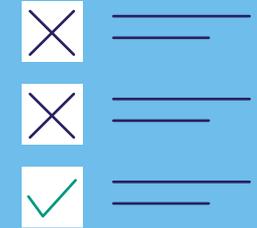


4 ÉDUCATION DE QUALITÉ



MAY 2021

# What Contribution Is International Exchange and Solidarity Volunteering Making to the 2030 Agenda?

*Experimental Study - Focus on SDG 4*





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*Experimental Study – Focus on SDG 4*

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# AVANT-PROPOS: Examining the contribution of IESV to the 2030 Agenda<sup>1</sup>

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*As part of a universal call to action to eliminate poverty, protect the planet, and improve the daily lives of people around the world, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the Member States of the United Nations in September 2015.*

Ten years ahead of time, the 2030 Agenda has become a major concern for all development aid actors, including those of International Exchange and Solidarity Volunteering (IESV) and those involved in civic engagement. This international sustainable development framework is today a benchmark instrument, as a tool of institutional management and influence on public policy, as well as for raising awareness of local and/or global development challenges. It is thus becoming an increasingly essential component in the discourse of volunteering's actors, as well as the subject of projects<sup>2</sup>, internal policies, and logics of influence.

Volunteerism is recognized by the UN as a “powerful and cross cutting means of implementing sustainable development goals. Volunteers have the capacity to mobilize individuals on a national level to help implement development policies. Volunteer groups can provide new spaces of interaction between governments and people (...).”<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, despite this recognition, civic engagement in the broad sense is not mentioned in the 2030 Agenda—nor in its 17 SDGs, its 169 targets, or its 233 indicators. That may seem paradoxical, inasmuch as international volunteering affects all of the SDGs through the diversity of its intervention methods, thematic issues explored, territories impacted, and stakeholders involved—all of which benefits civil societies around the world, thus contributing to the principle of “leave no one behind.”

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<sup>1</sup> This document presents the introductory parts of France Volontaires' study. The full French version is available here : [https://www.france-volontaires.org/app/uploads/2021/06/Etude-VIES\\_Agenda2030-VF\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.france-volontaires.org/app/uploads/2021/06/Etude-VIES_Agenda2030-VF_WEB.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> An example is the “PrODDige” project sponsored by SCD, a member of France Volontaires, a reciprocal volunteering program for the purpose of raising awareness of the SDGs in France and worldwide.

<sup>3</sup> Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, United Nations, 2014, paragraph 131.

This is all the more true in that volunteering is a part of the SDGs' indivisible and interdependent rationale; to achieve the 2030 Agenda, what really needs to be addressed is the interaction between objectives and targets<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the development of "SDG roadmaps," or documents presenting the strategies of the national and regional authorities for achieving SDGs, anchors civic engagement in official and recognized frameworks.

Therefore, how should international volunteerism actors talk about the 2030 Agenda? Has the Agenda upended our practices, and how can we appropriate it? What role does civic engagement play in achieving SDGs, and in transforming and implementing public policies that support the attainment of these objectives? What SDGs are most significant for IESV and to which does the latter contribute the most? How can we measure the impact of volunteering on the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda?

For several years now, these issues have been of particular concern to the sector's actors. However, despite their significant commitment, these actors lack the tangible resources needed to appropriate and integrate this international framework, whether through tools acquired through capitalizations or from surveys, particularly in the French-speaking world.

Concerning volunteerism, several studies on the subject had, for example, been produced within the international network FORUM<sup>5</sup>, in tandem with advocacy strategies to introduce civic engagement into the development framework of the 2030 Agenda. Various approaches had been proposed to measure the contribution of IESV to the 2030 Agenda by integrating specific indicators into one or several SDGs<sup>6</sup>, or by utilizing indicators integral to the *monitoring* of the new framework.<sup>7</sup>

To answer such questions and contribute useful feedback, France Volontaires and 11 of its member organizations<sup>8</sup> decided to undertake an experimental study project focusing on the 2030 Agenda, the results of which are presented in this publication. This project made it possible to inaugurate the work of France Volontaires' study program, whose aim is to assess international volunteering's social utility through the French volunteering system/sector.

