



Perspectives on COVID-19

The experience of volunteers and volunteering
involving organisations in the 2020 Pandemic

INTERIM REPORT

Helene Perold, Cliff Allum, Ben Lough, Jacob Mati

October 2020

Contents

Methods.....	2
Data Collection	2
Survey Instrument.....	3
Survey Responses.....	3
Section 1 Survey findings: What happened during the COVID-19 crisis?	5
1.1 How well did Volunteering Involving Organisations do?	5
1.2 What happened to the volunteers?	8
1.3 Volunteer support.....	12
Section 2 Perspectives on partner organisations' experience	16
Section 3 Perspectives on the future	18
3.1 How could VIOs do better?.....	18
3.2 What has changed in VIOs due to COVID?	20
3.3 Does it affect whether volunteers will volunteer in the future?	21
3.4 Volunteering for development in the future.....	22
4 The future of IVCOs.....	25
Postscript: A final word from a volunteer	27

Introduction

This study reports on the results of two surveys of which aimed to explore the experiences of Volunteering Involving Organisations (VIOs) and volunteers with seven International Volunteering and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs). It addresses three questions about the COVID-19 pandemic: what impact did the pandemic have on VIOs' programmes; how did they adapt their programmes in response to these changes; what do respondents consider to be the future of volunteering for development?

This survey would not have been possible without the support of four volunteer networks: the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum); the International Association for Volunteering Effort (IAVE); the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service CCIVS; and the Volunteer Groups Alliance (VGA). We thank them for their support and the members who participated. We were also delighted by the comprehensive responses from so many volunteers who shared their experiences.

Finally, we would like to thank James O'Brien, the Executive Coordinator of Forum, who supported us throughout this process.

Methods

Data Collection

In September-October 2020, the research team conducted two online surveys to develop our understanding of the research questions.

The first survey focused on **organisations** who were members of the four global volunteer involving networks identified above. The sampling frame was estimated at 130 organisations.¹ With 39 organisations responding to the survey, the estimated response rate was 30%.

The second survey focused on **volunteers** from six IVCOs that participated in accompanying fieldwork, and one IVCO, that did not participate in the additional fieldwork.² In total, 239 volunteers responded to the survey of which 70 were from Unité. Across the six IVCOs that participated in the fieldwork, there was an overall response rate of just over 30%. The final response rate of Unité volunteers is not yet known.³

¹ Forum supported the participation of other networks by distributing the electronic survey link to participating organisations. The distribution of the link to the electronic survey rested with the separate network organisations, who independently surveyed their own members. Some participating VIOs were members of more than one of the networks, and where possible cross-posting was avoided. Consequently, it is not possible to report on the precise number of organisations who were invited to participate. However, the sampling frame was estimated at approximately 130 VIOs.

² Unité has a separate report since it is a network and was not originally included in the study. However, the volunteer responses are retained a part of the overview of volunteer perspectives.

³ The survey responses are correct at the time of writing at which point the Unité survey had not closed. For the other six IVCOs, the sample size was set at a maximum of 100 hundred volunteers per organisation.

Survey Instrument

Both surveys attempted to explore similar views but from different perspectives. At the overall level, obtaining the perspectives of both volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and volunteers enables the comparison of their distinctive views and experiences. However, the VIO category combines a range of different kinds of organisations: IVCOs who provide international (and sometimes national and community) volunteers, as well as organisations that are primarily concerned with volunteering in their own country or community. This initial survey report does not attempt to disaggregate the VIO responses.

The survey data are also being compared with the qualitative data emerging from the fieldwork and organisational interviews. It is recognised that such comparisons, especially when the data is disaggregated, may provide differences as well as commonalities in the findings.

Survey Responses

The 39 VIOs responding to the first survey represented 22 countries.⁴ Of the organisations responding, 30 described themselves as not-for-profit organisations; 5 as governmental; and 1 as a for-profit business. In terms of membership affiliation, 23 organisations identified as being members of Forum, 11 as members of IAVE, and 8 as members of the VGA, which indicates significant cross-membership between those networks; and 8 respondents stated “none of the above.”⁵

Volunteer characteristics

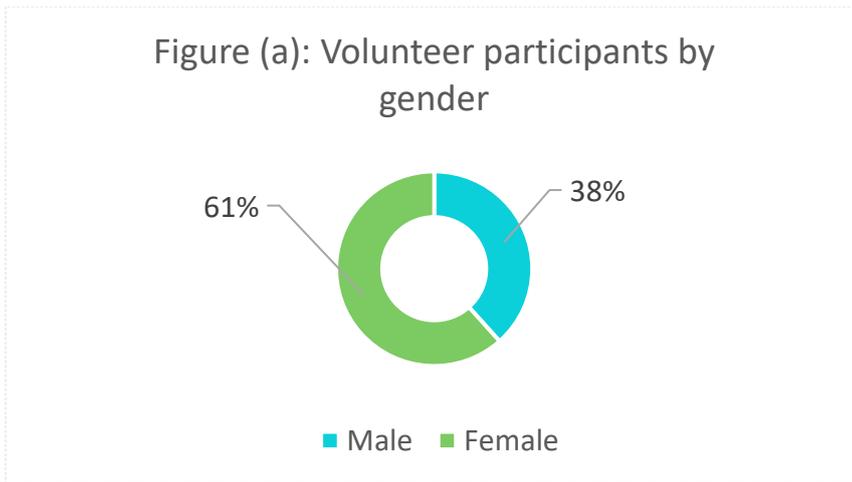
The survey asked volunteers to report on their gender, age, type, and role. Outcomes were as follows:

