

REFLECTING CITIZEN CONTRIBUTIONS THROUGH VOLUNTEERING IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 2019

Summary

United Nations Volunteers (UNV) works with UN Member States and other stakeholders to support evidence on whole-of-society approaches in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Globally, more than one billion active volunteers make economic and social contributions to development processes at scale. Incorporating evidence on volunteering can support national analysis on means of implementation for the SDGs, highlight citizen participation and engagement, and can demonstrate pathways and processes for leaving no one behind. Practically, UNV can:

- Package relevant knowledge and evidence on volunteering in the context (including, where available national statistics in line with the ILO standard) and provide advice and analysis to governments.
- Convene stakeholders to collate and validate data and inputs for specific themes or Goals.
- Facilitate volunteer-led data collection processes with target groups (e.g. youth or rural communities) to fill data gaps (online and offline) for the VNR reports.

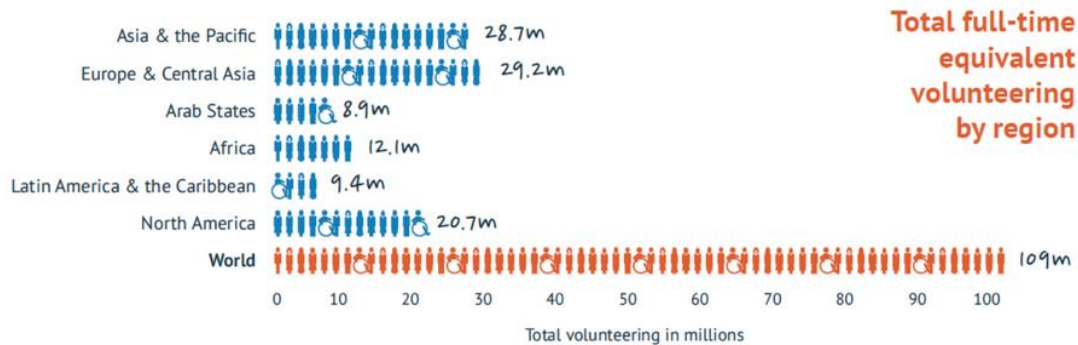
Why include information on volunteering in VNRs?

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

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

Globally there are an estimated 1 billion volunteers carrying out a range of roles in their communities and societies for the greater good (2015 State of World's Volunteerism Report). Conservative estimates that tend to capture the most visible types of volunteers have shown that volunteering adds significant value to economies and societies, for example, 2.4% of global GDP (Human Development Report 2015).

The role of volunteerism in the implementation of SDGs is recognized and anchored in high level UN documents: The UN General Assembly Resolution that established the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (A/RES/67/290); Integrating volunteering into peace and development: the plan of action for the next decade and beyond (A/RES/70/129); The UN Secretary-General's synthesis report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (A/69/700). Volunteers have been designated as a stakeholder group within ECOSOC processes through the Volunteer Groups Alliance (VGA). During the current General Assembly (UNGA73), UN Member States are reviewing a new resolution that encourages governments to increasingly cooperate with volunteer-involving and civil society organizations including reflecting the contribution and impact of volunteers in future VNRs.



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

How have countries reflected volunteering in previous VNRs?

In 2018, 29 reporting countries (over 60%) mentioned volunteers in their reviews - increasing from 17 in 2017 and 2 in the first round of reports in 2016. There are five principal ways in which governments incorporated information on volunteer contributions:

First, many countries recognize volunteers as critical partners, whose inputs are essential for addressing development priorities at scale. Australia's report includes a whole section on 'Volunteers for the SDGs' which estimates the economic and social contribution of volunteers at \$290 billion per year. Sri Lanka reports that 8.6 million people, or 40% of the population, volunteer at least once a year. Greece notes that since the financial crisis the number of national volunteers has grown drastically to support communities' needs. Niger documents the key contributions of volunteers under each of the Goals under review in 2018.

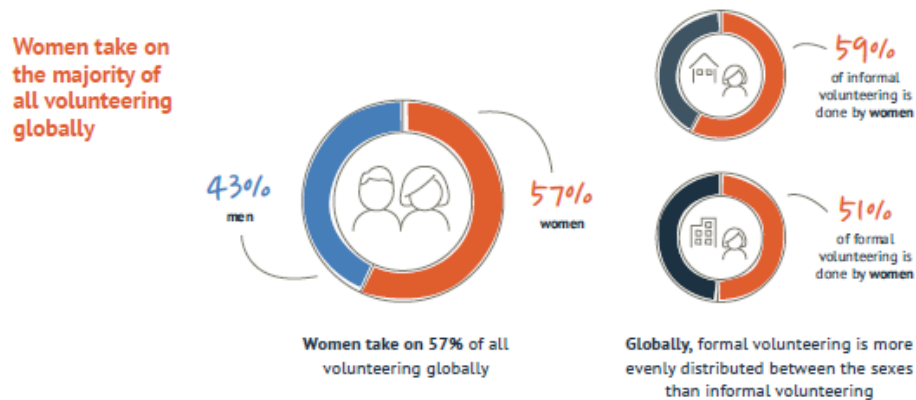
Second, governments see volunteers as innovators, bringing new perspectives and ideas to the table. For example, Andorra, Guinea, Jamaica, Malta and Vietnam note new volunteer approaches to disaster risk reduction and environmental protection. Likewise, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia and Togo document volunteer innovations in education, employment and poverty reduction while Bahrain, Bhutan, Kiribati, Lebanon and Sri Lanka include volunteer initiatives to strengthen community engagement and social cohesion.

