



**Volunteer Groups
Alliance**

Volunteers Stakeholder Group thematic position paper to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2025

***Advancing through volunteering* sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs for leaving no one behind**

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 significantly contribute to the only way forward to save our planet: accelerating the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda and each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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

- Gathering and amplifying citizen and volunteer voices in key moments and spaces for them to participate and fully engage in critical decision-making mechanisms and processes.
- Supporting volunteer-state partnerships and volunteer service expenditures in government budgets.
- Facilitating the permanent exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and joint efforts with volunteers across the world.

Following are our recommendations:

I. NATIONAL STRATEGIES

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

1. Advocate for and integrate volunteering in **policies and national development strategies** and in Voluntary National Reviews to create a more enabling environment for volunteering.
2. Explore **national and global partnerships and collaborations** to leverage efforts towards supporting and promoting volunteering.

3. Build **coalitions and networks for learning and shared action** on developing and enabling an environment for volunteering.
4. Adopt the [Global Volunteering Standard](#) which, combined with supportive public policies, strengthens the quality of volunteering.

II. 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. Promote and support **regional volunteer resource centers** to provide diversified participation and advocacy support.

III. MEASURING SUCCESS

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

1. Invest in **technology, data, and research** on the scope of volunteer work for the SDGs by accelerating measurement of the scale of volunteering.
2. Increase support for the 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.
3. Support a wider range of evidence-based, quality volunteering practices; knowledge sharing; and scaling up as ways to **address barriers to volunteering for marginalized groups**.
4. Accept **citizen-generated data** to inform SDG review processes and national plans.

“Leaving no one behind” stipulates that people, including 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

In December 2023, the [UN General Assembly](#) declared 2026 the International Year for Volunteers for Sustainable Development (IVY 2026) to highlight the role of volunteers in advancing sustainability, thereby promoting and recognizing volunteering as a significant force for sustainable development. The General Assembly calls on Member States, United Nations system organizations, and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and academia, to observe the International Year at national and regional levels.

Thus, 2025 is critical to prepare for the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development in 2026 to emphasize the power of volunteering, encourage greater investment in volunteering, and secure commitments from governments and others to support volunteering and an enabling environment in which volunteers will flourish. As we shape a collective vision and priorities for volunteering in 2026 and beyond, a key question will be how we can provide better enabling environments so that volunteers can significantly contribute to sustainable development.

As we face particular harm against our internationally-agreed system and the purposes and principles under the UN Charter, Member States need to accomplish the ambitious promises and commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, including the need to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and to address gaps in global governance. As Member States prepare for their own IVY 2026 observances and celebrations, volunteers continue as they always have to galvanize action on the SDGs and reach those farthest left behind.

A world dealing with the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution continues to be roiled in severe regional armed conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes of historic proportions. Thus, It is no surprise that we are off-track in delivering on the promises entailed within the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs provide the universally-agreed roadmap to bridge our economic and geopolitical divides, restore trust, and rebuild international solidarity, yet 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 volunteers across the globe are demanding compliance with the UN Charter and all 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 advocating 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 neighborhoods and needs. Volunteers are changemakers and experts who should not 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 strategically and periodically engage with volunteers through:

- 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.
- Organizational reform that secures rapid and accelerated responses to our current humanitarian catastrophes, particularly those coming from climate change and armed conflict, and that 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 of where volunteers are making a difference in the delivery of the SDGs:

SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being

Belarus | Providing Humanitarian Assistance

In Belarus, the JDC is committed to providing humanitarian assistance in response to various causes. Sergey Ignatiev is a volunteer with the JDC who provided compassionate service to the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. He provided this service by delivering food and medications to elderly members of his community, in addition to teaching them how to use the internet, computers, and cellphones to reconnect with their loved ones. For more information, visit <https://www.jdc.org/voice/the-open-door-in-belarus-a-volunteer-reflects-on-service-and-community/>