- a) Gender** (n=231): Figure (a) shows the gender breakdown of respondents. 61% identified as female and 38% as male.⁶

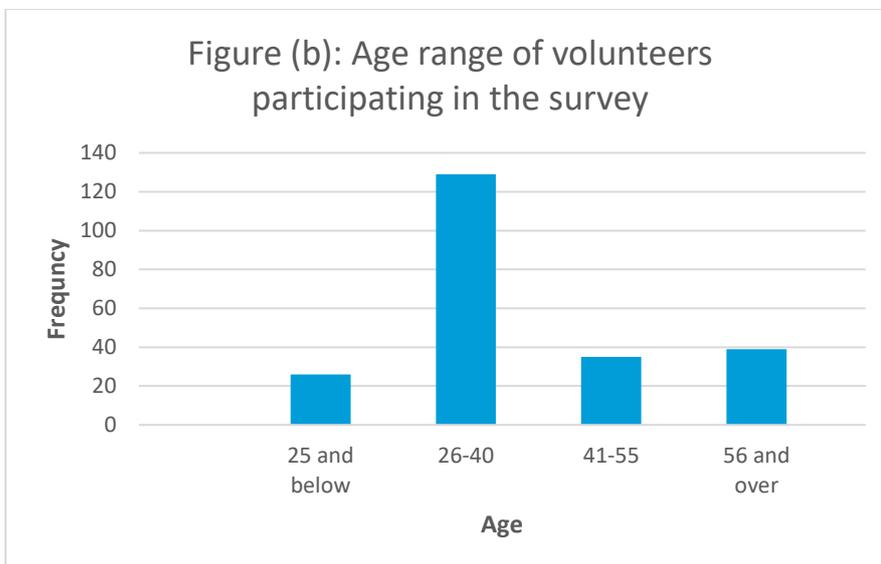
⁴ The largest number of responses came from Germany (9) and Canada (6).

⁵ The identified networks were the initial source of distributing the survey link to their members. However, it was agreed after the survey had commenced that CCIVS could distribute the survey to their network members and they would most likely identify with this option.

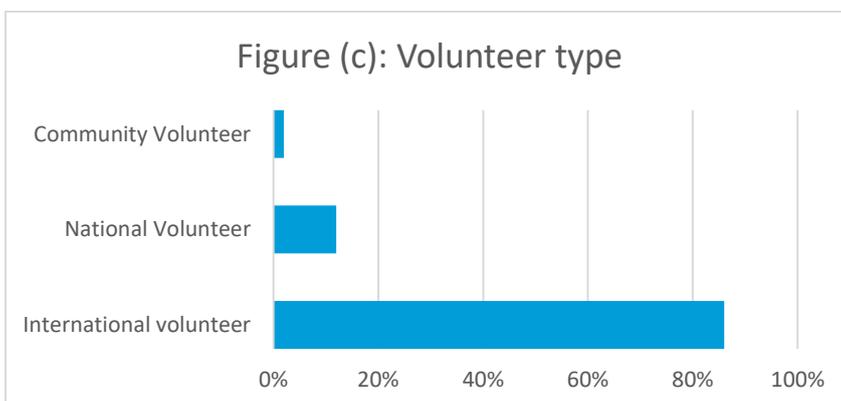
⁶ 231 volunteers replied to this question, of which one described their gender as “other” and three “did not wish to say.”



b) Age (n=229): Figure (b) shows the age bands for respondents. Most (57%) of respondents were in the age range of 26-40 years.

