestyle, teach basic first aid skills, provide social assistance to vulnerable people, help prepare for emergencies and natural disasters, as well as offer health and hygiene education, and environmental protection skills. Volunteers learn to save lives and care for others who need support. Particular attention is paid to lonely elderly people and people with disabilities; they are provided with assistance at home, such as volunteers who help clean their apartments and purchase food.



The growth in the number of volunteers in national Red Crescent Societies indicates an interest among the younger generation towards the public initiatives focused on humanity.

Significant work is carried out with orphans and children from disadvantaged families. New Year's parties for orphans and disabled children, during which the children receive gifts, has become a popular tradition that Red Crescent volunteers organize. Events like this, involving volunteers helping children, are being held throughout the country. They stage fairy tales and concerts and make costumes for New Year's celebrations. New Year's events are supported by all volunteer centres of Turkmenistan. Summer training camps are held annually for active volunteers, allowing them to relax, have fun and gain additional knowledge.

Florence Nightingale Medal

Turkmenistan had its own honorary recipient of the Florence Nightingale Medal – Maria Andreevna Kvitchenko. She was a volunteer for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for many years. A veteran of the Second World War, a woman with a remarkable life story, during combat she received a dose of radiation of such strength that it was considered to be fatal. Nevertheless, Maria Andreevna not only survived, but for many years she devoted herself to charitable work. The sheer will to live demonstrated by Maria Andreevna has become an example of personal courage and resilience for many generations of volunteers. In 1985 she was awarded the International Florence Nightingale Medal, established by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1912 as the highest award given to nurses and aides who have demonstrated exceptional courage and devotion to the wounded and sick, in times of both peace and war.



Maria Andreevna and her Diploma for the Florence Nightingale Medal.



Kazakhstani volunteers of the “Angels of Freedom” project make *motanka* dolls in the shape of angels. The project aims to equip shelters in Ukrainian schools and kindergartens in Chernigov, Ukraine, to mitigate the effects of war on children’s lives.
Source: Anastasia Lu, 2024.

Development of volunteering with United Nations support

UN Volunteers come from around the world and serve in all Central Asian countries. Citizens of Central Asian countries also serve as UN Volunteers in various United Nations agencies both at the national and international levels, see table 4.

In addition, UNV actively supports the efforts of governments and their agencies, civil society organizations and other partners to develop volunteerism throughout the region. The agency acts as a link in achieving peace and sustainable development through the support and integration of volunteerism in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For example in 2020, the Government of Kazakhstan, in partnership with UNV, began a three-year programme to fully fund seven international positions within the United Nations for citizens of Kazakhstan as UN Volunteers. Thus, Kazakhstan fully funds seven annual assignments since 2020.

The Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan (RCST), founded in 1927, was the first humanitarian organization in the country, providing services to the most vulnerable segments of the population, taking into account their needs. The National Society has five regional branches and 65 city and district branches, uniting over 12,000 volunteers and covering all of Tajikistan. The Society’s mandate to assist the vulnerable and strengthen its own capacity is an integral part of the overall development strategy for the RCST.

Over the years the RCST, based on its supporting role to the state, has focused its efforts on strengthening the country’s capacity to respond to emergencies and assist with projects in the field of health, water supply, sanitation and hygiene. The Law on RCST, adopted in 2010, defines the organizational and legal basis for the activities of the RCST. RCST emphasizes a community-based approach and operates through the extensive involvement of its volunteer networks throughout the country.



Table 4. Number of UN Volunteers who are citizens of Central Asian countries, 2015–2024

Citizens of which country	Total number	In which countries they volunteered	In which UN structures
Kazakhstan	462	Austria, Bangladesh, East Timor, Vietnam, Georgia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Iraq, Spain, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Laos, Malawi, Mozambique, Moldova, Niger, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Switzerland, South Sudan	WHO, UNV, DSS, UNICC, IOM, MONUSCO, UNMISS, UN Women, UN-Habitat, MCI, UNDP, UNHCR, OHCHR, UNODC, ISDR, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA
Kyrgyzstan	195	Austria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Hungary, Georgia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Liberia, Micronesia, Mozambique, Moldova, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Russian Federation, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Fiji, Central African Republic, Chad, Czech Republic, South Sudan	WHO, WFP, UNV, MINUSCA, UNMIL, UNAMA, MONUSCO, UNAMI, UNMISS, ILO, UN Women, UNDP, UNHCR, OHCHR, OCHA, UNODC, ISDR, FAO, UNEP, UNICEF, UNISFA, UNFPA
Tajikistan	127	Afghanistan, Greece, Georgia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Kazakhstan, Cambodia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Eritrea, South Sudan	WHO, MINUSMA, UNAMA, MONUSCO, UNMISS, IFAD, UNDP, UNHCR, ISDR, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA
Turkmenistan	18	Afghanistan, Cambodia, Myanmar, Turkmenistan, South Sudan	WHO, UNAMA, MONUSCO, UNDP, DPPA, UNICEF
Uzbekistan	176	Afghanistan, East Timor, Georgia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Iraq, Laos, Liberia, Mali, Marshall Islands, Moldova, Mongolia, Somalia, Somalia, Sudan, United States, Thailand, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Sweden	WHO, DHA, UNV, DPPA, MINUSMA, UNAMA, MONUSCO, UN Women, MCI, UNDP, UNHCR, ISDR, FAO, UNAMID, UNICEF, UNMAS, UNOPS, UNAIDS

The activities of other United Nations agencies can spur the development of volunteerism in the region. For example in January 2022, UNDP began a three-year project called, “Empowering Young People through Skills Development and Promoting Innovation in Tajikistan”. The project aims to address the employment challenges facing young people between 15 and 35 years of age, with an emphasis on the participation of girls and young people living in economically disadvantaged areas. The project also promotes the implementation of youth initiatives and strengthening volunteerism. An important result of the project will be strengthening the potential of the national volunteer movement and studying the best foreign practices in creating a volunteering infrastructure. In partnership with UNV and the Association of Volunteer Centres (Russia), a functioning nationwide volunteer web platform has been planned.

