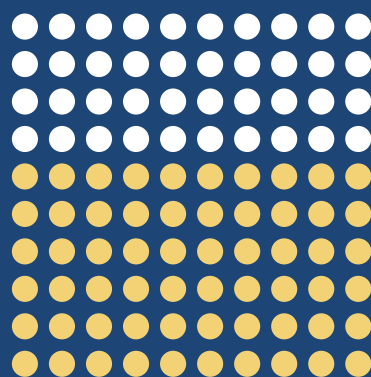


Volunteerism as a Driving Force for Entrepreneurship, Youth Employment, and Community Resilience



(each circle = 10,000,000 volunteers)

More than 1 billion people volunteer globally ...

... of whom nearly 600 million are young people.



17.5%

Africa's monthly volunteering rate, the highest across regions.

Expanding formal volunteer programs, especially for African youth, can help turn volunteering into skills development and pathways to employment.



Most volunteering is informal, especially in developing countries. **Only 6.5 percent** of the global working age population volunteers through an organization.

Women comprise **53 percent** of informal volunteers, often volunteering in contexts with less support and recognition such as community health work, teaching, and childcare.



Enhancing volunteer programs can unlock greater economic impact: across the OECD, their impact accounts for 1.9 percent of GDP.

Globally, volunteers contribute labor equivalent to **61 million full-time workers** every month.

Beyond GDP, volunteering has been found to bolster individual well-being and social cohesion, and it supports economic development by addressing the needs of socially excluded persons or marginalized communities.

How does volunteering empower global youth?

By offering youths valuable opportunities to develop professional skills and transition into the workforce. Research from South Africa showed that youth volunteerism acts as a bridge to full-time employment while also boosting social cohesion.

By serving as a pathway to entrepreneurship. For example, after realizing the nutrition gap in farming communities, a former CorpsAfrica volunteer saw an opportunity to transform underused crops into gluten-free flour made from potatoes, fonio, soya, and coconut.

By building social capital—the networks and relationships among people across different ages and backgrounds—and strengthening community identity and resilience, especially in aging populations.



In recognition of their vital role, the UN has declared 2026 the **International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development**.

What role does volunteering have in sustainable development?

Volunteers help address social, economic, and environmental gaps at the community level. Volunteering supports climate resilience through disaster response and mitigation, promotes locally led development through active participation of communities, and helps fill the gaps in communities where public services are constrained.



Advancing SDG 6 on water and sanitation, volunteers in Ghana **supported community sanitation efforts by constructing 20 biodigester latrines** for a community of over 200 households. Meanwhile, in line with SDG 4 on education, a volunteer-led global education program has helped more than 25,000 girls in over 100 countries build coding and AI skills.

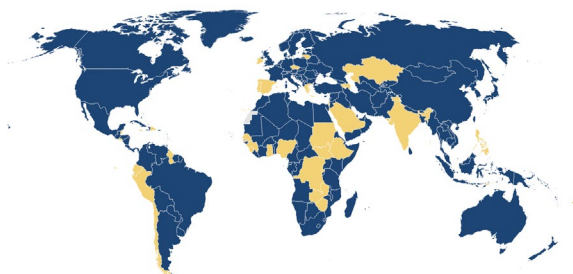
Advancing SDGs 2 and 13, a volunteer helped Gituto community members in Kenya **address climate-driven food insecurity by establishing a tree nursery**. The initiative increased income through seedling sales, supported climate resilience, and improved soil health and food security.



The UN General Assembly has repeatedly underscored the critical role of volunteering in supporting development objectives, and the UN Secretary General has called volunteering “**a powerful and cross-cutting means of implementing the 2030 Agenda.**”

However, most countries have yet to embed volunteering into their national development plans, limiting the development of more structured and scalable volunteering programs.

Only 20 percent of countries have formally integrated volunteering into their development plans, policies, and strategies.



Data source: UN Volunteers Knowledge Portal

How can key stakeholders promote volunteering for sustainable development?

GOVERNMENTS

- Integrate volunteerism into national development strategies; measure its contribution to achieving the SDGs; encourage international volunteering.

MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Facilitate volunteer exchanges between countries—one example being the African Union's African Health Volunteers Corps, which contributed 800 volunteers to address the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

PRIVATE SECTOR

- Encourage volunteering in the workplace by collaborating with multilateral and non-profit organizations, not only to improve employee engagement and satisfaction but also to benefit the community and drive sustainable development.

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Bridge volunteer opportunities with local communities—one example being CorpsAfrica's collaboration with local communities to address health, food security, environmental conservation, and more.

ACADEMIA

- Conduct studies on the impact, opportunities, and gaps in volunteerism, including how volunteering impacts youth labor market outcomes, measuring its impact beyond monetary terms, and best practices for advancing sustainable development.