INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS REPORT AND WHY NOW?

"We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives
are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and
along these sympathetic fibres, our actions run as
causes and return to us as results."

– Rev. Henry Melvill

"We live according to the saying: 'Stone are those
who are united, and sand those that move apart'".

– Local volunteer, Madagascar, SWVR field research

A UN Volunteer works on the Participatory Settlement Upgrade Program in Nairobi, Kenya (Jennifer Huxta, 2014).

Episodes of instability have become more frequent and intense in many countries.[2] Incidents ranging from those related to climate change and natural disasters to conflict and dislocation have created multiple vulnerabilities, even in countries with a long history of financial and political stability. Recurrent disaster risks are on the rise, with losses concentrated in low- and middle-income countries.[3] Political instability, conflict and terrorism cost thousands of human lives and weaken the global economy by trillions of dollars each year.[4] Although the long view suggests that armed conflict is declining overall,[5] the divide between the most and least peaceful countries has widened.[6] Increasing civil and other internal conflict is reflected in rising populism, polarization and political instability in many countries.[7] Demographic trends and growing inequities arising from current economic models are exacerbating global instabilities.

Community resilience is an intrinsic protective response for human vulnerability when faced with volatility and fragility.[8] Resilience is a common thread running through the three current main international development, peacebuilding and humanitarian frameworks: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on climate change. As global systems and structures have become more interdependent, the prerequisites for development include the ability to resolve conflict and sustain peace, the ability to prepare for and absorb shocks, and the ability to establish sustainable development processes that work for all people and groups, both now and in the future.[9]

The agency of people in resilience thinking

Resilience models conceptualize communities as clusters of individuals, groups and organizations that are part of larger social-ecological systems, each with their own risks, vulnerabilities, fractures and tensions.[10,11] This includes the roles that people have within and across communities and the forms and structures that allow them to work together at different levels to solve problems. Likewise, theories of community resilience emphasize that space must be made for vulnerable groups to operate as key actors alongside other stakeholders.[12,13] With an emphasis on relationships and networks within a wider system, focusing on resilience allows us to confront the underlying causes of people's vulnerability, raising questions about why adverse circumstances such as conflicts, economic shocks and climate change affect certain people or communities more than others based on their position in social, political and economic structures (box 1).

Resilience strategies emphasize the agency and capacities of people and groups. When shocks and stresses hit, diverse enclaves of vulnerable people may be able to come together within communities to confront them.[14] This ability to respond together reflects the key characteristics of resilient communities, including self-organization, connectivity, participation and the empowerment of vulnerable groups.[15,16] Although partnerships with other types of institutions may come into play, voluntary actions by communities themselves will necessarily play an important role in community resilience.

The way that volunteer efforts are expressed and organized is likely to reflect the structures, social norms and cultural practices embedded within the communities. Furthermore, a range of factors, from the decentralization of governance arrangements to societal gender norms, will influence local capacities to connect to wider resilience systems.

Box **1**

Features of community resilience

This report defines *resilience* as "the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from and more successfully adapt to adverse events". While dominant political structures and social processes have the power to affect people's livelihoods, this definition fits well with current inquiries into volunteerism because it recognizes the importance of people's ability to affect those structures and processes through voluntary action.

Many models, frameworks and definitions of resilience focus on different phases of the process. A key assumption is that shocks and stresses cannot always be avoided and that therefore communities need to plan for conflict and disruption by anticipating and planning for change in ways that enhance community resilience. A people-centred view may challenge the distinctions between phases, as volunteerism actively shapes avenues and opportunities to cope through cycles and patterns of risk.

The term *adverse events* refers to both shocks and stresses that disrupt a system functioning normally. Shocks are sudden and unexpected events that are potentially dangerous. They include both natural and human-made activities or conditions that can cause the loss of life and livelihoods. *Stresses* are longer-term processes with less acute impact and may include expected seasonal price fluctuations, periods of unemployment or poor health, incremental change in climate, small-scale conflicts and other circumstances that undermine livelihoods. Shocks and stresses interact and are often mutually reinforcing.

Sources: Frankenberger and others 2012; National Research Council 2012; Pasteur 2011; Sharifi and Yamagata 2016

Local volunteers clear debris in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal earthquake (UNV, 2015).

Volunteerism and community resilience: beyond the headlines

The 2011 State of the World's Volunteerism Report demonstrated that voluntary action in response to shocks and stresses is one of the clearest expressions of the human values and agency underpinning the drive to help others. Every day in communities throughout the world, volunteers organize to tackle long-term economic, social and environmental stresses that test community resilience, such as poor education, ill health, bad governance, poverty and food insecurity.[17] The line between voluntary and collective action is often blurred under these conditions. Where public support and social safety nets are absent, volunteering emerges as a fundamental survival strategy.

Although volunteers self-organize to meet the needs that arise from ongoing and persistent stresses afflicting their communities, the significance of voluntary action is accentuated in times of acute crisis. Volunteers have been at the forefront of every major conflict, natural disaster and other acute shock in the past few years.[18] For instance, volunteers took an early lead in responding to the 2015 Nepal earthquake and the recovery and reconstruction efforts that followed.[19] Local, national and international volunteers worked together during the 2014–16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa to tend to victims and halt the spread of the disease, despite considerable and cross-border challenges.[20,21] Likewise, diverse groups of volunteers have stepped up to welcome refugees and displaced people fleeing war and conflict in the Middle East and Africa while many state actors and NGOs have been gripped by political and bureaucratic paralysis.[22] Across the world in recent years, the growing

number of extreme weather events linked to climate change, including catastrophic flooding in South Asia, hurricanes in the Caribbean and the United States[23] and mudslides in Sierra Leone, have also pushed volunteer responses to the fore.

However, local volunteerism, particularly when volunteer participation is informal, should not be romanticized. To be most effective, volunteers often require support from wider, more formalized structures. The self-organization of local volunteering is rooted in community power dynamics and politics, meaning that it may exclude some vulnerable groups. Yet another challenge is that spontaneous volunteers who are not well integrated can hamper effective responses.[24]

As volunteers are demonstrably active in every major shock and stress experienced by communities, decision-makers need to better understand the relationship between volunteerism and community resilience so that voluntary action has the best opportunity to contribute to the collective and public good. Governments and other stakeholders also need to understand how to best support volunteer action as a core property of resilient communities. Although the global knowledge base on volunteerism is growing, the distinctive and complementary contributions of volunteer efforts are less well researched.[25,26] In a volatile, rapidly transforming world, it is vital to understand how different forms of volunteerism, many of them embedded in cultural traditions, norms and values, are changing in response to risks associated with urbanization, environmental degradation, involuntary migration, extreme weather patterns and the polarization of societies, among other global changes.

The distinctive contributions of volunteerism to community resilience

Building resilient communities requires the dedicated efforts of millions of volunteers. Volunteerism is a universal social behaviour that builds on people's desire to engage with change rather than to passively experience development processes. Neither public nor private actors would be able to fully compensate, qualitatively or quantitatively, for the voluntary efforts of citizens actively engaged in their communities and societies. Volunteerism has the potential to contribute to community resilience by enabling vulnerable groups to organize flexibly, respond in real time and adapt in the face of changing patterns of risk.

