



**Volunteer Groups  
Alliance**

## **Volunteers Stakeholder Group thematic position paper to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2024**

### **Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions *through volunteering***

As sustainable development suffers significant setbacks as a result of armed conflict, inequality, and climate change, the **more than one billion volunteers around the globe** continue to contribute to the only way forward to save our planet: accelerating the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We call upon the UN and Members States to **engage with volunteers strategically and regularly** by:

- Amplifying citizen voices in key gathering moments and spaces.
- Creating more open spaces for volunteer voices to participate and fully engage in key decision-making mechanisms and processes.
- Supporting volunteer-state partnerships and intentional governance structures.
- Engaging in permanent exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and joint efforts with volunteers across the world.

#### **Recommendations:**

##### **1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES**

**Volunteers build bridges** by brokering relationships between communities and state authorities and other development stakeholders. We request that Member States:

1. Integrate volunteering in **policies and national development strategies** and in Voluntary National Reviews to create a more enabling environment for volunteering.
2. Engage as **partners and advocates for policies** supporting an enabling environment for volunteering.
3. Explore **national and global partnerships and collaborations** to leverage efforts towards supporting and promoting volunteering.
4. Build **coalitions and networks for learning and shared action** on developing and enabling an environment for volunteering.
5. Adopt the **Global Volunteering Standard** which, combined with supportive public policies, strengthens the quality of volunteering.

## 2. INCLUSIVE DIVERSITY

Volunteering **offers diverse paths to civic participation, but gaps in volunteer practices and aspirations** across countries and regions remain. We ask that Member States invest in ambitious policies that aim to:

1. Build on experiences of promoting volunteering among youth and extend opportunities to **all demographic groups**, especially through virtual and hybrid opportunities.
2. Recognise, work with, and support **community-led volunteering systems and informal volunteers**, involving them as equal partners in the volunteering space.
3. Address **barriers to volunteering faced by marginalized groups**, ensuring that all volunteers are valued and supported as partners in social change.
4. Address **gender-related volunteering disparities and inequalities**, recognising that the disproportionate burden of care globally falls on women.
5. Adopt **adequate and inclusive mechanisms based on intersectionalities** and grassroots representation.

## 3. MEASURING SUCCESS

Volunteering enables people of all walks of life to shape and own the development in their communities. We ask that Member States:

4. Invest in **technology, data, and research** on the scope of volunteer work for the SDGs by accelerating measurement of the scale of volunteering.
5. Increase support for collection of **evidence and statistics on volunteer work** and the economic and social contributions of volunteers during their projects as well as afterwards in relation to long-term impact.
6. Support a wider range of evidence-based, quality volunteering practices; knowledge sharing; and scaling up ways to **address barriers to volunteering for marginalized groups**.
7. Accept **citizen generated data** to inform SDG review processes and national plans that contribute to tangible implementation mechanisms.

As the “leaving no one behind” motto on the 2030 Agenda stipulates, people and volunteers should be prioritized in international and national decision-making. We encourage those in power alongside all stakeholders to prioritize the well-being of all people above personal interests and egos. Only then can we build a more peaceful and just world for everyone.

## Accelerating Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

This year is a critical moment in which, more than ever before, we need to urgently remind UN Member States of the ambitious promises and commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. We need to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and to address gaps in global governance, particularly as we face particular harm against our internationally agreed system and the purposes and principles under the UN Charter. Volunteers continue to play a key role in galvanizing action on the SDGs and reaching those farthest left behind.

It is no secret that we are off-track in delivering on the promises entailed within the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. A world still dealing with the COVID-19 consequences, as well as the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, is now also embedded in severe regional armed conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes of historic proportions.

The SDGs were the universally agreed roadmap to bridge our economic and geopolitical divides, restore trust and rebuild international solidarity. Yet, we are going backwards as these commitments have been broken or ignored. We are living in a dangerous time, as international law is now more than ever before, fragile, and vulnerable due to state action. In the words of Secretary-General António Guterres: “Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been.”

Nonetheless, there is hope outside UN corridors and government premises, as it is volunteers across the globe who are knocking on your doors and demanding states’ compliance with the UN Charter and all of their other commitments towards the International Human Rights System. Volunteers are at the forefront of protests and mass mobilizations, defending through multiple and creative means the only way forward: international cooperation.

Despite significant challenges and an increasingly narrow civic space, volunteers are striving for positive change in their communities and countries. Volunteers play a crucial role in advancing progress towards the promises made within the SDGs, while being deeply connected to their local spheres. Volunteers are changemakers and experts who cannot be overlooked, repressed, attacked, or incarcerated.

