

4 ÉDUCATION DE QUALITÉ



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

*Experimental Study -
Focus on SDG 4
Summary Report*



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The purpose of this summary report is to present the main findings of the study on the contribution of International Exchange and Solidarity Volunteering (IESV) to the 2030 Agenda. Before presenting them, we will review the various components used to formulate this survey, as well as the methodology used to conduct it and the impact that the COVID-19 crisis has had on the latter. We will complete this overview with draft recommendations envisaged within the framework of a co-construction workshop with the study's partners.



Initial challenges and launching of the study

Volunteering is recognized 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,” yet it is never mentioned as such, nor as an objective. It was with this in mind that the first “Work Group” (WG) of France Volontaires’ study program initiated a project with the aim of developing tools and methods to observe the contribution of International Exchange and Solidarity Volunteering (IESV) to the 2030 Agenda. This WG, sponsored by France Volontaires, consists of the following organizations: AgirABCD, ATD Quart Monde, CLONG-Volontariat, Délégation

Catholique pour la Coopération (DCC), DEFAP, GREF, France Volontaires, Guilde, IFAID, Ligue de l’Enseignement, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Region Centre-Val de Loire, and Service de Coopération au Développement (SCD).

To that end, the WG adopted an experimental and pragmatic approach: to clarify a specific part of the 2030 Agenda in order to make it more intelligible as a whole. Following extensive discussions, **the object of the survey ultimately focused on SDG 4 (“access to a quality education”), and namely two of its specific targets: 4.3 (Equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education) and 4.5 (Eliminate all discrimination in education).** These were then translated by the WG into a **referent indicator** in order to demonstrate the contribution to these targets in an effort to inscribe the impact of IESV and correlate it with this SDG: “*Number of formal or informal teaching or training hours provided by volunteers to young people and adults per year.*” With this in mind, and to document IESV’ contribution to the 2030 Agenda, two distinct but complementary study phases were implemented.



Survey protocol and methodology

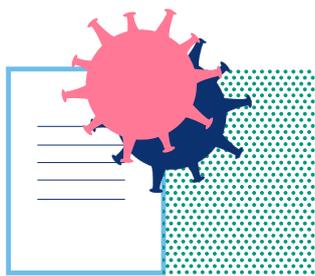
A first study phase, conducted via an online questionnaire, was launched transnationally and sent to all volunteers of France Volontaires' member organizations, as well as to volunteers of International Solidarity Volunteers (ISV)-accredited organizations, and also through Volunteering Spaces, that met a certain number of criteria.

The objective of this first phase was to quantitatively show what volunteers contribute to SDG 4—notably by feeding the data provided into the above-mentioned indicator. From the 649 volunteers who responded to the questionnaire, we collected a total of 447 complete responses.

These responses not only made it possible to have a better grasp of what IESV has contributed to the 2030 Agenda through multiple input sources, but also revealed some gray areas (mainly concerning the indicator developed by the WG).

In order to delve into these results and explore the courses of action that they had outlined, a qualitative, interview-based second study phase was conducted in a specific country: **Madagascar**. This methodological choice was justified by the fact that education there is a priority development item in its National Development Plan, as well as by the substantial number of volunteers in this territory.

For consistency's sake, and to ensure continuity, volunteers remained the prime targets of this stage, although other sending and hosting organizations were also included in it. In total, 9 International Solidarity Volunteers (ISV), and 7 organizational stakeholders representing the statutes of ISV, Civic Service (CS) and Exchange and Competencies Volunteers (ECV), were surveyed in semi-directed interviews averaging one hour each.



Impact of COVID-19 on survey methodology and protocol

As was the case everywhere, this study was greatly disrupted by the global crisis caused by COVID-19, which imposed many methodological and practical

changes—especially for the second study phase. The latter, which was expected to begin in the field in Madagascar in April 2020, had to be cancelled for reasons related to the pandemic, and rescheduled in France. Later, a second confinement period disrupted the survey work again, which is why most of the interviews ultimately had to be conducted via videoconferencing and telephone.