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<sup>4</sup>In this regard, the first 2030 Agenda quadrennial scientific assessment report identifies six key interconnections "cross-referencing" SDGs and targets: 1. Strengthening human well-being and capabilities; 2. Shifting towards sustainable and just economies; 3. Building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns; 4. Achieving energy decarbonization and universal access to energy; 5. Promoting sustainable urban and peri-urban development; 6. Securing the global environmental commons. Source: Independent Group of Scientists 2019 appointed by the Secretary-General, *The Future Is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development, Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* (United Nations, New York, 2020). Link: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR\\_report\\_2019.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>Forum (the International Forum for Volunteering in Development) is a global network consisting of 31 organizations involved in international volunteering. The network shares information and resources with its members, develops good practices, and encourages cooperation between stakeholders. For that purpose, it notably promotes and organizes research and studies, and holds the IVCO international conference. <https://forum-ids.org/about/>.

<sup>6</sup>Specifically: Devereux, P., Guse, K., "MDGs, Sustainable Development Goals and the Post 2015 Agenda: opportunities for consolidating the recognition of volunteerism. A discussion paper for IVCO 2012," FORUM, 2012. <https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2012-Discussion-Paper-Post-2015.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup>For example: Chowns, E., Rath, A., "IVCO 2017 Sub-theme paper: Measurement," FORUM, 2017. [https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/IVCO-2017-Sub-Theme-Paper%20%80%94Measurement\\_final-1.pdf](https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/IVCO-2017-Sub-Theme-Paper%20%80%94Measurement_final-1.pdf).

<sup>8</sup>AGIRabcd, ATD Quart Monde, CLONG-Volontariat, DCC, DEFAP, la Guilde, IFAID, Ligue de l'Enseignement, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Region Centre-Val de Loire, SCD.



## A study program for discerning international volunteering's social utility

This publication fits into a specific framework: that of the study program of France Volontaires, who is pursuing an experimentation and analysis mission within its platform. In fact, since its creation in 2009, France Volontaires has embarked on a special knowledge-generation mission that first manifested through an “Observatory for Volunteer and International Solidarity Engagement.” A series of publications has been published, including two “Maps for Volunteer and International Solidarity Commitment.”<sup>9</sup>

France Volontaires’ study program pursues this mission by striving to share the knowledge and expertise of the international volunteer sector’s actors in order to generate knowledge that will be useful to them. Although the study program’s objective is to assess the social utility of international volunteering, through the French volunteering system/sector,

its ambition is to produce knowledge that can be objectified beyond feelings and illustrations.

To that end, France Volontaires and its members developed a pluriannual program addressing various topics: the 2030 Agenda, “reciprocity” and the hosting of international volunteers in France, post-engagement situation in the field, international volunteering and local commitment, etc.

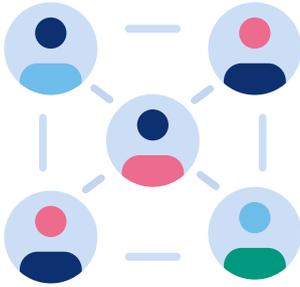
This multi-actor endeavor is being led by France Volontaires, who is spearheading an experimental mode of knowledge generation by involving the members of its platform in the various stages of the projects. Each project is led by a Work Group (WG) consisting of volunteer organizations so as to de-vote some time to study management and follow-up.

The decision to inaugurate this program in tandem with the 2030 Agenda survey was made in consultation with the France Volontaires’ platform by members concerned by the significance of the issue and its urgency, and who wanted to inform the sector’s stakeholders about it as soon as possible, when little knowledge on the subject was available.

This is therefore the first publication produced in this study program. It contains the findings of the survey conducted with *Sociotopie*<sup>10</sup> on the contribution of IESV to the 2030 Agenda, which also describes the results of the first experimental joint knowledge production initiative to place IESV stake-holders at the center of the process.

<sup>9</sup> Leyle D. and Lunel M. (coord.), *Cartographie 2013 des engagements volontaires et solidaires à l'international*, Ivry-sur-Seine: France Volontaires, 2013, p. 104. [http://www.observatoire-volontariat.org/IMG/pdf/cartographie\\_2013\\_engagements\\_volontaires\\_solidaires\\_international.pdf](http://www.observatoire-volontariat.org/IMG/pdf/cartographie_2013_engagements_volontaires_solidaires_international.pdf) and Leroux C. and Pissot O. (coord.), *Cartographie 2017 des engagements volontaires et solidaires à l'international*, Ivry-sur-Seine : France Volontaires, 2017, 111p. <https://www.france-volontaires.org/app/uploads/2020/01/2017-cartographie-engagements-volontaires-solidaires-international-vf-web.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Sociotopie is an applied human and social sciences workshop based in Lille. For additional details on the workshop’s methodology, see <http://sociotopie.fr/>.



