International Volunteer Day: an overview

The International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development (5 December), more commonly referred to as International Volunteer Day (IVD), is an international observance mandated by the UN General Assembly in 1985. It offers an opportunity for volunteer-involving organizations and individual volunteers to promote volunteerism, encourage governments to support volunteer efforts and recognize volunteer contributions to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at local, national and international levels.
Background

International Volunteer Day is celebrated by many non-governmental organizations, civil society, and the private sector, among others. It is also marked and supported by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme.

IVD is a chance for individual volunteers, communities and organizations to promote their contributions to development at the local, national and international levels. By combining United Nations support with a grassroots mandate, the day is a unique opportunity for people and volunteer-involving organizations to work with government agencies, non-profit institutions, community groups, academia and the private sector.

United Nations General Assembly resolutions

The General Assembly invited Governments to observe annually, on 5 December, the International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development (resolution 40/212 of 17 December 1985) and urged them to take measures to heighten awareness of the important contribution of volunteer service, thereby stimulating more people in all walks of life to offer their services as volunteers, both at home and abroad.

The United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 52/17 of 20 November 1997, proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). The year was conceived to further the recognition of volunteers, facilitate their work, create a communication network and promote the benefits of voluntary service.

In 2001, the International Year of Volunteers, the General Assembly adopted a set of recommendations on ways in which Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering and asked that they be given wide dissemination (resolution 56/38 of 5 December 2001).

The United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 57/106 of 22 November 2002, called upon the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to ensure that the potential of International Volunteer Day is fully realized.

On 18 December 2008, the General Assembly decided that on or around 5 December 2011, two plenary meetings of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly should be devoted to the follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers and the commemoration of its tenth anniversary (resolution 63/153).
Marking IVD and UNV campaigns

IVD is marked around the world every year in over 80 countries annually. UNV coordinates a campaign to promote IVD every year, building on the impact volunteers have in communities, nationally and globally for peace and development.

- **IVD 2019**: Volunteer for an inclusive future
  IVD highlights volunteers contributing to inclusion and Sustainable Development Goal 10, reducing inequality within and among countries.

- **IVD 2018**: Volunteers build Resilient Communities
  IVD celebrated volunteer efforts that strengthen local ownership and the resilience of the community in the face of natural disasters, economic stresses and political shocks. The event on 5 December 2018 will focus on how volunteers can build resilient communities.

  The focus of IVD 2017 was to recognize the positive solidarity of volunteers around the world who answer calls in times of crisis, helping save lives today and supporting those who want to continue living their lives with dignity tomorrow.

- **IVD 2016**: Global Applause - give volunteers a hand
  Under this theme, IVD presented a round of global applause to celebrate volunteers everywhere and encouraged others to join in and contribute to peace and sustainable development.

- **IVD 2015**: Your world is changing. Are you? Volunteer!
  The goal of IVD 2015 was to start a dialogue about how volunteerism is vital to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.

- **IVD 2014**: Make change happen, volunteer!
  During this year, IVD highlighted the contribution of volunteers in engaging people from the grassroots in decision-making processes, ultimately creating spaces for participation that lead to stronger
governance, social cohesion, peace and sustainable development.

- **IVD 2013: Young, Global, Active.**
  The aim of the IVD campaign in 2013 was to pay special tribute to the contribution of youth volunteers to global peace and sustainable human development, highlighting that young people act as agents of change in their communities.

- **IVD 2012: Celebrate volunteering**
  The main focus of IVD 2012 was awareness of and recognition for volunteers and volunteer organizations, and hope for a better world.

- **IVD 2011: International Year of Volunteers 10th Anniversary**
  In November 1997, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). The 10th anniversary of IYV fell in 2011 and the United Nations called for this anniversary to be marked across the planet. On International Volunteer Day 2009, a Global Call for Action was made to invite all stakeholders to join the global effort to mark IYV+10.

**A focus on partnerships and development**

Through the years, IVD has been used strategically: many countries have focused on volunteer contributions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, a set of time-bound targets to combat poverty, hunger, disease, health, environmental degradation and gender equality.

IVD celebrates active volunteers and attracts new volunteers in the global North and global South, with a special focus on promoting South-South cooperation.

The organization of IVD events is generally the result of a partnership between the UN system, governments, volunteer-involving organizations and committed individuals. Representatives from the media or academia, foundations, the private sector, faith groups, and sports and recreational organizations are often involved too.

Read more on [International Volunteer Day](#).