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Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with resolution [73/140](#) and provides an update on the implementation of the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The present report demonstrates significant progress in meeting the three objectives of the plan of action, which are: (a) increasing ownership of the development agenda through volunteering; (b) integrating volunteering into national and global development strategies; and (c) measuring volunteering and its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, progress was made with integrating volunteering into planning and review mechanisms under the 2030 Agenda, including recognition of volunteering in Member States voluntary national reviews, in General Assembly resolutions and in the planning frameworks of the United Nations and its entities. Volunteering work is also increasingly being measured statistically.

However, the report finds the need for further efforts to integrate volunteering into national development strategies, plans and policies in order to expand and mobilize constituencies and engage people in national planning and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Data, evidence and knowledge-sharing on the impact of people's engagement through volunteering can also be strengthened. Those two actions can ensure that volunteers are at the heart of efforts to respond, rebuild and recover from the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. That will also ensure that volunteering provides those furthest behind with opportunities for greater ownership in the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

* [A/76/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. By its resolution [67/138](#), the General Assembly called for Member States to integrate volunteering into their efforts to achieve peace and development in the next decade and beyond. Subsequent resolutions [70/129](#) and [73/140](#) outlined a global plan of action to disseminate good practices and lessons learned, promote successful volunteer actions and ensure that the contributions of volunteers to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are recognized as part of national policy processes.

2. The present report takes stock of the role of volunteerism at the outset of the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals in line with those General Assembly resolutions. The global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which saw the world's 1 billion volunteers at the forefront of our collective efforts, further highlighted the critical role of voluntary action. Even as volunteers continue to respond to the most urgent needs, we must consider how volunteering can support efforts to build back better after the pandemic.

3. The report draws on national situation analyses on volunteering prepared in the period from 2017 to 2019; inputs from regional forums on sustainable development in 2018–2019; volunteering case studies submitted by stakeholders in 2020; inputs from a United Nations global survey on volunteering conducted in 2020; a survey of United Nations entities completed in 2021; and data from a new Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism developed by the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV).¹

II. Plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

4. Pursuant to the 2015 report of the Secretary-General on integrating volunteering in the next decade ([A/70/118](#)), UNV and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies established a secretariat for the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The secretariat promoted three strategic objectives: (a) bolster ownership of the development agenda through enhanced civic engagement and widening the enabling environment for citizen action; (b) integrate volunteerism into national and global strategies for the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015; and (c) measure volunteerism to contribute to a holistic understanding of the engagement of people and of their well-being. Subsequently, the report of the Secretary-General on the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([A/73/254](#)) reaffirmed a three-tiered approach to knowledge exchange on volunteerism.

5. In the first tier of the knowledge exchange, technical guidance for national-level analysis of volunteering was developed for Member States. Between 2017 and 2019, a total of 44 countries conducted national situation analyses, demonstrating the diversity of measures that Member States and their partners are taking to support volunteers in contributing to national development goals.

¹ Available at knowledge.unv.org.

Table 1
National situation analyses submitted by Member States to the secretariat of the plan of action between 2017 and 2019²

<i>Region</i>	<i>Countries</i>	
Africa	Benin	Niger
	Burkina Faso	Somalia
	Burundi	Sudan
	Cameroon	Togo
	Ethiopia	Uganda
	Madagascar	Zambia
	Malawi	Zimbabwe
	Mozambique	
Asia and the Pacific	Afghanistan	Kazakhstan
	Cambodia	Nepal
	China	Sri Lanka
	Cyprus	State of Palestine
	India	Thailand
	Iraq	
Eastern Europe	Azerbaijan	Russian Federation
	Czechia	
Latin America and the Caribbean	Brazil	Paraguay
	Chile	Peru
	Ecuador	Uruguay
	Mexico	
Western Europe and other	Austria	Germany
	France	Malta

6. In the second tier, the main findings of the national situation analyses were summarized in five regional synthesis reports. The reports were presented at consultations on the role of volunteerism in the context of the 2030 Agenda convened by UNV, in partnership with the regional commissions of the United Nations, on the margins of the 2019 regional forums for sustainable development. Throughout 2019, additional discussions about the contributions of volunteers to the Sustainable Development Goals and gaps in terms of data and evidence were held with diverse

² In addition to those submitted by Member States, national situation analyses were also received from stakeholders in Croatia, Montenegro, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, bringing the total to 44 countries.

stakeholders, such as the African Union, the Higher School of Economics (Russian Federation), the International Association for Volunteer Effort, the International Forum for Volunteering in Development, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Government of Kenya, as well as through online consultations with more than 2,000 participants on the themes of private sector engagement, the future of volunteering and volunteering and the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. In the third and final tier, a global technical meeting on the theme “Reimagining volunteerism for the 2030 Agenda” was convened virtually from 13 to 16 July 2020 as a special event during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. It was co-chaired by UNV and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in coordination with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. More than 4,000 people joined to hear over 70 speakers from nearly 60 Member States in five plenary sessions and to participate in five regional breakout discussions. The global meeting resulted in the launch of the document entitled “Call to action: volunteering in the decade of action”.

