

EU-LAC Webinar:

"Challenges and innovations to promote voluntary service in the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean in a post-COVID19 context"

The webinar "Challenges and innovations to promote voluntary service in the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean in a post-COVID19 context" took place on September 14, 2020. The webinar was organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Technical Ministry for Economic and Social Development Planning from Paraguay.

The event began with the institutional greetings from Santiago Rojas, Director of International Relations and External Cooperation and Interim Secretary General of the National Ministry for Youth (SNJ) from the Government of Paraguay, and from Adrian Bonilla, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation.

The following panel included Daysi Hume, President of the National Voluntary Service Council (CONAVO) from Paraguay; Rocío Vergara Chalhoub, National Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteer Program (UNV) in Ecuador; Stefany Paez, Coordinator of France Volontaires in Ecuador; Rolando Kandel, Deputy Director of the Fundación SES and Vice President for America of the Coordination Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS); and Sofía Mejía, Manager for Voluntary Programmes and Global Campaign of Habitat for Humanity International, Latin America and the Caribbean Office. The webinar was moderated by Eunice Rivas, representative of the Technical Ministry of Planning of Paraguay.

Greetings from the Institutions

Santiago Rojas, Director of International Relations and External Cooperation and Acting Secretary General of the National Youth Secretariat (SNJ) of the Government of Paraguay

Representing 27.79% of the population, the National Youth Secretariat has the mission to work with and for young people in various areas, promoting the participation of youth in the political, social, economic and cultural development of the country.

From a social point of view and under the regulatory framework of Law 6,060/2018 which regulates volunteering, the Secretariat seeks to encourage young beneficiaries of the Youth Scholarship Programme to carry out social return activities, which address the particular needs of their communities. Among the projects to be carried out are plastic collection campaigns, cleaning of watercourses, and reforestation campaigns with native plants.

One area of particular focus is young people who have specialized abroad. Within the programme, we seek to encourage these beneficiaries to have the opportunity to share their knowledge; either through the Revista Científica de la Juventud, or through small lectures and training workshops, which are currently being held virtually in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The health crisis emphasizes the need to provide more opportunities and tools to young people, as well as to create the necessary stimuli to empower them to share their experiences, skills, knowledge and services with the community.

Adrián Bonilla, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation

The EU-LAC Foundation is an international and intergovernmental organisation, made up of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union. Founded in 2011, it aims to link civil society actors from both regions with decision-makers in the member countries, and to increase the visibility of this dialogue between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Foundation works with a variety of social issues, among which the youth has been one of the most important. In 2015, the First Youth Day was organised in Quito, a meeting of young people to discuss the matter of youth employment. The Second Youth Day took place in 2019, focusing on the promotion of volunteering; a subject the Foundation is committed to continue working on in the future. Unfortunately, given the situation regarding COVID-19, it has been necessary to postpone the Third Conference in Asunción until 2021; the Foundation will then be able to once again provide a space that brings together the greatest number of people interested in volunteering to continue working on this subject.

Today's webinar answers the question: How to sustain this initiative to support the needs of societies in the era of COVID-19? We are at a very difficult moment, and the coming years are going to present a series of challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean and for the European Union, including the global recession and diminishing resources. It is necessary to consider all these possibilities, to agree, plan and advance with public health policies in order to achieve the Social Development Objectives set for 2030: objectives of balance, social cohesion, greater equality, poverty reduction and more equality in all our countries. For this reason, and understanding it as a subject of systematic and organized work, volunteering is a very important tool, an instrument of the people and of governments, and a link between the needs of societies and the capacities and realities of states.

Panels

Daysi Hume, President of the National Volunteer Council (CONAVO) of Paraguay:

The National Volunteer Council (CONAVO) of Paraguay is the institution under the Technical Secretariat for Economic and Social Development Planning responsible for promoting national volunteer policy. Created in 2018 with the approval of Law 6,060/2018 which regulates voluntary citizen participation, the CONAVO is responsible for establishing the necessary mechanisms to facilitate the registration of volunteer organisations in the National Register of Volunteers. Likewise, it ensures that the different actors involved in volunteer programmes are aware of the law and improve the conditions of volunteers. The CONAVO is eligible to receive financial and technical support from international technical cooperation agencies, as well as funding for programmes from State bodies.

In its organisation, CONAVO is a public institution of mixed composition. It has fourteen councillors, who represent various institutions and sectors of society. Among them are five representatives of the executive branch, while the rest represent public and private universities and civil society organisations.