The comprehensive methodological approach initially planned ended up being dismantled and stripped of its main tools: observations, focus groups, and a joint brainstorming workshop to make recommendations and present the first results to the study's participants. Under such circumstances, it was impossible to attain all of the anticipated results.



Findings of the study

Presented below are the findings of both phases of the study. Each of the following subsections begins with the answers drawn from the survey analysis and the main conclusions that emerged at that time; each of the subsections is then expanded upon and developed further, based on the input from the qualitative study.

Volunteers' "formal" lack of knowledge about the 2030 Agenda

Through our analysis of the questionnaires, we learned that IESV volunteers had only a slight knowledge of the 2030 Agenda. In fact, 57.98% of the respondents stated that they did not know it "at all." However, after reading information about it, most of them considered it "useful" and "operational," thereby revealing a major lack of appropriation of this framework. The qualitative survey work then enabled us to bring some explanatory elements to bear regarding this bias.

First, the sharing of information on the 2030 Agenda is relatively new: there seems to be a correlation between the volunteers' departure date and their knowledge of the SDGs. We also noted that the extent of their appropriation differs depending on their profiles, the missions they are completing, and the size of the organizations in which they are working. Those volunteers who know the Agenda best generally learned about it during their studies, and most of them were involved in "organization" and "coordination" activities, rather than working directly in training activities. It also seems that the larger the hosting organizations (notably in terms of staff), the more familiar the volunteers are with the 2030 Agenda (their interactions with institutional partners necessarily being more frequent).

Nonetheless, even as the logic of the SDGs begins to be assimilated, volunteers still consider the field

"distant" and "out of touch" with the 2030 Agenda's goals. These core data highlight a pressing need to "contextualize" the 2030 Agenda in terms of the reality of the volunteers' experience in the field. In this respect, additional training in "interculturality" seems to be needed and desired by the volunteers in order to remediate their obvious lack of integrational and operational efficiency in the field. Without that training, it would seem challenging to even think about the 2030 Agenda, in view of how disconnected from its objectives the field appears to be.

Volunteers' objectives and internal evaluation

In line with this lack of knowledge, the first analysis had revealed the fact that **very few volunteers were correlating their objectives, and those of their organizations, with the 2030 Agenda, focusing instead on national, regional, or even local frameworks.** We were committed to exploring this further to see if they were actually imbricated in other, larger, frameworks. We were also interested in how to measure the volunteers' added value in terms of these objectives, in order for us to demonstrate their contribution.

The indicator developed by the WG proved somewhat limited, in this exercise, inasmuch as a distribution of the "Number of formal or informal teaching or training hours provided by volunteers to young people and adults per year" yielded very uneven results, according to the volunteers and

organizations involved (ranging from a dozen to millions of hours for some).

The qualitative survey allowed us to demonstrate that the organizations as a whole were having difficulties translating and framing their objectives within the 2030 Agenda—thus in effect referring more generally to national, regional and local goals— if not to the “*basic*” needs of populations in their territories. This reality underscores the fact that there is still a lack of knowledge and appropriation of the SDGs on the part of volunteer hosting organizations. Although some refer to them directly, most of them do not, thus having only a “*truncated*” view of their overall contribution.

Therefore, **the advocacy and communication work done—particularly by France Volontaires—is often acknowledged to be a vital lever for raising awareness. Such efforts may indeed enhance the organizations’ inclination to use the SDGs as a framework to showcase initiatives led by players in this sector.**

As for the methods by which volunteers are being evaluated internally, we have observed that they are all different, and counted as many of them as there are missions and hosting organizations with specific objectives.