## A pragmatic, collaborative, and experimental method

This first survey to be carried out within the scope of the study program is doubly experimental because of its subject (the 2030 Agenda) and its method, which relies on an organizational collective. The 11 members of the 2030 Agenda WG met prior to the survey to “problematize” its purpose; i.e., move from an opening topic to one or several survey questions. Very quickly, the WG stated their **dual ambition**:

- to develop a specific method for monitoring the 2030 Agenda
- to demonstrate the contribution of IESV to the 2030 Agenda.

During a process that spanned eight months, the WG advanced pragmatically, in a series of stages, through various workshops facilitated by France Volontaires. A “cascade” of concerns were clarified, making it possible to:

### 1. Define the purpose of the survey:

Thanks to the 2030 Agenda’s data inventory (studies, resources, projects), and workshops about the subject’s significance for the sector, the WG members chose first to explore the effects and impacts of the projects in which volunteers are involved on the basis of a specific SDG by examining certain targets, to the detriment of other approaches (focusing on the modes of appropriation of the 2030 Agenda by IESV actors, for example).

### 2. Formulate the survey protocol:

The members discussed the survey’s scope to answer a two-part question. First, **survey where?** A territory, a country, an international comparison? Next, **what SDG(s)?** To monitor *the entire 2030 Agenda, or just a specific part of it*, or even make comparisons? These two questions gave rise to key methodological distinctions that had to be put into perspective.

- **What field/Where?** These discussions led to an experimental protocol combining two survey phases: a first, transnational, phase that would target all of the volunteers by means of a survey to quantify their contribution to the 2030 Agenda, followed by a second phase on a national territory, focusing on the work of volunteers assigned to missions matching the surveyed target. Madagascar was chosen as a sufficiently diverse and representative field.
- **What SDGs?** Due to the absence of indicators or targets related to civic engagement in the 2030 Agenda, and the broad diversity of missions, the question of “what to look at” became a critical concern. In a sector in which interdependency

<sup>11</sup>For example, in 2015, 35% of international volunteers enrolled in missions related to education, coaching, or training, as France Volontaires already explained in a booklet devoted to SDG 4. <https://www.france-volontaires.org/app/uploads/2019/09/livret-odd4-education-france-volontaires.pdf>.

prevails, how can the focus be put on a specific issue when all initiatives are interconnected, based upon existing targets? To accomplish this, it was decided to consider a single SDG that would provide an initial avenue to explore, and artificially delineate reality via an experimental method. The SDG chosen seemed to combine a large number of missions and strategic interests: SDG 4 (“Quality Education”). Among ten or so targets, the WG focused on two: Target 4.3 on “Equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education,” and on target 4.5, “Eliminate all discrimination in education”.

- After having calculated the potential number of volunteers concerned, **an indicator was developed** to serve as the core of the experimental survey: the “number of formal or informal teaching or training hours provided by volunteers to young people and adults per year.”

### 3. Using an external consultancy

Lastly, this joint knowledge production work was summarized in a framework memorandum that allowed us to seek a consultancy to externalize part of the survey (it was entrusted to Sociotopie), and, more specifically:

- to assist in formulating the questionnaire, the design and approval of which remained at the WG’s initiative;
- to analyze the questionnaire’s results and conduct the field survey.

It is important to note that this survey was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the health measures and policies that it gave rise to. The schedule, as well as the methodology, had to be adjusted. An ambitious field survey in Madagascar, which was supposed to happen before the summer of 2020, ended up being replaced by a series of interviews—almost all conducted remotely between France and Madagascar in the fourth quarter of 2020—a different approach than the one initially planned, and which could not produce the same results.

Lastly, publication of this field survey and its main findings will open up a new work phase on the subject, thereby providing opportunities for practice-sharing and capitalization, as well as fostering awareness-raising and advocacy initiatives on the contributions of international volunteerism and its ever-growing relevance.



## Presentation of the survey report and its main findings

This publication presents the findings of the survey work undertaken in March 2020 by the WG and Sociotopie, and completed in December 2020. More specifically, it includes the survey report produced by Sociotopie, which will present:

- **the study's general objectives** (first part);
- **the context of the study and the survey profile** (second part);
- **an analytical report centering on the key issues tackled by the study** (third part), and
- **a general conclusion** focusing on the contribution of French international volunteering to the 2030 Agenda.

