

2022 State of the World's
Volunteerism Report

Building equal and inclusive societies

OVERVIEW



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Team:

Team leader: Emma Morley

Project management and policy lead:

Maggie Carroll, Tapiwa Kamuruko

Research coordination and management:

Maggie Carroll, Jane Muthumbi

Research and writing:

The research and writing of the report was a collaborative effort by the UNV SWVR team and a consortium of research institutions, consisting of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation and the Institute for Volunteering Research at the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom), the Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi and Kathmandu University School of Education (Nepal). The consortium led the case study research and analysis and wrote the report in coordination with UNV.

Chapter 2 has been prepared by UNV (Celina Menzel), with technical advice and input from Vladimir Ganta, International Labour Organization (ILO). Chapter 3 is based on the full report of a multi-country study on volunteering before, during and after COVID-19 (commissioned by UNV and carried out by Gallup, Inc.). The published study is available at <https://knowledge.unv.org/evidence-library/from-care-to-where-understanding-volunteerism-in-the-global-south-a-multicountry-study-on-volunteering-before-during-and-beyond-covid19>.

Research consortium members:

University of East Anglia, United Kingdom:

Anna Robinson-Pant (Team Leader), Chris Millora (Lead Researcher/Author), Catherine Jere and Jurgen Grotz.

Kathmandu University School of Education,

Nepal: Mahesh Nath Parajuli (*Lead*), Suresh Gautam and Lasata Joshi (*consortium members and case study researchers for South Asia*).

Centre for Social Research, University of

Malawi: Chrissie Thakwalakwa (*Lead*) and Elita Chamdimba (*consortium members and case study researchers for Africa*).

Tania Haddad, American University of Beirut, Lebanon (*case study researcher for Middle East and North Africa*).

Diego da Silva Rodrigues, Independent Researcher, Brazil (*case study researcher for Latin America and the Caribbean*).

Publication management (print and digital):

Vera Chrobok

Communications and outreach:

Alba Candel Pau, Vera Chrobok, Alissa Collins, Nina Jerak, Amina Said, Jennifer Stapper, Emma Webb

Stakeholder engagement:

Katrina Borromeo, Celina Menzel, Marguerite Minani

Design concept, layout, editing and translations:

Strategic Agenda, London, United Kingdom

Foreword

Volunteerism plays a central role in strengthening people–state relationships. It promotes better governance, helps build more equal and inclusive societies, and fosters stability. Increasingly, volunteers across the globe are forging closer partnerships with state authorities to address urgent development challenges, from climate change, to ecosystem and biodiversity loss, to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown by the 2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR) entitled *Building Equal and Inclusive Societies*, despite the devastating socio-economic impacts of this pandemic, global interest in volunteering has not waned.

This latest SWVR presents new evidence on volunteer–state partnerships. It demonstrates how cooperation between volunteers and governments is helping build a culture of collaborative decision-making.

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**As the report illustrates,
volunteerism offers new pathways
for rights-based participation.**

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New partnerships between governments and volunteers from marginalized groups—women, persons with disabilities, slum-dwellers and the urban poor—are reconfiguring long-standing power relations. While volunteers have more opportunities to engage in activities that are meaningful to them, volunteers from marginalized groups remain disadvantaged. For instance, caregiving and domestic responsibilities limit the ability of women and girls to engage in volunteering in many countries. Addressing such gaps in volunteering practices and aspirations is vital to tackling exclusion and gender inequality.

The report also asks us to rethink how to engage volunteers as partners in development as we work towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As some countries start to build forward better from the pandemic, governments and other stakeholders need to work even more closely with volunteers, engaging with them as key partners and opening up the space for them to collaborate on vital development solutions. In doing so, we can help create a 21st Century social contract that is more inclusive and responsive to the needs of communities. This much is clear: drawing upon the incredible creativity, energy and expertise of volunteers will be crucial to shaping that greener, more inclusive and more sustainable future.



Achim Steiner
Administrator
United Nations Development Programme
(UNDP)



Toily Kurbanov
Executive Coordinator
United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme

Introduction

Collective efforts are vital in addressing development challenges, and partnerships can play an important role in this regard. Understanding how partnerships between people and other stakeholders can help address the myriad of challenges humanity is facing is critical.