El Salvador | Advocating for Reproductive Health

In El Salvador, the Asociación Demográfica Salvadoreña (Pro-Familia) focuses on sexual and reproductive health and the active participation of men in rural areas in these discussions. When the organization came to recruit volunteers, José was immediately interested in the work of this organization. José volunteers as a health promoter to advocate – with other men – the use of contraception and couple's counselling and provides sexual health supplies like condoms and medicines. José has seen the positive change among men in his community, and those small achievements encourage him to keep going. For more information, visit <https://www.ippf.org/stories/i-changed-firstso-can-other-men>

India | Providing a Healthy Environment for Students

Established in 2002, KSV provides free education in academics and traditional Indian performing arts (Hindustani classical music, Bharatanatyam dance, and drama), along with food, accommodation, and healthcare, to empower disadvantaged youth and break the cycle of poverty. A French International Solidarity Volunteer (VSI) joined this residential school near Dharwad, Karnataka for a volunteering mission as health coordinator, aiming to ensure the physical and psychological well-being of approximately 220 students from socially and economically marginalized backgrounds. By providing targeted health initiatives to students aged 6 to 25, organizing preventive healthcare through workshops and awareness programs and creating a supportive environment, this mission powerfully drives equitable access to quality healthcare and advances the promise of healthy lives for all.

Philippines | Accessing Nutrition and Water in Urban Slums

In Manila, where over one in ten children experiences hunger and one in three suffers from stunted growth, French volunteers at the ANAK-TnK Foundation deliver community-based nutrition programs in urban slums. As part of an International Solidarity Volunteer (VSI) program, the volunteers were sent by the French association Fidesco, a member of the French volunteering network France Volontaires. They provide practical training to local health workers on creating balanced diets with limited resources and offer hot, nutritious meals to children.

Meanwhile, the French organization Better with Water (Eau et Vie) deploys volunteers from the French association La Guilde, a member of France Volontaires, to help enhance access to clean, affordable running water in vulnerable urban neighborhoods. Collaborating with local stakeholders, they establish social water enterprises and educate communities on hygiene practices. These initiatives help reduce the risk of waterborne diseases and improve overall well-being in areas often overlooked in city infrastructure planning.

SDG 5 - Gender Equality

Ghana | Helping Girls to Find their Place

As a member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, the Ghana Girl Guides Association is transforming the lives of thousands of girls, supporting them, and empowering them to become respectful, tolerant, and responsible citizens. Through innovative non-formal education programs, the association helps girls and young women to find their place in society. As part of a collaborative dynamic between Ghana and France, several French International Civic Service volunteers joined the association in Accra in a mission to support education, advocacy, and community development activities. There, the volunteers helped to promote the empowerment of girls and young women through education, leadership training, and life skills development. They also participated in advocacy efforts focused on menstrual hygiene, gender-based violence prevention, and the promotion of female leadership; and contributed to inclusive learning opportunities in areas such as STEM and languages, helping reduce gender disparities in education. Thanks to their support to the Ghana Girl Guides Association's actions, Ghana is making progress in the realization of SDG 5.

India | Empowering Women through Education

Tender Heart is an Indian NGO whose goal is to uplift people out of poverty through education. With this goal in mind, the organization aims to support special needs, underprivileged children and women. As part of the "Support for the Education of Underprivileged Children and Women" program, several French volunteers joined the organization through the Civic Service. The mission's implementation is coordinated by Tender Heart in partnership with the French international volunteering organization, Eurasianet, a member of France Volontaires. Tender Heart provides local expertise, infrastructure, and community connections to ensure the mission's relevance and impact. There, the Civic Service volunteers help empower women and children by securing access to education and shattering barriers to gender equality with unwavering resolve. They engage with local stakeholders, including families and community leaders, to advocate for gender equality and educational rights, thus helping to foster confidence and capacity amongst women in the community. By focusing on education and encouraging intercultural understanding and community cohesion, their mission aligns with SDG 5 and participates in its achievement.

Jordan | Empowering Women

In Jordan, as women are facing all forms of violence, Girl Guides launched a project with the purpose of spreading awareness among the Girl Guides, school students, and local community of women's rights as stipulated by religion, constitution, and human rights, as well as empower women throughout society in all social, economic, and political fields. Women became more aware of their rights within society by 80%, and Girl Guides

provided training to the students on small economic projects to support the empowerment of women.

