

Side Event at the 2026 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

organized by the Permanent Mission of France and France Volontaires
with the support of the Global Volunteering Forum, the Volunteer Groups
Alliance and Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO)

**Celebrating the 2026 International Volunteer Year –
Responsible and Impactful Volunteering for Sustainable Development**
Tuesday, 7 July 2026, 13:15-14:30 | United Nations Headquarters

*Statement by Naoual Driouich,
Head of the New York Office of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV)*

What's UNV global perspective on IVY 2026? What does current evidence tell us about volunteering contributions to SDG implementation? Main findings of SWVR. (5 min)

Thank you. Let me give the gloosbal picture first, then the evidence.

Member States proclaimed 2026 the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development as **an invitation to reflect and to act**: to strengthen the quality of volunteering, to promote responsible practices, and to ensure that volunteering keeps evolving in step with today's global challenges.

From UNV's vantage, the Year is not celebration for its own sake. **It is the moment to recognize volunteering as a measurable development resource, and to build it into how countries plan and deliver the SDGs.** The question is not only how many people volunteer, but how well we support, measure, protect, and ensure long term impact.

On the evidence, our flagship report this year, the 2026 State of the World's Volunteerism Report, is devoted to exactly this. We produced it with the International Labour Organization and academic partners. Its starting point is simple: **much of what volunteers do is invisible, and when it is not seen, it is not valued.**

The report's headline finding is the scale of volunteering: **about 2.1 billion people volunteer every month, which is roughly one in three working-age adults worldwide.** That makes volunteering one of the largest contributions to development anywhere, and one of the most under-counted.

I want to be precise about that figure, because it matters. It is not a sudden surge. It is what better measurement reveals. Less than a third of countries measure volunteering, and most that do, only count formal organization-based volunteering.

When you measure properly, two things become clear:

First, **participation is highest in the Global South**. For example, in Africa, close to 60% of working-age people volunteer each month, a reality earlier data missed.

Second, **most volunteering happens directly, person to person, outside any organization**; this is more than twice as much through formal volunteering. That direct, community layer is where much of SDG delivery actually happens, and it is exactly what our data systems overlook.

This is why volunteering is **both a strategic and a concrete enabler of the SDGs**. Strategic, because it is a measurable resource that governments can plan and budget around. Concrete, because on the ground volunteers strengthen social cohesion and resilience, extend public services, and are often the first responders when crises hit. But if we cannot see that contribution, we cannot invest in it.

That is why the report proposes a practical tool: the Global Index of Volunteer Engagement. It responds to a longstanding call for common standards, and measures volunteering across four dimensions: value to individuals, to communities, to the economy, and the strength of the enabling environment. It gives governments a

shared way to bring volunteering into national planning, into budgets, and into their Voluntary National Reviews.

So UNV's perspective on IVY 2026 is this: **The evidence is now strong enough to move volunteering from the margins into the center of national development planning.** First, we need recognition through measurement. Then, investment and integration will follow.

Where should governments, donors and international organization invest first? Which partnerships are most critical to scaling up volunteering's contribution to sustainable development. (3 min)

First, invest in evidence and measurement. This sounds technical, but it is the highest-return investment available, because everything else depends on it. You cannot fund, plan, or protect what you cannot see. For a relatively small cost, governments can build volunteering into their national statistics and their Voluntary National Reviews, and the Global Index of Volunteer Engagement gives them a ready framework.

For donors, funding measurement in the Global South, where the data gap is widest, would change the global picture quickly.

Second, invest in the enabling environment. That means legal recognition, clear policies, and support structures, including safeguarding that allows people to volunteer safely and effectively. Too often volunteering is expected but not resourced. Strong volunteer infrastructure is one of the most cost-effective investments a government can make.

Third, invest where most volunteering actually happens: the direct, community level. Our evidence shows most volunteering takes place outside formal organizations, and it is the least supported. Investing in local and community-led action reaches the communities furthest behind and builds resilience where it is needed most.

On partnerships, the critical ones connect four actors: **governments, volunteer organizations, communities, and the UN system.** No single actor can scale volunteering's contribution alone. Governments bring policy and financing, volunteer organizations bring reach and standards, communities bring ownership, and the UN system brings evidence and convening power.

These are the investments that carry volunteering through the final years of the 2030 Agenda and into what follows. IVY2026, and moments like the Global Volunteering Forum, are where these partnerships form. **Our task is to make them last beyond this Year.**

Closing remarks: *What's next for this international year? How can volunteerism stakeholders make their events and actions visible within the framework of IVY?*

Two things, briefly: what comes next, and how you can be part of it.

What comes next is practical. For the remaining months of the Year, **the goal is to turn recognition into action:** volunteering written into national plans, into financing, and into Voluntary National Reviews. and carried into the development agenda beyond 2030. The Global

Volunteering Forum will be a key moment on that path, and UNV intends to close the Year at UN Headquarters in New York this December. The groundwork we lay now is what carries volunteering into the years that follow.

On visibility, the answer is practical. The IVY 2026 Secretariat has built the tools to make your work part of a single, recognizable Year.

Register and showcase your events through the IVY 2026 Knowledge Portal. Use the official logo and the communications guidance. Connect with the national focal points already designated in over 50 countries, so national and global efforts reinforce each other rather than run in parallel.

Volunteers are partners in development, not its beneficiaries. That is the idea this Year exists to establish. Thank you to France Volontaires and all our co-organizers for keeping it at the center of the conversation.
