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UNV/ILO Partnership on the Measurement of Volunteer Work

QUICK FACTS

Countries: 41 countries (20 countries from Africa and Arab States and 21 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean)

Evaluation date: 17 June 2026

Evaluation type: External

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO Department of Research and Statistics

Technical Office: ILO Department of Research and Statistics, ILO Employment Department

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DC Symbol: GLO/24/08/UNV

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Key Words: Voluntary service, Volunteer Work Measurement, Informal volunteering, Formal Volunteering, Volunteer Work Module, Unpaid Work, Labour Force, Statistical Standards, Methodology, Employment

This evaluation has been conducted according to ILO's evaluation policies and procedures. It has not been professionally edited but has undergone quality control by the ILO Evaluation Office.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

Building on the previous UNV-ILO collaboration (2017-2022), the UNV/ILO Partnership on the Measurement of Volunteer Work project was developed to further advance the measurement of volunteer work according to international standards, in a context where fewer than 70 countries, mostly in the Global North, have official statistics on volunteering with differing scope, survey tools, and reference periods. Expected outputs included a standardized global estimation methodology, 2025 global estimates and State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR) chapter, an updated volunteer work module linked to the ILO Labor Force Survey, technical assistance to at least four countries, two regional workshops, new survey questions on formal/informal volunteer work, and three knowledge products. The project was implemented by ILO Department of Research and Statistics (RESTAT), with knowledge products developed jointly with the ILO Employment Department.

Present situation of the project

The project began in April 2024 with a total budget of USD \$563,992 allocated by UNV and will close on 30 June 2026, following a six-month no-cost extension. The extension was granted primarily to support Kenya in completing enumerator training and data collection for its volunteer work module. As of May 2026, the project had committed 65% of its total budget, leaving a balance of USD \$198,117 unspent, the majority of which was allocated to the country's technical assistance budget line. Beyond project closure, both ILO and UNV retain their mandates to promote and support the measurement of volunteer work. The ILO add-on module will continue to be available as part of the ILO's offer to Member States, and the global estimates methodology is now available for ongoing statistical work. These ongoing commitments provide a solid foundation for future collaboration between the two agencies.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

ILO Evaluation Office commissioned this independent final evaluation of the UNV/ILO Partnership on the Measurement of Volunteer Work, conducted from April - June 2026 in accordance with the ILO Evaluation Policy and Results Based Evaluation Strategy. The evaluation's purpose was to serve accountability, learning, and knowledge building, assessing the project against the OECD/DAC criteria, while examining cross-cutting dimensions and informing RESTAT's broader strategy for strengthening official national statistics on volunteer work. The primary users of this evaluation are UNV and RESTAT staff. It will also serve the ILO staff and constituents, civil society organizations, UN entities, donors, and other international organizations working in related areas.

Methodology of evaluation

This Final Evaluation followed a systematic and collaborative mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative data, triangulated across document review, key informant interviews, workshop participants' survey data. Participants were selected to ensure a range of perspectives across gender, organization type, leadership level, project role, location, ILO/UNV staff, supported countries, workshop participants, and NSOs. Data analysis was conducted through an iterative process framed by the Evaluation Questions and related Matrix and validated through a preliminary

findings workshop with key stakeholders to ensure practical, actionable recommendations. Key methodological limitations included limited availability of secondary data from country partners and the fully virtual nature of interactions, which were mitigated through triangulation of data and did not undermine the validity of the evaluation's findings.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The main findings of this report answered all key evaluation questions based on the evidence gathered and analyzed.

Relevance: The project objectives were strongly consistent with UNV's institutional priorities and ILO's normative mandate to promote and support the measurement of volunteer work, grounded in a series of UN General Assembly resolutions calling on member states to recognize and measure volunteer contributions to the SDGs. The project was well-aligned with UNV's Strategic Frameworks and ILO's mandate. The design was direct and practical for countries with existing Labor Force Survey infrastructure, although not fully aligned with government planning cycles, political priorities, or the varying levels of institutional capacity across countries.

Coherence: Project components were coherent for technical and knowledge-generation work, with the methodology, global estimates, Geopoll data, and SWVR chapter well-integrated and disseminated. The project was well-harmonized with relevant international development initiatives, building on UNV-ILO's 10 year partnership, and complementing larger efforts such as ILO support to Kenya's Labour Force Survey backed by World Bank funding. Both UN agencies leveraged their comparative advantages effectively. ILO led technical and thematic work and UNV provided policy perspective and visibility. However, UNV's staff and network were not fully leveraged to support country-level advocacy and implementation.

Effectiveness: The project made meaningful progress across most of its objectives, with its strongest results in technical and knowledge outputs. A standardized global methodology was developed and articulated in a chapter published in the SWVR 2025. Two regional workshops shifted the understanding about measuring volunteer work for 58 participants from across 41 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Arab states. Three knowledge products were completed and openly published, covering unpaid care work and gender, active ageing, and informal volunteering, with two dissemination webinars reaching more than 370 participants.