8. That participatory process generated a diverse range of perspectives from governments, the United Nations system, civil society, academia, the private sector and volunteers. Stakeholders were able to take stock of volunteer efforts during the first five years of the Sustainable Development Goals and to reflect on the potential of volunteering as an accelerator of the 2030 Agenda. The remainder of the present report showcases relevant evidence and newly emerging volunteering models and policies.

III. Progress on integrating volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A. Increasing ownership of the development agenda through volunteering

9. Six years into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, volunteering offers significant opportunities to catalyse the efforts, skills and creativity of people everywhere to deliver on the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals. Volunteers participate in a wide range of actions and initiatives related to the planning, implementation and evaluation of development processes. The present section highlights evidence of how volunteers’ involvement in development processes strengthened participation, inclusion and ownership by all peoples.

1. Participation in development processes

10. The previous report of the Secretary-General on this subject ([A/73/254](#)) reflected how, under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, many Member States had introduced mechanisms to consult with citizens and to localize the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States have continued such efforts since the publication of that previous report, often with a focus on amplifying the voices of young people. For example, in the United Arab Emirates, under the country’s Vision 2021 development strategy, volunteer “youth circles” respond to questions on important issues for society and recommend policy changes. In Colombia, *Conversación Nacional 2019–2020* facilitated discussions between the Government and citizens on sustainable development priorities. In Finland, volunteers work with a citizen panel to assess Sustainable Development Goal progress as part of the national reporting system on sustainable development. The 2020 Sustainable Development Goals Index and dashboard report shows that 65 per cent of African countries now have stakeholder engagement and consultation plans, from citizen

panels in Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Lesotho and South Africa to online surveys in Algeria, Seychelles and Uganda.³

11. Beyond consultations, Member States continue to strengthen institutional arrangements to enable people to participate in development efforts through volunteering. Since the most recent report of the Secretary-General, such institutional arrangements were established in Cambodia, Ghana, Peru and Uganda, where they strengthen the economic and social participation of young people. In addition, several Member States support national volunteer schemes for a range of mutual aid and other community-based initiatives, such as the integrated care system that provides comprehensive health services to the elderly in Japan and the Yicang neighbourhood mutual assistance programme, which promotes formal and informal urban community volunteering in China.

12. In addition to investing in new institutions, governments coordinate already existing volunteering organizations and raise awareness of their actions. In Guinea, a collective of volunteer organizations was established in 2019 to federate all volunteer organizations under the auspices of the National Youth Volunteer Agency. In the Niger, the National Agency of Volunteerism for Development is mandated to coordinate volunteers and volunteering organizations in line with national development policies and strategies. In Brazil, a new national volunteering incentive platform was established in 2019 through the Banco do Brasil Foundation. In Uruguay, the National Network of Dialogue on Volunteering and Social Commitment promoted legal mechanisms and institutional spaces for volunteers. In Germany, the Foundation for Commitment and Volunteering was established in 2020 to strengthen civic engagement across the country.

13. In his previous report on the plan of action, the Secretary-General noted the introduction of the Year of Volunteers in the Russian Federation in 2018. Since then, Member States, including Turkey (2019), Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (2020), and Hungary and the Netherlands (2021), have also designated national years of volunteering. These initiatives went beyond recognizing volunteerism and provided momentum to policy actions. For example, the Russian Federation developed a new standard on volunteer support and piloted a number of volunteer incentives, for example for medical students under the Ministry of Health. Kazakhstan prioritized volunteering for education and emergency response, introducing incentives for volunteer students, and is developing a methodology for measuring the contributions of volunteering to the country's socioeconomic development.

14. Involvement by multiple stakeholders helps to create opportunities for people to volunteer on a wide range of issues. YouthConnekt Africa is a continental platform working with the United Nations, private companies and civil society to create youth employment and leadership opportunities. The Tata Trusts DELTA programme, in India, is a private sector, civil society and local government partnership that enables community volunteers to gather data for Sustainable Development Goal localization. The Youth Coalition in Armenia, supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the KASA Swiss Humanitarian Foundation, brings together young people from refugee and host communities. The Nahno volunteering platform in Jordan, launched by the Government, the United Nations, the private sector and civil society, similarly makes volunteering opportunities accessible to young people.

³ Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, "Africa Sustainable Development Goal Index and dashboards report 2020", July 2020, Kigali and New York.