Volunteerism is an important vehicle for shaping and advancing development. To fulfil its potential to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development for all, and address development challenges effectively, partnerships need to be established between volunteers and other stakeholders.

The 2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR): Building equal and inclusive societies explores the ways in which volunteer–state partnerships can help address our most pressing challenges. The report aims to answer two fundamental questions. First, what role could volunteerism play in developing people–state relationships? Second, how can volunteerism contribute to development through new forms of collaboration and partnerships? One important message from the report is that partnerships are fundamental to and can play a key role in addressing our development challenges. The aim of the report is to illustrate how volunteer–state partnerships can play a role in this regard.

The first part of the report consists of three framing chapters that present the main ideas that underpin the report. The introduction discusses how to investigate the potential contribution volunteerism can make to building equal and inclusive societies. It is followed by two quantitative chapters: one on global volunteer estimates and the other on a volunteer perception survey on volunteerism in the Global South during the COVID-19 pandemic. These chapters shed light on volunteer data, trends and patterns.



A volunteer works on a nature conservation project in Peru, 2021. Source: UNV.

Chapter 1

Volunteerism: Building equal and inclusive societies

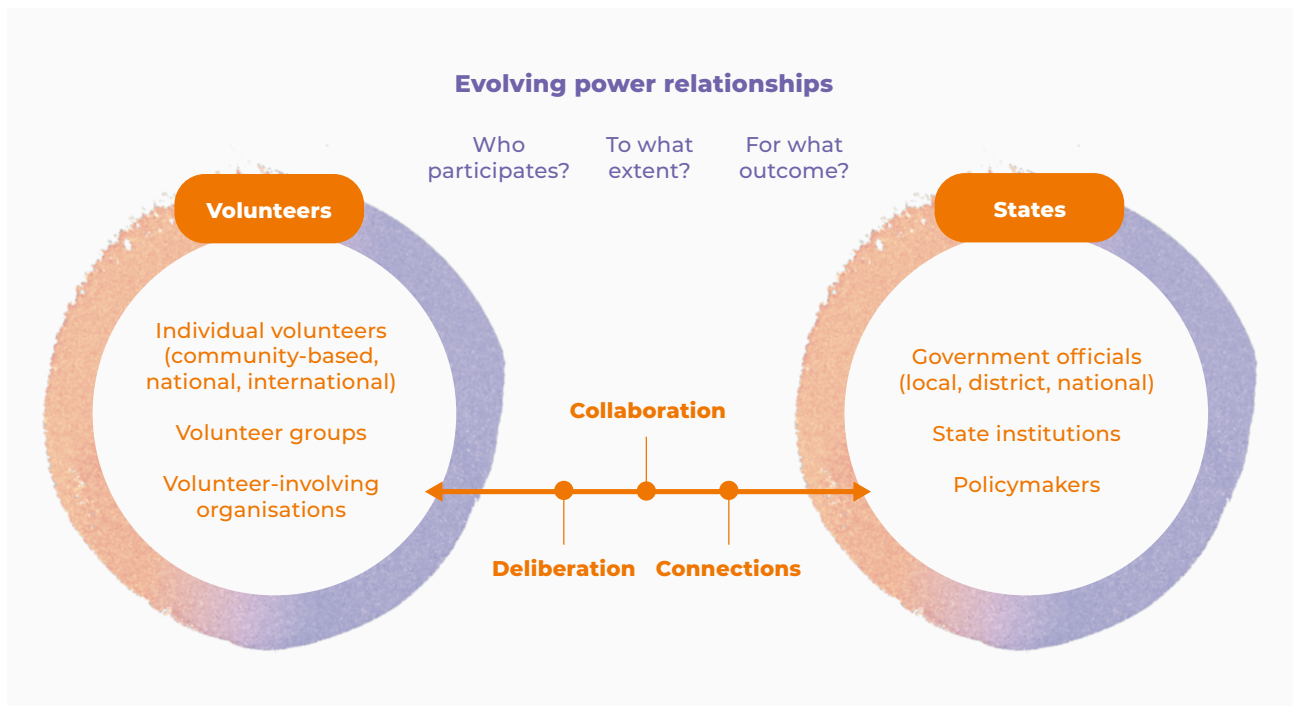
The introduction provides the conceptual framework for volunteer–state relationships. To understand these partnerships, the concept of the social contract between volunteers and the state is introduced. The chapter explores how volunteers, volunteer-involving organizations, and governments are working together to create more inclusive structures and more equal societies. In so doing, these partnerships can help catalyse the development of a 21st-Century social contract that is founded on inclusion and equality.