The existing research on volunteerism provides a starting point for understanding its contribution to peace and development. Volunteers can enhance the ability of communities to cope with shocks and stresses by increasing human capital,[27] strengthening social capital and well-being,[28] enhancing natural capital[29] and developing financial capital.[30] Research also demonstrates that by offering critical social support[31] and linking local and external actors,[32] volunteers can reduce disaster risks. In fragile states and post-conflict environments, volunteers can strengthen community resilience by integrating refugees and displaced people,[33] building ownership in the peace and development process and strengthening social cohesion within and across groups.[34] Volunteers are key actors in crises[35] (the vast majority of survivors of a disaster are rescued by local volunteers[36,37]) but volunteering is not a panacea. The evidence base shows that it can reinforce social divisions[38] and inhibit coordinated responses,[39] and while external actors can help develop local capacities,[40] they can also create dependencies that weaken resilience at the community level.[41]

Evidence of what sets volunteering apart from other resilience-building approaches is lacking. Current knowledge about volunteer activity tends to focus on its ability to mitigate, manage and respond to community risks and shocks, while much less is known

Volunteerism is a universal social behaviour that builds on people's desire to engage with change rather than to passively experience development processes

about volunteer activity as a discrete *property* of resilient communities. What the human-centred connections and self-organizing characteristics of volunteerism mean for the resilience of communities is not well understood. When volunteering is viewed merely as a cost-reduction strategy, its most important characteristics and complementarities are undervalued. Even narratives that feature volunteerism within a resilience context focus mainly on volunteers' roles in short-term or cyclical interventions, typically responding to or recovering from shocks and stresses.[42] Less study has been devoted to how the capacities of volunteers can support prevention and adaptation strategies that help communities actually avoid cycles of disaster and response.[43]

The forms and contexts in which volunteerism can foster resilience for all, including for those who have been left behind, also need careful examination. How does volunteerism interact with community resilience in the least developed countries? How does volunteerism include or exclude people managing diverse forms of risk, especially where the local political economy produces glaring inequalities that challenge efforts to equitably promote volunteerism?[44,45] For instance, while there has been some research on the intersection of gender, power and resilience (mainly in analyses of vulnerability and capacities),[46,47] there has been little if any attention paid to volunteerism as a strategy for empowerment. For development aid to be effective, disenfranchised and marginalized people must have opportunities to self-organize and to influence key decisions.[48,49] This leads to the critical question: how can volunteerism effectively and equitably contribute to longer-term community resilience in the 21st century?

This report presents the results of original research and analysis to understand the distinctive ways volunteerism contributes to or inhibits community resilience over the long term. It improves our understanding of how all stakeholders, such as governments, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector, can engage with volunteerism as a resource for achieving national and international development goals.

When volunteering is viewed merely as a cost-reduction strategy, its most important characteristics and complementarities are undervalued

The 2018 SWVR volunteer researchers prepare for community discussions in Bolivia (UNV, 2017).

Scope of this report

To extend the knowledge base on volunteerism, this report (figure 1):

- combines the theoretical and empirical evidence on community resilience and volunteerism under a common framework for the first time;
- offers the most precise global estimates on volunteering through research and analysis based on statistics on volunteering from United Nations Member States;
- describes the current policy, legislative and investment climate for volunteering across different contexts; and
- presents evidence on how the distinctive characteristics of volunteering help or hinder community resilience, a perspective that is often lacking in the existing literature.

For the first time the report draws on primary research on volunteerism and resilience undertaken across diverse communities in five regions. In 2017, 22 volunteers conducted qualitative research across 15 communities over the course of five months (box 2). The more than 1,200 research participants included local community members, volunteers, government and civil society stakeholders, and others. These participants identified their own priority threats and risks at the community level and identified the ways in which volunteerism strengthened or hindered the resilience of their communities (see annex 4 for details about the research methodology).

Findings from this research illustrate how local (largely informal) voluntary action can enhance or diminish the capacities of communities under strain. Recognizing the limitations of local voluntary action, the findings also illustrate the complementary value of support from outside the community, particularly when volunteerism reaches the limits of local action. Done well, volunteerism enables all types of actors to collaborate and contribute

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Box **2**

Selection of the 15 communities for data collection

> **CHARACTERISTICS**

To fill some of the knowledge gaps on the links between volunteerism and community resilience, 15 communities in 15 countries were selected for fieldwork. Five communities were in urban areas (China, Egypt, Greece, Netherlands and Russian Federation), and 10 were in rural areas (Bolivia, Burundi, Guatemala, Madagascar, Malawi, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Tanzania). Three communities were in areas that had experienced recent conflict (Burundi, Philippines and Sudan), and three were in areas that had recently received a large number of migrants and asylum seekers (Greece, Malawi and Netherlands). Each of the communities featured notable voluntary action across a range of shocks and stresses (see annexes 4–7 for details about the communities and the selection process).

> **DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS**

To ensure consistency in design, data collection, quality assurance and instrumentation, the research team developed a conceptual and measurement framework and an implementation guide that could be applied across these diverse contexts. Data were collected through 110 focus group discussions and 174 stakeholder interviews, reflecting the combined perspectives of more than 1,200 participants. Data analysis included qualitative coding and interpretation of interview transcripts using a standardized scheme. This analytic approach allowed for comparison of communities but was also flexible enough to allow for the addition of new categories that emerged from local contexts. The final global analysis collated findings across the 15 community reports to identify common patterns and themes. Researchers reviewed and validated the initial findings through participatory processes with the research communities and other local stakeholders (see annex 4 for details about the research process).

to the complex solutions needed by resilient communities without undermining the self-organizing capacities of those local communities. The research and analysis for this report strengthens our knowledge of how all stakeholders, such as governments, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector, can engage with volunteerism in a sustainable and equitable way to make communities more resilient. The first chapter of the report contextualizes this analysis by providing an overview of the current state of volunteerism, using the latest data to illustrate the scale and scope of voluntary action in 2018.

Scope and approach of this report

INTRODUCTION	CHAPTER **1**	CHAPTER **2**	CHAPTER **3**	CHAPTER **4**
Why look at volunteerism for resilience?	**What** is volunteerism for resilience at the global level?	**How** do volunteerism and resilience interact at the community level?	**Who** can collaborate with local volunteerism to strengthen community resilience?	**How** can volunteerism be maximized for resilience?
	• Estimating the scale and scope of volunteerism globally, page 10	• Expressions of local volunteering in the community, page 25	• Collaborations with external actors can complement local volunteering, page 58	• Developing an ecosystem for resilient volunteerism, page 77
	• Rates of volunteering across regions, countries and groups, page 11	• Distinctive contributions of local volunteering to resilience, page 29	• Local volunteers can strengthen development interventions by external actors, page 64	• Facilitating a community compact for resilience, page 85
	• Diverse trends and patterns shape expressions of volunteerism, page 17	• Limitations and challenges of local volunteering, page 45	• Collaborations must be structured carefully, page 69	

A POWERFUL AND CROSS-CUTTING
MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION:

VOLUNTEERISM

AS A GLOBAL ASSET FOR PEACE
AND DEVELOPMENT

"As we seek to build capacities and to help the new agenda to take root, volunteerism can be another powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation. Volunteerism can help to expand and mobilize constituencies, and to engage people in national planning and implementation for sustainable development goals. And volunteer groups can help to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable actions."