Volunteers are at the forefront of sustaining multilateralism and dialogue as the only options for prosperity in the world. **Volunteers in Ukraine provide victims of war with relief and hope. Volunteers in the Gaza Strip and Sudan continue to serve the needs of millions of displaced victims of two of the world’s worst humanitarian catastrophes.** Volunteers in SIDS are saving their communities from the consequences of the climate crisis through movement-building, mobilization, and campaigning.

As such, it is imperative for us that the UN and its Member States continue to engage with volunteers strategically and periodically by:

- Permanent exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and joint efforts with volunteers across the world, as it is their fight for the existence of a fully respected international system.

- Focus on organizational reform that secures rapid and accelerated responses to our current humanitarian catastrophes, particularly those coming from climate change and armed conflict, and creates an organization that can respond to crises and foresee ceasefires when needed.

Only then will we have inclusive, from-the-ground-up action-oriented and sustainable solutions over time promoting equitable progress for all.

Following are examples where volunteers are making a difference in the delivery of the SDGS:

## **SDG 1 - No Poverty**

### **Kenya | Supporting Women's Collectives**

In Kalifi county Kenya, community volunteers from VSO have been supporting women's collectives to develop entrepreneurial skills to increase their agricultural yields and support access to local markets. One group reported that harvest had increased from 1-2 bags to 6-8 bags of maize grains per acre as a result of the adoption of agroecology practices, and the Kidundu self-help group now earns 10 million Kenyan shillings annually as a result of the sale of mangrove seeds.

### **Nepal | Advocating for Local People**

In Nepal, VSO has been collaborating with the National Farmers Groups Federation (NFGF) and other CSO's to shape the focus and priorities of the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act. By mobilising and facilitating local farmers, youth groups and other community members to contribute to consultations with policy makers, volunteers have helped to ensure that the priorities of the Act have been influenced by the voice and agenda of local people. By the end of this year, five local governments will have developed and endorsed the RTF Act and in Lekhbesi Municipality, Surkhet, the local government has adopted a Farmers Identification and Categorization process and distributing Farmers ID Card (FID), meaning that the farmers are able to access government subsidies for the first time.

## **SDG 2 - Zero Hunger**

### **South Sudan | Ending Hunger**

In Yargot, South Sudan — **a region that has suffered from many years of civil conflict** — Action Against Hunger is leading a global movement to end global hunger by addressing the root causes of hunger, including climate change, conflict, inequity, and emergencies. The organization has partnered with local governments to create medical centers where treatments against issues such as malnourishment are provided. Agawol, who has availed the services of this organization for her own children in the past, is a dedicated

volunteer to the organization with the aim to end malnutrition in the community. Visit <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/story/south-sudan-day-life-community-volunteer>

## **Uganda | Increasing Food Security and Income**

In Bidi Bidi refugee camp in Uganda, VSO runs eight Early Childhood Care & Education centres. As part of the project, community volunteers have run planting schemes to support soil enrichment and stability for growing crops and helped establish school gardens which are producing vegetables for sale. These help to increase food security in the camp and for the children, and provide income to staff, volunteers, and parents.

### **SDG 13 - Climate Action**

## **Congo, Cameroon, Gabon, and DRC | Preserving Forests in the Congo Basin**

Volunteers for the Forests is a project launched in 2023 and co-constructed with young Africans at the One Forest Summit where 80 volunteers will be deployed in the Congo Basin to support agencies and NGOs in the rational use of forests, the preservation of biodiversity, and the protection of indigenous populations. The program is funded by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs. This cross-mobility project will involve international and national volunteers from five countries: DRC, Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, and France. The programme is run by France Volontaires and the One Forest Youth Initiative. In addition, the V-Forests programme has the staunch support of the youth ministries of the Congo Basin countries, which are keen to get involved in its coordination and implementation. Five ministers from the five countries involved in the initiative have expressed their support for the programme, underlining their country's involvement in valuing youth engagement for a sustainable planet.

## **Congo, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Vietnam, and Cameroon: Programme Forests**

Financed by the European Commission and piloted by France Volontaires, this action was part of the European Union's humanitarian aid volunteer's initiative (EU Aid Volunteers13) and ran for 3 years, from December 2019 to December 2022. Implemented in Cameroon, Congo, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry and Vietnam, the Forests project aimed to help reduce the vulnerability of communities living in forest areas and build their resilience. In concrete terms, 27 European volunteers were deployed in the field, with a budget of 1,156,792 euros.