UNICEF ensures that young people have the opportunity to develop new skills, implement their ideas and help others. Since 2020 UNICEF has been organizing volunteer programmes in Kazakhstan for young people between 18 and 35 years of age. The most well-known is the “Be Kind” project to create a safe environment in schools. It is aimed at preventing collective psychological violence (bullying). Project volunteers also introduce schoolchildren to environmental concepts such as how to reduce carbon footprints, the principles of reasonable consumption, and how to reduce plastic consumption.

UNICEF is conducting similar activities in Kyrgyzstan as part of the “Safe School” project. Volunteers teach schoolchildren safety skills that they can use during natural disasters, e.g. fires and earthquakes. As well, volunteers are also giving lessons on hygiene, coronavirus prevention and creating a safe environment. In addition, in October 2021 UNICEF, in collaboration with government authorities, launched the U-Report digital platform to engage young people and adolescents⁶⁸. Known under the motto “Your Opinion Matters!”, this global initiative is a



UNICEF in Kyrgyzstan involves volunteers in conducting training for children on health and hygiene in schools. Source: Aizhamal Amanbekova, 2024.

messaging platform used by 33 million young people between 14 and 30 years of age in 99 countries. It gives young people a chance to share their opinions and build dialogue with the government on issues related to their interests and sustainable development. Now, there are over 11,000 U-reporters in all regions of Kyrgyzstan.

In October 2018 Uzbekistan became the first country in the region to launch the U-Report platform. Now it ranks first in terms of the number of U-reporters (220,000) in Europe and Central Asia⁶⁹. Young volunteers actively participate in the information campaign to promote the global youth platform in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

In 2023 UNFPA, together with the National Committee of Turkmenistan for Physical Culture and Sports, launched a programme for the development of social volunteering among young people attending sports schools. The goal of the programme is to strengthen the role of young people in the development of society, engage in decision-making and in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and gender equality.



Volunteers of the U-Report project in Uzbekistan care about what is happening around them; they want to be heard and, therefore, enter into dialogue with the government. *Source: Dilnoza Sametdinova, 2024.*

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in Tajikistan launched the project “Strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities through community-based disaster risk reduction measures in Central Asia” in 2020. Volunteers take an active part in the implementation of the project. For example, a small volunteer disaster risk management team was created in the Nozirabad community. A team of local community volunteers learned first aid, disaster risk reduction methods, and how to ensure a safe water supply and reliable sanitation. They also got to put their newly acquired skills into practice.

Symbols and attributes of volunteering

At the national level, the symbols of volunteering have so far been fully adopted only in Kazakhstan. The process began at the Kazakh-Russian Youth Forum in Kostanay in May 2019⁷⁰ when Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the President of Kazakhstan, announced that 2020 would be the Year of the Volunteer. A working group was immediately organized to plan and implement Year of the Volunteer events. It included representatives of the supervising ministry – which at that time was the Ministry of Information and Social Development of Kazakhstan – and the NVN on an ongoing

The existing visual identity reflects values of organized volunteering and encourages volunteers to attract new participants.

basis; several other large volunteer organizations periodically joined in.

The priority tasks from June 2019 to November 2019 included the creation and approval of hashtags and a logo for the Year of the Volunteer. The logo is a red heart inside of which is the letter “V” and the main hashtag *Birgemiz*, which means “together” in Kazakh. The motto of the volunteer movement is *Biz Birgemiz*, which means “We are together.”

The unofficial presentation of these symbols of volunteering occurred at the final event of the Year of Young People – the International *Birlik* (Unity) Forum on 11 December 2019 in Astana. The logo and hashtags were officially presented at the opening of the Year of the Volunteer in early February 2020. Representatives from Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Uzbekistan, among other countries, attended. Initially, these symbols were meant only for the Year of the Volunteer 2020, but they were so beloved by everyone connected in some way with volunteering that they instead serve as permanent signifiers of volunteering, which is important for involving the population in volunteer activities and forming the identity of volunteers.

In order to preserve the same style, representatives of Uzbekistan agreed on adapting and using these logos/symbols. For example, thanks to joint efforts, on 3–4 May 2024, the first *Biz Birgamiz* volunteer forum was held in Tashkent under the auspices of the Year of Volunteerism in the CIS. The forum was attended by over 60 delegates – leaders of volunteer organizations from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and other Commonwealth countries. The purpose of



Logo of the volunteer movement in Kazakhstan



Logo of the volunteer movement in Uzbekistan

the forum was to strengthen social partnership for sustainable development and increase the involvement of volunteer movements in the Commonwealth countries.

The role of the state in the development of volunteering

Throughout Central Asia, the state actively participates in the development of volunteer activities. In Kazakhstan in late 2019, before the start of the national 2020 Year of the Volunteer, a strategic meeting was held at which the issue of measuring volunteer performance was discussed. Realizing that it is impossible to measure “everything at once,” narrow topics within certain areas of volunteering were singled out for study. This is how the priority areas of the *Birgemiz* volunteer movement emerged. Initially, eight narrow areas of volunteer activity were selected, for which separate government funding was subsequently allocated under the first Framework for the Development of Volunteering. The funding was provided in the form of grants from the

In Kazakhstan, each of the priority areas of volunteer activity has its own distinctive visual sign.

national *Birgemiz* project, which is a priority area of the NJSC Centre for Support of Civil Initiatives. These priority areas were named in the Kazakh language; they align with these general areas:

1. *Birgemiz: Saýlyq* (health). The general direction is volunteering in medicine. The priority focus is to attract volunteers in the field of healthcare to assist in caring for patients, including those in hospices, oncology clinics, etc.
2. *Birgemiz: Bilim* (education). The general direction is volunteering in education. The priority focus is providing volunteer assistance in preparing for the unified national test (UNT) and teaching English, computer and legal literacy to older students in secondary schools in rural areas.
3. *Birgemiz: Sabaqtastyq* (mentoring). The general direction is social volunteering. The priority focus is the introduction of the practice of mentoring by volunteers for children in orphanages and children





TAZA ÁLEM
birgemiz



QAMQOR
birgemiz



ÚMIT
birgemiz



AYALA
birgemiz



**КОРПОРАТИВНОЕ
ВОЛОНТЕРСТВО**



**СЕРЕБРЯНОЕ
ВОЛОНТЕРСТВО**

in difficult life situations within the social services system.