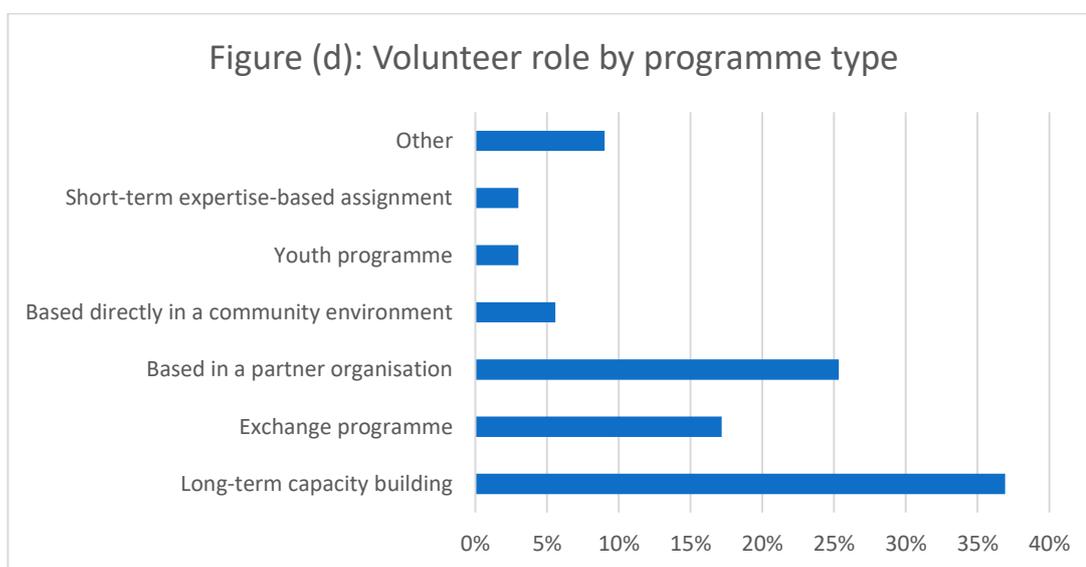


c) Volunteer type (n=233): Figure (c) shows that 86% identified as an international volunteer, 12% as a national volunteer and 2% as a community volunteer.



d) Volunteer Role and Programme type (n=233): Volunteers were asked to identify what type of volunteer programme they were assigned on. Figure (d) shows the range of responses against the offered range. The results represent the self-identity of respondents in respect of their perspective of their assignment.⁷

37% of volunteers identified as being on a long-term capacity building programme, with another 17% describing their assignment as an exchange program. Volunteers on a youth programme or on short-term expert assignment both comprised 3%. 25% of respondents identified as being based in a partner organisation, while 6% stated they were assigned directly in the community (6%). 9% of respondents identified as being “other”.



Section 1 Survey findings: What happened during the COVID-19 crisis?

1.1 How well did Volunteering Involving Organisations do?

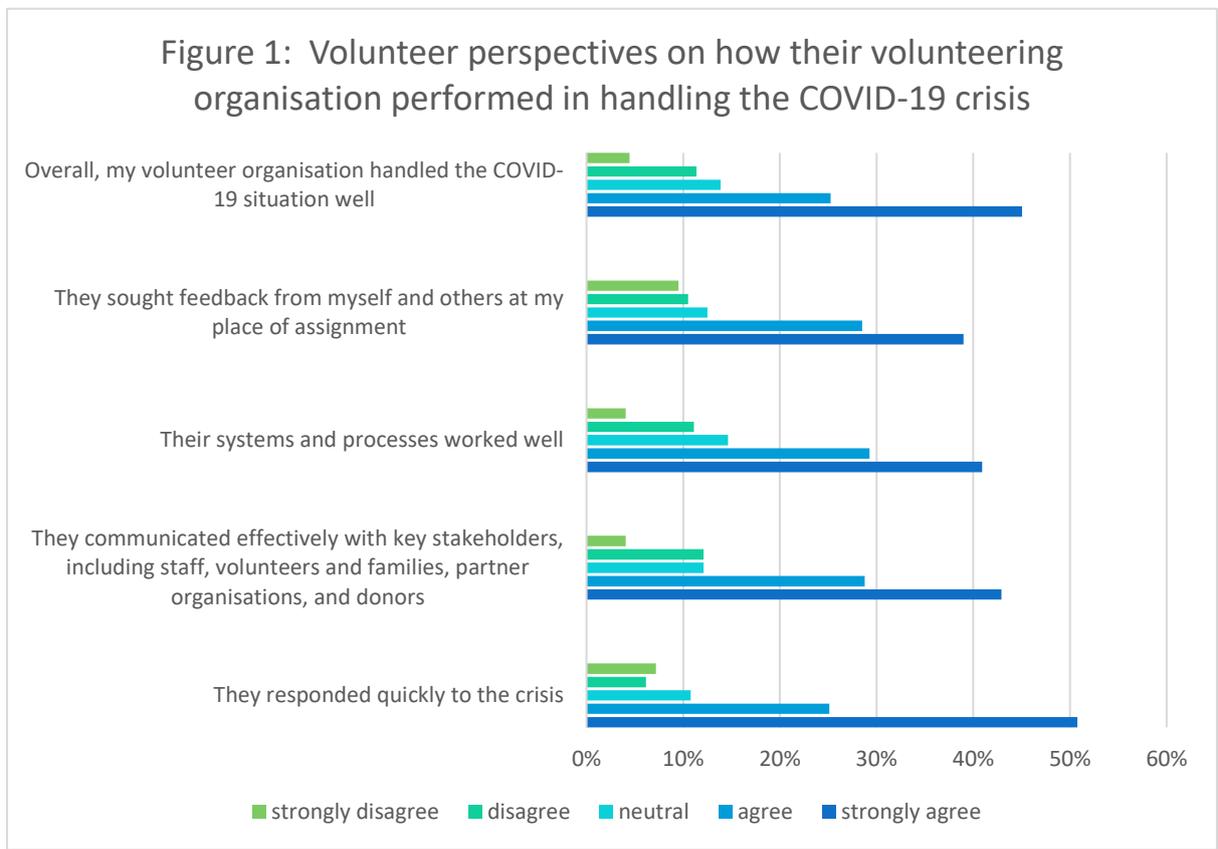
Volunteers and VIOs were asked to review how well they thought the issues around COVID-19 had been addressed.