– **The Road to Dignity by 2030**[50]

UN Volunteers in Lao PDR work on a drug prevention programme (UNV Lao PDR, 2011).
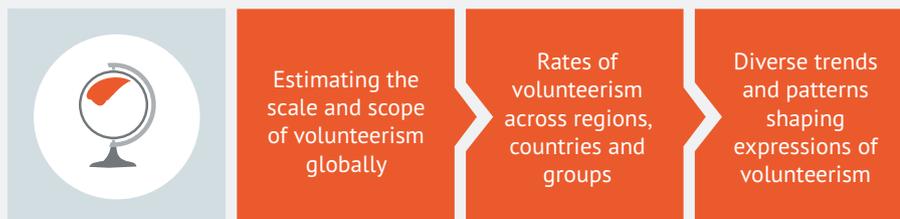
Volunteerism exists in all societies. It can be a critical resource for peace and development, yet not all governments systematically measure it to understand its role and contribution. To improve the evidence base, this chapter presents new estimates of volunteerism's scale, scope and trends at a global level using data from United Nations Member States. The analysis reveals patterns in the types and distribution of voluntary work around the world and identifies key trends, including the influence of public policy, technology and investment. The analysis presented here is a starting point for better understanding the diverse manifestations of volunteering globally.

Understanding volunteerism as a social behaviour means acknowledging that geography, gender, age and other social, economic and political realities affect people's voluntary action. When examined more closely, these influences reveal many different stories about how and why people participate. Some volunteerism is sporadic or episodic, while other forms are systematic and predictable. Volunteering opportunities may be created by organizations, while others are informal and spontaneous, taking place directly between individuals. Although most voluntary action happens at the local level, people may volunteer in neighbouring communities, at a national level, internationally and online. Gender and social status also shape the forms and functions of volunteer activity.

This chapter examines macro trends in volunteerism, including the scale and scope of volunteerism worldwide. Although the comparative global evidence on volunteerism does not yet allow for detailed disaggregation of findings, this report provides new evidence of key differences across various types of voluntary action. As these data illustrate, volunteering of all types is a substantial social and economic input across all societies, even exceeding the global workforce of many major industries.[51]

Figure **1.1**

Scope of chapter 1   What is volunteerism for resilience at the global level?

| | Estimating the scale and scope of volunteerism globally | Rates of volunteerism across regions, countries and groups | Diverse trends and patterns shaping expressions of volunteerism |

To better understand the issues as they stand in 2018, this chapter complements its reporting on macro trends by exploring themes in the research and evidence on volunteerism that have emerged since the 2015 SWVR, including the new global consensus on development expressed later that same year at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit. These global policies and patterns continue to shape expressions of and influence support for volunteerism worldwide.

➜ Estimating the scale and scope of global volunteerism is challenging and vital

Volunteerism embraces a diverse set of actors and activities and has varying impacts on peace and development, depending on the context. This diversity means that the concept is understood in different ways in different countries and even within them. As emphasized in the 2011 SWVR, definitions of volunteerism in cross-national comparisons will inevitably remain contested.[52,53] While recognizing these differences, this report uses the definition of volunteerism that was adopted in a 2002 United Nations General Assembly Resolution: "activities undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor".[54,55] Under this inclusive definition, volunteerism encompasses both formal activities performed through organizations and informal actions performed by individuals outside of formally registered organizations. This report focuses on local volunteerism or voluntary civic participation by people living within a geographically localized community.[56,57] Although local volunteering is largely informal, it can also include formal voluntary action through community-based organizations.[58]

Differences in people's understanding of volunteerism inhibit global agreement on a definition (box 1.1), and the logistics of data collection limit the reliability of cross-national data. Unlike paid employment, volunteer work is typically performed irregularly, which complicates the measurement of how much volunteering occurs.[59]

Although national statistical agencies view volunteering as a form of unpaid work that has social and economic value, only a handful of countries, largely high-income, regularly measure volunteering, and they have done so inconsistently.[60] And when volunteering is measured, the focus has often been primarily on organization-based volunteering, to the neglect of volunteering performed spontaneously by people in their communities.

Who is a volunteer?

Volunteerism takes many forms, and the designation and meaning of volunteering varies by context. Many people who perform voluntary actions would not strongly identify as volunteers. Some forms of volunteering rooted in religion or custom may have evolved over generations and be considered a core part of local tradition. Motivations may have become intertwined with feelings of duty and solidarity or with a person's moral code and are often rooted in people's desire to exercise choice and to act spontaneously. These motivations all influence how people understand and interpret voluntary action. Public attitudes to volunteering also differ, with volunteers stigmatized or de-prioritized in some contexts while idealized in others according to the task, status of the people involved and other factors. In this report, volunteering is frequently described as either formal or informal. Formal volunteering is organized through organizations and associations, while informal volunteering is done directly between persons. In reality and particularly at a community level the distinction between the two may be less evident.

Sources: Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003; Taniguchi and Thomas 2011; UNV 2011; Wilson 2000

Despite these challenges, estimating the scale and scope of volunteering worldwide is important. Doing so can help development practitioners extend their reach to marginalized groups and enable policymakers to estimate the economic value and contribution of volunteerism to national accounts. In addition, these data can improve decision-makers' understanding of who has access to volunteer opportunities and who does not, strengthening their ability to identify and eliminate barriers to voluntary action. Stakeholders can use this knowledge to improve volunteers' contributions to peace and development.