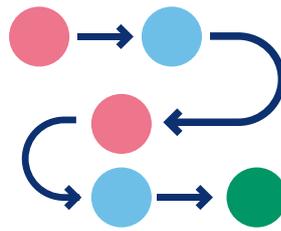
This publication thus makes it possible to bring thought-provoking answers about the link between volunteers and the 2030 Agenda, and the manner in which stakeholders adopt and use the latter, while also delving deeper into the issue by exploring the difficulties involved in monitoring and measuring the contribution of IESV to a specific SDG.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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From March to December 2020, France Volontaires, together with eleven member organizations, piloted a study on the contribution of French international volunteering to the 2030 Agenda, with the assistance of Sociotopie, an applied human and social sciences workshop. The dual purpose of this study was:

- to develop a specific method for monitoring the 2030 Agenda from the vantage point of the French international volunteering sector;
- to demonstrate the contribution of International Exchange and Solidarity Volunteering (IESV) to the 2030 Agenda.



### Methodology

In order to assess this contribution, a more specific scope was chosen. First, the study focused on SDG 4 (“Quality Education”), and its targets, 4.3 and 4.5<sup>12</sup>, in order to begin with a specific field. Additionally, an indicator unique to the survey was developed to provide input for achieving this SDG: “Number of formal or informal teaching or training hours provided by volunteers to young people and adults per year.” It was also decided to make Madagascar the geographic focus of the study.

<sup>12</sup>“Vocational training and higher education,” and “equal opportunities,” respectively. For more information, see: .

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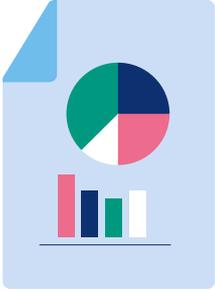
Next, the study was conducted in two survey phases:

- A **questionnaire**-based survey sent to all IESV actors worldwide collected 649 responses from volunteers, 447 of which were complete, mainly from International Solidarity Volunteers (70%), but also from civic service volunteers (18%).<sup>13</sup> The questionnaire dealt with the volunteers' missions and profiles, the way they related to the 2030 Agenda, and their commitment to SDG 4, while testing a method for measuring the impact based on the indicator.
- A survey conducted via **interviews** in France and in Madagascar with IESV actors (9 International Solidarity Volunteers and 7 volunteer hosting or sending partners who are, or were, assigned to Madagascar within the scope of missions related to SDG 4. The interviews delved further into the questionnaires' answers, while pursuing the analysis of various key issues, as described further below.

Note that the **COVID-19 pandemic** health crisis greatly impacted the study by interfering with the anticipated schedule and causing delays in the survey's two phases. This crisis **deeply affected survey plans in the field, in France as well as in Madagascar** (volunteer departures, progress of the missions, problems with meeting individuals to be surveyed, etc.).

Most importantly, **the survey team's trip to Madagascar** planned for the second phase, which was supposed to include a **joint knowledge production workshop** regrouping all of the stakeholders, was cancelled, causing the data collected to be less substantial than initially expected.

<sup>13</sup> But also, close to 7% of the "unpaid staff" (the majority of whom are seniors), and less than 1% are, respectively, trainees, volunteers with ATD Quart Monde, non-supervisory staff, or unsponsored staff, EU program volunteers, etc.



## Main findings

### Between lack of knowledge and recognition of the 2030 Agenda

When asked how much they knew about the 2030 Agenda, close to 60% of the volunteers answered “not at all” and 20% replied “a little.” However, after becoming better acquainted with it, close to 75% considered this framework “operational,” while 90% deemed it useful to varying degrees. These findings reveal a considerable lack of knowledge of the 2030 Agenda, despite a substantial propensity to acknowledge it as “useful” and “operational.”

Several factors contribute to this. First **the volunteers’ starting dates** vary in relation to the recent and increasingly substantial release of information about the 2030 Agenda. In addition, in view of the **extensive training work**—some volunteers have had an opportunity to study the 2030 Agenda, and others have not.

**The sending organization and its training policies** also affect this outcome (fluctuations range from 26% to 93%, depending on the organizations), and so does **the size of the hosting partner**, and its interactions with international donors increasingly focused on applying the 2030 Agenda. Lastly, the volunteers assigned to **“organization” and “coordination” missions** know this UN framework better.

### The Agenda 2030 framework is poorly integrated into stakeholder objectives and the assessment of the added value of volunteering work

The aim of the survey was to show how volunteering is contributing to SDG 4, thanks to a previously developed quantitative indicator. This experimental method revealed the indicator’s limits: the scope was too broad to integrate all of the experiences, the volunteers often could not answer the questions due to a lack of information, or the responses given seemed too disparate. Therefore, the surveyors were confronted with two underlying questions: were asked in the survey: in what framework do the organizations define their objectives? How is the volunteers’ added value assessed?

