

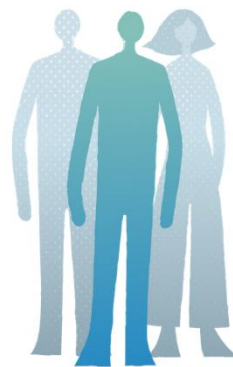
YOUTH VOLUNTEERING: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT IN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

How are young people impacted by COVID-19?

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted every aspect of our lives, with young people as some of the most disproportionately affected by the global pandemic. Even before COVID-19, one in seven young men (13.1 per cent) and one in three young women (31.1 per cent) were classed as [not in education, employment or training \(NEET\)](#), this has been further exacerbated over the past year. The [impact of the crisis on young people](#) has been systematic, deep and disproportionate, with particular challenges for young women, younger youth and youth in lower-income countries. For example, COVID-19 has left one in eight young people without access to teaching or training due to disruption in education and challenges in transition to online and distance learning. Young workers with less experience and lower skills are also at higher risk of losing their jobs. These impacts have also exacerbated the many complex development challenges facing youth before and during the pandemic, such as closing civic spaces and an exclusion from formal decision-making. Therefore, it is essential that young people are engaged in the COVID-19 response and recovery to ensure their voices will be heard and their needs will be addressed appropriately.

How does volunteering contribute to young people's empowerment?

Everywhere, and every day, young people are acting on the issues that affect them, including the climate crisis, conflicts, disasters, gender inequalities, political exclusion and governance failures, or lack of quality education, health, and decent jobs for youth. Globally, one billion people are active volunteers and around one in three young people report that they are volunteering – nearly 600 million youth worldwide.



Every **third** young person volunteers

600 million young volunteers

One in five young volunteers globally volunteers through organisations



In a supportive environment, volunteering can enable young people to determine their own priorities, lead their own initiatives and engage with young people and a broad range of other actors. Volunteering may be a catalyst, particularly for young people, to be civically engaged – especially in countries with younger populations, where rapid social change is leading to migration, loss of traditional structures and unemployment.

Apart from altruism and optimism, young people are also driven by a multitude of reasons to volunteer, including gaining skills for future employment. At the same time, [young people report challenges and issues with volunteering](#) in their communities and societies.

What are the challenges and opportunities around youth and volunteering?

Young people's experiences of volunteering are not always positive: youth volunteers [need to be seen as more than cheap labour](#) and more fully involved when it comes to making decisions about solving local problems and be trusted with leadership roles in their communities. Youth are also not a homogenous group, with disparities in access to resources impacting their participation in volunteering, for example. Even though online volunteering has been a key resource during COVID-19 response, a 2018 study showed that [in developing countries, girls were half as likely to own a smartphone](#) than boys, which may exclude girls from volunteering opportunities. Furthermore, when young people volunteer, they themselves can be vulnerable to risks, particularly in times of crisis, and so require practical and [psychological support](#) to prevent their exposure to further harm and to meet their health and well-being needs.

However, youth volunteers [are often involved in bringing together different components of social action](#), combining direct action and service provision with online and in-person advocacy and representation to solve challenges. Young people can also push older adults to challenge traditional practices or ways of thinking. Increasingly, young people are challenging the status quo and opening [new spaces for volunteering](#), especially through the use of technology and social media. Their [ability to reach those left behind](#) enables them to support data gathering and assessment activities, which provides a valuable resource for actors who are designing and targeting responses. [Well facilitated international South-South and South-North volunteering](#) can draw upon creativity and energy of youth to share skills and knowledge between countries.



How can young people meaningfully support crisis response and recovery through volunteering?

In times of crisis, the strengths of young volunteers can especially be applied through preparation, response, and recovery efforts. The [UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#) recognizes the leadership role (youth) volunteers assume in engaging marginalized communities, disseminating accurate information to remote areas, supporting large scale health service delivery activities as well as supporting training and capacity building initiatives and promoting [social innovation](#) and [youth entrepreneurship](#). UNDP's 2.0 offer "[Beyond recovery: Towards 2030](#)" as well as its "*YouthNow*" guidance note (available on [Sparkblue](#)) will in addition focus on the need for continuous activities for sustainable development for which volunteers can accelerate the implementation.

A range of roles in response and service delivery, from boosting numbers of [health professionals](#) to providing secondary support to those on the frontline, can be occupied by volunteers. Volunteerism can also contribute to counter post-crisis marginalization and [exclusion](#), promoting dialogue between authorities, youth and other marginalized populations and can help in livelihoods recovery. Volunteers build the resilience of communities and help to develop a sense of ownership of development interventions. The nature of the COVID-19 crisis with its need for social distancing, accelerated the utilization of online volunteering services, enabling volunteers to support communities remotely. However, whilst the engagement of volunteers in crisis situations is indeed crucial, the importance of ensuring a safe environment for volunteers must be further emphasized.

How are youth volunteers contributing to the COVID-19 response and recovery?