4. *Birgemiz: Asyl Mura* (cultural heritage). The general direction is ethno-volunteering. The priority focus is the preservation of historical and cultural heritage sites.
5. *Birgemiz: Taza Álem* (clean world). The general direction is environmental volunteering. The priority focus is environmental protection, cleaning riverbeds and forests, planting trees and training in waste sorting.
6. *Birgemiz: Qamqor* (caring). The general direction is social volunteering. The priority focus is to attract volunteers to nursing homes and social service centres.
7. *Birgemiz: Úmit* (hope) The general direction is volunteering in emergency situations. The priority focus is to attract volunteers to projects that search for missing persons, reduce disaster risks and eliminate the consequences of natural and human-caused emergencies, including the search for documents on their compatriots' exploits in the Second World War.

8. *Birgemiz: Ayala* (affection, gentle, caring hands). The general direction is animal volunteering. The priority focus is helping stray animals in cities and rural areas and developing a responsible attitude towards animals. This direction was highlighted in 2021.

The above priority areas were branded in the form of uniform logos in the *Birgemiz* style, painted in different colours. Later, two other areas were added: corporate and silver volunteering.

Volunteering has been embodied in such forms of modern art as painting, graffiti and sculpture.



A mural and a sculpture dedicated to doctors and medical volunteers by Marlen Bakachiev, Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Source: Aizhan Mambetalieva, 2021.

Artworks dedicated to volunteers

Volunteering has not yet received wide coverage in literature and art. However, this is gaining momentum. During this study, examples were found of contemporary art – including painting, graffiti and sculpture – depicting volunteering practices. Such representations began in the twentieth century. The most common form of expressing society's gratitude to volunteers was the creation of a mural – a type of monumental painting on the walls of architectural structures that is also known as graffiti.

The first example of a mural appeared in 2021 in Bishkek on the wall of a dormitory at the I.K. Akhunbaev Kyrgyz State Medical Academy (KSMA). Dedicated to the heroism of doctors and volunteers in the fight against coronavirus disease⁷¹, the mural has a total area of 200 m².

One section of the mural depicts a girl handing flowers to the doctors, and the other shows KSMA student Adinay Myrzabekova. She worked as a volunteer nurse in the red zone of one of

the temporary hospitals in Bishkek. Adinay died on 13 July 2020, at the very peak of coronavirus pandemic. She would have turned 22 on 2 August 2020. Adinay was posthumously awarded the *Erdik* (courage) medal. Later, a bust of Adinay was installed in the new conference hall of this medical academy. Also, on the initiative of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, one of the new parks in the southern part of Bishkek was named in her honour.

Another mural was painted at the end of 2021 in the city of Osh based on a design from the Public Foundation Institute of Youth Development. The author of the idea was a former trainer of the NRCS KR. Talking about the creation of the mural, he explained, "Various art objects have begun to appear around the world that show the challenges people faced in 2020. Doctors were especially on the front-line; volunteers came to their aid, mobilized and provided support throughout the country."

Another beautiful mural was created in 2022 in Tashkent by artist Rustam Bazarov, at the request of the volunteers themselves. “My neighbours have been asking me about it for a long time. An activist of the *Mushukkent* project lives on the first floor of my house. She treats stray cats and dogs from various diseases,” said the artist⁷². *Mushukkent*, which means kitten in Uzbek, is a charity project that provides medical care and shelter to homeless animals and educates society about the humane treatment of animals. This is an example of a social partnership between government authorities and animal rights advocates alongside journalists, bloggers and volunteers.

Conclusions to the chapter

Central Asian volunteers are very diverse in terms of age and background, as well as in the types of assistance provided and the array of benefactors, who range from primary schoolchildren to the elderly.

As a charitable practice of civil society, volunteering in the region has produced a long list of examples of cooperation with government and international agencies, and volunteer stories have inspired some artists to create new works.



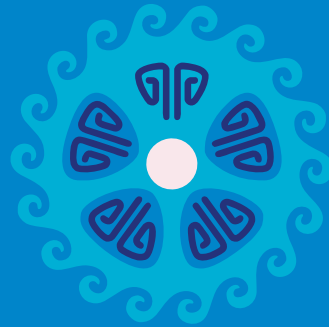
Mural “Thank you, volunteer!”, Osh, Kyrgyzstan.
Building address: Absamata Masaliev Avenue, 69.
Source: Osh City Hall, 2021.



Mural dedicated to animal protection volunteers. Low-rise residential building, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
Source: Sputnik, Uzbekistan, 2022.

CHAPTER 4

BEST PRACTICES OF VOLUNTEERING



CHAPTER 4

BEST PRACTICES OF VOLUNTEERING



The chapter presents more than a dozen examples of volunteering, including informal volunteering. Based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee members, compelling volunteer initiatives were selected in each country in the region – examples of volunteerism that deserve public attention. Highlighting them is a way of sharing best practices and may serve as a starting point for building dialogue among people involved in volunteering.

Each selected practice is recognized by experts as relevant, skilfully led, able to be used by other organizations, economically feasible and accessible in terms of resources, as well as effective, innovative and sustainable.

Volunteer movement “Club 28 Loops”, Kazakhstan and other countries

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3)
- partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17)

The movement originated in 2012 in Kazakhstan as a volunteer movement. Participants and community members knit clothes for premature babies and donate them to perinatal centres. At first, the volunteers of Club 28 Loops, who are called “fairies” in the community, knitted only tiny socks that required 28 loops on the knitting needles. Now, club members are also knitting hats, vests, socks, mittens, mini blankets and toys.

Over time, the club became an international community with branches in 12 countries, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Germany, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Estonia.

The clubs, which bring together everyone who wants to help premature babies, provide neonatology departments with warm, comfortable knitted products for these tiny babies. Beneficiaries include premature babies, doctors of neonatology departments and mothers of children born prematurely.

Over a decade, 3,703 volunteers in 150 branches knitted 379,023 woollen items. Similar clubs were opened at a drug rehabilitation centre. The movement inspired participants to extend their

effort to other similar projects including “Threads of Good”, “40 Loops” and “Early Rehabilitation of Newborns”.

Public foundation “Petroglyph Hunters”, Kazakhstan

SDG addressed:

- life on land (Goal 15)

With over 30 volunteers, the “Petroglyph Hunters” group studies, popularizes, preserves and supports the archaeological, historical and cultural heritage of Kazakhstan as a component of world culture. The project began informally about 25 years ago at the initiative of a group of amateur archaeologists in the Almaty region. Although from the very beginning the public movement complied with the principles of volunteer activity, it was only in April 2023 that the group registered as a public foundation.