First, the 2030 Agenda seems under-utilized for developing objectives, **to the detriment of regional, national, or local sustainable development frameworks**. Such an **Agenda seems difficult to translate or incorporate into practice**, when it is not simply unknown—despite a constantly growing awareness of it.

Second, there is a noted **diversity of methods for evaluating volunteers**, since different indicators are being used from one organization to the next, and from one mission to another. These are **often qualitative** (skill-building, project sustainability, etc.) **rather than quantitative** (number of training hours, number of individuals affected by the action, etc.). Furthermore, **many state that the volunteers’ build their added value on the missions’ sidelines**, during leisure moments spent with the local communities with which they sometimes become well-integrated, thereby developing specific capacities such as their interpersonal skills.

## Volunteers' multifaceted contribution exceeds the strict framework of SDG 4

The volunteers surveyed who contribute in one way or another to SDG 4 believe that they are interacting very strongly with other SDGs, and particularly with SDG 5, "Gender Equality" (45%), or SDG 10, "Reduced Inequalities" (43%). Such hybridization, which forms an integral part of volunteering, allows it to contribute more broadly to the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, by the very nature of those interconnected SDGs, assessing the contribution of a single SDG always raises some very challenging methodological hurdles. One case study showed the intrinsic interrelationship between SDGs and the success of a volunteer mission focused on SDG 4.

## Diversity and strength of the volunteer network

**Volunteers contribute to SDG 4 thanks to the joint action of various stakeholders.** By mentioning the role of sending organizations, who prepare the mission and train the volunteers, the survey highlights the importance of including information on the 2030 Agenda in pre-mission training. Conversely, hosting partners can help volunteers to successfully integrate not only into project teams, but into the local communities as well—thereby boosting the volunteer's significant added value. At the same time, when answering questions on how to achieve SDG 4, 66% of the volunteers stressed the key role of occasional stakeholders, and how important the role of local unpaid volunteers often seems to be.

## What volunteers contribute to SDG 4

Several types of volunteer contributions to SDG 4 were measured. First, the **qualitative**, because volunteers seem to be "innovation drivers," often introducing new forms of teaching methods and new tools in what are sometimes demanding local environments. They also contribute to skill-building—especially by reaching a marginalized public, thanks to their close ties to the communities, and sometimes by offering additional educational

and French language classes outside of the "formal" school setting.

Next, are the **mixed** contributions of **quantitative and qualitative** input, when volunteers help with the coaching in development projects, and formalize projects carried out by local partners. The partnerships that volunteers help to strengthen fall into this category, while also fostering potential funding.

The contribution of volunteers to SDG 4, and more generally to the 2030 Agenda, is diversified and occurs on various levels. If this makes it challenging to assess, several courses of action nonetheless seem to be worth pursuing.

## Recommendations and future courses of action

- Formulate some **indicators compatible with volunteerism: "translate" the qualitative indicators** developed during the survey that are unique to volunteering (linked to stakeholder skill-building and innovation) into quantitative indicators (skill transfer, know-how, project support), or build on the countries' National Development Plans (or any other document related to achieving the SDGs);
- Use some **new supports or data sources** to measure this specific contribution: end of assignment reports, systematic assessment cycles, etc.;
- Extend **the study into another field** by **focusing on the viewpoints of other sector stakeholders** (the project beneficiaries, for example);
- Take an interest in the volunteers' critical views about their own missions.
- Enhance the training of the volunteers and the sending and hosting organizations, so that they can **more effectively appropriate the 2030 Agenda, by contextualizing it in terms of local challenges.**

Today, more than five years after its adoption, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an international framework of reference for eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and improving the daily lives of people around the world.

Volunteerism, though not explicitly addressed in the SDGs, targets to be reached, or monitoring indicators, is recognized within the 2030 Agenda's framework document as a stakeholder in the achievement of the 17 SDGs. Moreover, volunteers and volunteer organizations worldwide have demonstrated their daily contributions to more cohesive and sustainable societies by taking concrete actions to meet climate challenges, combat inequalities, improve access to education, and promote gender equality.

Nonetheless, how can international exchange and solidarity actors appropriate the 2030 Agenda framework? What role does citizen engagement play in achieving the SDGs? How can the impact of volunteering on the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda be measured?

**France Volontaires** and **eleven of its member organizations**, along with the human and social sciences workshop **Sociotopie**, have provided some initial answers to these questions through an **experimental study on the contribution of VIES to the 2030 Agenda**, by focusing their attention on **SDG 4: "Quality Education" in Madagascar**.