- UNDP implemented the [Let's Beat Corona campaign](#) from June to September 2020 in **Iraq**, reaching an estimated total of 31.7 million people. Collaborating with the local authorities and mobilizing dozens of volunteers, including from youth organizations such as *Volunteer with Us* and the *Rwanga Foundation*, helped the campaign reach local communities in nearly 5,390 neighbourhoods, hospitals, and public places. The campaign introduced infotainment and an online concert to reach the youth while the volunteers worked around the clock to disseminate nearly 70,000 awareness items in 10 governorates.
- In **Peru**, [20,000 youth volunteers have reached out by phone to 450,000](#) older adults and people with disabilities throughout the country to understand their needs, including in terms of emotional health and wellbeing, and reporting any cases for follow up. Volunteers



also provided information and assistance through a helpline on the government's financial assistance package for vulnerable families.

- As part of the COVID-19 response in **The Gambia**, UNDP is contributing to training young volunteers through YouthConnekt in health awareness.
- UNDP and UNV together with the Zambian Government and the National Youth Development Council deployed [833 community youth volunteers](#), reaching an estimated 700,000 households, debunking myths and spreading life-saving messages in Lusaka and other parts of **Zambia**.
- UNDP Youth Co-lab with UNV in **Asia and the Pacific** engaged [online volunteers](#) to conduct research on youth empowerment and entrepreneurship in supporting the COVID-19 response.
- UNDP **Mali** has invested in young people as agents of behavioural change and social mobilizers, through the deployment of 60 young community volunteers who intervened in the most remote communities of Mopti and Bamako.
- In **India**, UNV and UNDP partnered with the NYKS (Youth Association under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports) to [engage young people in response efforts](#) across 58 districts. Some key areas of COVID-19 response by volunteers in India have been:
 - Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces;
 - Producing and distributing protective gear, like masks and other PPE with a focus on high-risk populations;
 - Combating misinformation and stigma around COVID-19 via door-to-door campaigns;
 - Distributing groceries to vulnerable groups;
 - Setting up pension camps with banks to ensure senior citizens' access to pensions is maintained in lockdown;
 - Supporting local police and healthcare authorities to monitor COVID-19 regulations;
 - Organizing a variety of outreach activities, such as webinars to address the importance of mental health, radio content to reach high-risk groups, career counselling in the context of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic; and
 - Launching virtual campaigns through V-Force (UNV's pan-India network of over 12,000 online volunteers).
- In **Pakistan**, UNDP is engaging UN Youth Volunteers under the "[Strengthening Electoral and Legislative Processes](#)" ([SELP](#)) project", since 2015, to promote civic knowledge and



engagement amongst the public, with a focus on marginalized groups. During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual civic education awareness messages were combined with health related information from the government and the WHO to reduce the spread of the virus and address the myths and misconceptions related to the disease, reaching nearly 286, 000 people across Pakistan.

- UNDP and the [Lebanese Scouts Federation](#) mobilized youth volunteers across **Lebanon** to raise awareness on COVID-19 prevention as businesses and public spaces re-open. Some 15 scout associations played a key role in circulating the awareness campaign and produced awareness videos.
- In **Serbia**, 65 young Roma were supported in their skills development and employment under the joint UNDP-UNHCR project, "[Local Initiatives for Improved Social inclusion of Young Roma](#)". During the COVID-19 pandemic, these young Roma were dispersed throughout Serbia and actively worked within their communities to deliver emergency aid packages, ensure health assistance, enable access to drinking water or help people obtain the personal documents (IDs, birth certificates, marriage certificates) needed to acquire health insurance or claim social welfare.

Recommendations

Youth volunteers can be a driving force to innovate project delivery, engage communities and build back better. To harness the potential benefits of youth volunteers, the following actions are recommended for UNDP offices:

1. **Enhance young people's capacities through UN Volunteer opportunities:** UNV provides young people under the age of 30 with the opportunity to work as [UN Youth Volunteers](#) and gain exposure with the United Nations, on the frontlines of political, developmental and humanitarian field operations, and engaging in development and peace initiatives worldwide.
2. **Engage youth meaningfully as effective partners in response and recovery efforts:** UNV and UNDP can support Member States in establishing or strengthening an [enabling environment](#) that not only empowers and protects young volunteers, but also provides them platforms where they can be creative, inclusive, and their voices can be heard. This will boost engagement with youth volunteers and balance socio-economic risks more equitably, maximizing the potential of volunteering to positively impact those youth often left furthest behind.



3. **Integrate youth volunteering in national response and recovery plans:** Recognizing the critical need to build back better, encourage the integration of youth volunteering in national recovery and socio-economic response plans, to engage marginalized groups, support the scaling of recovery efforts, and create sustainable skills development opportunities for young people, in order to transform youth volunteering from a coping mechanism to a strategic resource for community resilience in response to COVID-19.

Resources and further information

- [UNV's COVID-19 pandemic response](#)
- [Engaging Volunteers and Volunteer Groups in Health Emergencies](#)
- [Youth and Volunteerism UNV Knowledge Portal](#)
- [Volunteer for the COVID-19 pandemic response](#)
- Youth Now – UNDP’s guidance note on Youth & COVID-19 (available on [Sparkblue](#))
- [Inter-agency Statement on COVID-19 & Youth](#) (IANYD & youth organizations, movements, and networks) (2020)