2. Volunteerism during COVID-19

15. Volunteers exercised leadership roles in national responses and recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic around the world. In Belize, volunteers provided vital support to the operation of quarantine centres. In Fiji, volunteers disseminated health information to communities as part of the national disaster management system. In Thailand, more than a million Village Health Volunteers collected daily health information in rural communities and in Lao People's Democratic Republic, community radio volunteers reached people in rural and remote areas with COVID-19 prevention messages in their own languages. Additional examples of volunteers having vital roles in the pandemic response include: Jamaica, where volunteers under the Ministry of Health and Wellness received training to address mental health needs in communities; and Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Zambia, where volunteers led sensitization campaigns in markets and places of worship.

16. Volunteers also played critical roles in addressing the consequences of COVID-19 and mitigating its socioeconomic impacts. Pakistan established the Corona Relief Tiger Force national youth volunteer scheme to provide essential supplies to vulnerable groups. Panama empowered volunteers from the Ministry of Social Development's Voluntario Solidario programme to distribute millions of emergency "solidarity" packages to vulnerable families. Peru engaged volunteers from the bicentennial national volunteer programme to support the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion in monitoring the physical and mental health of more than 100,000 elderly persons and persons with disabilities. Furthermore, people organized in volunteer groups through neighbourhood associations, online groups and social movements to address the challenges of the pandemic. In South Sudan, the Anataban collective used arts-based strategies to provide information on COVID-19 to communities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Solidarité féminine pour la paix et le développement integral launched a campaign against domestic violence, following their experiences from previous Ebola virus disease epidemics. In Yemen, the Yemeni Women's Union recorded cases of domestic violence during the pandemic and provided legal support to women and girls forced to marry.

3. Strengthening inclusion through volunteering

17. The General Assembly, in its resolution [73/140](#), encouraged the meaningful inclusion of all people through volunteering, including youth, older persons, women, migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities and all marginalized groups. To this end, in Indonesia, volunteers with disabilities work with disaster inclusion units as part of national disaster management strategies to ensure appropriate support for those with specific needs. In Kyrgyzstan, volunteers work with the Ministry of Education and Science and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to transcribe and translate tele-lessons into sign language. In many countries of West Africa, young returnee migrants volunteer under the International Organization for Migration project entitled "Migrants as messengers" to raise awareness of COVID-19 prevention in vulnerable and remote communities. In addition, across the world, a growing number of United Nations Volunteers with disabilities add value to the work of the United Nations development system, including through the UNV-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities.

18. Volunteers help increase participation and leadership opportunities for women. In Burkina Faso, volunteers from the Programme National de Volontariat du Burkina Faso strengthened the participation of women in the 2020 electoral process. The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic worked with community volunteers in that country to enable 3,185 women to register as first-time voters, while 390 women candidates standing in the elections were

provided with capacity development opportunities. The volunteer-led Technovation Girls programme (launched in 2010 by Technovation, a global education technology non-profit organization) enabled over 25,000 girls in more than 100 countries to learn and apply coding and artificial intelligence skills to address the gender imbalance in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. In Solomon Islands, the volunteer-run savings club “The West ‘Are’Are Rokotanikeni Association” supported women, including in remote areas, in managing their finances and savings.

19. Expanding opportunities for all types of people to participate in development processes requires addressing the risks that volunteers face, and in its resolution 73/140, the General Assembly called for increased efforts concerning the protection, security and well-being of volunteers. Subsequently, a number of governments, national volunteer coordinating bodies and volunteering organizations released guidelines and voluntary standards to protect volunteers and the communities they work with. Volunteering Australia and the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth of Singapore issued national guidelines on volunteer safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Sudan, the Red Crescent Society created learning opportunities and referral mechanisms to integrate psychosocial support for its volunteers in its structures.

4. Outlook for increased ownership through volunteering

20. In sum, volunteering continues to enable large numbers of people to participate in development processes. Since the adoption of resolution 73/140, national and subnational consultation mechanisms to promote dialogue on the Sustainable Development Goals have become a regular practice in all regions. More opportunities have been created for people to participate through volunteering, both online and offline, in partnership with authorities and the private sector and through self-organized efforts by communities.

21. However, there is potential to expand people’s engagement through volunteering. Member States can build from the current focus on youth engagement to promote a life-cycle approach to volunteering that can mobilize everyone, everywhere, to meet the ambitions of the decade of action. Support by Member States can be broadened to include grassroots and informally organized volunteer groups who are often at the frontline of community responses. Leadership opportunities for women and marginalized groups can be scaled up to support national gender equality priorities through volunteering.

22. Beyond increasing the scale of opportunities, the time is right to explore the quality of participation through volunteering, on the basis of countries’ innovations and experiences since 2015. Member States may wish to ascertain how well the existing systems enabled the voices and perspectives of diverse groups in localizing and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Understanding the most effective ways to build ownership in diverse contexts and building the evidence base on how voluntary action, engagement and participation help bring about positive impacts for those groups furthest behind will be critical to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. Some emerging opportunities in this regard are identified in section IV of the present report.