The Foundation and a team of volunteers, together with professional scientists, deputies and the general public, are studying, protecting and preserving petroglyphs – the archaeological heritage of Kazakhstan. Volunteers organize archaeological expeditions to search for, study and document petroglyphs that have not previously been documented and, therefore, do not receive state protection. In addition, volunteers write scientific articles; organize scientific and educational activities; prepare publications

dedicated to the cultural heritage of ancestors; arrange archaeological fieldwork for high school and college students; hold talks with residents living in rural areas that are in the immediate vicinity of ancient sanctuaries; and create art objects dedicated to petroglyphs in an urban environment. For example, the Arkalan Petroglyph Park was created in the main Botanical Garden of Almaty.

With the support of scientists from the Institute of Archaeology, named after A.Kh. Margulan and deputies of the Mazhilis, the petroglyphs of the archaeological complex of the Arharly Mountains were certified, security zones were determined, the work of nearby enterprises was stopped, and the monuments were included in the Code of Archaeological Monuments of the Zhetysu Region. The scientific monograph “Petroglyphs of the Arharly Mountains” was published, an effort assisted by the Foundation’s volunteers.

Volunteer movement LIDER.KZ, Kazakhstan

The goal of the movement is to search for and provide assistance to missing persons, their relatives and friends.

Movement objectives:

- train volunteers in rescue skills and specialities with the involvement of emergency specialists and police



Volunteer movement “Club 28 Loops”, Kazakhstan and other countries



Public foundation “Petroglyph Hunters”, Kazakhstan



Volunteer movement LIDER.KZ, Kazakhstan

- professionalize volunteer assistance, including having trained volunteers regularly implement planned events
- organize volunteer activities to search for missing persons
- cooperate with civil society organizations and government services to search for missing persons

In Kazakhstan, a person must be missing for three days before an official report on the disappearance can be filed. This significantly increases the risks and potential danger for those missing, especially if they are children, people with disabilities, or older people suffering from dementia and other illnesses.

To address this gap, an informal group of concerned citizens took the initiative to form a group that could draw attention to those who were missing by distributing fliers and posting signs about them in crowded places.

As part of an awareness-raising campaign by the Kazakh Ministry of Internal Affairs to combat Internet and telephone fraud, volunteers are creating warning signs and distributing brochures. *Source: Aizada Zhusupova, 2024.*



Beginning in 2016, the informal group began organizing search teams. Gradually, search groups and detachments were formed. Now, they closely cooperate with police departments and departments of internal affairs within Kazakhstan, emergency services and the media. Volunteer searchers regularly undergo special education and training from medical experts, emergency agencies and police departments. They have their own equipment and resources for searching – walkie-talkies, flashlights, drones and other equipment. The movement has accumulated extensive experience in organizing searches for missing persons. This practice has received widespread support from citizens and has grown into a sustainable organization operating throughout the country.

In addition to search activities, volunteers train the population on how to behave in such situations and teach first aid. Cooperation with government agencies is also expanding. Joint efforts have been carried out to paint over signs on the streets with information on how to access drugs.

Public foundation «Eco Demi» – “Cleanup Hour” Project, Kyrgyzstan

The «Eco Demi» Public Foundation implements socially significant projects in Kyrgyzstan. The foundation cares for the elderly and single mothers and provides emotional and material support to people experiencing financial hardship. As part of the “Cleanup Hour” project, the foundation’s volunteers clean populated areas for exactly one hour every Saturday. The motto of the project is “Clean outside – clean inside”. It means that by clearing the outer space of debris, you also cleanse your inner self. During collection, waste is divided into secondary raw materials (metal, hard plastic, glass, cardboard) and non-recyclable materials (bags, plastics, cigarette butts, non-recyclable paper packaging). The volunteers who spend their time, energy and money on cleaning and organizing public spaces report that positive changes are occurring in their own lives.



The volunteers clean the shores of Lake Geokdepe in Turkmenistan during the “Green Games” organized by the European Union Delegation, the Turkmenistan Nature Conservation Society and the local mountaineering club. Source: Isabel Balasanova, 2024.

Volunteers began holding the Cleanup Hour in Bishkek in late 2017. Today, between 15 and 30 people participate in Bishkek’s events. The initiative takes place in parallel in other cities including Osh, Karakol, Jalal-Abad, Kyzyl-Kiya and Batken. In addition, contacts were established with volunteers from Uzbekistan, and now the Cleanup Hour is regularly held in Tashkent and Samarkand. In 2022, outdoor Cleanup Hour events began to attract sponsors. In 2022–2023, over 30 organizations and individuals became sponsors, a financial boost that allowed volunteers to organize a large-scale clean-up (*subbotnik*) in the Boom Gorge, Ala-Archa Gorge, on the shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, and in a poppy field in Bishkek.

The project manager, together with like-minded people, keeps a weekly journal that indicates the location, names and signatures of those who participated in the clean-up, along with the number of bags and the weight of the collected trash. The municipal service “Municipal Enterprise Tazalyk” helps to remove the trash bags.

Today, the Cleanup Hour channel on the Telegram social network has about 650 subscribers, and the page on the Instagram social network has about 2,900 subscribers. The movement gained popularity among the population due to a well-structured algorithm of actions. A volunteer only needs to spend one hour each week at a specific time.

This movement, despite the fact that it does not reach the general public, demonstrates constant involvement in volunteering and good deeds. The project management relies on a systematic approach in its activities; it carries out clean-up activities even when various obstacles arise, such as bad weather conditions.

Workshop for cancer patients “Together for Life”, Kyrgyzstan

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3)

The Public Association Workshop for cancer Patients “Together for Life” is a striking example of a humanitarian effort based on the experiences of women who have suffered from cancer. Founded by women, the organization assists women who are undergoing treatment for cancer and facing financial difficulties; it has become a centre of solidarity, compassion and support.

Volunteers create and sell a variety of products – clothes, bags, cosmetic bags and other items – to financially support women in need. The founders of the organization first sewed on their own sewing machines at home, purchasing materials with their own funds. Their initiative has attracted public attention as the products drew notice at various charity events and fairs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers sewed custom-made reusable gauze masks. All money received from the sale of products goes to fund chemotherapy for the craftswomen themselves.