## **France, Italy, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia | Climate Change Resilience**

Volunteers are addressing climate change before a disaster or shock occurs. For example, in 2018, France Volontaires and its partners from five countries (France, Italy, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) launched the TERO project (Territoires Engagés pour la Résilience des Oasis or Territories Engaged for the Resilience of Oases), funded under the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative (EUAV). The TERO project is designed to raise

awareness of the threat of climate change among oasian communities and how to address it. The effort is developing the organisations' capacities regarding volunteers' mobilisation, creating partnerships between youth organisations and environmental protection organisations, and implementing concrete actions to increase oasis resilience to climate change.

### **Mexico | Changing Attitudes**

MY World Mexico has been able to mobilize more than 100,000 volunteer actions in Mexico as a result of their annual campaigns focused on raising awareness on the SDGs. At least 90% of these actions during the last decade have included issues focused on climate action. From in-site and virtual workshops, lectures, courses, and policy advocacy in favor of environmental regulations, to massive campaigns such as Earth Day, World Environment Day, World Oceans Day, Global Week to #Act4SDGs and many others, the organization has been able to mobilize at least 20,000 volunteers on key actions to highlight urgently needed climate action.

### **Senegal, Mauritania, Chad, and Djibouti | Fighting Desertification and Drought**

The Volunteers for the Great Green Wall programme involves 70 volunteers across 30 projects in four countries: Senegal, Mauritania, Djibouti, and Chad. A blend of various kinds of volunteering schemes allows for adapting to the project's needs and partnerships with national volunteering agencies. The programme includes an innovative form of sub-regional volunteering. This project aims to combat desertification and climate change. Originally a forestry project, the approach is now more global, integrating the territory's environmental, social, and economic components. Presented in 2023, the Volunteers for the Great Green Wall programme will be implemented until 2025.

### **Zimbabwe: supporting sustainable food production**

In Masvingo and Chimanimani Districts in Zimbabwe, VSO is implementing agroecology demonstration plots, bringing together women smallholder farmers in collectives, and facilitating peer-to-peer learning and sharing of Indigenous knowledge to build capacity and awareness in smallholder farmers of their rights and ability to collectively bargain for better prices for food and on climate action through natural, local, and culturally sensitive approaches to farming. Volunteers are collaborating with farmers to share learning, to manage the demonstration plots, and to create and sustain the collectives.

## SDG 16 - Peace Justice and Strong Institutions

### **Philippines** | Fostering Community Coherence and Peacebuilding

In the Philippines, VSO works through volunteers to foster community coherence and peacebuilding in regions affected by civil war and violence. In Bangsamoro ex-combatant camp, volunteers have collaborated with ex-combatants, women, and children to create sustainable fishing, farming, and bio-organic fertiliser in order to provide resilient livelihoods bringing together different communities. Volunteers train ex-combatants and women in sustainable farming techniques and facilitate community cohesion sessions at a peace lodge built on the ex-combatant site. Volunteers also support advocacy initiatives for women to raise their voices to local government for what they need and improve access to health care and schooling for children. The model is now being rolled out to a further two camps.

### **Uganda** | Supporting Street-Connected Children and Youths

When COVID-19 hit Uganda, the government implemented a complete lockdown as well as a strict curfew, which put street-connected children and youths (SCCY) at an extremely elevated risk, considering that they solely depend on the streets to survive and that they are among the most vulnerable and stigmatized people in Gulu City in Northern Uganda. **The measures put in place by the government did not include the protection of such vulnerable people, who were therefore at risk of falling into criminality, exploitation, and potentially death.**

## SDG 17 - Partnership For The Goals

### **Kenya and India** | Providing Media Training and Awareness

Salt Lake City Prayasam in India and Slum Dwellers International Kenya exchange media volunteers who provide technical training and skills to youth of slum dwelling communities, as well as local TV channels and media outlets. As a result, the slum-dwelling communities are more aware of local and citywide issues that concern them.

### **South America** | Supporting Volunteers in South America

The EnLAzando project, which has been conducted since 2020 by France Volontaires with the support of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE), aims to strengthen the capacities of volunteering actors in South America. The first phase of the project (2020-2022) identified and supported the structuring of volunteer organisations in five countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru. The positive results of the first phase of EnLAzando and the expectations of those involved have led to the launch of a second 24-month phase (September 2022 - August 2024). This second phase aims to bring a change of scale through greater ambition and a geographical extension to include Argentina.