Incremental improvements in measurement over the past two decades have increased the accuracy of global estimates of volunteerism. In 2013, through the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, the International Labour Organization (ILO) spearheaded the adoption of new international statistical standards that provide a framework for integrating volunteer work into official work statistics.[61] Key references, such as the ILO *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*, the United Nations *Handbook on Non-profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*, time-use surveys and other national volunteering surveys, contribute to the knowledge database and enable more accurate estimates of the prevalence, scope and composition of volunteerism worldwide for both formal, organization-based volunteering and informal volunteer work.[62]
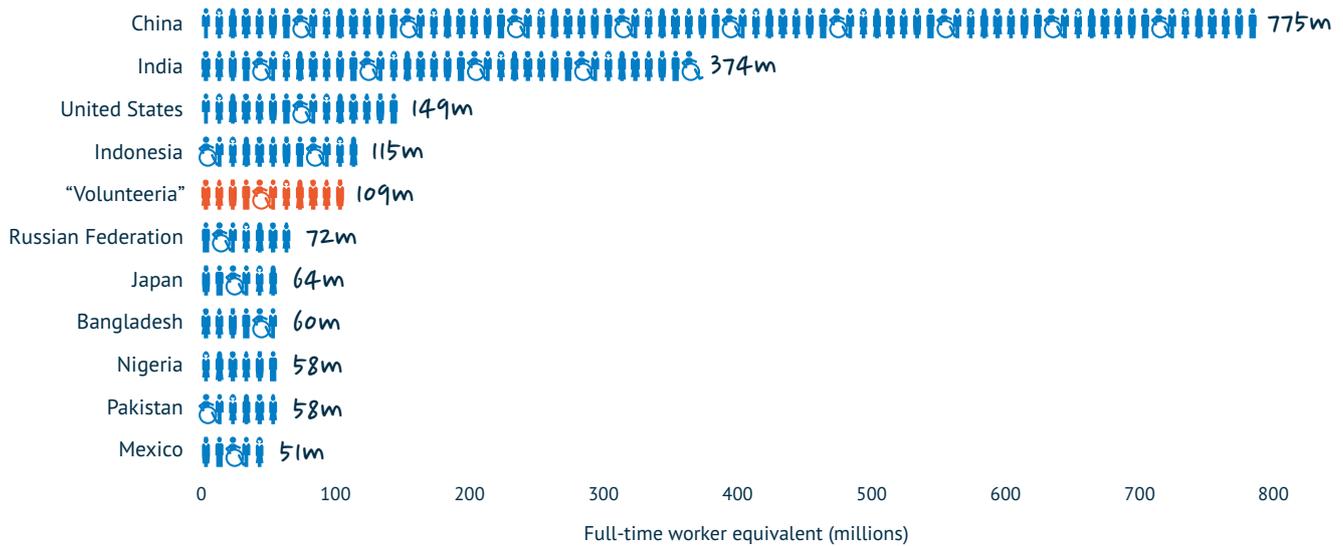
Although the figures presented in this report go much further than previous estimates, more research is needed on the factors and variables influencing volunteering rates and the breakdown of formal and informal volunteering across different contexts. Capturing informal volunteering has additional complexities. Nonetheless, while serious limitations remain, the available data provide rich insights into global volunteering patterns that have crucial policy and practice implications.

➜ Rates of volunteerism across regions, countries and groups

The most comprehensive estimate of global volunteering today, produced as background research for this report, puts the global informal and formal volunteer workforce at 109 million full-time equivalent workers.[63,64] If these full-time volunteer workers constituted a country, the workforce of "Volunteeria" would be the fifth largest in the world (figure 1.2), roughly equivalent to the number of employed people in Indonesia. Looked at another way, the full-time equivalent size of this global volunteer workforce exceeds that of many major global industries.[65]

Figure **1.2**

The global volunteer workforce exceeds the number of people employed in more than half of the 10 most populous countries, 2016

China 775m
India 374m
United States 149m
Indonesia 115m
"Volunteeria" 109m
Russian Federation 72m
Japan 64m
Bangladesh 60m
Nigeria 58m
Pakistan 58m
Mexico 51m

0   100   200   300   400   500   600   700   800
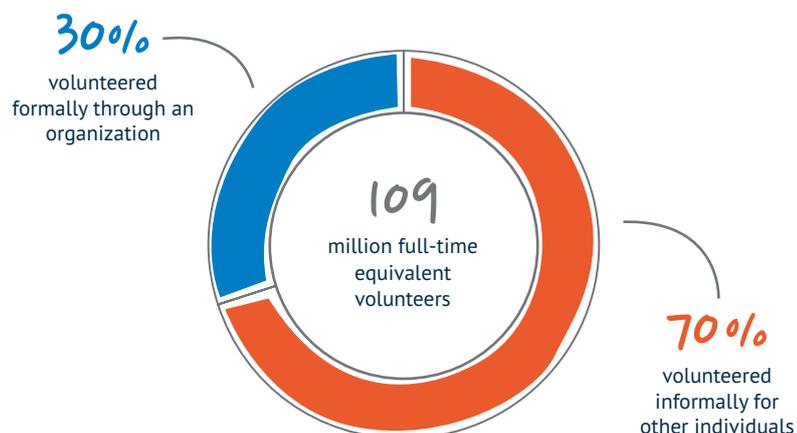
Full-time worker equivalent (millions)

Source: UNV 2018a

In terms of composition, some 70 per cent of global volunteer activity occurs through informal (direct person-to-person) engagement with people outside the volunteer's household, while 30 per cent takes place formally through non-profit organizations or various associations (figure 1.3). Accordingly, much of the focus of the qualitative research for this report was on local and informal volunteering, which was prioritized by communities themselves but is largely underrepresented in data and research on volunteering.

Figure **1.3**

Majority of volunteering globally is informal

30%
volunteered formally through an organization

109
million full-time equivalent volunteers

70%
volunteered informally for other individuals
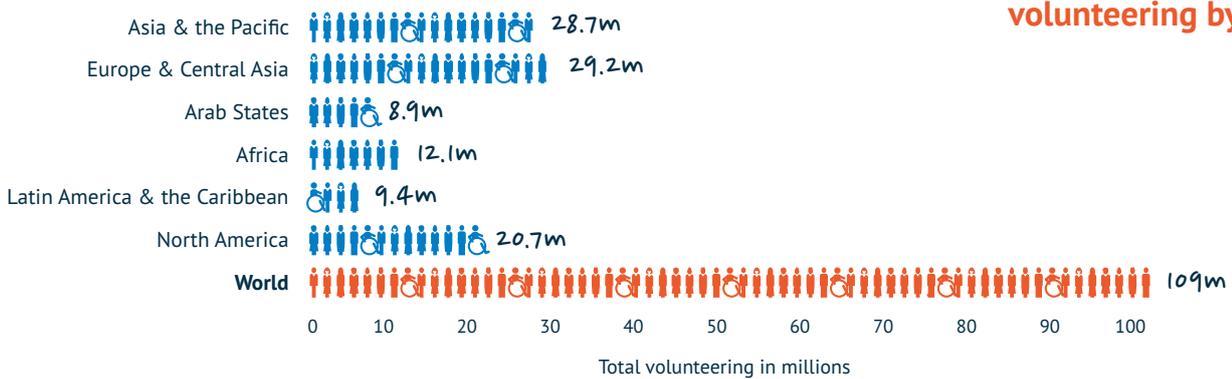
Source: UNV 2018a

Although volunteering is universal, the form of people's participation depends on such variables as location, gender and age. A range of factors may limit or enhance people's opportunities and capacities to participate in both informal and formal volunteerism depending on who they are and the environment in which they live. For example, in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, factors including educational attainment, marital status and age all influence formal volunteering rates.[66] Underpinned by structures and processes that facilitate the engagement of volunteers, time-use data indicate that both informal and formal volunteering may compete for time with other activities, such as paid work, leisure and studies.[67]