Volunteers of the public association “Workshop of cancer patients “Together for Life” at the production site of reusable masks, Kyrgyzstan. *Source: Guliza Chudubaeva, 2024.*

Money earned from sales, including international ones, and from sponsors allowed the women to expand their activities and acquire the necessary professional equipment. The workshop has developed an effective system of providing assistance to those who most need support during their cancer treatment. The organization also provides emotional support, accompanying patients throughout the entire treatment journey. Currently, the organization also has an apartment, provided as a charitable donation, that is used as a hospice.

In total, over 300 volunteers participated in the workshop, which indicates a high level of social mobilization and public interest in its goals and mission. The fact that a majority of volunteers are women who have themselves survived the battle with cancer and are in remission makes this practice unique. Their own lived experience and understanding of the complexity of treating the disease make their participation in the organization valuable for those who are looking for support and inspiration on their own path to recovery.

Charitable foundation “Muzaffar”, Tajikistan

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3)
- affordable and clean energy (Goal 7)
- decent work and economic growth (Goal 8)
- climate action (Goal 13)

The Foundation, which opened in 2015, works on 12 areas that cover many facets of life including education; healthcare; social welfare, including support for orphans and disabled persons, the elderly and veterans; and construction of bridges, schools and kindergartens. The Foundation’s activities are among the best practices not only in Tajikistan but also in the region. Entrepreneurs provide most of the funding. The Foundation employs only four people, but its more than 700 volunteers offer ongoing activities, supported by an annual budget of over 1.2 million somoni.

The Foundation’s activities may offer a template for companies and government agencies that wish to apply its methods and practices in their social projects. For example, thanks to the efforts of the Foundation, some institutions for troubled



«Eco Demi» Public Foundation,
Kyrgyzstan



Workshop for cancer patients
“Together for Life”, Bishkek,
Kyrgyzstan



БЛАГОТВОРИТЕЛЬНЫЙ ФОНД
“МУЗАФФАР”

Charitable foundation
“Muzaffar”, Tajikistan

teenagers, as well as boarding schools for disabled children, have become more willing to allow their students to participate in activities outside the walls of the institutions. This was almost impossible just a few years ago.

The Foundation’s projects include supporting labour and war veterans; providing children from low-income families with school supplies; supporting families with disabilities and orphans during holidays; reconstructing and provisioning animal shelters; supporting gifted young students and athletes; planting trees; and promoting a healthy lifestyle. The main mission of the Foundation is to reduce poverty in the Republic by promoting the ideals of kindness and mercy, participating in charity and helping those in need.

Considering the importance of infrastructure projects in remote areas of the Republic, the Foundation’s management prioritized large-scale projects involving water supply, bridges, and education and health-care facilities. For example, a secondary school with 750 places was opened in 2021 in the Vakhsh District of the Khatlon Region. The budget of the institution, together with equipment and facilities, amounted to 800,000 somoni. The Foundation funded the entire project, which replaced a dilapidated school building from the 1950s. The Foundation also financed the construction of a kindergarten for 300 children in Kanibadam, Sughd Region, with a project budget of 790,000 somoni.

One of the most famous large-scale events the Foundation holds is its annual charity exhibition of flowers and plants called “Sow goodness” (*Neki Bikor*) in the capital. The exhibition is held with the support of the executive authority of the city of Dushanbe, the Committee for Environmental Protection under the Government of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Tajikistan, and the Botanical Garden of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan.

The exhibition brings together amateur gardeners, florists, specialists in the fields of environmental protection and nature conservation in the Republic to share knowledge, foster respect for nature and draw public attention to the problems of climate change. It is equally important to encourage the population to use environmentally friendly products and promote the principles of green energy, which corresponds to Goals 7, 8, 13. In addition, the exhibition is including a project of the Life Without Cancer Foundation, aimed at informing the public about the importance of a timely diagnosis of cancer among women. The Foundation provides free screening for women in rural areas and promotes a healthy lifestyle and a responsible attitude towards one’s own health. More than 40 exhibitors participate, while over 3,000 people visit in person and the same number participate online.



Charity exhibition of flowers and plants “Neki Bikor”, Dushanbe. Source: Media group “Asia-Plus”, 2024.

National Tuberculosis Elimination Project, Tajikistan

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3).

The Tuberculosis (TB) Elimination Project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development, operates throughout Central Asia. The project promotes evidence-based solutions leading to the early detection, treatment and prevention of tuberculosis. According to the World Health Organization, Tajikistan is among 30 countries in the world with a high burden of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. Therefore, the project is important in the fighting the disease.

The project is being implemented on a national scale and is focused on the interaction of doctors with local communities. The project covers all levels of the health-care system. Volunteers take an active part in its implementation and perform

various tasks.

Volunteer mentors were selected from among the directors of Healthy Lifestyle Centres in pilot districts. Volunteers from the local community visit their neighbours and talk about the possibilities of the project, doing so in mosques to talk with men and in households and residential courtyards to talk with women. They visit people in contact with patients, as well as migrants and members of their families and share with them information about tuberculosis, its symptoms, modes of transmission and options for seeking help. They also discuss how to treat the disease and outline the risk factors for infection. Adults and children are screened at home, and people infected with tuberculosis are identified. The latter are sent to nearby hospitals and tuberculosis centres.

Medical volunteers responsible for treatment visit patients daily to monitor their intake of anti-TB drugs, provide support for timely completion of



Through the “Winter Relief Project”, a volunteer donates money to people with disabilities to help them meet their needs during extreme weather conditions. *Source: Nurila Duysheeva, 2024.*

control tests, report side effects to the attending physician, provide psychological and social support, and identify social problems.

Volunteer teachers conduct information activities in schools. They organize training sessions on tuberculosis among schoolchildren over 12 years of age. They also teach proper sanitation and hygiene methods to young people.

As well, 26,603 people, including vulnerable groups, were screened for tuberculosis in 2020–2023. Psychosocial support was provided to 997 patients with new or recurrent cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis. Preventive measures and medical supports were provided to 38,714 households (181,642 people).

