



How can corporate volunteerism help achieve more robust volunteerism programmes in the region? By opening spaces to exchange ideas and building something together with communities.

Twenty years of recognizing volunteerism around the world

How can volunteerism contribute to a more just and equitable world where no one is left behind? The year 2001 was the first time when the 5th of December was recognized as an official date to celebrate the hundreds of thousands of volunteers worldwide. Twenty years on, this is the right time to reflect on the advances in promoting and protecting volunteers and other factors that further volunteerism.

When people get involved in addressing the problems they face, the solutions are more achievable and sustainable. Today, volunteerism is a crucial factor to face the most painful challenge in the world—the challenge of inequality, the effects of which have become even more profound with the COVID-19 pandemic.

“ Inequality defines the times we live in. More than 70 per cent of the world's population faces growing inequality in terms of income and wealth in their lives... the lives and expectations of millions of people are mainly determined by the circumstance of their birth.” --António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, speaking at the [Nelson Mandela conference in 2014](#)

Given that volunteers have first-hand knowledge of the needs and potential of the communities they serve, and sometimes are even part of these communities, they become experts on the challenges of the most vulnerable groups. This knowledge is highly valuable in designing and implementing plans and programmes for the common good, since they provide people-centred solutions, which are thus more solid, legitimate and sustainable.

According to recent volunteering estimates, annually, more than three billion people volunteer in the world (Source: [Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism](#)). Moreover, globally, almost 58 per cent of working-age people volunteer throughout the year. However, 70 per cent of volunteerism does not take place in the framework of organizations, rather exists informally or happens spontaneously among people in their communities (Source: [SWVR 2018](#)).

This latter figure is very relevant to illustrate the state of volunteerism in 2021, which shows that the majority of volunteering takes place via informal schemes. This is a major finding to consider in plans recognizing and promoting volunteerism, as well as strategies to integrate volunteerism effectively towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Inequalities in volunteering and corporate volunteerism

If this international day intends to promote volunteerism around the world, we should start by recognizing inequalities in volunteering itself and take action to reduce those gaps.

Therefore, the analysis and actions of volunteering must be broken down by gender and age. This should also be differentiated, considering whether the volunteer work is conducted in rural or urban areas, under formal or informal schemes, or done by historically marginalized groups or communities.

Then, how can corporate volunteerism—volunteerism promoted by companies—make a difference to achieve more robust volunteerism programmes in the region?

The first step is to identify the already existing volunteering schemes in the communities or the groups they try to contribute to. This is not about arriving with pre-designed solutions, but about opening spaces to exchange ideas and building something together with community leaders, neighbours and youth. In this way, volunteer actions can be more legitimate and effective to contribute to lasting solutions.

Given that corporate volunteerism is managed under formal volunteering schemes and have enough resources to influence communities, corporate volunteerism can be a key factor in promoting effective collaboration between states, the private sector and volunteering groups at all levels. It can also strengthen community solutions with technology, new alliances for financing and innovation.

International Volunteer Day 2021

The call to action for the 2021 International Volunteer Day is to encourage, recognize and promote volunteerism in all its forms. We aim to create a more equitable and inclusive future for communities.

“ The world we want is where all volunteers have the same opportunities for personal and professional growth and where volunteerism represents a substantial and sustainable contribution to our future. Through volunteerism, we can build a future that is more prosperous, respectful of nature, just, and where no one is left behind.

On the occasion of International Volunteer Day 2021, let us take a moment to consider the current state of volunteerism in its 20 years and what we can do to strengthen the foundations of volunteerism in the 21st century.

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)