ESTIMATES OF VOLUNTEERING BY REGION AND COUNTRY

Global data on volunteering reveal regional variations in volunteer participation rates and in the share of informal and formal volunteering. Figure 1.4 sets out the full-time equivalent volunteers per region, from nearly 29 million in Asia and the Pacific to around 9 million each in the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean. There is a relative lack of volunteerism data from lower-income contexts, and there are additional complexities in capturing the full range of informal volunteering. Noting this relative lack of data, the living conditions of people in many lower-income countries also necessarily put more demands on their time. People in low-income countries devote at least a third more of their time to earning a living than those in high-income countries.[68] They also spend more time waiting for services, getting to work and travelling to volunteer activities. However, the relationship between volunteering and available leisure time is complex, as the data below on male and female participation rates suggest.
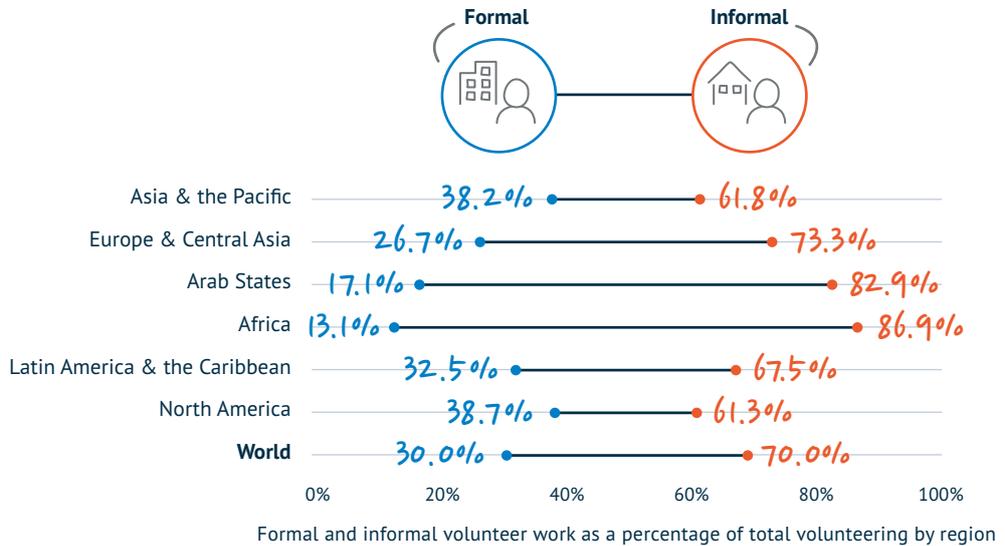
Figure **1.4**

Total full-time equivalent volunteering by region

Region	Value
Asia & the Pacific	28.7m
Europe & Central Asia	29.2m
Arab States	8.9m
Africa	12.1m
Latin America & the Caribbean	9.4m
North America	20.7m
World	109m

Total volunteering in millions

The form and extent of volunteering also vary by context. For instance, although informal volunteering exceeds formal volunteering in all regions, it accounts for nearly 90 per cent of volunteer activity in Africa but closer to 60 per cent in North America and Asia and the Pacific regions (figure 1.5). Participation in formal (organization-based) volunteering is likely affected by the number of organizations mobilizing volunteers in a country as well as by differences in institutional arrangements.[69] Higher-income countries tend to have a greater concentration of formal voluntary organizations and consequently more opportunities for people to participate in this way.[70]

Figure **1.5**

Informal volunteering exceeds formal volunteering in all regions

Formal   **Informal**

Region	Formal	Informal
Asia & the Pacific	38.2%	61.8%
Europe & Central Asia	26.7%	73.3%
Arab States	17.1%	82.9%
Africa	13.1%	86.9%
Latin America & the Caribbean	32.5%	67.5%
North America	38.7%	61.3%
World	30.0%	70.0%

Formal and informal volunteer work as a percentage of total volunteering by region

ESTIMATES OF VOLUNTEERING BY SEX

The sex of volunteers is one of the only reliable demographic variables for which data are available for cross-national disaggregation. Formal volunteering is fairly evenly distributed between the sexes (51 per cent women and 49 per cent men), which up-ends the belief still held by many people that more women than men volunteer through organizations.[71] Informal volunteering, however, has higher female participation rates globally. Since informal volunteering accounts for the majority of voluntary efforts in all regions and women account for the larger share of informal voluntary action, women constitute a larger proportion of volunteering overall – nearly 57 per cent (figure 1.6).

Figure **1.6**

Women take on the majority of all volunteering globally

59% of informal volunteering is done by **women**

43% men   **57%** women

51% of formal volunteering is done by **women**

Women take on 57% of all volunteering globally

Globally, formal volunteering is more evenly distributed between the sexes than informal volunteering
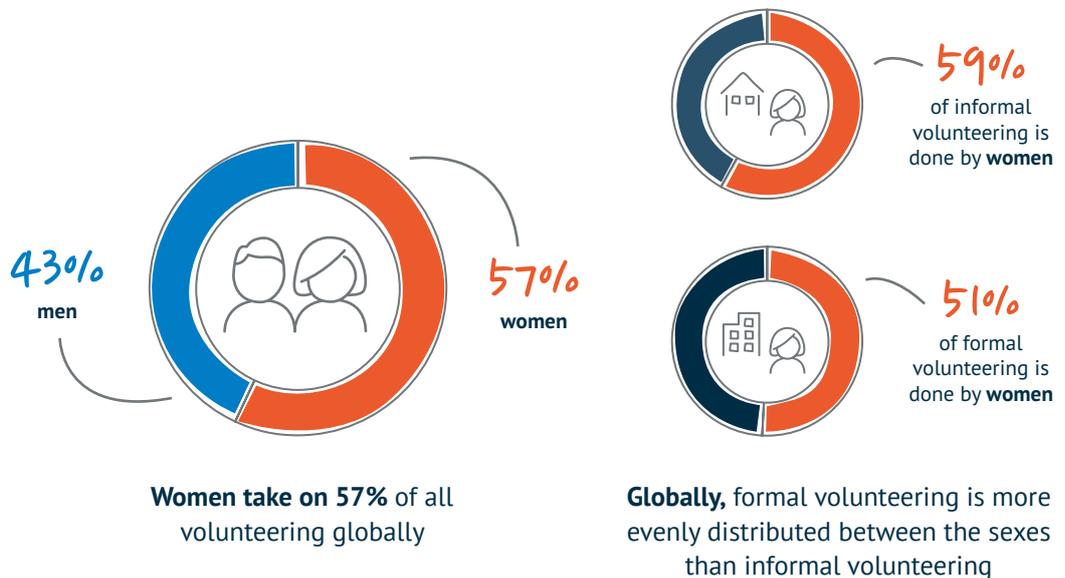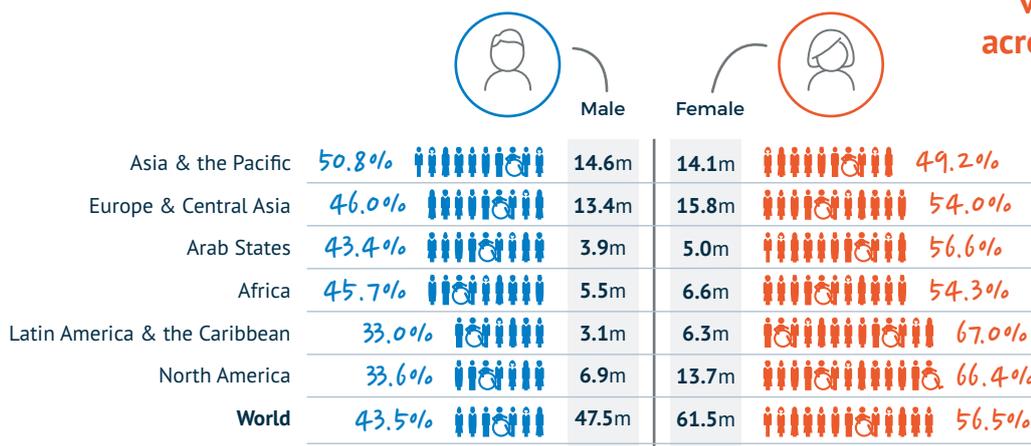
Source: UNV 2018a

