



Volunteer Groups Alliance

Volunteers Stakeholder Group thematic position paper to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2023

Through volunteers, we can together accelerate the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels

With more than one billion people volunteering annually, the world is recognising the power of volunteers, as highlighted in last year's [Ministerial Declaration](#) adopted by UN Member States on 15 July 2022:

*We express our highest appreciation of, and support for, the dedication, efforts and sacrifices, above and beyond the call of duty of all health professionals and workers and all other relevant frontline workers and **volunteers** in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Volunteers build hope and resilience, improve lives, and strengthen sustainable development. Every day, volunteers meet community needs and exercise leadership roles on the frontline in national responses and recovery. And volunteers remain critical to addressing the consequences of COVID-19 and restoring communities.

Thus, it is more important than ever for Member States to fulfill their commitments, made under the plan of action on [volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), to:

- Meaningful participation and involvement of volunteers in partnerships
- Promotion of conducive environments for volunteering and volunteers to enhance the sustainability of development results as they continue to increase recognition of the value of civil society.

Recommendations to Member States

NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Volunteers build bridges by brokering relationships between communities and state authorities and other development stakeholders. We ask Member States to:

1. Integrate volunteering in **policies and national development strategies** and in their **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)** to create a more enabling environment for volunteering, providing a broader and inclusive point of view
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 an enabling environment for volunteering
5. Adopt the [Global Volunteering Standard](#) to strengthen the quality of volunteering

INCLUSIVE DIVERSITY

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

1. Build on experiences of promoting volunteering among youth and extend these opportunities to **all demographic groups**, especially through virtual and hybrid volunteer 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 marginalised 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 falls on women around the world

MEASURING SUCCESS

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

1. Invest in **volunteer data, research, and measurement** on the scope of volunteer work for the SDGs by accelerating investment and technology in measuring the scale of volunteering

2. Increase support for collection of [evidence and statistics on volunteer work](#) and the economic and social contributions of volunteers
3. Support a wider range of evidence-based, quality volunteering practices; knowledge sharing; and scaling up ways to **address barriers to volunteering for marginalised groups**
4. Accept **citizen generated data** to inform SDG review processes and national plans

Accelerating Forward Together

Volunteers make an immense, and often unrecognised contribution, to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Volunteer Groups Alliance (VGA) is a global NGO bringing together a coalition of more than 80 organisations and networks working in more than 150 countries to contribute to achieving the SDGs through volunteering in all its forms.

■ As UN Member States and international institutions contribute to the Decade of Action (2020-2030), the VGA is imagining a world in which the phenomenal resources, social capital, and insights of volunteers mean they are truly in the driving seat of development. We know that these goals can be achieved in the following three ways:

1. **Reimagining through knowledge**, by integrating evidence on volunteering at all stages in the 2030 Agenda processes at the national level and together in the United Nations

Evidence is critical for the recognition of volunteer contributions on sustainable development. In 2022, 55% of countries mentioned volunteering in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on their SDG progress, and 9% reported the integration of volunteering into development plans, policies, and strategies. Member States should cooperate with volunteer-involving and civil society organizations to include information on the scale, contribution, and impact of volunteering, including informal volunteering.

2. **Reimagining through dialogue**, by creating new spaces to hear the voices of people taking action for the Sustainable Development Goals

Millions of volunteers from all walks of life are playing a critical role not only in delivering the SDGs but also in supporting their accountability. Governments should engage volunteers in monitoring sustainable development at all levels as part of a wider commitment to civic engagement, accepting citizen-generated data and other evidence to complement official processes. Member States should also consult communities on sustainable development policies at all levels, take advantage of new forms of technology, and work with volunteers to listen to and amplify the voices of those who are frequently excluded or left behind.

3. Reimagining how we work together to partner with the world's one billion volunteers, boosting the role of Member States as “connectors” and enabling partnerships to ensure robust cross-sector volunteering practices

Strengthening partnerships across sectors is essential to advance the state of volunteering globally. It is imperative to bring together governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, and the international community in a collective conversation featuring multiple perspectives.