The volunteers were asked to comment on five different dimensions of how their IVCO had handled the pandemic. They were asked to rank the performance on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. As the open-ended responses from volunteers below reveal, most volunteers believed that their IVCOs responded well:

⁷ The categories are not mutually exclusive but represent how volunteers viewed their prime focus. 233 respondents replied to this question and 233 options were selected which means volunteers chose one of the offered descriptions to define their assignment.

- *They responded quickly to the crisis*
- *They communicated effectively with key stakeholders, including staff, volunteers and families, partner organisations, and donors*
- *Their systems and processes worked well*
- *They sought feedback from myself and others at my place of assignment*
- *Overall, my volunteer organisation handled the COVID-19 situation well*

Qualitative results to this question are illustrated in Figure 1 below⁸:



This shows a level of consistency against all five measured criteria, where approximately 70% of volunteers either strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation had handled the crisis well. These five measures indicate the pace of IVCOs’ responses, communications, processes, and proactive engagement, as well as an overall rating.

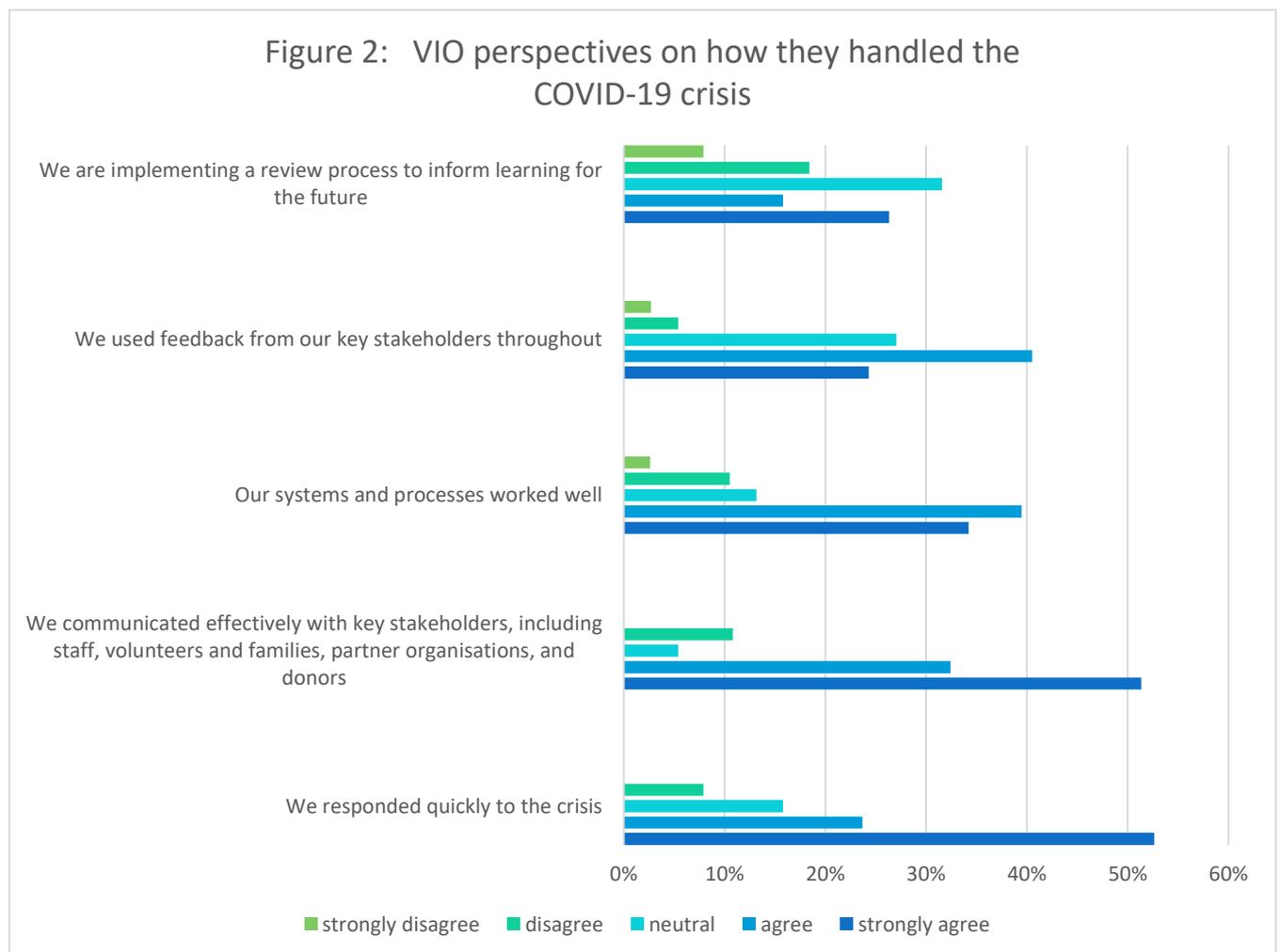
On the negative experiences, 20% disagreed that their organisation had sought feedback, and 16% disagreed that their organisation had handled the COVID-19