Regionally there is wide variation in terms of women's participation in volunteering. Female participation is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean at 67 per cent and lowest in Asia and the Pacific where women and men have more equal participation rates (figure 1.7).
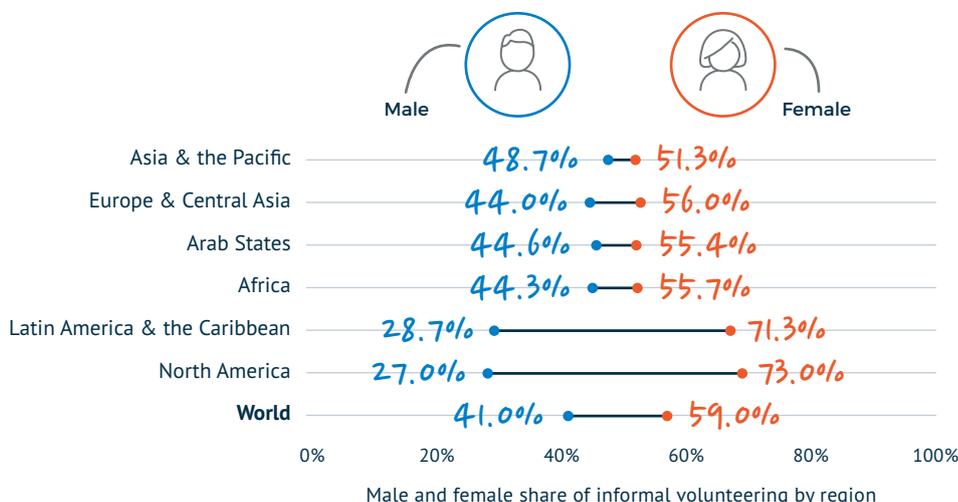
Women's share of total volunteering is higher across all regions except Asia and the Pacific

	Male	Female	
Asia & the Pacific	50.8%	14.6m	14.1m	49.2%
Europe & Central Asia	46.0%	13.4m	15.8m	54.0%
Arab States	43.4%	3.9m	5.0m	56.6%
Africa	45.7%	5.5m	6.6m	54.3%
Latin America & the Caribbean	33.0%	3.1m	6.3m	67.0%
North America	33.6%	6.9m	13.7m	66.4%
World	43.5%	47.5m	61.5m	56.5%

Women undertake a larger share of informal voluntary action across all regions, accounting for nearly 60 per cent worldwide (figure 1.8). In North America and in Latin America and the Caribbean, women undertake more than 70 per cent of all informal volunteering. As discussed further in chapters 2 and 3, these findings bring to light the amount and type of volunteering women do and have implications for the ways in which volunteerism can reinforce or challenge gender roles and the social, political and economic inequalities faced by women.

Women take on the majority share of informal volunteering across all regions

	Male	Female
Asia & the Pacific	48.7%	51.3%
Europe & Central Asia	44.0%	56.0%
Arab States	44.6%	55.4%
Africa	44.3%	55.7%
Latin America & the Caribbean	28.7%	71.3%
North America	27.0%	73.0%
World	41.0%	59.0%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Male and female share of informal volunteering by region

VOLUNTEERISM AND STATISTICAL PRODUCTION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

ISABEL SCHMIDT DIRECTOR, STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA

Tshepiso steps back and admires his handiwork. As part of his contribution to Mandela Day, he has painted the interior walls of a corrugated iron shack that serves as a crèche for young children in an informal settlement in Johannesburg. In the spirit of ubuntu,[a] *he regularly ferries his elderly parents, aunts and uncles to hospital or assists them with shopping. Just last weekend he repaired a broken kitchen cabinet door for his neighbour, Mrs Potts.*

Enabling people such as Tshepiso to drive their own development priorities and agenda for change is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development. An active civil society is an essential component of a cohesive and well-functioning state. By encouraging an active citizenry, the state can potentially achieve more, using less financial resources, and also achieve greater social cohesion in the process. Volunteerism asks: how can I make a difference in my extended family, in my community, in my country and at a global level?

According to the Volunteer Activities Survey[b] conducted every four years by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), the number of South Africans doing volunteer work increased from 1.3 million in 2010 to 2.2 million in 2014. The latter figure represents 5.8 per cent of the South African population aged 15 years and older. The average annual number of hours per volunteer was 277, and their efforts were valued at R9.8 billion (USD0.8 billion). How comparable are these statistics with estimates produced in other countries? And can everything that Tshepiso does for others, without remuneration, be considered volunteer services?

As these questions demonstrate, statistical standards and definitions are essential to the task. StatsSA defines a volunteer as "a person aged 15 years and older who did any unpaid non-compulsory work", where unpaid non-compulsory work is defined as "time an individual gave without pay through an organization or directly for others outside their own household in the four weeks preceding the survey". Therefore all of Tshepiso's most

recent activities that were not remunerated are included, with the exception of those done for his elderly parents. They are excluded because they live in the same household as Tshepiso.

The potential for discrepancy in standards and comparability across countries is around how voluntary work for the household and/or related households is defined. In the African context, where aunts and uncles are often considered as mothers and fathers, it is difficult to pinpoint where "related household" starts and stops. Does it include all blood relatives, regardless of how far removed? StatsSA overcame this dilemma by including unpaid non-compulsory work done in all households except a person's own household.

Another potential point of divergence in international comparability is the issue of reimbursements received towards the coverage of costs and whether these constitute payment within a definition of unpaid work. According to the ILO definition,[c] only moneys received that amount to more than one third of local market wages are considered remuneration rather than cost coverage. But in the absence of clear national payment standards or detailed income classifications for various activities, the data collection process is more complex and may result in inconsistent statistical standards within and across countries.

The ILO standards adopted at the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians provide an important starting point for internationally comparable statistics on volunteering. However, more qualitative and quantitative research is needed to develop our concepts and tools, particularly to reflect manifestations of volunteering in Africa and the global South. As well as the issues identified above, there is also a need to standardize survey recall periods and ensure coverage of informal volunteering in all contexts. Working together with the ILO and UN Volunteers, StatsSA will continue to share its experiences to enable these standards to evolve.

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a. A social philosophy prevalent in Southern Africa described as "the capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining community". Nussbaum, B. (2003). *Ubuntu*: Reflections of a South African on our common humanity. *Reflections* 4(4):21–26.
b. Volunteer Activities Survey (2015). The Volunteer Activities Survey is conducted by Statistics South Africa every four years as a module attached to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey.
c. International Labour Organization, *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work* (2011).

