



Why we must reimagine volunteering for the 2030 Agenda

Over the last six months, as COVID-19 has swept across the world, volunteers have been at the forefront of medical, community and social responses. News headlines have recognized the positive contributions of volunteers, from providing medical care to grocery shopping for vulnerable neighbours. But why does it take a global health pandemic to recognize the importance of volunteers in improving our world?

2020 is a year of urgency – and not just because of the coronavirus outbreak. Rising inequalities, long-lasting conflicts, complex emergencies, climate crisis, migration, displacement and the threat of ecosystem collapse currently affect the lives and livelihoods of billions of people. Locally led responses to these challenges are critical and volunteers are often at the helm of local efforts.

This is also a year of reflection. Moving forward, we are collectively rethinking the kind of world we want to live in. **What is the role of solidarity, mutual aid and people action, the core attributes of volunteering, in the 21st century?**

These are important questions for the development community, as well as one billion global volunteers, especially as we collectively aspire to deliver the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and our pledge to ensure no one will be left behind.

These points will guide discussions at the Global Technical Meeting on Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda from 13 to 16 July, as a special event of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). At the meeting, representatives from United Nations Member States, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia will come together to reimagine volunteering for the [2030 Agenda](#).

Why reimagine volunteering?

2020 marks the start of the [Decade of Action](#) to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It is time to ask whether we are leveraging the people power and people action of volunteers to shape and accelerate efforts on the 2030 Agenda, in supporting sustainable development, as well as humanitarian action.

Volunteering is expanding and changing as quickly as our societies and economies. Across the globe, more people are volunteering, in new ways, than ever before.

However, we must fully integrate volunteering into the development agenda to better address today's most pressing challenges.

What if we harnessed the skills, resources and innovation of all volunteers more? What if we galvanized volunteers more to help solve the world's intractable problems, such as climate change and inequality?

We need to accept and envision new models of volunteering to face these challenges. **For example, a next-generation model of volunteering might harness the innovation of volunteers into a global force for sharing solutions on climate change, supercharging the best ideas.** Or, it might look like a local force that brings together diverse social groups to counter social, political and economic polarization and inequalities.

What are the challenges?

Of course, increased access to volunteering opportunities brings new challenges. Volunteering, like our societies, is unfortunately unequal. For example, digital volunteering creates more opportunities for some, but leaves others behind. In humanitarian emergencies, volunteering can be risky and, at times, dangerous.

We can remove barriers to volunteering by directly providing resources to cover costs incurred by their volunteering activities and access to technologies for individuals and communities.

We must ensure that volunteers who work in the most dangerous places are adequately protected, and that they benefit from new models of insurance and physical and mental health support. And we need to support those who volunteer informally, by building the spaces, tools and networks that they need to do their best work.

With the right resources, policies and financing, the next generation of volunteers will go faster and farther.

What's next?

If we want to accelerate and transform our plan to achieve the 2030 Agenda, we must reimagine volunteering. It needs to be supported by transformational structures, systems and partnerships that recognize and flexibly respond to both the shifts in volunteering patterns and contributions and shifts in the sustainable development landscape. **In this way, volunteering could reach its full potential.**

As part of a collective effort to better understand volunteering and find ways to support its potential for achieving the SDGs, UNV and IFRC have reviewed how volunteering addresses the challenges of the 21st Century. IFRC's own [Strategy 2030](#) and UNV's [Strategic Framework 2018-2021](#) are contributing to this effort and support the implementation of the [Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda](#), a mandate set forth by a UN General Assembly Resolution.

We look forward to you joining us for the Global Technical Meeting on Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda, and your ideas on next generation volunteering. How might volunteering be leveraged as a transformative and accelerative force for the SDGs? Contribute to the global conversation.

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