B. Integrating volunteering into national and global development strategies

23. Since the most recent report of the Secretary-General, Member States continued to generate and exchange knowledge and good practices on the integration of volunteering into national and subnational strategies, plans and policies. The data contributions of Member States and development partners were compiled into the

UNV Knowledge Portal, a live portal for national, regional and global information on laws, policies, institutions, data and good practices in relation to volunteering for the 2030 Agenda. The below section provides a stock-taking based on that evidence.

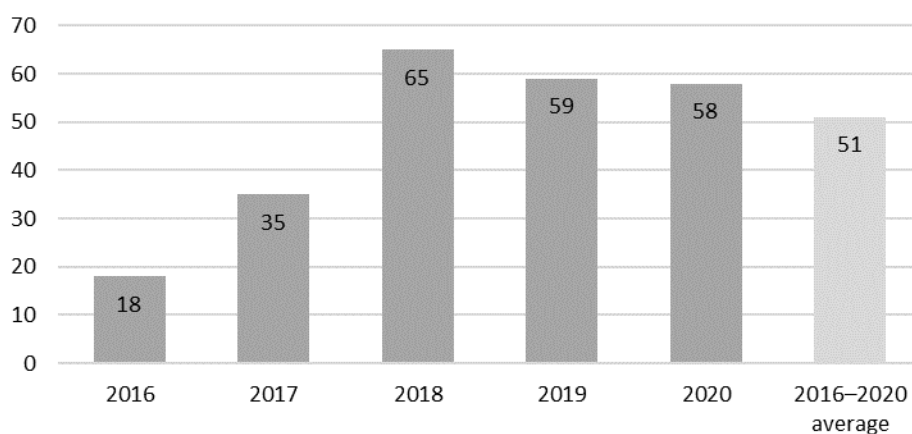
1. Integration for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

24. Recognition of the contribution of volunteers at the intergovernmental level has flourished since 2018. The General Assembly has referred to volunteerism in 34 of its resolutions, in comparison with 12 resolutions in the previous three-year period. These range from resolution [73/291](#) on the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second high-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, to resolution [74/115](#) on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, to resolution [75/154](#) on inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs continues to facilitate the participation of volunteer groups at the high-level political forum on sustainable development and in 2020 published findings on multi-stakeholder engagement in voluntary national reviews.⁴

25. In its resolution [73/140](#), the General Assembly encouraged Member States to document the contributions of volunteers to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in voluntary national reviews. A total of 61 per cent of reviews submitted in the period from 2018 to 2020 did so, a considerable increase from 29 per cent in 2016 and 2017 (figure I), as Member States moved to better reflect whole-of-society approaches to the Sustainable Development Goals. Volunteer efforts were recognized across all 17 global Goals for the first time in the 2018 voluntary national reviews. As many of these reviews relied on anecdotal evidence on volunteering at the national level, there is a need to build from these foundations by strengthening country-specific data on the economic and social contributions of volunteering under the 2030 Agenda.

Figure I

Percentage of voluntary national reviews mentioning positive contributions of volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals⁵



Source: United Nations Volunteers programme.

⁴ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Multi-stakeholder engagement in Agenda 2030 Implementation: A review of National Voluntary Review Reports (2016–2019)”, 2020).

⁵ Based on a UNV review of full voluntary national review reports uploaded to the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, in line with outcome 1 indicator of the UNV strategic framework for the period from 2018 to 2021.

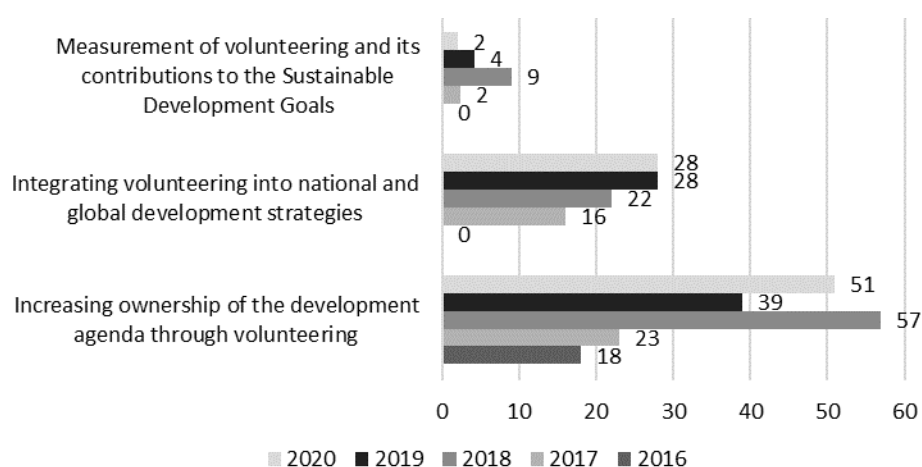
2. Integration in national development policies and strategies

26. To create a conducive environment for voluntary action, at least 121 countries now have laws, policies or schemes on volunteering. At least nine Member States enacted new legal instruments on volunteering since the last report: Bahrain, Gabon, Germany, Kazakhstan, Paraguay, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan. During the reporting period, at least seven Member States approved new policies or strategies to promote volunteering: Angola, Iraq, Ireland, Mali, Malta, Nigeria and the Russian Federation. As highlighted in the previous section of this report, at least four countries developed new national volunteering schemes for young people since 2018.