Thank You!

■ Volunteering is often the first step towards active citizenship and can help strengthen people's ownership of their community's development. We commend those governments that recognize the value of systematic legislation, policies, structures, and programs for volunteer engagement and that have structures to enable more people to volunteer.

■ Where governments have created a conducive environment for civic engagement, and more particularly for volunteers to participate – or where they have been responsive to volunteer-led community initiatives – volunteers are more effective in SDG implementation. Volunteers, too, are important for holding Member States accountable for their commitment to the SDGs.

■ Every day across the world, millions of ordinary citizens give their time to volunteer, making a vital and often under-recognised contribution to the delivery of the SDGs. United Nations Volunteers (UNV) estimates that one billion people annually contribute their time and energy to volunteer, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has estimated that volunteering adds 2.4% to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). VGA thus calls for Member States to:

- Formally recognize the contribution of volunteering to the implementation of the SDGs in their Voluntary National Reviews
- Ensure that Volunteer Groups are fully recognized and supported in the national plans and strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda
- Support the participation of non-governmental actors in the SDG follow up and review processes
- Ensure the accountability, transparency and review framework for the SDGs involves community consultation at all levels, including representation of the most marginalised voices, as well as the volunteers that work closest to them
- Collect data on the contribution of volunteers in delivering the SDGs

Volunteering and the Focus for the 2023 HLPF

We share the below examples with two goals in mind:

1. To highlight the varied and impactful work of volunteers globally on the SDGs under review at the 2023 HLPF, especially in countries presenting their Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) this year
2. To educate Member States on the power of volunteering

GOAL 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Bangladesh | Providing Clean Water, Sanitation and More

Awareness 360 is a global, youth-led organization, headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, that empowers young people to do community service projects in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Currently, more than 1,500 youths from 23 countries, aged between 16 and 27, support the organization as volunteers. In Bangladesh, the organisation's focus is SDG-6, which deals with clean water and sanitation. Volunteers and partners reach out to the most vulnerable communities to create awareness about handwashing techniques, water filtration, and menstrual hygiene.

Bolivia | Supporting Clean Water

In collaboration with government, partners, and volunteers, Water For People helps provide communities, families, schools, and health clinics in Cuchumuela and San Pedro with access to reliable water service. Also, through research, reports, and sometimes visits to the field, the organization's World Water Corps volunteers help create and adapt organizational strategies such as alternatives analysis for addressing high fluoride levels in groundwater, remote GIS support and in-person training to Water For People monitoring and engineering staff, translation of key programmatic documents to increase the exchange and learning, and assessment and recommendations for rehabilitating non-functional wastewater treatment plants in small towns in Bolivia.

India | Tapping Rainwater

Uneven rainfall and runoff have depleted the groundwater in Bengaluru, India, contributing to a groundwater crisis in the region. United Way India and United Way

Bengaluru set out to replenish the depleted groundwater levels through effective rainwater conservation. Their “One Billion Drops” Campaign aims to tap and percolate 1 billion liters of rainwater into the ground by the end of 2023. To achieve this, a minimum of 10,000 percolation wells each holding 128,100 liters of rainwater must be constructed across the city. Broadly, this initiative seeks to ensure water security and a sustainable city for communities in and around Bengaluru. United Way India and United Way Bengaluru collaborated with Kennametal India Ltd. to construct 86 Percolation pits at J.P Park, Bengaluru. They built the percolation pits over the course of 90 days, beginning with a groundbreaking ceremony in the park. After implementation, the percolation pits increased the water table by 6-meters, conserved otherwise wasted rainwater, and improved water security for surrounding communities. Additionally, The Central Groundwater Board indicates a presence of fluoride beyond a safe limit in the city’s drinking water. Percolation pits help with this by capturing and percolating the rainwater in its purest form which improves the groundwater’s quality.

GOAL 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Burkina Faso and France | Sharing Skills on Energy Efficiency

As part of the decentralized cooperation between the cities of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso and Grenoble in France, an international volunteer program on energy efficiency is being implemented in partnership with the company Schneider Electric and the NGO Energie Sans Frontières.