Non-governmental organization “Keik Okara”, Turkmenistan

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3)
- gender equality (Goal 5)

The public organization “Keik Okara” organizes the “Leadership in Turkmenistan” project for young people between 18 and 30 years of age. The

Volunteers take an active part in the implementation of the nationwide project to eliminate tuberculosis in Tajikistan.

project promotes the development of leadership skills among young people, helping them to become more confident, active citizens focused on social change. This project helps train a young workforce to be capable of putting forward initiatives, developing volunteerism, setting up organizations and carrying out socially useful activities.

As part of the project, young leaders began designing their own socially significant projects. For example, an initiative group from the region applied for and won a grant for the “Donation of Blood” project, which attempts to raise public awareness about the need to increase donations to a blood bank. The estimated out-of-pocket costs for the project only includes fees for printing leaflets, brochures and stationery. Volunteer labour covers the rest. During the project, volunteers disseminated information to 5,000 people about the problem of blood shortages for patients in hospitals and clinics. Thanks to the campaign, about 700 people arrived at the blood transfusion station.

In addition, Keik Okara has been helping victims of violence in Turkmenistan for over 20 years by providing consultations, psychological assistance and legal support to women, large families,

people with disabilities and low-income families in difficult life situations.

Public organization “Yenme”, Turkmenistan

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3)
- quality education (Goal 4)
- reduced inequalities (Goal 10)

The organization “Yenme” was created in 2012 to provide social support to persons with disabilities, orphans, the poor, the elderly, young people and other socially vulnerable groups. Organization volunteers implemented the “On the Path to Success” project, promoting professional self-determination of young people. About 30 young people, including those from vulnerable sections of the population, participated. The initiative offered participants training to help them develop professional skills and foster active participation in civic life.

During individual and group consultations, participants were prepared for a job fair featuring entrepreneurs from Turkmenistan. Sharing their experience, volunteers encouraged young people to achieve success and reach their potential. After completing the project, participants chose their future professional path. Some of them became volunteers in public organizations, others continued their studies in educational institutions, and the remainder got full-time jobs.

Public organization “Tebigi Kuvvat”, Turkmenistan

SDGs addressed:

- climate action (Goal 13)
- life on land (Goal 15)
- partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17)

Tebigi Kuvvat (Natural Energy) Public Association Enterprise (PAE) was established by the Nature Conservation Society of Turkmenistan and registered in 2003. It operates in accordance with the main provisions of the legislative framework of Turkmenistan and State programmes for environmental protection. The organization works in support of environmental protection and sustainable development.

The association pursues innovative approaches to environmental issues and projects, and offers consultancy services, seminars and round tables on sustainable development with the goal of increasing the potential of civil society.

The organization prepares and distributes informational materials on environmental issues, including waste disposal. It organizes seminars on ethical waste management and hosts events for young people about household waste recycling. In the area of proper waste management, representatives of the organization participated in the European Union project, “Support for the implementation of sustainable development policies – rational use of national



NGO “Keik Okara”,
Turkmenistan



Public organization “Yenme”,
Turkmenistan



Public organization “Tebigi
Kuvvat”, Turkmenistan



Public foundation "Ezgu amal", Uzbekistan



Legal Clinic of Tashkent State University of Law, Uzbekistan

resources in the energy and environmental sector of Turkmenistan".

In addition, the enterprise strives to improve environmental legislation, including the Law of Turkmenistan "On Waste"⁷³, and draft by-laws in the field of waste management. Together with environmental partners, the organization aims to implement Turkmenistan's Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, known as the "Aarhus Convention"⁷⁴.

Along these lines, a team of PAE volunteers and the Aarhus Centre of Turkmenistan are conducting a tree-planting campaign on the administrative territory of the Koytendag State Nature Reserve. Due to the lack of water for irrigation in the administrative territory of the reserve, the landscaping campaign is occurring in stages – 200 seedlings of various tree species will be planted during each planting season. Tebigi Kuvvat is providing the seedlings free-of-charge. The organization also announced plans to develop eco-tourism, also inclusive of persons with disabilities, in the Koytendag mountain system.

Public foundation "Ezgu amal", Uzbekistan

SDGs addressed:

- no poverty (Goal 1)
- good health and well-being (Goal 3)
- gender equality (Goal 5)
- reduced inequalities (Goal 10)
- peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16)
- partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17)

The name of the Foundation translated from Uzbek means "good deed". This is the first charitable foundation in Uzbekistan created by an initiative group of volunteers. Among the activists were parents of seriously ill children who deeply understood the problems of childhood oncology. In November 2018, they united and acquired legal status as an NGO. A group of volunteers has a page and a channel, "The World is Not Without Good People", on Facebook and Telegram, which unites like-minded people.

The Foundation assists seriously ill children fighting cancer, seriously ill people from low-income households; children living in orphanages; people in residential care homes; and those in difficult life situations.

Students at the Tashkent State Law University apply theoretical knowledge in practice by volunteering.

The Foundation develops and submits proposals to the relevant government bodies to amend current legislation to improve the level of medical services in the field of cancer prevention and haematology. The Foundation also promotes the development of corporate charity, strengthening cooperation between businesses and NGOs, the development of private charity and volunteering, and the development and implementation of unique social projects. The foundation has implemented over 150 projects since it was started, and it has supported over 40 clinics.

Legal Clinic of Tashkent State University of Law, Uzbekistan

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3)
- quality education (Goal 4)
- gender equality (Goal 5)
- decent work and economic growth (Goal 8)
- reduced inequalities (Goal 10)
- responsible consumption and production (Goal 12)
- peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16)
- partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17)

This volunteer initiative was founded in 2000 to provide the population with access to free legal advice and improve legal awareness of society. Student volunteers provide free legal assistance to the people of Uzbekistan in the form of oral and written consultations, both online and offline. This way, student volunteers have an opportunity to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. University teachers review the legal advice offered

by the student volunteers, ensuring the reliability of the information.

The number of volunteers in the legal clinic increases every year. Currently there are over 200 of them. Volunteers undergo special training where they learn counselling skills and how to write applications. Since 2023, the legal clinic has responded to over 6,000 calls.

For those who cannot come to the clinic, weekly on-site appointments are available in remote areas. Student volunteers, together with volunteer teachers, provide legal advice on-site. In addition, there is a joint project with the Association of Persons with Disabilities of Uzbekistan called “Barrier-Free Environment”; volunteers visit businesses and ask organizations to install ramps for people with disabilities.