27. However, evidence gathered during implementation of the plan of action suggests that, globally, progress on linking volunteering policies and investments to development strategies is uneven. In 2020, only 28 per cent of voluntary national reviews included examples of volunteer efforts forming part of national or subnational policies or partnerships to address development priorities (figure II). In the period from 2015 to 2020, only one fifth of voluntary national reviews demonstrated linkages between volunteering and other policies and planning.

Figure II

Percentage of voluntary national reviews in the period from 2016 to 2020 containing evidence supporting each of the three objectives of the plan of action⁶



Source: United Nations Volunteer programme.

28. Looking at the policies and strategies available through the UNV Knowledge Portal, the strongest area of policy alignment to date appears to be between volunteering and youth empowerment. At least 43 Member States integrated volunteering into their national youth policies and strategies. Since the 2018 report, Jordan included volunteering in its National Youth Strategy 2019–2025 to promote youth innovation, Kiribati included volunteering in its National Youth Policy Framework and Action Plan 2018–2022 to nurture youth participation, and Tunisia promoted youth volunteering in its 2018–2020 Sector Vision on Youth under the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

29. Progress is also noted with regard to integrating volunteering into disaster risk reduction strategies and initiatives. Between 2018 and 2020, seven voluntary national reviews documented long-term partnerships between Member States and volunteers

⁶ Based on a UNV review of full voluntary national review reports uploaded to the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.

to train and organize for disaster response, with another six voluntary national reviews demonstrating new partnerships to respond to crises, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic. In Ecuador, the National Secretariat for Risk Reduction and Emergencies engages volunteers to strengthen local capacities and share experiences between communities. The National Integrated Disaster Risk Management Plan and Implementation Strategy of Guyana provides for support to volunteer responders, including a voluntary emergency response team established in 2019 by the Civil Defense Commission.

30. However, examples of government support of volunteer efforts for the broader Sustainable Development Goals are not yet widespread. Notable exceptions in which volunteering was well integrated into thematic or sectoral priorities include the Peacebuilding Priority Plan of Sri Lanka, which involves volunteers in community peacebuilding, and the Civil Society Development Strategy 2018–2020 of the Republic of Moldova, which incorporated volunteering as one of three strategic priorities. The National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2014–2020, of Malta, recommends volunteer programmes to improve mortality rates, psychological well-being and social networks of retirees. In addition, a small number of national development strategies are beginning to recognize volunteering as a valuable resource. The Vision 2030 national sustainable development strategy of Egypt links volunteerism with sustainable agriculture and biodiversity. The 11th National Development Plan 2019–2023 of Turkey promotes youth volunteering as a means to foster a culture of civil society engagement among school-aged children.

3. Regional, South-South and triangular cooperation

31. Volunteer initiatives have become common in various forms of international cooperation, again largely associated with the development of youth capacities. Regional organizations encourage volunteerism to strengthen integration and a common identity, such as through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, one of the strategic pillars of the ASEAN regional cooperation framework. The Arab Regional Volunteering Strategy was endorsed by the League of Arab States in 2020 to promote regional support and cooperation around volunteering for sustainable development.

32. Member States often support volunteering as part of South-South cooperation. The Friends from Thailand programme is implemented by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to share domestic approaches to sustainable development through South-South volunteering. The Volunteering Reciprocity International initiative, in Togo, facilitates volunteer exchanges between Togo and other countries from the global South. Across Africa, a network of over 800 medical professionals volunteer through the African Health Volunteers Corps to provide support in public health emergencies, such as the 2019 Ebola virus disease crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

33. Member States and other stakeholders also encourage South-North volunteering, triangular cooperation and reciprocal exchange. For example, between 2016 and 2020, youth volunteers from Benin, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania engaged in South-North exchange through the African-German Youth Initiative supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the African Union Commission.