Philippines | Rebuilding Lives for At-Risk Young Women

Volunteers play a vital role in ACAY's School of Life, a comprehensive reintegration program designed to support vulnerable young women who have experienced trauma or have been in conflict with the law. This transformative initiative is grounded in a holistic approach, providing a nurturing and safe residential environment where the girls receive tailored therapeutic care, educational support, vocational training, and opportunities to engage in meaningful community service. ACAY's program is dedicated to helping these young women heal, rebuild their lives, and prepare for a brighter future. The NGO Eurasianet, a member of France Volontaires, sent several French volunteers through a Civic Service program to support the local teams. Volunteers contribute significantly by facilitating life skills workshops, organizing therapeutic activities, assisting with academic sessions, and offering guidance in the reintegration process—both within their families and broader society. Through their engagement, volunteers help foster a supportive atmosphere that empowers the girls to regain their sense of dignity, develop autonomy, and take confident steps toward reclaiming control over their future. This mission embodies the essence of restoring hope and transforming lives, one step at a time.

Turkey | Improving Outcomes for Women

For Ekin Su Yilmaz from Turkey, joining UN Women as a UN Youth Volunteer was her life-long dream. UN Women in Turkey works closely with the Government and civil society to focus on initiatives in leadership and political participation, ending violence against women and girls, and peace, security, and engendering humanitarian action. As an integral part of the UN Women country team, Ekin contributes to the empowerment of women and girls in Turkey, including women with disabilities, refugee women, and girls under temporary protection and their advocacy networks.

SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth

Germany | Helping Youth Secure Employment and Vocational Training

Research by Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research shows education opportunities continue to be unevenly distributed with youth from immigrant backgrounds, low-income families, and rural areas less likely to move up the education ladder. In 2020, PHINEO gAG and its partners, with support from the John Deere Foundation, strived to boost educational outcomes by improving access to food and directing 26 volunteers in Germany to mentor youth through virtual and in-person online engagement activities and

identify, collect, and distribute computer hardware to mentees in need. Through these and other efforts, 88% of all mentees found a job or vocational training following completion of the mentoring program. Volunteer testimonials and internal impact reports show the experience was positive for everyone involved. Employees that volunteered tended to be more aware of their company's support and strategy toward crisis response and increase their support for student success.

Ghana | Empowering Farming Communities

In Ghana, the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) is committed to empowering communities by providing them with various resources, opportunities, and skills. Cocoa Life Ghana is helping enhance the abilities of farmers so they can help to improve the issue of low cocoa production. This training for farmers is quite extensive (e.g., improving the farmers' financial literacy and supporting the development of cooperatives). Additionally, they are dedicated to increasing the opportunities available for women and young people. Grace received VSO-led training on business skills and nutrition and went on to teach 30 other members of her women's group. For more information, visit <https://www.vsointernational.org/our-work/resilient-livelihoods/resilient-rural-livelihoods/cocoa-life-ghana>

Ghana | Providing Fair Trade and Sustainable Farming

As part of an International Solidarity Volunteer (VSI) program, a French volunteer joined FairTrade Africa to work as a project assistant and support fair trade and sustainable farming in Ghana. During her time there, the volunteer supported the organization's efforts to promote decent work and economic opportunities by improving working conditions and income for smallholder cocoa farmers. Her contribution also helped strengthen sustainable economic growth in rural areas through the implementation of fair trade and agroforestry projects; and enhance the economic inclusion of farming communities by improving access to fair markets and supporting cooperative governance. Thanks to her engagement in supporting the local teams, FairTrade Africa was able to carry out meaningful projects, leading to the realization of SDG 8.

India | Training and Mentoring for Local Development and Growth

As part of the "Support the Development of Local Entrepreneurship and Livelihoods", several French volunteers went to India to carry out their mission in Marian College Kuttikkanam. This institution is committed to education and social development and pursues various initiatives aimed at mobilizing the community and promoting social progress. This initiative aligns with the principles of decentralized cooperation, emphasizing capacity-building, knowledge exchange, and France Volontaires' community-driven development. The mission is developed through a collaborative framework involving Marian College Kuttikkanam, France Volontaires, and the French

association – AIME (International Association of Mobilization for Equality), with the goal of empowering local entrepreneurs and promoting socio-economic resilience.