Charity fair “Time of Miracles”,
Uzbekistan

Charity fair “Time of Miracles”, Uzbekistan

SDGs addressed:

- good health and well-being (Goal 3)
- quality education (Goal 4)
- decent work and economic growth (Goal 8)
- reduced inequalities (Goal 10)
- partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17)

Volunteer initiative “The Time of Miracles Charity Fair” has been held annually since 2003 (except for 2020 due to the pandemic) in the capital of Uzbekistan. At the fair, children with special needs – including orphans, children with disabilities, children living in difficult living conditions or who are HIV-positive – present their creative works. As part of the programme, participants and all guests explore over 20 thematic blocks, such as health; education; creative potential; laughter therapy; art therapy; sports and para-sports. They also meet stars from the worlds of show business, sports, business and international art.

The Time of Miracles platform is currently the only one in Central Asia that systematically explains the importance of inclusion in everyday life. The fair also highlights the importance of professional guidance for children and young people in their social adaptation and in maintaining good health.

The initiative tries to show residents and visitors to the country that they should not promote negative stereotypes that result in the exclusion of socially vulnerable children from creative self-expression, professional achievement and building a fulfilling life.

The charity fair has the following goals:

- Focusing attention on the issues facing children from socially vulnerable segments of the population, including orphans, children with disabilities, children living in difficult conditions, and children who are HIV-positive.
- Seeking opportunities for the further implementation of children’s creative

initiatives and their social adaptation, fostering a positive attitude towards health and preparing for employment.

- Supporting and working with children from vulnerable groups of the population, based on the principles of social responsibility, and strengthening efforts at promoting inclusion.

To date, this initiative has trained over 6,000 volunteers, brought together over 15,000 children who received help on-site, and scaled up the participation of beneficiaries and experts from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

Conclusions to the chapter

Several best practice case studies, drawn from each country in the region, have been provided as examples. These examples prove that volunteering activity in the region is gradually becoming more systematic, informed and organized. It relies on new communication technologies and seeks collaboration with other organizations from the non-profit sector, governmental agencies and businesses. Familiarization with the above practices once again confirms that volunteering is strongly associated with humanity, mercy, human kindness and the selfless desire to help others, especially those in difficult life situations.

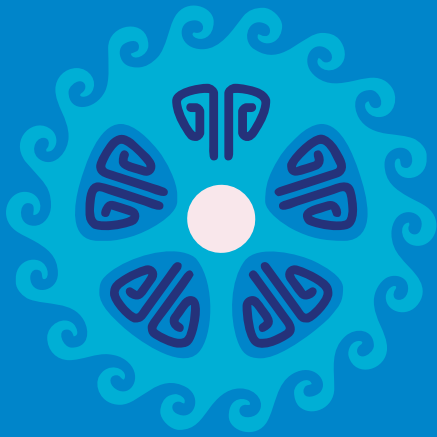




Volunteers are supporting tuberculosis elimination project at the community level in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Volunteering has a long history in Central Asia. Those traditional forms of volunteering have been preserved and are now a source of pride for the new generation. Volunteering in the region is currently undergoing a revival and is a rapidly developing social phenomenon. Volunteering takes a variety of forms and is practised in a variety of ways. Its societal effectiveness and significance have increased, and the range of opportunities for public participation has expanded exponentially.

Volunteering is a tool for achieving SDGs in the region, mainly in social development areas such as inequality, demographic change, migration, youth unemployment and climate change. An important outcome of the research conducted within the region is the development of practical recommendations to further development of volunteerism gathered from volunteers, organizers of volunteer activities, experts and consultants. Their constructive ideas and rational proposals are aimed at a wide audience and designed to attract the interest of local government representatives, employees of ministries who support and coordinate volunteer activities, politicians, public figures, volunteers themselves and representatives of volunteer organizations.

The implementation of a significant number of the recommendations aims to reach volunteers, NPOs, the government and corporate sectors. **Government agencies** could expand opportunities to encourage volunteer activities by including the costs of their implementation in the national budget and attracting funding from the

private sector. Government authorities also should continue to highlight incentives to encourage participants in volunteer activities, such as holding competitions for best practices and projects, and awarding certificates recognizing the socially beneficial contributions of volunteers. The culture and values of volunteering at all levels of education and in all kinds of educational settings should be encouraged. Another priority is to provide for the professional development of volunteers by offering training sessions at resource centres and partnership programmes with the support of the **private sector**.

Another important step could be to encourage volunteers and volunteer organizations to participate in government programmes and national development strategies, and not only at the stage of their implementation. Volunteer initiatives and projects could be included in regulatory documents at the planning stage. It is also recommended to involve volunteers in coordinating bodies and other existing mechanisms for implementing the SDGs, since they participate in the implementation of many global Goals at the local level; their contribution, however, often remains invisible and unaccounted for. Volunteer organizations can be contracted to help implement government programmes, including within the framework of social services procurement. Furthermore, **government agencies** could develop a national-level system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of volunteer projects to ensure their closer connection with the SDGs. This will make it

Practical recommendations were developed taking into account the suggestions of volunteers, organizers of volunteer activities, experts and consultants.

possible to carry out qualitative and quantitative measurements and analyse outcomes to identify the most successful volunteer practices with a view towards replicating them at the national level.

National statistics offices could measure volunteer work. This would allow government agencies to focus on collecting current volunteering data and statistics and also to conduct annual nationwide surveys, at the national government's expense, on volunteer activities. As well, it would allow the government to update guidelines for best volunteering practices.

Government agencies also should consider these ideas:

- implement an insurance programme for volunteers or offer compensation during emergencies;
- 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; and
- develop humanitarian diplomacy and cross-sector cooperation together with volunteers.

In particular, it is recommended that **NGOs and representatives of volunteer organizations**:

- promote regular contact with the international volunteer community; and
- organize national and regional resource centres for the development of volunteering.

Resource centres can assist initiative volunteer groups in many ways. In turn, they will be encouraged to expand their partnerships with public and other organizations involved in the volunteer movement.