The chapter also contains an overview of the emerging models of volunteer–state partnerships in deliberative governance, co-production of services and social innovation that are examined in the second part of the report.

These models are based on case study research across five regions: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Arab States, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Recognizing that volunteer–state partnerships are dynamic, and that volunteers and states are not homogeneous, the report introduces a framework for understanding how relations between volunteers and state authorities evolve through three forms of partnerships: deliberation, collaboration and connections.

Figure 1. Evolving volunteer–state partnerships



Chapter 2

What is not counted does not count: Global volunteering estimates

Chapter 2 provides a perspective on how many people volunteer and how they volunteer. Building on previous efforts to measure the scale and scope of volunteering at the global and regional levels, the chapter highlights ongoing challenges related to estimating the scale and scope of global volunteerism, among them, lack of consistency in how volunteering is defined across countries and in how it is measured. Progress in the development of data-collection and measurement tools that aim to better capture the full diversity of volunteering efforts is helping to close the gap.

The global volunteer estimates highlight differences across regions.

The trends show the dominance of informal volunteering (14.3 percent) compared with formal volunteering (6.5 percent of working-age people worldwide).

While twice as many people volunteer informally than formally, informal volunteering is likely to be underestimated due to the difficulty of capturing informal volunteering, representative of wider difficulties in measuring volunteerism at the global, regional and national levels that need to be overcome.

Gender disparities in volunteering are also evident as men tend to engage in formal volunteering, while women tend to volunteer informally. Given that informal volunteering tends to have a lower status, attracts less recognition and receives less practical support than formal volunteering, this highlights the need to address gender-related disparities. In terms of the economic contribution of volunteering globally, the number of full-time equivalent volunteer workers is estimated at approximately 61 million full-time workers monthly, assuming a 40-hour week.

Chapter 3

Understanding patterns and trends in volunteerism in the Global South: a multi-country study on volunteering before, during and beyond COVID-19

Building on the data and measurement theme, chapter 3 focuses on a study undertaken by UNV and Gallup during the COVID-19 pandemic. Undertaken in eight countries in the Global South (Bolivia, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Senegal, Thailand, Turkey and Uzbekistan), the UNV and Gallup volunteer perception study explores trends of volunteering before, during and beyond the global COVID-19 crisis.

The study, which highlights the pandemic's impact on both volunteer–state relationships and volunteering, offers insights into volunteering during an unprecedented time, and contributes to bridging the gaps in volunteering data in the Global South.

In terms of the types of volunteer participation, findings show that while civic participation declined during the pandemic, there was an increase in volunteer engagement in developing new ideas or solutions to local issues.

There were gender differences in volunteering during the pandemic in the eight countries, as men were more likely to have volunteered than women. At the same time, informal volunteering was the dominant type of volunteering during the pandemic, with these trends reflecting global volunteering patterns.

Despite the disruption it has caused, the COVID-19 pandemic has not dampened people's interest in volunteering as most of those who engaged in volunteering during the pandemic plan to continue volunteering.

Gender-related differences with respect to future volunteering plans highlight the need to better understand gender-related barriers to volunteering.

The second part of the report focuses on the three models of volunteer–state partnerships: deliberative governance, co-production of social services and social innovation. Drawing on research case studies from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Arab States, and Latin America and the Caribbean, the three chapters investigate the components of volunteer–state models and discusses their drivers, challenges and barriers.



A volunteer discusses gender-based violence with students in Malawi, 2021. *Source:* UNV.

Chapter 4

Volunteer–state partnerships and deliberative governance

Chapter 4 on volunteer–state partnerships and deliberative governance focuses on volunteerism within the context of communities in states and regions in the Global South. Drawing on case study research from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and Tunisia, the chapter explores how volunteers from marginalized groups, including indigenous communities (Nepal), rural women (Kyrgyzstan), farmers (DRC and Tunisia) and activists (Ecuador) collaborate with their governments to tackle a variety of issues, from climate change (Ecuador and Nepal), agriculture (DRC) and water crises (Tunisia), to women’s rights (Kyrgyzstan) and heritage conservation (Nepal).

