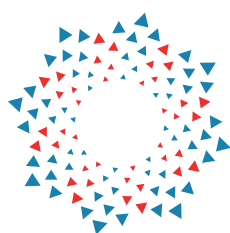


IVCO 2021 INTRODUCTORY PAPER

# 44 QUESTIONS ABOUT INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING FOR GLOBAL EQUALITY

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**IVCO**  
THESSALONIKI 2021

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the theme and the sub-themes of IVCO 2021, set the frame for the research agenda, and invite researchers and practitioners to contribute to advancing our understanding of burning issues in the domain of volunteering for development. Rather than being a research piece itself, this paper introduces 'Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality' as the over-arching theme followed by the three sub-thematic areas of decolonisation, digitalisation, and directionality of volunteering. Each topic is introduced by a short theoretical text followed by a set of questions aiming to inspire and mobilise the discussion.

## Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality

The substantial contribution of volunteering to 'hard' development outcomes has been highlighted by researchers, development actors and institutions for decades. Nevertheless, their added value to the process of systemic change towards a more inclusive and equal world has more recently become central in global discourse. An increasing number of research papers have shown how international volunteering activities create solidarity, tolerance, communication, interaction, and good connections between volunteers. Previous IVCO research papers have covered thematic areas of inclusive development and specifically addressing questions related to women and youth (Rath, 2018; Tiessen and Delaney, 2018; Savard and Allum, 2018), challenging the limited room offered to volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) for local or indigenous participation (Mati and Perold, 2019), and highlighting the need to deepen links between inclusive development and intersectionality and develop tools to apply an intersectional approach in different contexts (Glassco, Arnaud, Tremblay, 2018). Although the role of volunteers in inclusive development has been gaining space in academic research (Devereaux, 2008), 'inclusive volunteering' remains a relatively unexplored area. From a volunteer and organisational perspective, recent research has shown that inclusive organisational environments encourage the satisfaction of volunteer needs and positively influence future behavioural intentions towards the volunteer-involving organisation (Huang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, is volunteering for development inclusive in practice?

IVCO 2021, through its overarching theme 'Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality', aims to broaden and deepen this discourse by inviting researchers, practitioners, and volunteers to exchange best practices, discuss the barriers that prevent inclusive volunteering on the side of institutions, societies, organisations, and volunteers, and to recommend solutions. The conference will focus on three burning issues: decolonisation, digitalisation, and directionality of volunteering – seen through the programmatic, organisational, methodological, policy making lenses, amongst others.

Forum's recent research report COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering for Development (Perold et al, 2021) identifies digitalisation and directionality as two of the key future trends of IVCOs in the post-pandemic era, with organisations predicting an increase in online and local volunteering. At the same time, the notion of the North as the aid 'giver' and the Global South as the aid 'receiver', with a clear superiority of North over South reinforcing unequal global power structures, is still reflected in numerous international volunteering schemes, as highlighted by recent research studies (Georgeou and Haas, 2019).

IVCO 2021 invites contributions on the diversity of volunteer identities, models and assumptions about inclusive volunteering. A wide spectrum of questions will be addressed, including:

- What does diversity and inclusion mean in the context of volunteering for development?
- Do we provide volunteering opportunities to all people regardless of age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, social status or disability?
- How can organisations offer greater access and ensure a more equitable participatory experience?
- To what extent are volunteers involved in decision-making, properly informed or actively participating in the wider work-related and social reality?
- How would inclusive volunteering contribute towards global equality and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
- What is the role of intersectionality in inclusive volunteering?
- What is the role of states and institutions in creating an enabling environment for inclusive volunteering?
- Which policies and civic structures can encourage diversity and inclusion in international volunteering?
- What are some of the policy barriers for inclusive volunteering, and how do we overcome them?
- How can organisations advocate and influence policy changes?
- What parts of our organisational programming, practice or culture need to change, and what constraints are there?
- What are the existing tools and methodologies to measure diversity and inclusion in volunteering for development?
- What has been the impact of COVID-19, and what opportunities have arisen?
- How have new needs and vulnerabilities resulting from COVID-19 been addressed?
- How do we manage diversity with our limited resources?
- How do we ensure that risk management frameworks and approaches support diverse and inclusive volunteering?
- How can the Global Standard for Volunteering for Development become a compass for change?

## Decolonisation

In the ever-growing academic literature on volunteering for development, scholars have demonstrated how global structural inequalities permeate relations between volunteers and hosts. Those relations are found to be “subordinate to, or consistent with, macro-level patterns of uneven power” (Griffiths, 2018). As discussions about unequal power dynamics in the international aid system have recently entered the mainstream, decolonisation of aid has become a central topic on the development agenda. In November 2020, Peace Direct in collaboration with Adeso, the Alliance for Peacebuilding and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security, convened a three-day online consultation, where over 150 people from the development sector participated, to discuss the issue of structural racism and how to ‘Decolonise Aid’. Although the report highlights structural racism embedded in the everyday culture and working practice of the development and aid sector, it does not capture the domain of volunteering for development. Georgeou and Haas (2019), in a recently published multiple case study paper, demonstrate how state-run Youth Volunteering for Development programmes operate under the logic of “the wealthy North giving to the global South”, reinforcing the already embedded hierarchical power dynamics.