➜ Diverse trends and patterns shape expressions of volunteerism

People's volunteering evolves in line with a range of context-specific influencing factors, from demographic changes in the population to newly available technologies. Many countries with ageing populations are finding new resources and challenges for volunteering.[72,73] Likewise, increasing youth populations are prompting some countries (particularly low- and middle-income countries) to emphasize volunteering as a means of constructively engaging young people.[74,75] In some countries, formal volunteering is becoming more episodic than the regular and predictable volunteering of the past, influenced by factors such as work and leisure.[76]

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Because of the crisis, volunteerism is considered to be a luxury today. You can think of it as an application of the Maslow pyramid. People try to cover first their primary needs. They try to have food to eat, they try to find a job, they try to support their families… Therefore, the need to help other people without receiving any kind of help by the community does not come first, and this has a direct negative impact on volunteerism.

▶ Research participant, Greece, SWVR field research

The rapid rise of smart, mobile, crowdsourced and other new technologies continues to bring sweeping changes to how volunteers and voluntary organizations engage. As the 2011 SWVR recognized, "technological developments are opening up spaces for people to volunteer in ways that have no parallel in history".[77] Since then, the uptake of these technologies, including across low- and middle-income countries, has accelerated. Today, for many volunteers, both formal and informal, the use of technology in some aspect of their volunteering is no longer a convenience but an everyday necessity. This creates exciting new prospects for volunteering. It gives organizations powerful new tools to mobilize, organize,

Volunteer Voices: ROHINI

Volunteers working online use geospatial mapping for emergency response efforts

As a geospatial specialist, during emergencies I volunteer to map affected areas using satellite data.

On 20 September 2017, at close to midnight, I received an email:

"Dear GISCorps Volunteers,
…seeking assistance for conducting damage assessment of…health center locations affected by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico… If you are interested and available, please send an email."

I immediately responded, as did five other volunteers from different corners of the world. Working together through an online group we scanned through miles and miles of data in just a few days, which would have taken weeks to gather from the field. Getting this kind of information at the right time can fast-track recovery efforts and even save lives. Online volunteering is a cost-effective and efficient way to get important information from the satellites to the people on the ground. It also gives me a way to use my technical skills meaningfully and to be part of a bigger picture. I believe that future disaster response and recovery efforts will increasingly rely upon remotely sensed data, such as from drones. Analysing this information through crowdsourced geospatial mapping platforms, volunteers like me can play a significant role.

Volunteer training session for the UN Climate Conference 2017 in Bonn, Germany; 650 volunteers supported the event (UNV, 2017).
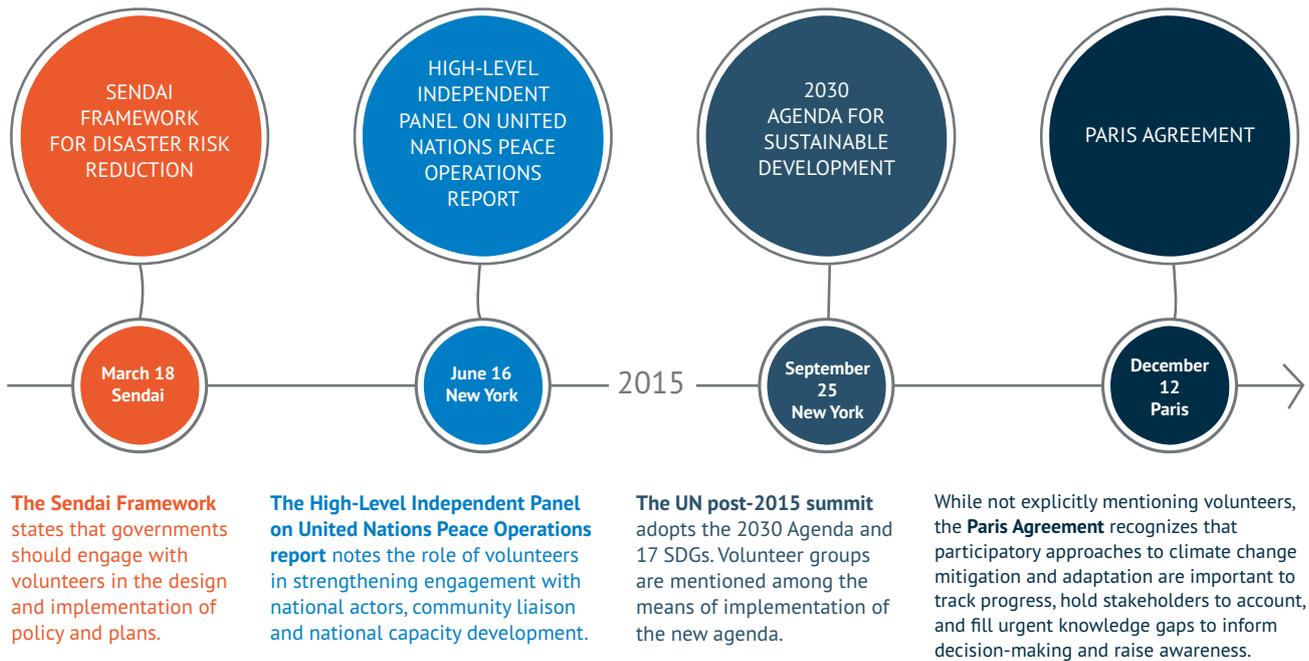
incentivize and evaluate volunteers while also offering volunteers new opportunities for agency and feedback. It also enables new forms of volunteering such as online volunteering and micro-volunteering that are disconnected from specific times and locations.

These developments, a key trend in the networked age of humanitarian aid,[78,79] offer innovative ways for volunteers to enhance community resilience by widening social connections. However, while presenting exciting opportunities for some people who have found it difficult to volunteer in the past – for example, persons with disabilities – these technologies raise new barriers for others. A digital divide persists in most contexts, and as technology use in volunteering spreads it will affect volunteering opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable groups.[80] In many countries, men, urban residents and young people are more likely to be online than women, rural dwellers and the elderly. Volunteer-involving organizations need to be sensitive to the issues of unequal access to technology while adapting its use to local needs, cultural contexts and technology infrastructure.

The post-2015 development frameworks, which emphasize new partnerships and local participation, promote volunteering and people-centred approaches to development (figure 1.9).[81] There is more emphasis on the normative values of volunteerism and a recognition that a top-down, uniform volunteer infrastructure does not fit all contexts.[82] A variety of peace and development actors, from national governments and local authorities to corporate leaders, humanitarian aid agencies, NGOs and community-based organizations, are partnering with volunteers to deliver on their objectives.

Volunteerism and citizen engagement are common threads across the post-2015 international frameworks and processes

The Sendai Framework states that governments should engage with volunteers in the design and implementation of policy and plans.

The High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations report notes the role of volunteers in strengthening engagement with national actors, community liaison and national capacity development.

The UN post-2015 summit adopts the 2030 Agenda and 17 SDGs. Volunteer groups are mentioned among the means of implementation of the new agenda.

While not explicitly mentioning volunteers, the **Paris Agreement** recognizes that participatory approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation are important to track progress, hold stakeholders to account, and fill urgent knowledge gaps to inform decision-making and raise awareness.