4. Integration in the work of the United Nations system

34. In its resolution [75/233](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development, the General Assembly recognized the role of volunteers in the COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged the United Nations development system, in partnership with Member States, civil society and the private sector, to

promote a conducive environment for volunteerism to enhance the sustainability of development results. At least 16 draft or approved United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks⁷ that began to be implemented in 2020 and 2021 reference volunteerism in relation to partnerships, which is the subject of Sustainable Development Goal 17, or other Sustainable Development Goals.⁸

35. UNV continues to support the United Nations system through the mobilization of volunteers and promotion of volunteerism for peace and development. For the period from 2018 to 2020, 14,411 United Nations Volunteers served in the United Nations system across the globe, 52 per cent of whom were women and 82 per cent of whom were from the global South. UNV facilitated the dissemination of over 5,400 online volunteer opportunities, seeking to engage at least 16,800 online volunteers to contribute their skills and knowledge globally, across sectors, borders and Sustainable Development Goals. Finally, UNV contributed to the engagement of more than one million local non-United Nations volunteers through national volunteer schemes in 22 countries across all programme regions.⁹

36. Many United Nations entities created more strategic ways to embed United Nations Volunteers, in particular national volunteers who can bring their experience to bear on critical issues while strengthening national and regional systems and capacities. In 2020, UNV and the World Health Organization launched the Africa Young Women Health Champions initiative to support the skills and talents of women working in public health across the continent. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNV launched a new initiative for population data fellows for data and research on female genital mutilation in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations includes United Nations Volunteers as one of the four pillars of its young professionals programme. Continued partnership between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNV enabled the deployment of national lawyers as United Nations Volunteers to provide legal assistance. A total of 20 national United Nations Volunteers in Yemen worked with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to document violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law since 2020. UNV online volunteers played important roles, for example in Turkey, specializing in machine learning supported by the UNDP Sustainable Development Goal artificial intelligence lab. Online volunteers helped the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to translate 20,000 school names in the Sudan, to make them available in Arabic and English to support management and planning by the Ministry of Education and their partners.

37. To support national development priorities, other United Nations entities continue to embed volunteerism into their organizational strategies. UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment

⁷ For Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)), Liberia, North Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda and Uzbekistan.

⁸ This is based on the results of a review UNV undertook of 32 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks that: (a) began to be implemented in 2020 or 2021 and were prepared under the new generation Framework guidance from June 2019; and (b) were available to UNV for review by April 2021. In determining whether a Framework references volunteerism, UNV employed the following criteria (either): (a) volunteerism being integrated in various sections of the document (as per guidance on structure of the Framework); or (b) volunteerism being integrated into the results and resources framework.

⁹ Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, China, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, India, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kosovo (references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)), Mali, Pakistan, Panama, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Uganda, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe.

of Women included a common chapter on volunteering in their strategic plans for the period from 2018 to 2021. UNFPA included volunteerism in 15 country programme documents approved from 2018 to 2020, provided guidance on mainstreaming volunteerism across the programme cycle and continues to host an interdivisional group on volunteerism. From 2018 to 2020, 14 UNDP- and 13 UNICEF-approved country programme documents also mainstreamed volunteerism. Following a successful partnership with UNV, the Department of Statistics of the International Labour Organization (ILO) placed a new strategic focus on the measurement of unpaid work, including volunteer work.

5. Outlook for integration into development strategies

38. In sum, significant progress was made in integrating volunteering into planning and review processes at the intergovernmental level, in Member States voluntary national reviews and in global and country-level frameworks of the United Nations development system. Since 2018, the majority of voluntary national reviews submitted for the high-level political forum on sustainable development recognized the positive contributions of volunteers, while in 2020 the role of volunteers for the sustainability of development results was recognized in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review.

39. In terms of national and sectoral policies, in 2021, Member States are primarily linking volunteering with national youth policies and, to a lesser extent, disaster planning and preparedness strategies. The present report demonstrates the need for further efforts to integrate volunteering into wider strategies and plans in order to expand and mobilize constituencies and engage people for the decade of action.

C. Measurement of volunteering and its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals

40. The present section highlights the progress made in the measurement of volunteering and its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular relating to national measurement efforts, the development of new tools and guidance on the measurement of volunteer work and the economic and social value of volunteering, as well as data collection efforts, including by volunteers themselves.

1. National statistical measurement

41. At least 95 countries have measured volunteer work since 2007, with 25 countries conducting new measurements since the report of the Secretary-General published in 2018.¹⁰ However, statistical coverage in the global South remains patchy, and in many countries plans to measure volunteer work were postponed during 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most countries measuring volunteer work did so through the addition of a module to labour force surveys, with a small number embedding volunteer work in national social surveys. To date, however, only a very small proportion (4 per cent) of countries are reflecting this statistical data in voluntary national reviews of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see figure II above).

¹⁰ Countries that conducted at least one round of measurement since the start of 2018: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Israel, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland and the United States of America.

42. To address these issues, UNV and ILO continue to facilitate international cooperation to support national statistical measurement of volunteer work. Since the most recent report, those partner organizations tested and published volunteer work measurement tools that can capture the full diversity of volunteering efforts, including modules for labour force surveys,¹¹ modules for population censuses,¹² a new indicator on volunteer work in the ILOSTAT online database¹³ and the first-ever online publication of national statistics on volunteer work from 48 Member States.