More than discussion

Recognizing that volunteer–state partnerships are characterized by unequal power relations, the case studies help illustrate how new ways of working that enable volunteers to play a greater role in decision-making alongside the state can make spaces more inclusive and contribute to outcomes that better respond to the needs of marginalized communities, while providing the basis for a shift in power relations.

Across the case studies, volunteer–state partnerships promote volunteers’ voice and agency. In addition to ensuring that volunteers from marginalized groups are involved in decision-making processes and that volunteers can influence decisions, these structures give them agency and help to amplify their voices. Volunteer–state partnerships also allow for diverse perspectives to be heard, with volunteers providing knowledge and expertise that result in sustainable solutions. Besides engendering the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making processes, volunteers play an important role in supporting difficult decision-making, contributing to more responsive outcomes. For all their strengths, deliberative spaces have limitations: while they provide avenues for volunteers from marginalized groups to take on a central role in making decisions about issues that affect them, challenges in ensuring that deliberative spaces are inclusive remain, in some cases reinforcing ongoing disparities (for example, gender differences). Furthermore, despite the strides made in addressing power inequalities between people and states, deliberative spaces do not necessarily eliminate them.

Chapter 5

Volunteer–state partnerships and co-production of services

Chapter 5 explores how volunteers and state authorities partner to co-produce services in China, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Senegal. Volunteers from diverse marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, women, indigenous communities and migrants, engage in the co-production of services with state authorities in various contexts. The case studies focus on gender equality issues in Lebanon and Senegal; disability rights and employment in China and Kazakhstan; reproductive health in Senegal; and migration in Kyrgyzstan and Lebanon.

Volunteering: an essential component in the co-production of services

Collaboration underpins volunteer–state partnerships in co-production. Across the case studies, volunteers and state authorities leverage the partnerships for mutually beneficial outcomes in co-production. By advocating for services for migrants and persons with disabilities and helping community members to navigate highly bureaucratic processes in governments that are often difficult to access, volunteers' efforts contribute to effective delivery of services to marginalized groups while enabling governments to better integrate disadvantaged groups in society through the provision of services. While they play a key role across different stages of the co-production process, from co-development of ideas to co-implementation, volunteers' engagement with state authorities—which often is due to their dissatisfaction with the way local authorities address development challenges—could be viewed as a deficit of trust among states, service users and volunteers.



A volunteer helps migrants access COVID-19 vaccines in Lebanon, 2021. *Source:* UNV.

Chapter 6

Volunteer–state partnerships and social innovation

Chapter 6 explores how volunteerism can be a driver of social innovation. Drawing on case studies in Colombia, Kenya, Malawi, Trinidad and Tobago, and a project that spans the Small Island Developing States of Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the chapter explores how volunteers can shape and facilitate new ways of working while generating new solutions that address sustainable development challenges.

Volunteers from a wide array of marginalized groups, including young people (Malawi and Trinidad and Tobago), peasant farmers (Colombia), slum-dwellers and urban poor people (Kenya), and women market vendors (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) tackle a variety of challenges from sexual and reproductive health and rights (Malawi), youth participation (Trinidad and Tobago) and rural health (Colombia), to slum-dwellers' rights and urban development (Kenya) and women's economic empowerment and rights (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu).

Volunteerism: a catalyst for social innovation

Volunteerism can play a fundamental role in engendering social innovation. As volunteer–state partnerships in social innovation illustrate gaps in services in marginalized communities, they provide the impetus for—and help drive—innovation. Partnerships between volunteers and stakeholders are integral in facilitating inclusive structures that allow for the development of new relationships between people and state authorities. In addition to enhancing network-building, partnerships often enable different stakeholders to engage in and find solutions to development challenges.

Critically, innovation can enhance outcomes for marginalized communities, with volunteers helping to facilitate new ways of working that in some cases reconfigure power relationships between people and states. The partnerships nevertheless can reinforce ongoing inequalities; for example, social innovations that focus on online platforms can exacerbate the digital divide.