The institution has eight objectives:

- 1) To support the organisation and expansion of volunteer service
- 2) To promote the inclusion of volunteering in development plans
- 3) To coordinate volunteering schemes through appropriate communication policies between regional organisations
- 4) To define policies for the promotion, support, cooperation, coordination and articulation between volunteer organisations
- 5) To improve the quality of voluntary services, thus avoiding the exploitation of volunteers and generating humane working conditions
- 6) To propose and recommend incentive policies for volunteering
- 7) To propose and recommend legislative reforms concerning volunteering, adapting the legislation to current times

- 8) Coordinate with the various civil society organisations, as well as public and private institutions to promote their participation in the development of the volunteer service.

Furthermore, CONAVO has identified three main challenges for the promotion and development of volunteerism. Firstly, it is necessary to work so that volunteering is perceived as a tool for building citizen awareness that contributes to national development, and not just as an activity carried out by citizens individually. The second challenge is to build social capital that promotes a supportive, free and equal society, using volunteering as a tool for generating empathy and reducing inequality in society. Finally, the third challenge is to ensure that volunteering is encouraged in society through state and civil society mechanisms.

To this end, the Council suggests two specific actions. First, to work towards the development of public policies and the regulation of Law 6,060/2018, thereby developing a regulatory framework that will lead to the creation of a Regulatory Decree. Second, the CONAVO should assume a leading role as a link between the state and civil society, combining and coordinating the efforts of the various actors.

Sofia Mejia, Manager of the Volunteering Programmes and Global Campaign for Habitat for Humanity International, Latin America and the Caribbean Office

Habitat for Humanity is a global, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, working in more than 70 countries worldwide. Since its establishment in 1976, Habitat has worked with more than 29 million people around the world to facilitate the construction or improvement of their homes. The institution seeks to empower families through housing, using a variety of projects as a tool, including the construction of low-cost housing, influencing public policy for decent housing, influencing the housing market and financial systems, and supporting preparedness and response to disasters.

Habitat is a global institution, based in Atlanta, Georgia. It has several area offices for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in Costa Rica, for Europe, the Middle East and Africa

(EMEA) in Slovakia, and for Asia-Pacific (AP) in the Philippines. In the LAC region, Habitat has 13 national organisations and specific projects or partnerships in four countries - Dominica, Ecuador, Panama and Costa Rica. In 2019, Habitat supported 2 million people, mobilising 2 million volunteers each year to support the projects globally. In LAC, these volunteers contributed approximately US\$5 million to the local economies of the countries they worked in.

The pandemic brought about new challenges for Habitat, exposing the social inequalities in the region even more dramatically. Before COVID-19, 84% of the population lived in cities, of which 21% - almost 100 million people - lived in poverty, inadequate housing or settlements with little access to drinking water or sanitation (ECLAC 2018) - when considering the urban and rural population, the percentage of people living below the poverty line rose to 30%. Additionally, 53% of the population worked in the informal sector.

The consequences of the pandemic have exacerbated the situation. Since the beginning of the crisis, millions of people have lost their livelihoods due to COVID-19, increasing the percentage of the population living in poverty. In response, Habitat has developed the "Housing, Communities + Hope" campaign. To address the situation, this campaign focuses on improving access to water and housing, which are necessary for isolation and the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19. As such, Habitat is committed to working with communities to contain the transmission of COVID-19, and particularly to ensure that people affected by the economic crisis as a result of the pandemic are not forced to leave their homes and expose themselves to the risk of infection.

For this purpose, the campaign has three main lines of work, seeking to provide a dual response to the crisis. Firstly, actions to address the health crisis, considering that housing is the first line of defence against the transmission of COVID-19. Secondly, measures to counteract the economic crisis, supporting the economic recovery of the housing market in favour of the most vulnerable population, and the use of the leverage of housing as an economic engine for recovery. Thirdly, advocacy and measures to support communities to demand accountability from national, regional and local governments.

The pandemic has also affected how Habitat relates to volunteers and communities. Due to their face-to-face nature and high levels of contact, volunteer programmes worldwide had to be paused. However, as the need continues, it is essential to reinvent and find new ways to connect with volunteers and communities. In order to achieve this, several mechanisms have been identified, including empowering families and community leaders, building resilience in communities, using different approaches and lines of support, and continuing the commitment to build together and support communities.