2. Measuring the economic and social value of volunteering

43. To improve the use of statistical data, stakeholders collaborated on tools and methods to demonstrate the economic and social value of volunteering. In 2020, a measurement innovation challenge by UNV brought together teams from Argentina, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Togo, the United Kingdom and the continental research network Afrobarometer to produce new analytical approaches and alternative data sources, indicators and models for measuring volunteering and its contributions.¹⁴ Plan of action stakeholders subsequently published a toolbox of emerging practices in measuring the economic and social contributions of volunteer work.¹⁵

44. Other notable research and measurement activities since the most recent report of the Secretary-General included questions on volunteering in the UNDP Kazakhstan COVID-19 socioeconomic impact survey, which estimated that 16 per cent of people had volunteered during the emergency, with the same proportion of the population also reporting having received assistance from volunteers. In Latin America, the joint efforts of the United Nations development system resulted in a regional online survey on youth in the context of COVID-19, which showed that one in three young people in the region volunteered during the pandemic. The results of the survey will inform implementation of the United Nations youth strategy in the region, entitled “Youth 2030”. The 2019 Volunteering Conclave in India published a number of papers on the economic value of volunteer work. In 2020, ILO delved deeper into the role of volunteering in improving labour market prospects for young people, particularly those not in education or employment. Their study found that voluntary work is associated with positive labour market outcomes for young people, particularly from higher-income countries. Those effects were stronger for young women in all development contexts.¹⁶

3. Volunteer-led data

45. Volunteers themselves play increasingly active roles in addressing gaps in data collection and analysis. In the Niger and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, volunteers gathered data on Sustainable Development Goal indicators to support monitoring at the local and national levels. In Samoa, volunteer teams collected data to support the Government’s response to a measles outbreak in 2019 and 2020. Online platforms and applications tracked volunteer contributions beyond numbers of

¹¹ International Labour Organization, “Volunteer work measurement guide”, 2021, available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/publication/wcms_789950.pdf.

¹² International Labour Organization, “ILO Model question on volunteer work for Population and Housing Censuses”, 2019.

¹³ Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/volunteer-work/>.

¹⁴ United Nations, United Nations Volunteer programme, “Measuring the economic and social contributions of volunteering: anthology of papers from the plan of action innovation challenge”, anthology research report, Bonn, 2020.

¹⁵ United Nations, United Nations Volunteer programme, “Measuring volunteering for the 2030 Agenda: toolbox or principles, tools and practices”, research report commissioned by the secretariat of the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda, Bonn, 2020.

¹⁶ International Labour Organization and United Nations Volunteer programme, “Volunteer work and its links to the labour market experiences of young people”, 2020.

assignments, such as the Volunteer Circle platform in Lebanon, which estimated the economic value of volunteering hours contributed through the platform between March 2019 and March 2020 at more than \$500,000.

4. Outlook for measurement of volunteering

46. In summary, while some progress was made in the measurement of volunteering and its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, investments in measuring the scale of people's voluntary efforts must be accelerated, in particular in low- and middle-income contexts where data gaps persist. There is a need to regain momentum following the COVID-19 pandemic, during which a number of countries' plans to measure volunteer work were postponed. The emergence of new data collection methods from ILO and others can help to speed up the availability of comparable and standardized data across contexts. Furthermore, to increase the use of such data on volunteering for national planning, analysis and reporting on the 2030 Agenda, Member States may wish to draw on available statistical data on volunteer work in voluntary national reviews and continue to collaborate to build a range of models to reflect the economic and social value of volunteers to specific Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

47. The following section highlights opportunities for Member States and other stakeholders to reimagine their support to volunteers and volunteering to accelerate progress under the 2030 Agenda.

IV. The way forward

A. Volunteering in the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals

48. The Sustainable Development Goals and targets can only be achieved if entire societies are mobilized. In the present report, a robust foundation for volunteering is shown to be in place under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Volunteer contributions are well-recognized in planning and review processes for the Sustainable Development Goals, including Member State voluntary national reviews and in United Nations frameworks and programmes. Improved data is available on the scale and scope of volunteer work via national labour force surveys and other social surveys.

49. Through the present report, the Secretary-General encourages Member States and other stakeholders to create conditions for volunteering to achieve maximum impact on development results. The poorest and most vulnerable are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; to "build forward better", volunteering must do more than meet their needs. In the decade of action, volunteering must also provide opportunities for those groups furthest behind to address the underlying causes of such inequalities through individual and collective action.

50. To that end, a number of areas for further investment and support are identified in this report, aligned with the call to action endorsed at the global technical meeting held in 2020 on re-imagining volunteering for the 2030 Agenda.

