



A group of volunteers in Sri Lanka help a family clean up the rubble left by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. (ILO, 2004)&#13; &#13;

## Volunteers count. Their work deserves to be counted.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly recognises volunteer groups as stakeholders to support grassroots implementation of the 17 Goals. And yet, statistics on volunteers, the work they do, the skills and time they contribute to improve the lives of others are, for the most part, lacking. The International Labour Organisation (ILO)—in partnership with UNV—wants to change that. In this blog, ILO's Chief Statistician and Director of ILO Department of Statistics, Rafael Diez de Medina, explains the need for measuring volunteer work.

The [ILO Department of Statistics](#) and the UN Volunteers have joined forces to scale up efforts to improve the global availability, quality and use of statistics on volunteer work. Starting this month, the ILO-UNV partnership will focus on assessing the current status of volunteer work statistics around the world; engage directly with countries to identify good practices and challenges in volunteer work data collection and analysis; and develop practical survey approaches and tools to support countries' efforts.

When disasters strike, volunteers that in many cases include firefighters and other public emergency service workers are among the first responders, playing a vital role in relief efforts. In everyday life, in our schools and our neighbourhoods, volunteers are there

helping to make our lives better and keeping communities together. At work, volunteers are the engine behind the non-profit sector and are contributing to the transformation of the world of work through their involvement in the cooperative movement, the growth of social enterprises and of public-private partnerships.

“ Global estimates place the number of volunteers worldwide at 970 million. Considering the hours they contribute, we are talking about the equivalent of over 125 million full-time workers – according to a study published by John Hopkins University. Approximately one in four volunteers contribute their time and skills through organizations and the rest do so directly, helping their neighbours as well as their communities. In terms of economic impact, estimates place the value of volunteer work at US\$ 1.348 trillion or 2.4 per cent of the entire global economy.

Joining global efforts to ensure the work of volunteers is counted and integrated into the development process, we have spearheaded a number of initiatives including the publication in 2011 of a Manual on Measuring Volunteer Work in collaboration with the John Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies to provide countries with much needed guidance to develop their statistics on this important group of workers. In 2013, we led the adoption of new international statistical standards through the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) that provide a framework to integrate volunteer work as part of official work statistics.

However, this is only the beginning. To translate these achievements into actual improvements in data availability requires a sustained effort with partners at global, regional and national levels. Our partnership with UNV will further strengthen the capacity of countries to make sure that volunteer workers and their contributions are fully counted and integrated into national development plans and policies.

As the world celebrates the United Nations International Volunteer Day (IVD) next month, we join this important occasion by making sure that the contributions that volunteers make to communities and to development around the world are properly counted. This year's theme, "[Volunteers Act First. Here. Everywhere.](#)" is particularly close to ILO's vision of work as integral to human dignity and to achieving long-lasting peace and security. We look forward to updating the 20th ICLS on the progress made at its next meeting scheduled for 10-19 October 2018.

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