Two examples of these alternative approaches to volunteering are Paraguay and Brazil. The Paraguay national office is working extensively on communication at the local level in the settlements and 'bañados' - the neighbourhoods located in flood-prone areas in Asunción - to inform and raise awareness about the virus and thus prevent its spread. In addition, the Paraguay office signed an agreement with more than 20 organisations and the national government to work with community referrals and volunteers; this initiative aims to train community members, to increase outreach without exposing either volunteers or communities.

Other projects include the installation of 300 community sinks, the delivery of hygiene kits to 350 families and the installation of health posts, always working in line with the ODS-11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities. Likewise, sanitation and water have been prioritised, as well as support for the development of protocols in collaboration with other organisations at a national level in Paraguay.

In Brazil, several large digital campaigns were carried out, including the 'Uma Mão Lava Outra' campaign, through which 310 community batteries were installed to help favelas and other settlements. Also, hygiene kits were distributed nationally through community referrals, even in places where there was no previous Habitat access or presence. Finally, a project was implemented to support families of young people who contracted Zika during the 2015 epidemic by providing individualized hygiene kits considering the particular needs of these families.

Seeking to raise funds, the volunteers, volunteer ambassadors and influencers in Brazil also organised for the first time a live music festival via Facebook and YouTube, resulting in the creation of a support fund. In addition, the first pilot project of face-to-face volunteering was conducted by staff of the institution, to evaluate the possibility of safely re-establishing on-site volunteering activities. Several other projects were implemented, including the installation of urban mini-cisterns in settlements, as well as collaboration with other organisations and the establishment of alliances, for example by participating in sectoral roundtables to reach more families.

Rolando Kandel, Deputy Director for the Fundación SES and Vice President for America of the Coordination Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS)

Voluntary service is a broad field, within which exist several types of service. Created in 1948 under the auspice of UNESCO, the Coordination Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) focuses on promoting international voluntary service. This type of voluntary service arose 100 years ago, with the end of the First World War; in 1920, groups of volunteers from Germany and France built reconstruction camps in areas damaged by the conflict, which served also as a form of reconciliation. Since then, the international voluntary service acquired a meaning as a tool for peace-building promotion.

The CCIVS is a network that encompasses 188 social organisations in over 90 countries, working on areas of sustainable development and human rights; annually, they mobilise over 30.000 volunteers from around the world. The core principle of the organisation is the bringing together of diversities; the CCIVS considers that it is fundamental to respect and value the differences, as a fundamental source of learning, both for the volunteers and for the communities.

The CCIVS facilitates opportunities for young volunteers to travel to distant countries or regions to provide a service for the community. With the collaboration of local organisations, it aims to encourage young people to carry out significant actions respectful of local dynamics for a determined period of time. There are short term voluntary service camps, through which volunteers can work two weeks intensively on specific projects.

Additionally, there are medium and long term projects, linked to broad community projects that can last up until one year. The activities of volunteers are varied, and can include educational, cultural, heritage restoration or housing projects; as well as thematic projects, covering topics such as integration, gender inequality reduction, anti-violence or refugee support.

Besides the particular goals of each project, CCIVS strives that through their service, volunteers work alongside volunteers from other countries and local volunteers to encourage cultural exchanges and learning. It promotes that volunteers interact with one another and share their perspectives, traditions and cultures, using the daily tasks and common goals of the project as the basis for dialogue. By collaborating on a common project, the goal is to have opportunities to work for a common purpose using their own capabilities and learn through practical experience.

In addition to coordinating the projects, the CCIVS seeks to increase the visibility of voluntary services. In cooperation with various organisations, the committee organise communication campaigns and studies on the impact of voluntary service. Through the various voluntary activities, young people develop a higher self-confidence and strengthen their interpersonal and social skills; they learn collectively and through their own actions that it is possible to create change that has an impact on their surroundings, as can be seen in the following testimonies.

“For me, voluntary service is an opportunity to meet one another, to share and learn together, to empathize and be solidary. It is also an opportunity to be a part of change, to be and spread hope. Volunteering helped me to realize and appreciate my value and my abilities. It gave me the chance to challenge myself, it brought me friends, many lessons, skills and languages, and allowed me to encounter new realities and thanks to that, to see things differently, with a new look and being more tolerant” (Agustina, volunteer in Italy)

“I believe that the main part of a voluntary service is its work for the common good, through which it can transmit the sense of cooperation and encourage acting from a social responsibility standpoint without imposition. That makes it so that every

contribution is unique. Personally, being a volunteer showed me the grace of helping others; being willing to give a hand is fine, but doing so by working together with others and getting to know them, reconnects with the most human parts, and gives sense to everything.” (Melina, volunteer in Iceland)

One of the visibility activities is the Voluntary Service Congress. The first edition took place in 2018 in Buenos Aires, where over 300 representatives of institutions and volunteers participated. The second edition is planned to take place virtually on October 14-16, and will focus on three lines: education and voluntary services, intercultural volunteering and global citizenship, and voluntary services policies and challenges during the pandemic and afterwards.