The third part focuses on the conclusions and presents the key messages and policy recommendations.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and recommendations: Volunteerism – helping build equal and inclusive societies

Volunteerism can play a fundamental role in building and strengthening people–state relationships that, in turn, lead to better governance and promote sustainable development and peace, helping lay the foundation for building equal and inclusive societies.

In various ways, volunteers have been answering the call for collaborative people–state decision-making and action,

underscored by their important and diverse roles in deliberative governance, in the co-production of services and in social innovation. Now more than ever, partnerships are critical as communities and countries strive to build forward better following several crises and pave the way for a more equal and inclusive future that leaves no one behind.

Volunteer–state partnerships are an important mechanism for expanding volunteers' roles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and can play a role in laying the foundation for a 21st-Century social contract that is founded on inclusion and equality and is responsive to the needs of communities.

Figure 2. A social contract for equal and inclusive societies



Key messages

Volunteerism can promote a culture of collaborative decision-making by contributing to shaping and prioritizing issues that are important to them, and by working collaboratively with state authorities.

Volunteerism can alter unequal power relations: through collaboration with state authorities, volunteers have the capacity to reconfigure unequal power relations.

Volunteerism offers diverse pathways to civic participation but remains unequal: volunteers have diverse causes to volunteer for and use various channels and approaches for volunteering.

Volunteers build bridges: volunteers are often in the unique position of brokering relationships between service providers and beneficiaries.

Policy recommendations

Address barriers faced by marginalized groups in volunteering: policymakers can adopt policies to ensure access and inclusion in order to facilitate marginalized groups and volunteers' participation in decision-making processes. Policies aimed at promoting partnerships between volunteers and government and other entities, including the private sector, can be important in engendering the development of such partnerships.

Leverage partnerships through volunteering: policymakers should leverage existing support networks, volunteering practices and values when developing policies on volunteerism. Recognizing the importance of partnerships among volunteers, volunteer-involving organizations and government, Bangladesh is co-creating a National Volunteer Policy with various stakeholders that aims to embed volunteerism within the national development policies and significantly strengthen local government institutions.

Policy recommendations

Address gender-related volunteering inequalities:

policy makers can adopt gender-sensitive measures that can optimize women's participation in volunteering; for example, by ensuring they have access to decision-making processes. Understanding ongoing barriers that women face in volunteering is important. Studies that assess how collaborative decision-making processes reinforce or challenge gender norms, as well as other gender inequalities in volunteerism across countries and regions, can help close this gap.

Leverage volunteers' expertise, knowledge and experiences:

policy makers should recognize the expertise of volunteers and implement measures to facilitate or create an enabling environment for the full utilization of their skills. Policy makers should also consider building on the strong interest in diverse forms of volunteering beyond service delivery, including social innovation and civic engagement.

Promote social innovation:

policy makers should promote measures that support the development of new ideas in order to enable innovations that align with and are more responsive to communities' development needs.

Social innovation requires inclusive policies that enable marginalized groups to engage in innovations..

Recognize informal volunteers' work and contributions:

policy makers should consider developing mechanisms for valuing volunteers for the work that they do, from recognizing their opinions and integrating their input in decisions, to other considerations such as social protection for volunteers in marginalized communities. Policy makers should also recognize volunteers' contributions, including through various forms of incentives such as social recognition to build on their desire to feel needed and valued.

Invest in volunteer data collection and, research and measurement:

policy makers should invest in the measurement of volunteering to close the gap in volunteering data, and generate better-quality, more comparable data. To better measure volunteering, they should also explore partnerships with national- and regional-level entities for the purpose of data collection. Partnerships to collect data and better measure volunteering with entities at the national level – for example with National Statistical Offices – with regional organizations at the regional level, and with partners – for example, ILO – at the international level can help close the gap in data management.

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The *2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report : Building Equal and Inclusive Societies* presents new evidence on the relationship between volunteers and the state. It shows how volunteer–state partnerships can redefine power relations to create societies that benefit all. When governments collaborate with volunteers from marginalized groups, these relationships foster new ways of working that engage volunteers as key partners in the creation of development solutions.

We need to draw on the creativity and energy of volunteers. In doing so, we can lay the foundation for a 21st Century social contract that is more inclusive and responsive to the needs of communities. This report offers timely insights into the important contribution of volunteers today, and the crucial role they could play in the future as we seek to build forward better towards more equal and inclusive societies.