⁸ Respondent numbers across the statements ranged from 195 to 202

situation well. Several open-ended comments from volunteers provide additional insights about these challenges:

- *The management at regional was excellent whilst at country level the response was chaotic and experimental. I was repatriated under panic mode, the booking of my return flight at country level was so confused. There was no proper contingency plan*
- *Placement country (name of organization) need to act more efficiently to communicate with International Volunteers and try to bring them back to headquarters. It does not happen.*
- *Very good at the beginning, but lack of follow up after*

The VIO survey asked the respondents for a self-assessment of how their organisation had performed ⁹. The questions overlapped with those asked of volunteers. They were asked to rank the performance on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. The results are shown in Figure 2.



⁹ The number of respondents on each statement ranged from 37 to 38

In the areas of pace of response, communication, and use of systems and processes over 70% of the responding organisations either strongly agreed or agreed that they had handled it well. This is consistent with, if slightly more positive than, the volunteer responses. The use of feedback from stakeholders reached 65% for strongly agree and agree. However, the comparison with volunteers' negative views of IVCO organisational performance is perhaps revealing, where organisational views appear to be more positive than those of volunteers.¹⁰

VIOs were also asked about learning. 40% of organisations agreed they had put in place a review process to learn for the future.

We were in touch with each of our country staff daily and asked them regularly for feedback on what they needed in terms of support; we also asked staff for feedback via 2 surveys to find out if their needs were met and if our organisation's handling of the crisis was adequate. No formal review process was undertaken.

In the period immediately following the repatriation, we conducted an internal assessment of our actions and identified areas for improvement with respect to communications, budgets, post-return follow up and support to volunteers, and collaboration with other organizations.

- 1. Safety - we ensured that all our community volunteers remained safe and kept the beneficiaries safe too.*
- 2. Support - need levels were overwhelming and therefore we couldn't reach out to some very needy cases.*
- 3. Systems - the COVID Pandemic caught us off-guard and challenged our normal ways of operation, at the same time, it has provided room for great improvement and appropriate state of preparedness.*
- 4. Way Forward - we have realized the urgent need of empowering Community Based Volunteers. An area in which we now seek urgent partnerships.*

1.2 What happened to the volunteers?

61% of volunteers reported they continued at their place of assignment.¹¹ It was noted that 124 respondents engaged with the question of how long they stayed at their assignment and their words indicate a substantial number who did remain on their assignment.

¹⁰ This is perhaps unsurprising in the sense that volunteers gave individual views and organisations gave an overall view of all volunteer arrangements. It is also important to remember that the volunteer views came from those on assignment with 7 IVCOs while the VIO views reflected those of 39 VIOs.

¹¹ 202 volunteers replied to this question. 124 stated they remained at their assignment and 78 stated they did not stay at their assignment. A more detailed review of the responses indicates that this did not exclude subsequent removal from their place of assignment.

I am still there. Never left.

The declaration was made when I had not been given my working visa to go to my placement. So I remained in the capital city waiting for it while working with the IP remotely.

I went for holiday and home assignment to (name of country) from beginning of July to end of September and now I am back in the project

Of the international volunteers, 47% reported they had been repatriated.¹² Of those repatriated 44% stated they had no choice in this decision, although this was not always a clear-cut issue.

They did not order me to repatriate and requested me, but I was not in a situation to refuse. It was virtually compulsory.

The (country) foreign office said (country) nationals should go back to (country) if could do so. I was told by head of operations I could go back but it was a personal decision, and I would have to pay for the flight. Country office was saying safe to stay. Country Director was quick to support my decision and did agree to pay for flight. Country Office did not repatriate international volunteers for a further week or so. Caused stress to volunteers, especially those whose embassies were saying you should leave.

Technically was given a choice to remain at place of assignment, but realistically this would not be possible because of the severance of support (i.e. visa, insurance, flights, etc.).

Volunteers were offered the space to add further comments. They indicate the challenges of the time for volunteers and their organisations.

The system of using a company to arrange flights was shambolic. If I had not been firm then I would have to have waited at least 4 days whilst this was arranged, by which time flights had been taken. It was also extremely expensive as an option.

As most of the world started to prepare for the pandemic, we were not informed about anything about it. The first information about that something

¹² The total number identifying as international volunteers in the survey was 201 of which 182 answered this question. 86 stated they had been repatriated and 97 stated they had not been repatriated. The definition of repatriation was determined by the respondents.

might happen to us through the organization was something we had to read online in a news article. We received the first news 14th of March and suddenly had to sit on a plane back home 16th of March. Traumatic experience.

