Volunteering Offers Opportunity for Developing Youth Skills

Today’s youth are the most educated generation ever - with more than 92.58% of young men and 88.61% of young women literate. However, youth still face difficulties in entering and remaining in the labour market - young people being three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Volunteering can be one of the solutions to address youth employability challenges. Reports show that volunteering can improve chances at a job by enhancing a person’s vocational and social skills.

Young people gain professional, technical, and soft skills (creativity, leadership, critical thinking) that are crucial for employability through their volunteering activities.
arise through social networks that people form through volunteering and these can lead to securing useful references and even finding a job. The 2019 ILO report on Work for a Brighter Future states that lifelong learning, that includes social and cognitive skills, offers a pathway to inclusion of labour market for youth and the unemployed.

Alexandra Palmquist, UN Youth Volunteer in Environment and Climate Change, works in her office at UNDP in Bolivia. (UNV)

“Through my assignment, I have learned a lot, both professionally and personally. I have gained knowledge and experience by working in a field in which I was not an expert. Doing that in a foreign country helped me understand the daily issues that people are facing here and the different ways of managing conflicts, which are all very diverse from a Swedish context - Oskar Tinnerholm, UN Youth Volunteer in Conflict Resolution with UNDP Guatemala."
Linking volunteerism to the national, regional and global development discourse to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can help to tackle youth unemployment through enhancing human and social capital. Governments must develop policies and schemes for youth volunteering as volunteering provides the transition of youth from education to employment through soft skills, mentoring relationships, employment training and access to labour force. SDG 8 session at ECOSOC Youth Forum 8-9 April 2019

Scout Workshop to celebrate the International Youth Day 2016 in Sri Lanka.

In its voluntary national review of progress towards achieving the SDGs at the national and sub-national levels conducted in Cambodia 2019, policy discussions focussed on curriculum development and reform to integrate 21st-century skills. Together with UNV, the Cambodian government launched three youth volunteering pilot programmes aimed to improve skills including teamwork, problem-solving and inquiry-based learning among young people. Moreover, they also endeavor to capacitate young people as solutions for sustainable development through volunteering opportunities.
Developing youth volunteer skills for increased employability through the UNV-IBSA Fund project in Cambodia 2018. (UNV)

Many regional and national governments are focusing on formal and informal youth volunteering to enhance the employability, competencies and leadership skills of young people. (A/73/254) In Togo, Civic Commitment Volunteerism (VEC), which is open to youth (out-of-school and half-schooled), mobilizes young people for development projects.

In Australia, the Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program which was replaced on 31 December 2017 by the new Australian Volunteers program, gives citizens the chance to contribute to the SDGs and promotes volunteering as a tool to enhance volunteering for career and employment. The program motivates and mobilizes young people across Australia to deliver on the SDGs at home and overseas. Another example is AIESEC in Australia sent 430 young people to volunteer in countries in Asia as part of “Youth for Global Goals”.

In 2015, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa. In this huge young population, volunteering is an effective means of capacitating the youth, equipping them with valuable experiences and skill sets to access employment opportunities and adapt to the changing nature of work. ECA regional consultation 2019.

"Volunteering is a bridge that connects all types of actors. By doing so,
it builds skills and connections and can empower young people, as was the case in Togo.” Paul Armand Menye, Regional Programme Specialist in UNV Regional Office for West and Central Africa.

In the ESCWA consultations, volunteering for skills building for the youth was also a prominent mention. The region called for ways to ensure protection, integrity, and credibility of volunteers to avoid abuse and warned that volunteering and unemployment should not be synonymous.

Ms. Meryem Agadi, in charge of Cooperation and Partnerships at the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Morocco, talked about volunteering infrastructure in her country and shared the experience of the MoYS in supporting youth volunteering, pointing out that it is seen as a means of enhancing youth employability.

Member states should create an enabling environment to channel youth energy and creativity through volunteering towards the SDGs, while building skills to enhance employability. - Meryem Agadi, in charge of Cooperation and Partnerships at the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Morocco, ESCWA, POA regional consultation, Lebanon.
The online conversations under the topic of “Shaping the Future of Volunteering” held from April to June 2019 further highlighted that volunteering is an important tool to equip young people with skills necessary to prepare themselves for the future work and using new technologies. Keywords such as work, skills building, training, and employment are mentioned in the online consultations over 400 times from over 1,000 responses, which indicates how important these points in shaping volunteering future.

In the consultation on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) held by UNV, the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Ukraine and the GURT Resource Centre during IVD 2015.

In 2017, UNV mobilized and deployed 1,852 (1220 females and 632 male) UN Volunteers under 29 years in 111 countries. In the State of Palestine, a UNESCO project supported by a UN Volunteer has mobilized more than 600 young local volunteers who have contributed to the activities of ten community libraries and helped more than 24,000 vulnerable higher education students – most of them women – find the support they needed to carry out their studies and enhance their skills.

“... My volunteering in the library allowed me to benefit more from the...
University and the academic life itself. Through my interaction with other students, I enhanced my knowledge and communication skills with others -- Zaid, a student from Hebron, West Bank

In the recent training workshops conducted by UNV East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) in Nairobi, Kenya, UN Youth Volunteers were able to develop an understanding of the skills, competencies, and personal qualities needed to contribute to the work of the UN agencies effectively. They also discussed key aspects of leadership, team-work and conflict resolution skills, and how to leverage available learning opportunities to build a strong career path.

“"The training was really concrete and the contents very relevant to my professional development. I look forward to applying the new experiences and lessons in improving my contribution within my assignment."." 

Fleury Ineza, one of the participants from Burundi

UN Youth Volunteers learning about the importance of the SDGs at a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya.

UNV is working continuously to engage young volunteers into the UN system through specific modalities and initiatives as Global Youth Advocates programme for UNICEF, Youth African Women Leaders for UNDP, Young Evaluators and Innovators for UNFPA, and a joint UNV-UNDP Talent Programme for young professionals with disabilities.
Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth**