

TERMS OF REFERENCE
INSIGHT PAPER FOR IVCO 2026
VOLUNTEERING FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES: EVIDENCE AND PATHWAYS BEYOND 2030

1. Context

The **International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum)**, in partnership with **France Volontaires**, seeks to engage a consultant or a team of consultants to prepare an **Insight Paper** on *Volunteering for Sustainable Futures: Evidence and Pathways Beyond 2030*.

This paper will serve as a **framing document** for the discussions at the **IVCO 2026 Conference**, hosted by France Volontaires in Paris, in October 2026. The conference will take place in the context of the **United Nations International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development (IYV)**, providing a unique opportunity to highlight the crucial link between volunteering and the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** of the 2030 Agenda. The paper will also **resonate with the Call to Action** to be launched by Forum and its partners on 5 December 2025.

As the international community approaches the conclusion of the 2030 Agenda, there is a growing need to assess the evidence of volunteering's contribution to the SDGs, and to identify how volunteering can evolve and remain a transformative force in shaping the **post-2030 global development framework**.

2. Background and Rationale

Several UN political and technical documents recognize volunteering as a **“lever for achievement,”** and even a **“powerful and cross-cutting means”** of implementing the SDGs. Volunteering mobilizes individuals and communities, fosters local ownership of development processes, and strengthens social cohesion.

At the same time, the SDGs provide a **shared global framework and storytelling space** for diverse volunteering actors. This common language facilitates **impact measurement**, promotes collaboration, and enhances the visibility of volunteer contributions to sustainable development.

The Research Paper will explore how volunteering, in all its forms, formal and informal, national and international, across all ages, contributes to the realization of the SDGs, while identifying gaps, challenges, success stories and opportunities for the post-2030 development agenda.

3. Audience

The primary audience for this Insight Paper is the **members of Forum**, particularly those participating in IVCO 2026, who will use the paper as a shared analytical foundation to guide discussion and collective positioning. Beyond Forum members, the paper is also intended for **stakeholders engaged in the shaping of the post-2030 global development framework**, including international organizations, policymakers, donors, volunteer-involving organizations, and research actors contributing evidence to global dialogues on the future of volunteering and sustainable development. The document should therefore speak both to practitioners seeking actionable insights and to decision-makers involved in the policy processes that will influence how volunteering is recognized and integrated beyond 2030.

4. Purpose of the Research Paper

The purpose of this paper is twofold:

1. **To objectify and analyze** the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs, using available data, research, and case evidence from across the volunteering ecosystem (governmental, civil society, international and local actors).
2. **To take a forward-looking perspective**, exploring how volunteering can adapt and innovate to address emerging global challenges and opportunities beyond 2030 (including climate change, inequality, digital

transformation, demographic shifts, and civic participation), while also examining **how volunteering can be more fully recognized, integrated, and valued** within the **future global development agenda**. In addition, the document will:

- Serve as a **reference paper** for the **IVCO 2026 Conference**, providing a shared analytical basis for participants;
- **Provide analytical input** to frame and stimulate discussions throughout the event;
- Highlight **key themes and issues** to guide the conference dialogue across the three main days:
 - **Day 1:** The evolving role of volunteering in development – How volunteering contributes to sustainable development.
 - **Day 2:** Partnerships and enabling environments to strengthen volunteering's contribution to sustainable development.
 - **Day 3:** Accelerating volunteering's contribution to sustainable development in the run-up to 2030 and beyond – Tools, stories, and strategies to increase volunteering's impact and recognition.

This dual analytical and forward-looking approach will ensure that the paper provides both **an evidence base** and **a strategic vision**, supporting informed dialogue and collective reflection during IVCO 2026 and beyond.