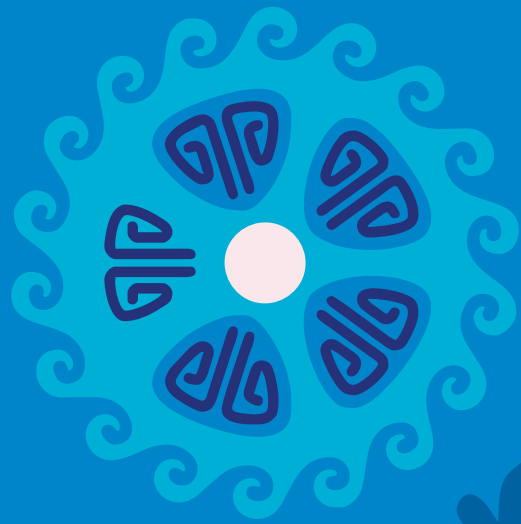
Such centres can be created by both governmental and non-governmental organizations that will provide training and consultation to participants and coordinators of volunteer activities, including government employees, as well as provide volunteers with free access to information resources and technical support.

NPOs that lack centralized information platforms for the support and development of volunteerism would benefit from creating them; interested stakeholders may help. This will simplify the search for information for those wishing to join volunteer projects, give a more complete understanding of volunteer opportunities in various areas of interest, introduce training opportunities and promote the acquisition of skills useful for volunteering.

The interaction among the **non-profit sector, private enterprises and companies, and government organizations** to create corporate volunteering programmes is critical to expanding opportunities for citizens to participate in volunteer projects. Corporate volunteering should be given more attention in legislation, with specific articles dedicated to its development. This is not only about introducing such a concept into the law, but also about formulating preferences and obligations for companies organizing corporate volunteer activities.

To summarize, some of the suggested recommendations, such as the creation of digital platforms, are intended only for the short-term. In contrast the longer term recommendations require careful consideration, public discussion and coordination with government authorities. The list of recommendations and proposals can be expanded; to achieve this, all parties interested in the development of volunteerism need to continue their dialogue.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

A. Research methodology

When preparing the *State of Volunteering in Central Asia Review*, methods and procedures were used to collect information from reliable sources for subsequent processing and analysis. The research methodology was based on the collection of data related to volunteering and its contribution and impact on the society, culture and economy of the countries studied. Data sources included official websites of state authorities, regional authorities, local governments, statistical and research organizations, consultancies, commercial companies, public associations and foundations, non-profit organizations and centres for the support and development of volunteerism. Expert interviews were also conducted.

During the work on the *Review*, materials from peer-reviewed scientific publications, conferences, literature reviews and analytical reports, laws and other regulations, publications on social networks, online reference systems and data search engines were collected and analysed. All sources used are accompanied by bibliographic references, which are presented in accordance with international style.

In order to describe fully the features and components of volunteer activity, information was gathered from case studies, surveys of representatives of volunteer groups, focus groups, personal interviews and online meetings with individuals and groups involved in the volunteer movement. In addition, a round-table with experts from all countries of the region was held in Tashkent from 3 to 4 April 2024.

B. Comparative characteristics of the legislative definition of volunteer activity principles

A comparative analysis showed that relevant laws strongly diverge in their descriptions of the principles involved in volunteer activity. According to table 5, compiled to complement the material in chapter 1, only two of the 26 (about 8 per cent) known principles of volunteering are common to all five countries in the region.

Sources: the Law of Kazakhstan, article 5 “Principles of volunteering”; the Law of Kyrgyzstan, article 5 “Key principles of volunteering”; the Laws of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan article 4 “Principles of volunteering activities”; the Law of Tajikistan, article 4 “Principles of volunteering”.

Table 5. Comparison of articles of laws dedicated to principles of volunteering

Item	Principles of volunteer activities specified in the relevant articles of the laws of Central Asian countries	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
1	Gratuitousness	+	+	+	-	+
2.	Voluntary basis	+	+	+	+	+
3.	Equality/equity	+	+	+	+	+
4.	Honesty	-	+	-	+	-
5.	Humanity	-	+	-	+	-
6.	Integrity	-	+	-	-	-
7.	Solidarity, good faith	+	+	-	-	-
8.	Collaboration of volunteer activity participants / support for volunteer activity participants	+	+	-	-	-
9.	Legal basis of volunteering activities	+	+	-	+	+
10.	Free determination	-	+		+	-
11.	Freedom in determining the goals, forms, types and methods of choosing volunteer activities	+	+	+	-	-
12.	Unconditional respect for human and civil rights	-	+	-	+	-
13.	Publicity/openness, public availability of information	+	+	-	+	-
14.	Openness while respecting the confidentiality of citizens' personal data	-	+	-	+	-
15.	Respect for human rights and freedoms in volunteer activities	-	+	+	+	-
16.	Safety of life and health of the volunteer and others	+	+	-	+	-
17.	Equal and mutually beneficial international cooperation in the field of volunteer activities	+	-	-	+	-

Item	Principles of volunteer activities specified in the relevant articles of the laws of Central Asian countries	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
18.	Volunteering activities cannot be aimed at supporting political parties, commercial promotion of goods, works, services or commercial intermediation in order to achieve social or material benefits	-	+	-	+	-
19.	Volunteering activities cannot be aimed at supporting religious organizations	-	+	-	-	-
20.	The creation of volunteer organizations similar to paramilitary forces is prohibited	-	+	-	-	-
21.	Volunteering activities do not replace the activities of state bodies and local governments in the exercise of their powers	+	+	-	+	-
22.	State authorities and local governments have the right to support volunteer activities in the manner and forms that do not contradict the law	-	+	-	+	-
23.	Volunteer activities are carried out without receiving any monetary or material remuneration from the recipient of volunteer assistance, the receiving party, or the attracting organization – except for reimbursement of costs associated with the implementation of this activity.	-	+	-	+	-
24.	Recruitment and selection of volunteers is carried out on the basis of equal opportunities and without discrimination	-	+	-	+	-
25.	A volunteer's knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, their expertise, skills, abilities and experience in doing the work that requires the volunteers' practical input	-	+	-	+	-
26.	Volunteer activities are not regulated by labour laws	-	+	-	-	-

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Chapter 1

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Central Asia is a subregion according to the classification of the United Nations Statistics Division: and according to the United Nations Terminology Database Geoscheme of the World <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49>.
- 2 *Hashar* in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is the same as *Ashar* in Kyrgyzstan, *Asar* in Kazakhstan, and *Yowar* in Turkmenistan. See Tolstoy (1963, p. 731).
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