(country) had no cases of COVID-19 and still don't. It was a pity to be repatriated early without a choice

VIOs were asked if they had repatriated their international volunteers. 38 responded to this question, with 17 (45%) saying they repatriated their volunteers and a further 13 (34%) saying they partially repatriated volunteers. This left just 8 (21%) who did not repatriate volunteers.

This is seemingly in contrast with the volunteer experience and needs further investigation to understand these differences.¹³ However, it is clear that IVCOs adopted a range of approaches from what was effectively complete repatriation of their international volunteers, through bringing back volunteers on selected programmes, to arrangements where responsibility was assigned to the local organisation and volunteer. **In any case, these findings dispute the common perspective that in-person international volunteering ceased because of COVID-19.**

We repatriated around 60% of our international volunteers - those who were high risk or wanted to return, while allowing those who could not return home or who wanted to remain in country to stay.

Many volunteers already on programs decided to return home, but this was their decision not ours.

We have repatriated more than 1,400 volunteers in 39 countries.

Those who wanted to stay were allowed to do so if the host place could guarantee to take care for their safety; volunteers and parents had to sign. They would have been taken possible risks into account.

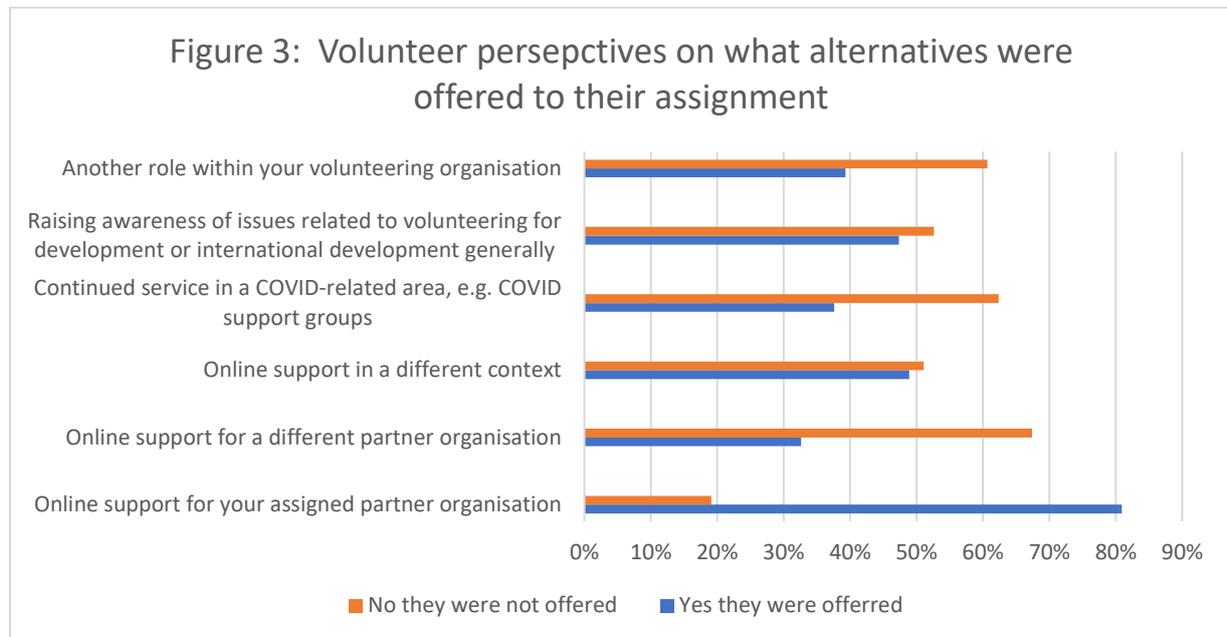
When considering national and/or community volunteers, 21 (65%) of VIOs reported that volunteers remained at their assignment; 7 (22%) reported they had been partially removed; with 4 (12%) left their assignment.

The volunteers who left their place of assignment were asked if their IVCO offered them an alternative. Just under 70% stated they had been offered another

¹³ The size of different VIO international programmes may be one possible difference here. It is also likely that some VIOs may have hosted international volunteers as against the IVCOs who provided international volunteers.

opportunity.¹⁴ They were then asked what they had been offered and these results are shown in Figure 3.

The overwhelming opportunity offered – at 80% - was remote online support for their partner organisation.¹⁵ Furthermore, nearly one-third stated they were offered this opportunity for a different partner organisation. However, on each of the other opportunities, most volunteers stated that they were not offered alternatives.