5. Key Questions and Thematic Areas

The study will address the following guiding questions:

- **Contribution of Volunteering to SDG Achievement**
How does volunteering, including community-based, informal, and formal engagement across different age groups, contribute to the implementation of the SDGs? Where are the current gaps, and how can greater volunteer engagement help address them in the coming years?
- **Measurement and Evidence**
How can we measure the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs?
- **Engagement and Inclusion**
What strategies and mechanisms can effectively increase the engagement and overall impact of diverse groups of volunteers in advancing the SDGs?
In what ways can volunteering ecosystems evolve to support young people as drivers of innovation and social transformation?
- **Partnership**
In what ways can volunteering strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships and serve as a catalyst for advancing SDG 17?
- **Beyond 2030**
What lessons from the 2030 Agenda can inform the positioning of volunteering in the next generation of global goals? In what ways can volunteering be innovated to address emerging challenges and opportunities beyond 2030? How can volunteering be more effectively recognized and integrated within the post-2030 global development framework?

6. Expected Deliverable

- A **research paper** of approximately **15 pages** (excluding annexes and references);
- **Written in English**, in clear, analytical, and engaging language;
- Structured to support both **practical reflection and strategic discussion** during and after IVCO 2026.

7. Duty Station

The work will be conducted online/home based in coordination with by **Forum** and **France Volontaires**. No travel is envisaged for this consultancy.

8. Suggested Methods and Scope

These will be agreed with the consultant(s) in the inception phase and documented in an inception report. The project will require engagement across the Forum network, and with outside experts, including representatives from stakeholders outside of the volunteering sector.

This project will focus on the particular needs and interests of Forum members and will provide value to the wider volunteering and development sector.

9. Key Sources for Consultation

These will be agreed with the consultant(s), and may include:

1. Existing research, including but not limited to the pieces referenced in 'Background and Rationale' above;
2. Representatives of Forum member organizations – head office and in-country staff; International and National members;
3. Academics with an understanding of funding structures and the research economy;
4. Representatives of in-country partner organizations and other community-based organizations that work with volunteers.

10. Ethics and Risk

We ask that the consultant(s) make clear that their approach will be based on ethical principles. Specifically, the consultant(s) are expected to adopt **an intersectional and gender-sensitive approach**, including gender, age, socio-economic status, disability, and other intersecting factors in results, evidence and storytelling. The analysis must ensure that diverse perspectives are accurately reflected and that structural barriers and inequalities are not reproduced in the research process.

11. Timeline and Coordination

The work should be completed **by the end of May 2026**. The consultant(s) will be invited to present preliminary findings at the Forum IVCO Working Group Meeting in March 2026. A detailed timetable will be agreed with the consultant in the inception phase.

The consultant(s) will work in close coordination with the **Forum Secretariat and France Volontaires** to ensure alignment with IVCO 2026 themes and overall objectives, and validate deliverables.

12. Recruitment process

A **call for applications** will be launched to identify a consultant or a team of consultants. It will **remain open until 26 January 2026 at 11:59 p.m.**, final deadline, and will be widely disseminated through the networks of **Forum, France Volontaires, and partner organizations** to ensure broad outreach across regions.

Submitted applications will be **reviewed by the Forum IVCO Working Group** during its **January 2026 meeting**, based on pre-established selection criteria including relevant research experience, understanding of the global volunteering landscape, and analytical and writing capacity in English.

In line with the principles of inclusivity and global representation that guide both Forum and France Volontaires, **applications from consultants or research teams based in the Global South will be strongly encouraged**.

13. Qualifications and experience required

The consultants selected should have strong knowledge of volunteering in development and of the 2030 Agenda, proven experience in conducting analytical and policy-oriented research, ideally for international organizations, NGOs, or multilateral institutions, and solid experience with qualitative and/or mixed research methods.

14. Expressions of interest

Forum invites expressions of interest from consultants to carry out this work. We are open to expressions of interest from researchers, strategists, and others.

To be considered, please submit an expression of interest, **no more than two pages** please, setting out relevant skills and experience and a brief proposal of how you intend to approach the work, including an indicative timetable and budget, and the consultant(s) resume.

Applications must be submitted **by 26 January 2026 at 11:59 p.m. GMT**, final deadline, to **James O'Brien - jobrien@forum-ids.org**