The current situation has created marked difficulties for international voluntary services. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the ongoing problems in the communities due to inequalities, the increase of violence and the consequences of climate change; in addition to these problems, the communities now have to face food challenges caused by a reduction in incomes, as well as the sanitary issues. Nonetheless, the crisis has not suspended voluntary activities; on the contrary, they have increased due to the rising need, though in different formats, suited to the circumstances.

Due to the need to adapt the activities rapidly since the pandemic started, international voluntary service trips were interrupted and the organisations are currently relying on local volunteer structures. Moreover, distance voluntary activities have increased, through which volunteers in other countries can continue to participate. There have been several activities in this field, including communication campaigns, as well as management activities for emergency funds and school support.

Online meetings are particularly important, since they preserve interpersonal connections and allow for complex experiences lived during the pandemic to be shared. These connections allow the volunteers to not feel isolated and that there are persons around the world who are living similar situations, despite different contexts. Some examples of projects carried out in this form are the project ‘Hágalo Usted Mismo’ - where volunteers

learn to make ecological cleaning products and natural cosmetics recycling clubs, and various projects related to language learning.

The current juncture has emphasized the need to strengthen public policies to ensure the access to connectivity. Given the transition towards digital activities, it is increasingly important to guarantee connectivity, access to equipment and to a stable internet connection. Access to the internet is fundamental, since it allows access to other rights. For instance, within the educational sphere, education systems have been forced to interrupt physical teaching formats, but they continue to offer classes virtually. However, it is necessary for students to have an adequate internet connection for them to be able to participate in their classes.

In Argentina, the CCIVS has implemented the programme 'Subir al Sur', through which the organisation supports secondary school students with difficulties to connect to the internet or to use digital tools. Volunteers support the students and their families - virtually in most cases, or with the appropriate precautions if the volunteers are part of the community - so they can learn to use digital tools in a self-sufficient manner. The goal is not only to give students the necessary tools to have access to education, but also to guarantee the contact with students and avoid school dropout, one of the main educational problems in Latin America.

In addition to the current challenges derived from the pandemic, the international voluntary service faces two constant challenges. In the first place, there is a need to increase the visibility of voluntary services in Latin America, particularly encouraging the exchange of volunteers between countries of the same region. The second challenge is the continuous need to develop public policies, both to foster voluntary service and to guarantee the protection of volunteers; it is important that projects are suited to existing public policies in each country. Yet, in this challenging context, the aim is that the voluntary service is seen as an opportunity to create a new citizenship, where the individual is a collective citizen, with empathy and critical thinking, and conscious of their social and natural environment.

Stefany Páez, Coordinadora de France Volontaires en Ecuador

France Volontaires is a French association created ten years ago with the mission of promoting the exchange and international solidarity through volunteering, from France to the world. Since then, this mission has evolved at par with voluntary service itself, allowing for the organisation to mobilise French volunteers internationally since 2012, and establishing reciprocal voluntary service programmes since 2015. These programmes provide opportunities for foreign volunteers to be mobilised to France and participate in development projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). France Volontaires seeks to increase the mobility of voluntary services, with the objective of building a concept of universal volunteerism, in order to strengthen the cooperation between States, the promotion of solidarity and exchanges, and the construction of a global citizenship.

Furthermore, it aims to create solid voluntary service ecosystems at a national and international level; that is, volunteer networks developed in each country in different areas, with legal frameworks, a solid institutionality, with financing, strong associative networks and training programmes that support volunteers before, during and after their experience. This would allow to develop quality missions for the volunteers, considering the contributions of national actors and the potential that exists in complementing national and international volunteerism.

To achieve this, France Volontaires created a network of collaborators that includes the French diplomatic representations, and 40 French international voluntary service organisations. The establishment of these cooperation networks has been fundamental to achieve the objectives of the organisation, by strengthening the cooperation and international solidarity ties, promoting the mobilisation of volunteers, the exchange of experiences and common knowledge, and the support of sustainable development. In this sense, the purpose of France Volontaires is to inform and accompany the volunteers, create networks between them and the organisations and generate spaces for dialogue on this topic.