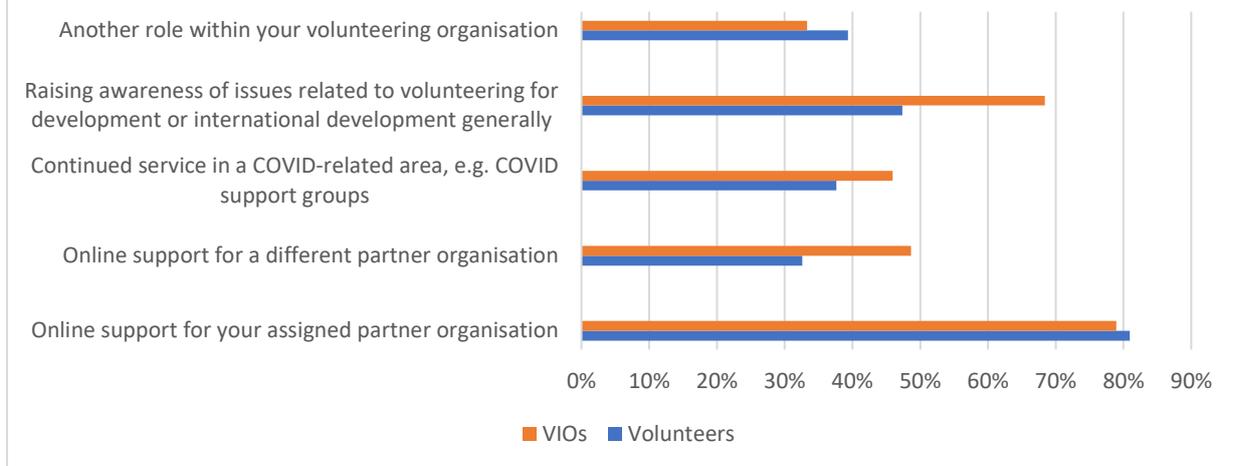


The view of volunteers on the opportunity of remote volunteering aligns with the VIO survey, which has a remarkably similar score at 79%. However, the VIO survey suggests that their view of what was offered in other areas does not align with the understanding that volunteers believed was offered by their IVCOs, especially in relation to awareness raising. This is shown in Figure 4.

¹⁴ 137 responded to this question of which 96 stated they had been offered an alternative.

¹⁵ 110 respondents answered this section (suggesting 130 were on assignment) and all of them answered the question on remote volunteering

Figure 4: Comparison of volunteer and VIO "yes" responses on alternatives to the assignment



1.3 Volunteer support

Volunteers were asked what support they required and in the COVID-19 situation and whether it was offered. 179 replied to these questions which means those responding included many volunteers who stayed on their assignment as well as ones who returned home. Five options were put forward in the survey, both for what was required and what was offered.

The same questions were put to VIOs and the answers compared. Figure 5 compares what volunteers and VIOs views on what was *required* by volunteers; while Figure 6 compares views on what was *offered* to volunteers. Figure 5 shows just one option – financial support to return home – having a majority of volunteers stating they required it. This meant that most volunteers said they did **not** require:

- financial support for a period afterwards, e.g. payment of returning grant in full or additional allowance (55% said "no")
- counselling in respect of the sudden experience and impact on personal circumstances (56% said "no")
- ongoing medical support due to the risk of exposure to COVID-19 (63% said "no")
- support for post-assignment plans (54% said "no").

When comparing what volunteers required and what organisations thought they required, the main discrepancy is on counselling where 72% of VIOs thought it was required compared with 44% of volunteers. More generally, the views of VIOs indicated they thought volunteers required more than the volunteers themselves stated in 4 out of 5 categories.