As part of their mission, the volunteers help support local entrepreneurship, igniting sustainable livelihoods and fueling robust economic growth in communities. They provide training, mentoring and access to resources to small-scale entrepreneurs, women, and youth and help coordinate activities, sharing best practices and building bridges between French and Indian stakeholders. By promoting decent work opportunities and driving inclusive economic development, they participate in the achievement of SGD 8.

Philippines | Digital Inclusion and Youth Empowerment

In Cebu, Passerelles Numériques Philippines (PNPh), a French association, provides a 2.5-year IT training program for underprivileged youth, with a strong focus on empowering young women. The program offers comprehensive support, including housing, meals, healthcare, and soft skills training. Deployed as part of the collaboration with the French association La Guilde, in relation with France Volontaires, International Solidarity Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting students' academic and personal development. Since 2009, 803 students graduated thanks to PNPh's program, and 96% are now employed in the IT sector. The entry-level salaries have increased fourfold, and all students were employed within two months after their graduation. This approach ensures access to dignified employment and sustainable livelihoods.

South Africa | Providing Employment Training

On 6 September 2021, United Way South Africa (UWSA) kicked off their entrepreneurial training program for unemployed and marginalized individuals. In partnership with 'Meals on Wheels,' UWSA provided certification training to become a nail technician. At the program's conclusion, 34 beneficiaries graduated with a certificate of completion, practice materials, and a start-up pack that included everything a nail technician needs to start a small business. UWSA offered this program to individuals of all genders. Some graduates of the program are human trafficking survivors. Three of the program's top-performing students were awarded a paid internship at a high-end salon, and some students have already started their businesses. A volunteer professional nail technician offered to mentor the graduates as they start their new careers. UWSA looks forward to seeing them continue to practice and create successful and sustainable businesses.

SDG 14 - Life Below Water

Ghana | Protecting sea turtles and promoting eco-tourism

In Ghana, the Ghana Instinct association aims to educate and raise awareness on environmental issues and sustainable tourism amongst the community. Through several projects, the organization supports the development of eco-tourism, the protection of sea turtles, the promotion of sport among young people and organizes the “Eco-awareness” festival. As part of the collaboration between Ghana Instinct and French association AIME (International Association of Mobilization for Equality), several French volunteers went to Ghana through an International Civic Service program.

During their mission to “raise awareness on environmental issues, sustainable development, and the preservation of biodiversity,” the volunteers support the local teams in their daily activities. Together, they supported environmental education initiatives, conducting workshops on topics like waste management, local biodiversity, and sustainable tourism; they assisted in sustainable agricultural practices, such as composting and organic fertilizer production, to reduce land-based pollution affecting marine ecosystems; and participated in marine turtle conservation efforts, including monitoring nesting sites and raising awareness about marine biodiversity. Thanks to the strong partnership between the French and the Ghanaian associations, Ghana Instinct was able to carry out its projects successfully and participated in the realization of the SDGs in their community, helping to protect life below water.

Kenya | Preserving Marine Biodiversity

With a background in marine science, UN [Volunteer](#) Mohamed Ahmed Hussein serves with [UNEP](#) to conserve coastal coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses in his home country [of Kenya](#), helping protect its [ocean](#) and livelihoods. For more information about his story, visit <https://bit.ly/3q0sbqz>

Philippines | Protecting Marine Biodiversity and Coastal Communities

In the Philippines, France Volontaires is fostering several meaningful partnerships to further progress towards SDG 14. Through the cooperation with local and international organizations, both International Solidarity Volunteers and French Civic Service volunteers are mobilized to support local efforts. Volunteers with French NGO Better with Water (Eau et Vie) focus on improving water access and reducing waste to combat pollution that directly impacts coastal and marine ecosystems.