These network efforts are done at several levels. Within the organisation, there is a network of 23 offices worldwide, known as volunteer spaces. The organisation has regional representatives, both in France and in the continents where it works. Additionally, France Volontaires has established a network of volunteers and ex volunteers that remain in contact after finishing their service.

Outside the organisation, they collaborate with French organisations in the same platform, as well as with international and local organisations that receive French volunteers to collaborate with their development projects. International voluntary service is concentrated in Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. France Volontaires has been present in Latin America for eight years through two regional offices, in Peru and in Ecuador, mobilizing an average of 700 volunteers per year. Regarding reciprocal voluntary service, the association closely collaborates with Germany and Norway, looking to replicate the good practices of these countries in other European countries.

Seeking to understand the volunteer ecosystem in Latin America, France Volontaires Ecuador, with the support of the French Regional Cooperation, France Volontaires Peru, the Embassy of France in Ecuador, and the Latinoamerican Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) organised the regional seminar 'A World in Movement: Development, Cooperation and International Solidarity through Volunteering'. This summit took place in November 2019 in Quito, and included the participation of State and civil society actors from Colombia, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay. The participants shared experiences and different approaches regarding regional challenges for the development of voluntary services and the fulfillment of the Agenda 2030 commitments; the discussions covered topics such as the role of voluntary services in social cohesion, sustainable development, national and local public policies, good practices and social innovations in volunteerism, alliances and networking, among others.

This encounter recognised the potential existing in the region in the field of voluntary services through the exchange of experiences and to identify voluntary service organisations worldwide, who work in different manners, but have a common goal: the

development of volunteerism. This diversity in the perspectives is a strength for creating joint projects or programmes, strengthening the capabilities of organisations, and promoting the establishment of new national networks. That was the case of Ecuador, where the summit fostered the creation of a new voluntary service network with the participation of referential organisations and which also includes new organisations and areas.

Another significant result of the regional seminary was the creation of a solidarity fund for innovative projects, supported by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs in cooperation with France Volontaires. The main objective is to energize the mobilisation of volunteers within the five countries in the region, through studies on voluntary work, the development of projects to strengthen the capabilities of organisations, the support to innovative initiatives and the development of voluntary missions. This project is still being developed, and the strategies and best partners are yet to be established; however, it is an example of the importance of a cooperation between the State and the civil society in developing a solid ecosystem that strengthens the cooperation and international solidarity. Because its mandate is part of an international policy from the French State, France Volontaires receives strong support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This public-private alliance has ensured that, thanks to the efforts of various actors, quality voluntary service missions have been developed.

The experience, support, will and convergence of various actors have allowed volunteerism to strengthen. This regional seminar brought together several committed actors and allowed the exchange of experiences, knowledge and good practices in the field, which will be reflected in a publication. Voluntary service needs to generate knowledge; there have been several experiences and lessons learned through the work of the organisations, but there has not been a consolidation of all the information. The challenge now is to create a repository of this information that allows any interested actor to have access and use this knowledge.

Rocío Vergara Chalhoub, National Coordination of the United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) in Ecuador

The current scenario poses enormous challenges that emphasize the need to rethink volunteerism as a fundamental tool for sustainable development and the fulfillment of the Agenda 2030. Recognising this, in the last year the United Nations have approved a series of resolutions on volunteerism which, being approved by the member states, strengthen the impulse of voluntary activities for sustainable development in the international agenda. In 2012 the resolution for integrating voluntary service into the next decade was approved and the States requested the United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) to develop an action plan to integrate volunteerism into the efforts for peace and development.

The action plan ‘Integrating volunteerism in peace and development: Action plan for the next decade and after’ was approved in 2015, at the same time as the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. It seeks to foster volunteerism as an accelerator for development, particularly during the so-called “decade of action”. To facilitate this objective, in 2018 the resolution ‘Volunteerism in pro of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development’ was approved, encouraging member states to improve cooperation with interested parties to collect data on the impact of voluntary service for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

This need to have more and better data on the scope, contribution and impact of voluntary activities led to the organisation of the Global Technical Summit on Volunteerism “Reimagining Volunteerism for the Agenda 2030”, which took place on July 2020 within the framework of the High Level Political Forum of the United Nations, in collaboration with the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Half Moon. As preparation for this summit, there was a “Call for Action” process, through which it was sought to gather as much evidence as possible on the contributions of volunteerism for sustainable development, as well as regarding the main challenges for the future of voluntary service. This process was led by the member states, who introduced volunteerism into their 2018 report for the UN Secretary General, into the Voluntary National Reports, and in some

cases presented an analysis about the national situation of volunteerism in their countries. Other processes were led by civil society organisations, the private sector and academia, who collected and reported evidence on the contributions of volunteerism for the SDGs in their countries.