None of the individuals surveyed mentioned the number of hours taught or authorized, stressing **the need to transcend the indicator developed by the WG**. Evaluations are based more on “qualitative” indicators (skill-building, project sustainability, partnerships, etc.), than on “quantitative” ones (percentage of population, number of hours, etc.). **According to hosting organizations, the added value of volunteers resides rather in their “interpersonal skills” and their “professional expertise” in organization and coordination.**

Volunteers’ multifaceted contribution

From the completed analysis of the questionnaires, it was evident that a large portion of the activity, and thus of the volunteers’ impact, **exceeded the strict scope of SDG 4**, highlighting the **need to more closely examine the SDGs’ interconnections and interrelations within the volunteers’ missions** in order to shed light on this core element and get a

better grasp the volunteers’ overall contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

The interviews allowed us to show that these missions still represent an idiosyncratic reality (according to the purpose of the project, the location in which the mission is completed, the cultural, economic and social environment, and the public or fields targeted by the various actions undertaken), which may indicate that the training/ educational activities provided or facilitated by volunteers constitute only part of their contribution to SDG 4 and to implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There is a sort of intrinsic relation between the various elements that should be demonstrated. To do this, we relied on a case study of one volunteer’s mission, which brought into focus some issues shared by all of the persons surveyed.

This volunteer’s “*core mission*” truly resides in SDG 4 (she is an educational coordinator in an NGO). Her work, however, is highly diversified and ultimately fits the criteria of a broader contribution to the 2030 Agenda. Before being able to work within the scope of SDG 4, extensive prior work must be performed (SDG 1 – setting up student scholarships, SDG 6 – access to water in training sites, SDG 17 – research and implementation of partnerships/funding). This preliminary stage is crucial in establishing the conditions necessary to carry out the primary “*core mission*.” The latter subsequently has numerous direct and indirect repercussions on a much wider set of SDGs:

- Short-term, on SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), by offering a healthy and safe environment that meets the targeted public’s basic needs.
- Then, in the medium and long term, on SDG 1 (No Poverty), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), by reducing inequalities, by promoting more efficient vocational integration, and, consequently, by reducing poverty and by facilitating peace processes between the various communities. To envisage the contribution of volunteers within this framework, it must be understood as a whole, and not in isolation.

Diversity and strength of the volunteer network

For over 66% of the survey respondents, the number of occasional stakeholders in a one-year period ranged from 2 to 10. Conversely, since 75% of the volunteers are involved in organization, management, and coordination, the contribution of a variety of actors is essential in implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDG 4. Although we cannot precisely measure this contribution (at least not quantitatively), the latter needs to be evaluated factually to reveal this key and consubstantial “*hidden side of the iceberg*.”

First, **the essential preliminary role of the sending organizations:** it is they who “*select*” volunteers by meeting the requirements of given “*mission statements*.” This first stage, as well as the trainings provided prior to deployment in the field, are indicators of the successful implementation of the volunteering (and thus also of its potential contribution to the SDGs).

Next, **hosting organizations are central to the equation.** They facilitate the entry of volunteers into a new environment and team (usually comprised

While volunteers work primarily in the management and coordination of training activities, the contribution of numerous external actors directly contributes to the implementation and impact of volunteers on the achievement of SDG 4 and the 2030 Agenda. This contribution stems mainly from the multiple partnership relationships characterizing the volunteer ecosystem

of Malagasy wage earners). Even if the volunteers are more often involved in the coordinating, training, and coaching activities of these teams, the latter facilitate a smoother integration, as well as provide privileged access to the field and to local stakeholders—thus allowing them to more effectively complete their assignment. This

creates a sort of “*innate*” interdependent relationship that is key to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

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contributes to the implementation and impact of volunteers on the achievement of SDG 4 and the 2030 Agenda. This contribution stems mainly from the multiple partnership relationships characterizing the volunteer ecosystem.

Local unpaid volunteers, some of whom may include external stakeholders, are very important in the field.

Volunteers may be considered the “cornerstones” of volunteerism. Not only because of the stakeholder management and coordination component previously mentioned, but also due to their translation work and ability to adequate the various rationales characterizing volunteerism Although the core mission of surveyed volunteers is, no doubt, teaching and training in a “formal” framework, “informal” time spent “outside” the scope of the mission is also

considered important. It is on these occasions that local unpaid volunteers mainly intervene, thereby helping to attain the organizations’ objectives.