B. Transforming volunteering for development results

51. The universal desire of people to contribute through volunteering was reaffirmed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Member States can build on their

experiences of promoting volunteering among youth and extend these opportunities to all demographic groups. A life-cycle approach would position volunteering as an important pillar of a revitalized social contract, alongside other elements such as voting and taxation.

52. Making volunteering more inclusive requires new models that enable everyone to participate, particularly as people struggle more than ever with work, health and well-being in all contexts. Beyond the national schemes and online platforms showcased in the present report, Member States can also help to support a wider range of volunteering practices. For example, they can explore new ways to support the types of grassroots action that emerged during COVID-19.

53. As volunteering practices evolve, there is a need to understand how they shape the participation of diverse groups. For example, while online and digital volunteering has flourished, facilitating access for some people, it can also exclude others. Member States and development partners can continue to share knowledge and scale up ways to address barriers to volunteering for specific groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous groups and refugees.

54. With many societies increasingly polarized, the trust and solidarity generated through volunteering can help groups to work together on shared goals. Intergenerational volunteering, cross-neighbourhood volunteering and other models can broaden engagement, while capitalizing on the solidarity generated within and among communities in the response to the pandemic.

55. Beyond widening access, stakeholders must deepen the evidence on the quality of participation through volunteering under the 2030 Agenda. Knowledge is needed on the volunteering mechanisms that best amplify the voices of those furthest behind. Such evidence could help shape a second generation of localization approaches, for example moving from rapid surveys and consultations to building on the relationships created through volunteering, to deepen dialogue and to strengthen leadership by marginalized groups.

56. Evidence provided in the present report demonstrates the need for further alignment of volunteer efforts with Sustainable Development Goals gaps and challenges. Building on progress in the areas of youth empowerment and disaster risk reduction, Member States can integrate volunteering in other sector policies and national development strategies. Volunteer-led data can help to strengthen planning and resource allocation processes, particularly in relation to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Integration into sector strategies would also provide a basis for dialogue and collaboration with volunteer groups at the national and subnational levels to address opportunities and bottlenecks.

57. More and better data is still needed, and there is a need to rebuild the momentum on statistical measurement, since a number of countries postponed the measurement of volunteer work owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Member States measurement efforts should build on statistical data collected through new volunteer work measurement tools created by ILO and UNV for incorporation in national statistical surveys, including labour force surveys and time use surveys.

58. The present report demonstrates that measurement data is also currently under-utilized. Evidence of the economic and social contributions of volunteers should replace anecdotes wherever possible. As we seek to recover, rebuild and reset in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, development frameworks should incorporate measures with respect to volunteering and other unpaid work as part of environmental, social and economic benchmarks for progress.

C. Role of the United Nations system

59. In its resolution [75/233](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the General Assembly recognizes volunteerism as a powerful and cross-cutting means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. It encourages the United Nations development system to work in partnership with Member States and all stakeholders to promote a conducive environment for volunteerism and volunteers to enhance the sustainability of development results.

60. United Nations country teams should deepen their engagement with volunteers as essential partners in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and reflect the distinct contributions of volunteering in Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and country programme documents of United Nations entities.¹⁷

61. UNV remains the appropriate United Nations entity to mobilize volunteers in support of the United Nations development system, including to promote South-South cooperation and to leave no one behind. The role of UNV includes coordinating the sharing of good practices, evidence and lessons learned on integrating volunteering into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the country, regional and global levels and providing support at the intergovernmental level to Member States on the integration of volunteering processes, such as voluntary national reviews.¹⁸

62. Member States and other stakeholders are encouraged to share their continued efforts to integrate volunteering in the 2030 Agenda through the global Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism, including policies, strategies, research, evidence and good practices on volunteering for the Sustainable Development Goals. That shared resource will form the basis for further updates on the plan of action on volunteering in the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹⁷ United Nations, “Consolidated annexes to the cooperation framework guidance”, 2019, available at https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/CONSOLIDATED-Annexes-to-the-Cooperation-Framework-24-May-2019-Submitted_Revised.pdf; and “Common minimum standards for multi-stakeholder engagement in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework”, 2020, available at <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/UNSDG-Common-Minimum-Standards-for-Multi-Stakeholder.pdf>.

¹⁸ United Nations, United Nations Volunteer programme, “Reflecting volunteer contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals in voluntary national reviews – guidance note for United Nations Member States”, 11 May 2021, available at <https://knowledge.unv.org/guest-post/reflecting-volunteer-contributions-to-the-sdgs-in-voluntary-national-reviews-guidance-note-for-un-member-states>; and “Reflecting volunteer contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals in voluntary national reviews: note for the United Nations system”, 11 May 2021, available at <https://knowledge.unv.org/guest-post/reflecting-volunteer-contributions-to-the-sdgs-in-voluntary-national-reviews-note-for-un-system>.