At the same time, UNV organised various regional surveys to gather evidence; in Latin America, the survey was carried out in Chile in 2019, in the framework of the Forum for Latin American and Caribbean Countries on Sustainable Development for the ECLAC. It also organised online surveys and virtual fora to ensure the participation of a broad spectrum of citizens. The collected information was gathered on a database published on the website <http://knowledge.unv.org/>. This knowledge management site, unique in the world, collects pertinent information on regional, national and global voluntary service. The webpage includes three sections. The first is a database of the official information provided by member states on their Annual Voluntary Reports, including the various components of voluntary service, legislation or existing public policies, as well as the national statistics on volunteerism. The second section is an evidence section, and includes exclusively academic and scientific research conducted on the impact of volunteerism for development, aiming to improve accessibility of the evidence produced, specially in the global South. Finally, the third section, which is still under construction, is focused on the practice community, and will allow to share documents on voluntary service by different actors, and will include any report or study on the subject without a need for an academic background.

Furthermore, the preparatory process for the Global Technical Summit on Volunteerism included the elaboration of a Global Summary Report and a series of regional Summary Reports on how volunteerism can be reimaged for the Agenda 2030. There are two conclusions to be highlighted: in the first place, voluntary service is still not strongly rooted in the efforts to promote the Agenda 2030; and secondly, there are still significant gaps in the measurement of volunteer work and in the data and evidence generated, particularly among the countries of the Global South.

As for the particular situation of the LAC region, the “Summary Report. Action Plan for the Integration of Volunteerism in the Agenda 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean” recognised the need to increase the measuring of voluntary activities’ contributions, as well as improving the use of technology to strengthen voluntary service in the region. Other actions identified as important are the generation and impulse of policies and legislation, and the promotions and strengthening of alliances. The main areas where voluntary service has an impact as an accelerator for SDGs are inequality and inclusion, migration, unemployment, youth, violence, and environmental degradation and climate change.

Based on this information, the Technical Summit took place virtually between July 13-15, 2020, with over 5.000 participants. Conceived as part of the Action Plan framework, this summit summarised the conclusions reached in a declaration. Among the main conclusions, the participants identified the gradual advances in appropriation, integration and measuring of volunteer work, and established the commitments to guarantee an increased involvement of the people in the development programmes; in addition, they recognised the diverse forms of contribution of different types of volunteer activities, and the need to develop, try and use new instruments and approaches to measure and understand the scale, scope and contributions of volunteerism.

In this perspective, the vision of volunteerism in 2030 was conceived as a unique resource that allows to transform and accelerate the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. During the next ten years, on the so-called “Decade of Action”, collective efforts must be focused on mobilising people globally, demand urgency and ambition, and promote solutions through ideas. To achieve this, the actors committed to seven specific actions, including:

1. Broadening the access to voluntary service and its opportunities in all SDGs.
2. Firmly supporting volunteerism, beyond formal opportunities and through the organisations.
3. Attending the inequalities and risks of voluntary work.

4. Strengthening the structures that permit the involvement of people in development processes through voluntary services.
5. Generating new models of voluntary action to promote solutions through ideas.
6. Measuring the impact of actions taken to consider the welfare of volunteers and the fulfillment of the Agenda 2030.
7. Adapting the efforts of volunteers to address gaps and challenges in the pursuit of the SDGs.

The discussions focused on Latin America and the Caribbean concluded that, though in different sectors and in different contexts, the narrative of the region around volunteerism, its transformative impact and the challenges it faces to advance in its practice, is cohesive, sharing a common language that allows to identify the same challenges between the countries and propose similar solutions for similar problems. With this objective in mind, four challenges were identified as the most significant for the region:

1. Recognising volunteerism as a tool to address inequalities and social tensions, understanding that inequalities are one of the main problems that the region faces.
2. Strengthen strategic alliances and inclusive networks to promote voluntary service.
3. Enable safe and protected environments so that volunteers can perform their tasks, recognising the need to strengthen the normative and institutional frameworks, as well as the measures for the protection and security of the volunteers.

