



UN Volunteers in Lebanon celebrating the contribution of volunteers to the Sustainable Development Goals on International Youth Day.

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## Building back better: why volunteering matters for the post-COVID world

COVID-19 is testing the resilience of communities at an unprecedented scale. It has exposed vulnerabilities in healthcare capacities, markets and jobs, welfare systems, political agility, the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, community cooperation, and more. The parts that are broken will have to be rebuilt. For this reason, we will come out of this crisis into a new world: a post-COVID world. Together, we must make sure that this new world is an improvement on the last. We must 'Build Back Better'.

To achieve this, new development patterns must be inclusive, resilient and advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By weaving a strong social fabric within communities, volunteering is at the key intersection of these qualities. When those with local knowledge and insights take collective ownership of local problems, communities are uniquely mobilized around development efforts.

However, too often there is insufficient investment in volunteering infrastructure and not sufficient measurement of its impact. It therefore becomes a secondary consideration for those involved in developmental

operations.

Indeed, the United Nations recognizes the role of volunteers and seeks to integrate it in the ‘Decade of Action’ to achieve sustainable development goals by 2030. Most recently, the *UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19* takes note that ‘volunteer groups often play an indispensable leadership role in the response, notably in reaching out to vulnerable people, and in getting to remote places. They can amplify responses.’

For this, perhaps, a global discussion on the future of volunteering could not be more timely. Over four days (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> July), the Global Technical Meeting (GTM 2020) on Re-Imaging Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda convened all stakeholders to discuss practices on integrating volunteering into the SDGs, perspectives on reimagining volunteerism and ways to translate this into practice. Through the GTM2020, the world seeks to take action to advance the role of volunteering above and beyond the current model.

Mandated in 2018 by the UN General Assembly, this week’s GTM2020 aimed both to inform and to transform the conversation on volunteering. Led by the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) – and alongside more than 400 representatives from governments, UN entities, and civil society, including academia, volunteer groups, and the private sector; the GTM2020 strived to reimagine the concept of volunteering for the 2030 Agenda.

Many voices from the Arab States region joined the global discussion, with a variety of participants from all the above-mentioned sectors.

Evidence from across the Arab States region, already present in the newly launched [UNV Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism](#), demonstrates how volunteer initiatives contribute to skill development and employability, and how the impact of digital transformation is accelerating the growth of volunteerism.

Through discussion of existing evidence, good practices, and lessons learnt around volunteering, the GTM2020 tried to spearhead new models of volunteering and create a sense of urgency among governments and organizations to integrate volunteering into their action on development.

The vision for volunteering in the Decade of Action for the SDGs requires addressing inequalities in volunteering, new models of volunteer collaboration and considering new measures to support informal volunteering. Volunteerism infrastructure must be developed, initiatives

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must be funded, and results must be measured.

The hope for the Call to Action resulting from this global meeting is to be able to unite the global community around a commitment to position volunteering as a leading development solution. NGOs, CSOs, government ministries, businesses, local groups, or individuals engaged in social development will be encouraged and energised to promote volunteerism both within their own work and across society. However, for this movement to succeed, we must motivate ourselves and mobilize our communities. Those with time and resources must channel the determination to overcome this crisis and create a better world. Volunteering is the catalyst for that transformation.

Together, we can Build Back Better. The recent past must not be prologue.

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