Sources: United Nations 2015a; Ilitchev 2015; UNGA 2015b; United Nations 2015b
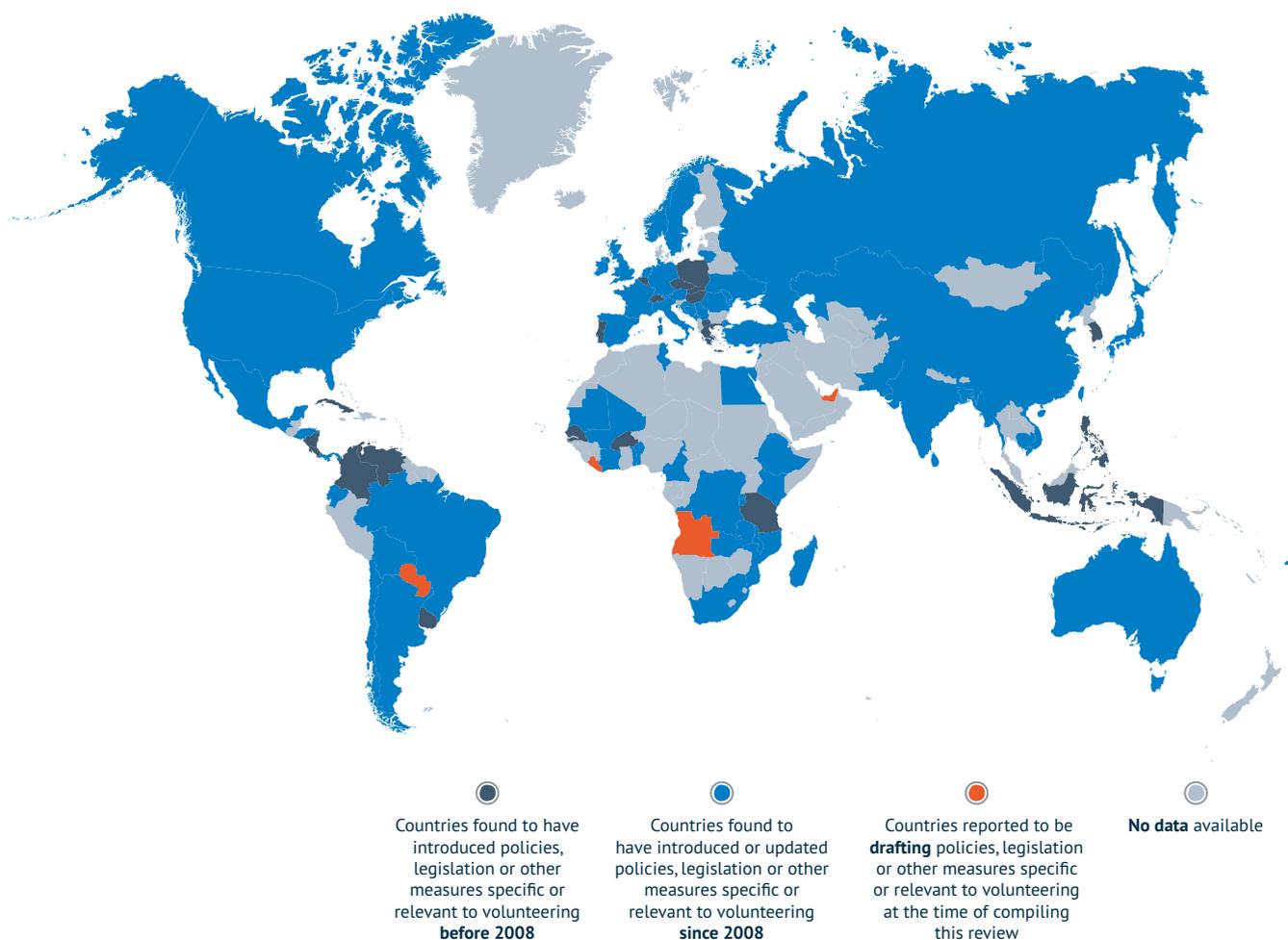
While informal volunteering continues to be the most common form of voluntary activity, formal volunteering has grown as new actors have emerged. Low- and middle-income countries have seen the establishment of new programmes and schemes, due in part to greater recognition of the added value of volunteering to domestic development efforts[83] and the continuing spread of policies and legislation promoting volunteering (see annex 3). New opportunities have also arisen, particularly in middle-income countries, to satisfy the demands of people in increasingly wealthy societies to formally volunteer and as volunteering is included in the expanding and diversifying overseas development cooperation emerging from the global South, including South-South Cooperation.[84]

Public and private investments in volunteering are both responding to and shaping these global trends. Globally the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) remains one of the largest providers of formal opportunities to volunteer, with around 14 million active volunteers in 2016.[85] Private sector actors continue to become more prominent in volunteering[86] as an increasing number of global businesses see volunteering as a core component of corporate social responsibility.[87] Meanwhile, the academic community is producing a growing volume of research and evidence on volunteering, although questions remain over the reliability of data and large gaps persist for evidence on volunteering in developing countries.[88]

Legislation and policies remain important to promote volunteering, and a UNV programme review found at least 72 countries had introduced or amended or were in the process of drafting policies, legislation or other measures specific or relevant to volunteering between May 2008 and May 2018 (figure 1.10). However, while in many countries policies and laws have had positive effects, in others they have not promoted all aspects of volunteerism – for example, by neglecting or restricting freedom of expression and association or self-organization among all groups of people. There is therefore growing concern that certain applications of policies and laws related to volunteering, and in particular overregulation, narrows access, shrinks diversity and restricts civic space.[89] These issues are further discussed in the analysis of the findings emerging from the 15 communities that were the subject of the research for this report.

Figure **1.10**

Global coverage of volunteering policies and legislation, 2018

Countries found to have introduced policies, legislation or other measures specific or relevant to volunteering **before 2008**

Countries found to have introduced or updated policies, legislation or other measures specific or relevant to volunteering **since 2008**

Countries reported to be **drafting** policies, legislation or other measures specific or relevant to volunteering at the time of compiling this review

No data available

Source: UNV 2018b

Volunteers provide support to visitors in Trafalgar Square, London, United Kingdom (Greater London Authority, 2016).

What do these global estimates and trends tell us about volunteerism in 2018? People are volunteering at scale, although access and participation differ by context, gender and other less visible influences. Informal action is the most common form of volunteering globally and was a major feature in all communities participating in the field research for this report. Ultimately, differences between formal and informal volunteering rates can have implications for community resilience, as discussed in the following chapters. Formal volunteering may be more likely to facilitate connections with actors outside communities and the partnerships and resources they may offer, while informal volunteering builds on principles of self-organization and community cohesion, offering maximum flexibility and opportunities for innovation.

The updated data on volunteerism show a clear gender divide, with women taking on the majority share of volunteering. Women are particularly overrepresented in informal volunteering, offering insights that can inform discussions on the gender-related findings evident throughout this report. Demographic changes, new technologies, people's livelihoods and the policies and procedures of institutional actors all feature as key determinants of voluntary action.

Recognizing that volunteering is prevalent in communities struggling to cope, what does this look like in real terms? As a social behaviour most strongly manifested at the informal local community level, how are vulnerable communities organizing to deal with the threats they face each day? The analysis in this report looks at how the distinctive contributions of local volunteerism, in collaboration with external actors, enhance or inhibit community resilience in contexts of instability, disaster and conflict. The value of local volunteers' capacities for human connections and self-organization is further illustrated in the next chapter.