In 2022, two Burkinabe volunteers, both future engineers, carried out a six-month assignment to accompany the creation of a solar energy training center in Grenoble, from its conception to the installation of the equipment. They also took part in school activities for students aged 9 to 11 years old as part of global education programs.

At the end of this mission, and in a logic of reinvestment and transfer of skills, the two volunteers continued their mission with the National Volunteer Program of Burkina Faso (PNVB) in a training center for renewable energy in Ouagadougou to participate in the training of students on solar energy.

Comoros | Developing New Energy Sources

In Comoros, a cooperative society named SHAWIRI-scoops, partially funded by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program), aims to educate and empower the local community in waste management and recycling. It is mainly run by women, and through funding acquired from UNDP, it has set up biodigesters and biomass energy sources on the Comoros islands. The energy source, virtually unknown to the community, aims to be

a more sustainable way of fueling their everyday lives. The president of SHAWIRI-scoops and a single mother of three boys, Abidate, following the completion of her high school degree after having her first child at 18, went on to complete a university degree in biology. Being passionate about sustainable energy and waste development, she competed in a startup competition and emerged third, which kick started her career and drove her to found SHAWIRI-scoops. Abidate is the first Comorian woman to lead the effort on sustainable biofuel and bioenergy. Through her efforts, the UNDP program has microfunded up to 50 thousand US dollars to go towards three biodigesters in the country. SHAWIRI-scoops also regularly holds workshops, information and education seminars to educate their general public.

France and Morocco | Sustaining Energy

Since 2016, the City of Lille in France and the Municipality of Oujda in Morocco have jointly led the Decentralized Cooperation Project for Sustainable Energy. It aims to promote renewable energy and improve the energy efficiency of buildings in both cities. Involving all local actors (research and high education institutes, companies, civil society, residents, and local authorities), the project is delivered by international volunteers of France Volontaires who have come to offer their expertise. One of the flagship actions is the establishment of an “Energy Information Service” in Oujda, on the model of the “House of Sustainable Housing” in Lille, which intends to inform, guide, and raise awareness among inhabitants on the reduction of their energy consumption (electricity, water, and fuel) and the challenges of climate change.

Kenya | Providing Rural Electrification and Employment Opportunities

In 2018, Mercy Chelangat decided to become a full-time volunteer for the IEEE Power & Energy Society’s Kenya Chapter. As secretary and treasurer, she worked to increase membership through social-media outreach and in the process learned about IEEE Smart Village, a program that brings electricity—as well as educational and employment opportunities—to remote communities. For her humanitarian efforts, Chelangat received the 2019 IEEE Region8 Women in Engineering Clementina Saduwa Award. The honor recognizes female engineers who, through their engineering and career achievements, have demonstrated support for women in the profession and have established a record of excellence.

GOAL 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Spain | Combating School Dropout Rates

Spain has the highest school dropout rate in the EU at 17.3 %, which is 7% higher than the EU average of 10.2%. These high dropout rates have significant socio-economic impacts on young generations that contribute to future unemployment and cycles of poverty. As one strategy to combat school dropout rates, United Way Spain conducts “Tech4Change,” an initiative providing disadvantaged youth the opportunity to innovate and explore STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) subjects. In Spring 2021, United Way Spain, the Everis Foundation, and the Creática Association, completed the third edition of Tech4Change. The program consisted of seven modules covering different areas, including Design Thinking, Programming, Digital Manufacturing, and Prototyping. This year, the program adapted to meet COVID-19 guidelines through a hybrid approach of both in-person and online sessions. At the conclusion of the program, students developed a CO2 sensor that can measure and respond to the ventilation needs of the educational center. This device is replicable and demonstrates a successful collaboration between business and educational innovators.