Third, governments recognize that voluntary actions strengthen the ability to reach the furthest behind first. For example, Australia's report notes the implementation of volunteer schemes to increase the economic and social inclusion of persons with disabilities; Canada promotes volunteering for active citizenship among new immigrants; Lao PDR and Singapore are harnessing volunteerism to strengthen women's empowerment and leadership; and in Ecuador and Mexico, volunteers have an important role in engaging vulnerable children and youth in support schemes.

The 2018 national reviews also demonstrate how governments are working with volunteers to improve participation for the SDGs, including with data collection, consultation and validation of results. We know that volunteer-led processes are a cost-effective approach to widening stakeholder involvement in SDGs monitoring and reporting. For example, in Mexico and Mali, volunteer structures have been established to support SDGs awareness raising, feedback and data-gathering, particularly among young people. Singapore notes how volunteer-led citizen science is gathering data as part of conservation efforts. In Lao PDR, Spain and

Sri Lanka, volunteer organizations and platforms supported consultation and feedback processes for the 2018 national reviews, including stakeholder workshops and online and onsite consultations to address data gaps.

Finally, several Member States highlight the value of volunteering as part of international cooperation, including South-South Cooperation. For example, Togo has established the International Reciprocal Volunteering (VIR) mechanism for cooperation with other African countries and beyond. Australia, Hungary, Ireland and Poland report bilateral and other arrangements for international cooperation through volunteering, as part of joint capacity development for the SDGs.



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

What are some of the tools and approaches that countries can use to integrate volunteering?

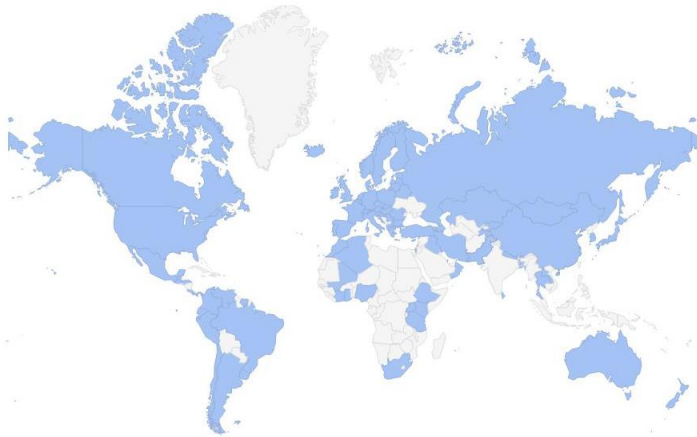
- **Evidence gathering:** Quantitative data from Labour Force Surveys, Time Use Surveys or other research on volunteer inputs; Qualitative National Situation Analyses on volunteering, prepared by Member States under the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering; Volunteer sector and academic reports on volunteering.
- **Data collection:** Dissemination of online surveys via UNV's online volunteering roster of 600,000 persons, or other methods. On-the-ground surveys with remote communities to get feedback and inputs to VNRs facilitated through volunteer networks.
- **Consultation and validation:** Stakeholder workshops with volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations, to document initiatives and approaches under specific SDGs; volunteer-led workshops with other target groups for example persons with disabilities, youth not in education and employment, or indigenous groups.
- **Reporting:** UN Volunteers can support research, data analysis and reporting as well as report design and production processes.

What about over the longer term? How can UN Member States work with UNV to build knowledge and evidence in this area?

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

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

Geographical distribution of countries for which data collection on volunteer work, between 2007 and 2017, was identified



Source: National Practices in Measuring Volunteer Work, ILO, 2018

Further information and support:

- [National practices in measuring volunteer work](#): A Critical Review (ILO, 2018)
- [Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer work](#): (ILO, 2011)
- [State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018](#): (UNV, 2018)
- [Volunteer Contributions to the SDGs in Voluntary National Reviews](#): (UNV, 2018)

Contact: Maggie Carroll (margaret.carroll@unv.org) or Boram Kim (boram.kim@unv.org) or your national UN Volunteers focal point for further information.