

INFORMATION NOTE

Highlighting citizen contributions to the SDGs through volunteering

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports for 2018 demonstrate improved focus on documenting whole-of-society approaches to monitoring and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most VNRs highlighted citizen contributions, though approaches ranged from the inclusion of highly specific case study examples, to calculations regarding the economic value of volunteer inputs as analysis of the means of implementation. Overall 29 of 46 reporting countries (63%) documented the contributions of volunteers, increasing from 40% in 2017 and 9% in 2016. UN Volunteers provided direct support to 11 countries to strengthen data and analysis on volunteering for inclusion in the reports.¹

The VNRs confirm firstly that volunteers remain important partners for implementation of the SDGs across diverse contexts; secondly, that Member States continue to develop specific volunteer initiatives and programmes as a means of engaging those populations often left behind in development processes; and finally that Member States are also starting to leverage volunteer structures and networks to improve data collection, participation and consultation mechanisms under the 2030 Agenda, including for the VNRs processes themselves.

- **Volunteers as critical partners for implementation of the SDGs:** Australia's VNR included a sub-chapter called 'Volunteers for the SDGs' as part of a 'Whole of Australia' endeavour which estimated the economic and social contribution of volunteers at \$290 billion per year. Sri Lanka reports that 8.6 million people, or 40% of the population, volunteers at least once a year. Greece notes that since the financial crisis the number of national volunteers has grown drastically to support communities' needs. Niger documents the specific contributions of volunteers under each of the Goals under review in 2018. Other Member States highlight significant volunteer initiatives and innovations under Goals or sectors, for example disaster risk reduction and environmental protection (Andorra, Guinea, Jamaica, Malta and Vietnam), education, employment and poverty reduction (Lithuania, Saudi Arabia, Togo) and community engagement and social cohesion (Bahrain, Bhutan, Kiribati, Lebanon and Sri Lanka). Member States also include examples of policies and initiatives to foster volunteering such as tax-related initiatives in Canada and Slovakia.
- **To reach the furthest behind first,** Member States highlight the structures that they have developed and supported to engage women and marginalized groups in development processes as agents of change and drivers of development. For example, VNRs note the implementation of volunteer schemes to increase the economic and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Australia; to promote active citizenship among new immigrants in Canada; to strengthen women's empowerment and leadership in Lao PDR and Singapore; and to engage vulnerable children and youth in Ecuador and Mexico.

¹ UNV provided support to Cabo Verde, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guinea, Jamaica, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Mexico, Niger, Sri Lanka and Togo. Eight of these ultimately included volunteering in their VNRs (see Annex 1)

- **Volunteer-led data collection, validation and consultation processes** are a cost-effective approach to widening stakeholder involvement in SDGs monitoring and reporting. For example, in Mexico and Mali, volunteer structures have been established to support SDGs awareness raising, feedback and data-gathering, particularly among young people. Singapore notes the role of volunteers in citizen science to gather data as part of conservation efforts. In Lao PDR, Spain and Sri Lanka, volunteer organizations and platforms supported consultation and feedback processes for the VNR, including stakeholder workshops and online and onsite consultations to address data gaps.

Finally, several Member States highlight volunteering as a focus for international cooperation, including South-South Cooperation. For example, Togo has established the International Reciprocal Volunteering (VIR) mechanism for cooperation with other African countries and beyond. Australia, Hungary, Ireland and Poland report bilateral and other arrangements for international cooperation through volunteering, as part of joint capacity development for the SDGs.

Annex 1

Countries mentioning volunteering in Voluntary National Review reports 2016-2018

2016 (2 of 22)		
Estonia	France	
2017 (17 of 42)		
Belgium	Belize	Costa Rica
Cyprus	Denmark	Ethiopia
Guatemala	Indonesia	Italy
Jordan	Malaysia	Nepal
Nigeria	Portugal	Qatar
Slovenia	Thailand	
2018 (29 of 46)		
Andorra	Australia	Bahrain
Bhutan	Cabo Verde	Canada
Ecuador	Greece	Guinea
Hungary	Ireland	Jamaica
Kiribati	Lao PDR	Lebanon
Lithuania	Mali	Malta
Mexico	Niger	Poland
Saudi Arabia	Singapore	Slovakia
Spain	Sri Lanka	Togo
United Arab Emirates	Vietnam	