At People and the Sea, volunteers actively participate in community-driven marine conservation efforts. These include promoting sustainable fishing practices, conducting marine research, educating local youth, and enhancing resilience in coastal livelihoods.

The initiatives empower communities to sustainably manage and benefit from their marine resources.

Blue Alliance operates across multiple Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Philippines. Volunteers play a crucial role in coral reef regeneration, mangrove reforestation, reducing bycatch of threatened species, and addressing illegal fishing practices. The organization also fosters “reef-positive” businesses and eco-tourism, creating employment opportunities while safeguarding marine ecosystems.

UAE | Preserving Marine Biodiversity

Emirates NBD, a leading banking group and a pioneer in private sector volunteering in the UAE, runs Exchanger as an integral part of the bank’s CSR strategy and commitment to advance the sustainable impact agenda through volunteering. Exchanger is an award-winning Volunteer Programme for employees, friends and family, and partners to exchange their time for community service and make a real difference. The bank’s Keep the Creek Clean initiative is a marine conservation programme supported by volunteers. Since inception, volunteers and partners have successfully removed more than 5,400 kilograms of various types of refuse from the ocean through dive, kayak, and beach clean ups.

SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals

Bangladesh | Health and Livelihood Service

In Bangladesh, 3,000 people supported by youth volunteers are engaged in activities to promote the SDGs, monitor services, and hold duty bearers to account for their delivery with a specific focus on health and livelihoods services. Young volunteers supported by VSO have run national campaigns on important issues facing their communities, including on child marriage and climate change.

Ghana and France | Strengthening the Relationship between Countries

Ghana and France, 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 and Ghana also carry out local partnerships to share resources and knowledge towards a more sustainable development. As part of the partnership between the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the City of Paris, an International Solidarity Volunteer (VSI) program was implemented in Accra, focusing on waste management issues. The French volunteer who came to Ghana to assist the local teams on this matter helped support the implementation of waste management initiatives, focusing on improving the city's waste collection and recycling systems. He also engaged with different stakeholders, including local authorities, waste management organizations, and the public, to raise awareness and promote active participation in waste management solutions. His mission, alongside the fruitful partnership between the French and Ghanaian cities, helped strengthen local capacities to develop and manage waste reduction programs, contributing to environmental sustainability, while fostering partnerships between international and local actors.

India and France | Global Cooperation and Resource-sharing for Development

The decentralized cooperation between the Région Centre-Val de Loire and the State of Tamil Nadu, initiated in 2008, is a structured partnership aimed at fostering sustainable and mutually beneficial projects across multiple sectors. This collaboration is built on the principles of shared interests, reciprocal enrichment, and regional engagement, aligning with the Centre-Val de Loire's policy of international solidarity and cooperation. As part of this initiative, an international volunteer mission on resource-sharing has been implemented, with a key focus on promoting "soft tourism," cultural heritage, and gastronomy.

A French International Solidarity Volunteer (VSI) and the French Institute in Pondichéry together foster international collaboration between regions, forging ironclad partnerships to conquer sustainable development goals. As part of their mission, they facilitate the cooperation between the two regions by emphasizing academic and scientific exchanges, supporting student and faculty mobility, and fostering joint research initiatives. The VSI also implements monitoring and smooth coordination for regular missions, delegations, and joint committees and ensures the evaluation and planning of ongoing projects. Their mission drives global cooperation and resource-sharing to deliver transformative community development in their host region, participating in the achievement of SDG 17.

India and Kenya | 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.

Philippines | Building Bridges for Inclusion

Life Project 4 Youth (LP4Y), a French organization, collaborates with a network of private sector companies to support excluded youth in transitioning to decent jobs. French volunteers play a vital role in mentoring and preparing these youth for integration into the professional world, acting as bridges between emerging talent and inclusive employers. These partnerships are crucial not only for the personal transformation of each youth but also for fostering a more inclusive labor market. Through its solidarity-driven ecosystem, LP4Y exemplifies the impact of collaboration among civil society, local stakeholders, and the private sector in achieving sustainable development goals.

For more examples of how volunteers are delivering the SDGs, please visit more volunteer stories at <https://www.volunteergroupsalliance.org/stories>.