Two objectives were not fully achieved. (i) Substantive country technical assistance was only provided to Kenya, falling short of the target of at least four countries, due to competing national priorities, Labour Force Survey scheduling constraints, limited National Statistics Office capacity and financing, and insufficient enabling conditions in many participating countries. (ii) The development and testing of new survey questions on formal and informal volunteer work also remained incomplete, as country support did not materialize at the scale envisaged.

Gender and non-discrimination were fairly well-addressed within the project, particularly given that there was no specific strategy, action plan, marker, objective, nor indicator. Gender issues were discussed

in workshops and sex-disaggregated global estimates were delivered consistently. The three knowledge products represented the project's strongest contribution by focusing on women's disproportionate unpaid care burden, gender gaps among older volunteers, and intersectional analysis of gender, disability, education, and unpaid care.

Efficiency: The project budget was allocated strategically for technical outputs and appropriately under-utilized for the country-level technical assistance, which only partially occurred. The project effectively leveraged internal expertise across the ILO Statistics and Employment teams, UNV, external consultants, and peer learning through south-south cooperation. The monitoring framework was adequate for tracking activity completion, with quarterly reports consistently flagging the country engagement risk starting from the first quarter, but lacking higher-level performance indicators, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and tracking of knowledge product reach and use. Although a Steering Committee was planned in the initial project design, it was reported that the project team determined the Steering Committee was unnecessary given the size and scope of the project and allowed for more efficient implementation.

Potential Impact: The project's strongest connection to ILO's core principles was through International Labour Standards, directly operationalizing the 19th ICLS resolution defining volunteer work as a distinct form of work and advancing implementation of the 21st ICLS distinction between formal and informal volunteering. The project made no documented contribution to tripartism or social dialogue, as its stakeholders were exclusively national statistical offices, government officials, UNV and ILO. A connection to SDG 5.4.1 on unpaid care work emerged as an advocacy tool. The results framework tracked output delivery rather than changes in national practice or policy, limiting data for an impact assessment. The project is not on track to achieve its higher-level objectives, which were far-reaching for its scope.

Capacity Development and Sustainability: The project's results showed limited integration into national institutions beyond countries that already had enabling conditions before the project began. Brazil offered the clearest example of institutionalization by embedding the volunteer work module into its national household survey without funding from this project. Kenya and Ecuador were at early stages of implementing the module, and it remains unclear if either country will repeat the module in a future survey cycle. Individual-level capacity was strengthened through workshops, peer learning, webinars, and technical assistance, suggesting potential organizational or institutional commitment may occur in the future. The project's tools, module, measurement guide, and knowledge products remain publicly available, serving as potential avenues for continued efforts.

Conclusions: The UNV-ILO partnership has been evolving and expanding since 2017. This project was another catalyst in the long trajectory towards a comprehensive understanding of how the world economy functions. It strategically embedded key components of volunteer work into larger efforts with more resources, impact and

visibility. The project expanded knowledge, tools and training capacity to better understand the role volunteer work plays in an economy, which have now become the empirical and methodological backbone of UNV's flagship 2026 report and newly emerging Global Index of Volunteer Engagement. Although there was no gender and non-discrimination strategy, key project outputs significantly addressed these issues. The lack of a clear monitoring, evaluation and learning plan limited evidence available for decision-making and accountability. However, country uptake of the volunteer work module was the most significant challenge. In the context of a stressed global economy and highly limited country budgets, measuring volunteer work was not a top priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions

Recommendations 1-3 Measuring Volunteer Work: The UNV-ILO partnership should continue to leverage their expertise and develop strategic projects to deepen understanding of the complexities of the global economy. Aligning with the UN80 Initiative, UNV and ILO should seek to integrate and advocate volunteer work measurements within the category of unpaid work at global, regional and national working groups, conferences, and networks. While ILO should fully integrate volunteering into all its efforts pertaining to unpaid work.

Recommendations 4-7 Awareness Raising & Implementation: UNV should continue raising awareness of various measurement models and demonstrating the value of measuring volunteer work through concrete examples, such as supporting 2-3 countries annually to employ the volunteer work module. South-South Cooperation could enhance these efforts by developing cohorts and facilitating learning between countries. Gender and non-discrimination should be meaningfully addressed at all levels of delivery (such as participation, disaggregated data, leadership roles, or addressing power dynamics in trainings).

Recommendations 8-9 Administration & Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: All projects should have a theory of change and results framework, even if it is simple, to provide a clear roadmap that strengthens evidence-based decision-making, adaptive management and accountability. While simplified contracting mechanisms between UN agencies will align with the UN80 Initiative's aim to reduce duplication and strengthen coordination.

Main lessons learned and good practices

Lesson 1: International and national commitments motivate prioritization and ensure targets will be measured and met.

Lesson 2: A strong M&E plan will inform decision-making and demonstrate progress.

Lesson 3: Articulating a strategy with accompanying targets will facilitate integration of gender and non-discrimination issues.

Good Practice 1: Leveraging organizational expertise and high profile efforts lead to impactful value for money.

Good Practice 2: Progress occurs over time.