Tech4Change centers its educational methodology around learning-by-doing. Students are put at the center of the educational experience, where they’re given the tools and support to improve their STEAM skills. The program encourages students to use their new skills for enacting social change through technological innovation. By fostering support and enthusiasm for STEAM, Tech4Change also seeks to minimize the gender gap in male-dominated STEAM fields. While the main objective of Tech4Change is to lower school dropout rates and foster enthusiasm for STEAM in disadvantaged students, it also pursues several secondary objectives. These include developing soft skills in communication and interpersonal relationships, fostering self-confidence and a sense of belonging, self-discovery of unknown or undervalued skills, and eliminating inequality.

“We are very proud of what we have achieved with this project, and of employing technology as a catalyst to encourage more and more young people to discover scientific careers. With Tech4Change we are not only looking to help Spain get out of the number 1 position in the EU of school dropout rates, but also to empower high school boys and girls to see that they can achieve what they propose with the help of someone, in this case, the volunteer, and their effort,” Says Marina Fuentes Arredonda, Director of United Way Spain. Throughout its three-year implementation, Tech4Change has reached 136 students with the help of 94 volunteers who dedicated over 1,050 hours.

GOAL 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Bosnia and Herzegovina | Cleaning Up Municipalities

“Let’s Do It!” is a project begun in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012 to clean up illegal landfills and plant trees with nearly 200,000 volunteers participating in the program. Approximately 13,500 tons of waste has been cleaned up and nearly a half million seedlings of different species of trees have been planted. Volunteer actions culminate in a “Let’s Do It – Clean Up the Country in 1 Day” and “Let’s Do It – Million Seedlings in 1 Day” events. One hundred fifteen municipalities already participate in the program, and the goal is to get all municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to become involved. The official organizer of “Let’s Do It” events in the country is the Association of Citizens “Ruke” in Sarajevo. The program is credited with being a force for positive change. “Let’s Do It!” in Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of the global “Let’s Do It World” movement, which includes 113 countries and 18 million volunteers.

Burkina Faso | Leading “The Green Brigade”

For more than two decades, the “Green Brigade,” a group of 3,000 volunteer women, has committed to sweeping the streets of the city of Ouagadougou at least twice a week. Their efforts to improve the cleanliness and sanitation of their city have earned several regional and international awards. Solid waste disposal is a major problem in Burkina Faso, where garbage is often either thrown in dumps or in the streets of urban centers. The “Green Brigade” is just one of many volunteer programs under the Burkina Faso National Volunteer Program (PNVB) created under the technical supervision of the Ministry of Youth and financial supervision by the Ministry of Finance as a project, thanks to the efforts of the Burkinabe government. Additional support is provided by the United National Development Programme, United Nations Volunteer Programme, and France Volontaires.

Comoros | Creating Sustainability

In Comoros, a project funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) called DRR, or Resilience to the Risks of Climate Disasters, has made it its goal to build resilience in the Comoros population and improve their disaster response systems at the individual and community level. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they shifted their efforts to controlling the spread and advocating for community awareness at this time. Anwadhui, a volunteer with DRR for 3 years, is a well-known name in the community. Through Anwadhui’s work and the work of his team, they have managed to modify the logistical operations of hospitals to be more energy efficient when it comes to oxygen and power generation. Specifically, they have installed respirators and hybrid solar generators to power the hospitals. In an emergency, they have also provided logistical support towards the transport of COVID-19 patients

Pakistan | Reducing and Responding to Disaster Emergencies

Rescue 1122 was established under the 2006 Punjab Emergency Service Act to provide management and prevention of emergencies across the Punjab, as prior to 2004 this service did not exist in Pakistan. It is an integrated emergency service providing emergency, fire, rescue, disaster management, water rescue, animal rescue and community safety services under one umbrella. To build capacity within the emergency response teams, British NGO VSO worked with the Pakistani government and other partners to facilitate and train Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) of volunteers, who can respond in the event of natural disasters, and who are an integral part of Rescue 1122. With assistance from VSO, the government of Pakistan established two national volunteering mechanisms, the National Volunteer Platform and the National Volunteer Database. The promotion of volunteering within Pakistan not only enabled volunteers to participate in programmes like Rescue 1122, but also to promote social cohesion and peace, to challenge harmful social norms, and to encourage active citizenship within Pakistan.