In March 2019, the UNV as a member of the UN Interagency Youth Group, supported the survey on “Young People and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean”. This was answered by 7751 young persons between 15 and 29 years old in 39 countries of the region, seeking to collect evidence on the situation of young adults and teenagers in the context of the pandemic. Among the results obtained, a significant finding that is worth mentioning shows that 4 out of 10 young persons in the region have participated or led an action in response to COVID-19. The more common actions include online voluntary actions and donations to support the efforts of civil society organisations.

There is great potential in the region and a strong capacity for immediate and massive action in moments of crisis; the young people show a need to organise and participate in the solutions to problems that our countries are facing. In this juncture, volunteerism must be recognised as an important accelerator for development, and as such, be strengthened to address the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic, while also considering the medium and long term commitments to fulfill the Agenda 2030.

Q&A Session:

Question for Rocío Vergara Chalhoub (UNV): What opportunities can be generated from volunteerism to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in a post-pandemic age?

Currently there are many opportunities to participate and engage in voluntary service, and a great need and willingness to be involved. Where there is opportunity to improve people's life quality, there is an opportunity to strengthen volunteerism, and today's context presents a scenario with multiple possibilities.

It is important to highlight that the response to the socio economic crisis in a post-pandemic age must be guided fundamentally by the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Volunteerism is a unique resource to transform and accelerate this agenda, and to place in the center of all efforts the promise of “not leaving anyone behind”, since there is an extremely high risk of excluding and leaving behind millions of persons in this particular context, which is why there needs to be special emphasis on reducing inequalities; inequalities which are at the core of most problems in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is here where voluntary service can play a strategic role to ensure the integration and inclusion of all persons who need to be included in the responses. There are many opportunities, but we need to work on it to achieve it.

The volunteers' commitment, enthusiasm and capacity to respond immediately are fundamental to support the recovery processes, and allow for the possibility of amplifying the actions and policies through volunteer networks; they are key actors in the acceleration of the SDGs and of the effectiveness of actions in remote communities, where official responses take longer in being implemented.

The United Nations has developed a response plan to the world, where the need to prioritise people's health and protection is highlighted, while ensuring the social protection and basic services, promoting an adequate economic response for recovery - which includes actions that protect employment, informal workers, and SMEs -, as well as efforts to foster social cohesion and resilience. These working lines are ideal to incorporate volunteers, who have the capacity to contribute in these activities, amplifying the scale of interventions, maximizing the impact, integrating more people, and ensuring no one is left behind.

Question to Rolando Kandel (CCIVS): What lessons does the pandemic hold for the future of volunteering in terms of form and content?

On the road to sustainable development, it is essential to maintain the Agenda 2030 and the ODS as guidelines. However, the current context has complicated the situation and shown that there is a need to rethink the lines of action. The pandemic has caused great uncertainty, requiring us to learn how to work, react and change, and to create a permanent dynamism in line with changes in this context.

These lessons have been both of form and of substance. One of the lessons in terms of form is the idea of dynamism. The constant need to adapt due to unexpected changes and uncertainty has generated a surge in creativity of new solutions; if it is not possible for people to meet personally, it is necessary to generate ways to work together though at a distance, with the tools that are available. In particular, combinations of face-to-face and virtual activities will continue to be used and further developed. This will allow a greater number of meetings, not only physical but also virtual, increasing the opportunities for dialogue from different countries.

The fundamental lessons concern solidarity and the collective. As rarely in history, the pandemic and the corresponding care policies were experienced simultaneously in different countries; people were isolated in their homes, but at a global level, which generated a very strong collective feeling. These collective efforts to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic demonstrated that when the community manages to prioritise and generate a prevailing shared understanding of the magnitude of a problem, societies react, even from very diverse contexts. It will be a challenge to mobilise this awareness to address other issues of similar magnitude, such as inequality, poverty and climate change, when the pandemic is no longer the priority.

Question to Daysi Hume (CONAVO): What are the main challenges for the work between civil society and the state to promote volunteerism in the circumstances of the pandemic?

One of the main challenges is to establish CONAVO as an institution with a leading role in volunteering and with the capacity to articulate the volunteering programmes that exist both in state institutions and in civil society organisations. It is particularly important to make it clear that volunteer work is not synonymous with charity, but rather that it is a tool for societal transformation that can serve to raise public awareness about different issues such as climate change, education and inequality.