Lastly, volunteers may be considered the “*cornerstones*” of volunteerism. Not only because of the stakeholder management and coordination component previously mentioned, but also due to their translation work and ability to adequate the various rationales characterizing volunteerism. On one side, there are guidelines set up by hosting organizations, on another, those of international donors who partially fund their activity and project development, and finally those of local, regional and/or national public authorities. It is where these three areas intersect that the work of volunteers can be viewed as the most important, because it is they who make it possible to reconcile these various rationales with the needs and field-based realities of the local partners—the principal beneficiaries of the actions taken. Thanks to that, a consistent and efficient development can be envisaged.

Volunteers’ contribution to SDG 4

The contributions of volunteers to this SDG are of three different types: qualitative, quantitative and “mixed.”

The first, “qualitative,” is mainly associated with “direct” training and educational activities: the volunteers are “*innovation drivers*,” enabling the Malagasy education model to evolve by introducing new forms of pedagogy and new tools (including IT), thus substantially improving educational outcomes. They also do key work by building local stakeholder skills (via vocational training) and provide for a “*cultural diversity*” that promotes progress in teaching methods and deontology—thus ensuring more effectiveness and overall efficiency.

“Non-formal” and “informal” educational and training activities are this contribution’s primary manifestations. Lastly, the latter play a major role in

Taking into account all of these elements, it is obvious that volunteers’ contribution is highly diversified (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) and intervenes at multiple levels (education/training, organization, skill-building, management, etc.)

the pursuit of school courses for the audiences for whom they are designed, by promoting French learning outside of the “formal” school setting, especially during extracurricular hours. A small portion of the Malagasy population speak fluent French, including teachers; however, it is the language of instruction as of the third grade. The contribution of the volunteers thus represents a resource and essential complement to Madagascar’s national education system, which contributes to the success of the overall educational model.

Volunteers also contribute through their two-dimensional quantitative and “mixed” input—this time in the form of coordinating, organizational, and skill-building activities. As such, they play a key coaching role in facilitating development projects related to education and training. Armed with their “professional expertise,” and “interpersonal skills,” they support the formulation, implementation, and organization of projects carried out by local partners.

These same qualities, coupled with their “French” status—highly regarded in Madagascar—help to strengthen local, regional, national, and international partnerships. They also contribute by helping to facilitate funding from international institutions and donors, ultimately making it possible to create a wider range of educational programs offering an ideal framework for advancing SDG 4’s objectives in Madagascar.

Taking into account all of these elements, it is obvious that volunteers’ contribution is highly diversified (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) and intervenes at multiple levels (education/training, organization, skill-building, management, etc.). By definition, this plurality can scarcely be appropriated and measured by a sole indicator—like the one developed by the WG. To propose an alternative valid enough to encompass all of the contributions provided by volunteers to SDG 4, while addressing all the challenges presented in this study, would seem, in this context, to be a rather complex undertaking.



Key points gleaned from recommendations made by WG members during the joint workshop

This workshop was structured around three key questions:

- How can the volunteers' contribution to SDG 4 be recognized more effectively?
- How can the volunteers' contribution to the 2030 Agenda/and other SDGs be broadly measured?
- What courses of action should be taken to achieve more effective validation and appropriation of the 2030 Agenda?

The objective of these joint discussions was to outline some courses of recommended action, as well as to plan the next phase of the program addressing the issues raised by this study.

The volunteers' contribution to SDG 4 can be enhanced by translating the "qualitative" indicators highlighted during the second study phase (stakeholder skill-building, innovation input) into "quantitative" indicators (skill transfer, expertise and coaching). Once promoted by the hosting organizations, these specific elements and aspects could then easily be extended to other SDGs, and to the entire 2030 Agenda. New "quantitative"

indicators could also be developed based on the objectives defined in the countries' National Development Plans. Data gathered as part of the volunteers' end-of-mission reports, or of systematic assessment cycles directly related to the attainment of the SDGs, could feed those indicators.

It was also noted that this study could be extended to other mission fields, taking into account the viewpoints of volunteerism's other stakeholders (notably the "beneficiaries" of activities carried out by the volunteers), in order to have a broader understanding of their contribution. That would also allow the main findings of the second qualitative study phase to be tested and the volunteers' contributions to be examined in a more thorough and factual manner. Lastly, the volunteers' critical view of their own contributions and missions seems important, and would deserve to be *«investigated and validated»*.

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**.