Through the sub-theme of decolonising volunteering for development, we intend to bring the links between colonisation and international volunteering into the foreground and challenge the colonial legacies and power dynamics which undermine the principles of global equality. We look forward to opening the debate, and listening to unfiltered ‘voices from the field’ that present a considerable move towards global equality. Questions seeking responses include the following:

- How can we effectively tackle the issues of power imbalances between international and local volunteers?
- What would it mean to reshape programme design and practices to take into account the history, culture and context of host communities mean?
- How do we ensure that programmes are designed with input from those most directly affected by poverty and marginalisation, and not just in consultation with a small number of powerful elites?
- What neo-colonial assumptions or elements of the ‘charity’ model of international volunteering underlie our organisational practices?
- How can IVCOs foster more equitable relationships between Northern and Southern development actors and a critical understanding of development?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic provided a good opportunity to further drive the decolonisation of international volunteering with potential changes in the global balance of power?
- How can we critically reflect on development as a goal for volunteering?
- How can we rethink volunteering for development as volunteering for international solidarity and understanding?
- What are the risks of delegitimising solidarity in the process of decolonising development?
- How do we decolonise volunteering research and practice, reflecting on and challenging current practices?
- To what extent do ethnographic studies of marginalised people in the Global South overturn the (neo)colonial mode of research?

## Digitalisation

Technology has opened up new pathways for volunteering organisations, enabling a quantitative increase in volunteer opportunities. Internet-based tools have been developed to recruit and support traditional forms of international volunteering and to develop new forms of volunteering. The availability of Internet technology has also revolutionised VIOs' training and communication capacities. Online campaigns have made it easier for international volunteers to advocate for global causes and to participate in global development efforts, even without leaving their home country (Lough, 2015). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has further spurred the sector's digital transformation, with many IVCOs now leveraging technology to support international volunteering activities, given the travel restrictions in place and the fact that e-volunteering has become a trend.

Nevertheless, the digital divide persists! Piatak, Dietz, and Mc Keever (2019) demonstrate that home Internet access has an independent influence on volunteering and that those with access are more likely to become volunteers, either formally or informally. In their IVCO 2018 framing paper, Glassco, Arnaud, and Trembley (2018) conclude that further research is needed to identify the concrete changes and opportunities that online participation is creating for women and youth in the Global South, and how IVCOs and their local counterparts are using online spaces to support inclusive development.

Through the 'digitalisation' sub-thematic area we aim to answer questions such as:

- Does technology promote inclusiveness by providing greater access to volunteering opportunities, or does it exacerbate existing patterns of inequality?
- How do technological solutions contribute to the recruitment of new cohorts of skilled volunteers?
- How can digitalisation increase capacity and diversity?
- What is the future of virtual voluntary service?
- How can we aim to replicate the well-documented positive impact of in-person volunteering with e-volunteering?
- What new digital tools are available to mobilise and manage volunteers more effectively?
- What will be the impact of the digitalisation of work and employment on volunteering in the post-pandemic era?
- How can gaps in connectivity and a lack of digital literacy be overcome to achieve an inclusive digitalisation of volunteering?

## Directionality

In a Forum discussion paper, Devereaux and Allum (2016) posed questions around the consideration and recognition of the role of national volunteers in volunteering for development programmes, and the relationship between international and national volunteers as a core element of programme models, introducing the subject of directionality of international volunteering. International frameworks such as the SDGs provide a canvas for a paradigm shift away from a traditional North-South orientation, as 'connecting international, national and local volunteering can encourage embedded relationships and result in more sustainable impacts that go beyond traditional "helping" or aid models' (Thompson et al., 2020). However, neoliberal conceptualisations of development have evidently shaped international volunteering, failing to capture the relational and experiential impacts of volunteering. According to Schech (2017), 'the technologies of proximity afforded by volunteering can lead to critical and transformative insights into development and aidland, particularly when volunteers are embedded in local organisations over a longer time.' Current literature on development volunteering is embedded 'in the geographies of "here" (the developed world as helper)... and "there" (the developing world as "the helped")' (Yea, 2018).

Academic discussions need to re-imagine the spatiality of development volunteering to include, for instance, refugees and migrants who volunteer in development work in their new homes. Within the domain of local volunteering in the Global South, recent research has also highlighted the negative impacts of wider systemic political and ethnic divisions in volunteer civil society organisations, groups and initiatives including biased access to volunteer opportunities and resources, and volunteers opting to offer help only to those in their own ethnic or political group (Picken and Lewis, 2015). As an increasing number of middle-income countries and emerging economies become both providers and recipients of development assistance, North-South positioning gives space to emerging South-South volunteering programmes, with significant new actors entering the space of international volunteering.

Through the sub-thematic area of directionality, we intend to explore responses to questions including:

- How do we create enabling environments across the Global South so that international volunteering programmes will no longer be restricted to sending volunteers from traditional donor countries?
- What are the strategies to enhance South-North, South-South and reciprocal forms of international volunteering?
- How can we work towards more reciprocal relationships with partners?
- What challenges do organisations face in implementing such programmes, and how can they overcome them?
- Has COVID-19 acted unevenly as a barrier towards different models of directionality?
- What are the implications of COVID-19 for future models of cross-national volunteering?
- What policy reforms are needed to strengthen and build reciprocal partnerships across the different volunteering modalities?
- How can volunteering for development organisations bolster local action and accelerate implementation?
- What is the role of volunteers from the Global North when they return home?

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