Question to Stefany Paez (France Volontaires Ecuador): How can we encourage young people to volunteer between the two regions in this phase of the pandemic?

There are many initiatives by various international volunteer organisations that seek to create spaces for reflection on this issue. The uncertainty of the current context poses great challenges, but five elements were identified to guide volunteer work in a post-pandemic era.

First, to recognise that volunteering is neither fixed in form nor a single model, but requires constant rethinking and consideration of the evolving society and context. In this sense, it is necessary to consider the realities of each country in the post-pandemic context and to

adapt and create new volunteer programmes at the national and international levels. In many countries in the region, organisations have been limited by the closure of borders and by the lack of health conditions, which led to a reorientation of activities, strengthening national volunteering. Moreover, it must be considered that the needs of each country are generated by the negative impact of the pandemic at a socio-economic and political level. The problem must be understood in a comprehensive manner, with the objective of developing new missions, guiding existing missions, prioritising projects and valuing the role and participation of volunteers in facing these new challenges.

The second element to consider is the involvement of volunteers in generating ideas. Volunteers want to develop new initiatives and innovations to find new solutions to problems and they have the capacity to do so. It is necessary that the organisations promote meeting spaces for volunteers, where they have the opportunity to share new proposals to deal with social problems; For example, in Ecuador a virtual volunteering initiative was carried out, which allowed the inclusion of almost 1000 young university volunteers during the pandemic to support families in times of confinement. The power of young people and their commitment should not be underestimated; their input, experience and vision of how they see volunteering in a post-pandemic era is needed.

The third element is to strengthen the capacities of organisations working and managing volunteerism. A survey of organisations in Ecuador identified that only 10% of the organisations that responded used technology in their management; not all had the capacity to work with virtual forms of volunteering, even though in reality this model of volunteering was the one that could be implemented during the pandemic. Many organisations, particularly local ones, had to adapt their missions, activities and objectives without having the required capacities. Seeking to develop volunteerism comprehensively requires commitment from those organisations that have experience in building these competencies to accompany those that do, helping them to develop their own capacities.

The fourth element to be considered is the need to adapt to the current conditions of mobility. International volunteers were unable to travel because of the restrictions, and many volunteers who had already arrived were forced to return to their countries. Virtual

volunteering has become a means to continue supporting missions, despite the restrictions of the pandemic.

Finally, the development of sustainable volunteer programmes should be a priority. In this sense, the French system of volunteer programmes serves as a model, as it provides funding and tools for the development of missions. The French civic service offers the volunteer a monthly compensation and international health insurance, thus allowing young people to carry out long-term missions in dignified conditions. Such conditions are not common in the context of Latin American volunteering; it is important to reconceptualize volunteering as a valuable sector to which funding must be allocated. In the post-pandemic era, a regional volunteering programme could be created with a financial contribution, establishing a common fund that allows for the mobility of young people, giving them an incentive but also ensuring social recognition.

Many countries face the same issues and challenges today, and organisations need to respond to them. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary that they receive support regarding management and financing; that laws and public policies are designed to guarantee the development of volunteering, as well as the strengthening of the capacities of the entities and above all the social recognition of volunteering as a fundamental element for social participation and cohesion.

Question to Sofia Mejia (Habitat): What are the next steps in promoting the recruitment of new volunteers? How can we ensure safety?

There have been many changes and uncertainties regarding security, and it is essential to adapt and propose a safe reunion between volunteers, staff of the organisations and the communities. This must be achieved from the grassroots up, starting to work on simple issues with community references and the community, such as explaining to the communities that it is not possible at this time to share water or food, to hug each other, and that the contact of the families with the volunteers will be limited temporarily. Habitat's speciality before the pandemic was international volunteering, with the Global

Village programme; however, in order to maintain security conditions, it was necessary to focus on the local.

However, the organisation is already preparing to mobilise international volunteers when conditions improve in different phases. New protocols are being developed at various levels, including logistics and volunteer management as well as protocols and regulations for action in the field, such as restrictions on sharing water and beverages, maintaining distance in public transport, and eliminating shared rooms between volunteers.

Due to the conditions in the region, EU-LAC volunteering will not enter the first phase. Instead, regional volunteering and inter-regional travel will be prioritised to ensure a higher degree of safety through direct flights. The idea is to find mitigation mechanisms that are officially and internationally proposed by the organisation, while also considering the opinion of community leaders, who help to identify the needs and realities of the communities, so that the biosecurity protocols make sense.

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