In partnership with VSO, Rescue 1122 have now established 5,037 Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) with 11,4138 community volunteers in all 36 districts of Punjab. These teams conduct emergency response actions, awareness campaigns, build community resilience, conduct risk assessments and safety survey, and identify hazards, vulnerabilities, and capacities in order to manage disaster risks and create early warning mechanisms. The government of Pakistan has now expanded the Rescue 1122 services to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan province after seeing the success of its services and response in Punjab. Overall, the participation of volunteers within Pakistan's rescue service has provided millions of people with rapid and effective emergency response services, which are able to respond to natural and manmade disasters. CERTs are highly trained teams of volunteers able to respond to emergencies and save lives across the 36 districts of the Punjab.

GOAL 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Cambodia | Promoting the Recognition and Participation of Youth Volunteers

Volunteer for My Community (VMC) is the largest national program for volunteering and community outreach in Cambodia. This program has been launched in 2019 by the Department of Youth Center of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, in collaboration with the United Nations Volunteers in Cambodia. It aims at creating opportunities for local youth to explore and initiate new ideas by participating in building

and developing the community where they live, as well as building their own capacity for future work.

The VMC program has a vision and mission to promote the recognition and participation of youth volunteers at all levels, youth, communities, public institutions, educational institutions and across Cambodia through collaboration between the Royal Government, development partners and the private sectors. Several international actors are also involved in this program such as France Volontaires, JICA, KOICA, Peace Corps, VSO and World Vision.

In 2022 a group of 506 young volunteers participated in 86 volunteer projects across the capital and 25 provinces, mainly on education and environment, but also into areas such as health, tourism, industry 4.0, administrative services, entrepreneurship and agriculture.

France and Ghana | Strengthening the Relationship between Countries

France and Ghana, through the schemes of France Volontaires Ghana, have deployed over 30 volunteers to and from Ghana. This collaboration has also led to the signing of a cooperation agreement between the two countries to facilitate the deployment process between the two countries, particularly regarding residence permits. In the same light, France Volontaires Ghana has begun negotiations with the National Service secretariat to potentially increase the number of volunteers deployed between the two countries and, possibly, to make the voluntary missions of Ghanaian volunteers count as their National Service.

France | Strengthening Cooperation between Territories

Carried out by France Volontaires with the support of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Territoires Volontaires program (Territoires Volontaires - TEVO) provides financial and technical support to French local authorities in the implementation of international volunteer projects. Thus, the program allows local authorities to strengthen their decentralized cooperation partnerships, and to reinforce the commitment of citizens, especially youth..

In line with the principle of reciprocity, the projects allow both to offer an international solidarity mobility to Southern countries to citizens of the mobilized territory, and to welcome in France young people coming from these partner territories.

In the first call for proposals launched in 2022, 27 local authorities benefited from the program's support for a total of 101 assignments, in partnership with 17 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Pacific. In 2023, 45 French local authorities have expressed their willingness to participate in the program, with a goal of more than 320 assignments in partnership with some 40 countries.

Rwanda and **UK** | Sharing Knowledge and Expertise in Rwanda

Since 2018, VSO has facilitated a twinning partnership between Lewisham Sexual health services (part of Lewisham and Greenwich NHS trust in the UK) and Nyagatare District Hospital in north-eastern Rwanda. The initiative unites two institutions and medical professionals working in the same sector in different parts of the world to share staff knowledge and learn from one another. The twinning arrangement has mobilised volunteers from the UK and from Rwanda and has led to increased understanding of community outreach in both countries.

Suriname | Creating a New Community Center

In Paramaribo, Suriname, Stiwewa, a neighborhood association, supports the citizens and the environment through education, informative activities, and recreation. It focuses on physical education and recreational sports. Ramesh Dwarkasing, the managing director at Pittsburgh Plate Glass (PPG) Varossieau, headed the initiative to get his company to donate funds and painting facilities to Stiwewa for the construction of a new neighborhood center in the area. Having been a volunteer with Stiwewa for a long time, he headed the project to completion allowing for a vibrant community center to be established and used for increasing awareness, education, and wellness activities among the locals.