Figure 5: Comparing volunteer and VIO views on volunteer support required

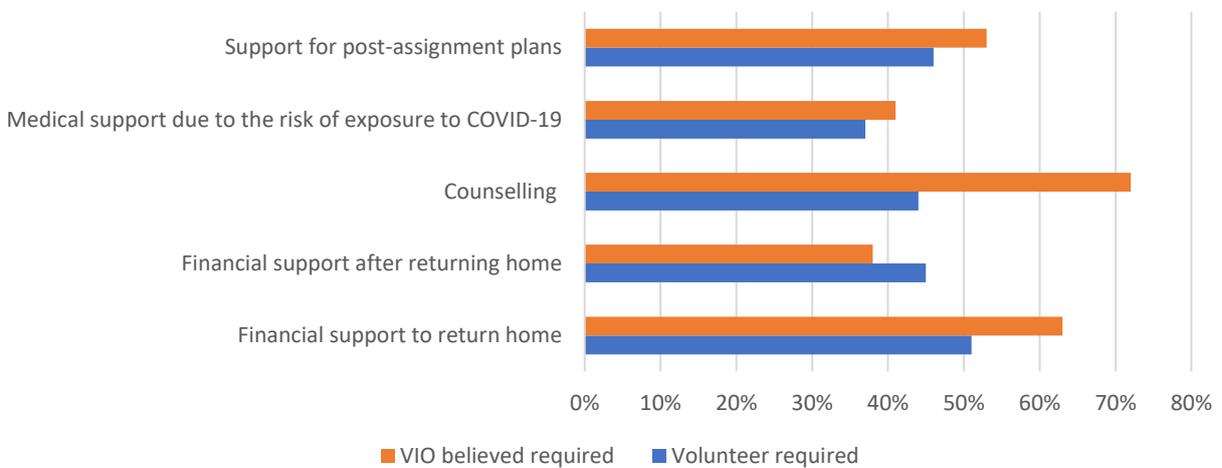
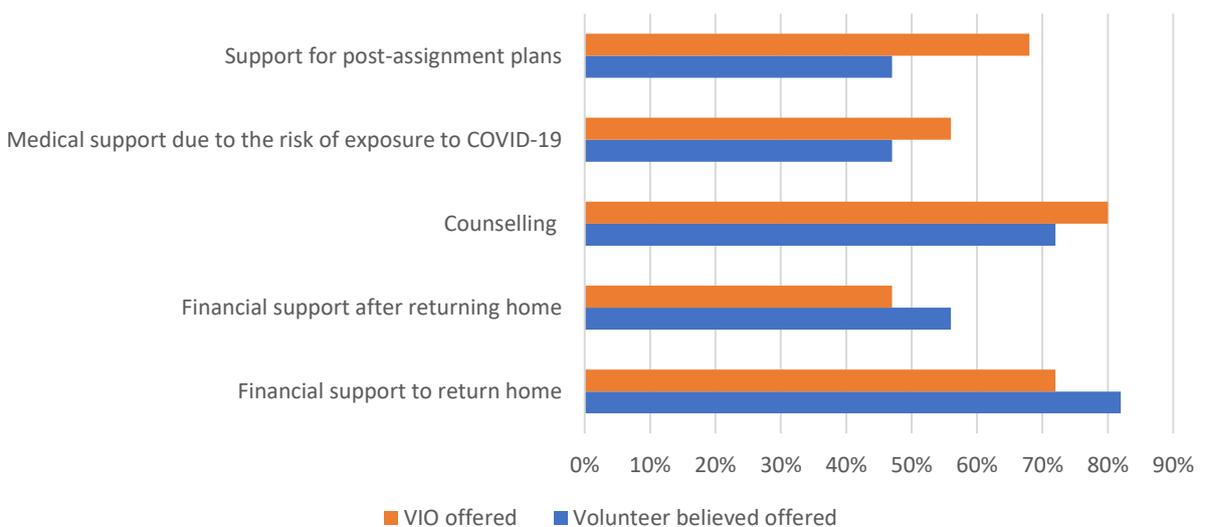


Figure 6 shows the results of what volunteers and VIOs believed had been offered. Over 80% of volunteers stated they had been offered financial support to return home with 55% believing their organisation offered financial support for a period afterwards. 72% thought counselling support was available. Support for post assignment plans (47%) and ongoing medical support (47%) were seen to be available by a minority of volunteers.

Figure 6: Comparing volunteer and VIO views on volunteer support offered



The discrepancy on counselling in what was required is not found when comparing views on what was offered. However, when comparing support on post assignment

plans, 68% of VIOs believed they were offering support in this area, compared to 47% of volunteers.

Volunteers' open-ended comments identified some of the challenges to repatriation and in some cases when it did not happen. Three examples are provided below:

During the Covid-19 period (organization) keep me in my placement. Now things are coming normal, (organization) terminate my Volunteer placement. They did not provide any alternative support for me. My Volunteer placement is for two years but after 14 months my placement is terminated. It is big shock for me.

I didn't need any support. But I only found out by asking that my health insurance was expiring two weeks after returning home. (organization) had immediately cut me off everything. Those are not things you can organise quickly when returning home unexpectedly. Also, my (organization) email wasn't accessible anymore, so I couldn't close my work things properly.

I am repatriated into the country of my citizenship where I have not been living for the last 7 years, and where I have only 1 family member, unable to support me, and no property, where I could live. The volunteer allowance generously covers accommodation and living costs in) country of assignment) but does not cover it at all in my country of citizenship.

On the other hand, the organisational survey brought out what was being offered in the eyes of the respondents.

We offer all volunteers 3 months medical insurance extension after placement, debrief and reintegration session which was delivered virtually; financial support was offered for the quarantine period and for accommodations if this was needed. we did not make counselling mandatory but is available for all to access.

We offered 2 special options for our volunteers in addition to early resignation. One is "Special standby for remaining contract period" and the other is "Special registration for future dispatch".

1.4 The overall picture: comparing volunteer and organisational perspectives

In conclusion, the survey asked volunteers and organisations to comment on the overall performance of IVCOs/VIOs during the COVID-19 crisis against specific areas. They rated performance on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent) on the following five areas:

- repatriation of international volunteers;
- continued support for international volunteers upon repatriation;

- removal of national and/or community volunteers from their place of assignment;
- continued support for national and/or community volunteers once removed from the place of assignment;
- support for international, national or community volunteers who remained on assignment.

Most volunteer respondents scored their IVCOs above average in all five areas. The highest score was on repatriation which exceeded 60%.

Many VIOs did not respond to these questions, making conclusions unreliable. The two questions that gained a good level of response concerned the repatriation of volunteers, where self-assessment saw an above average score of 70% of the respondents; and support for volunteers who remained on assignment, which had a score in excess of 80% of the respondents.

This fits with a general picture that both volunteers' perspectives and organisational perspectives demonstrated a generally positive view of how COVID-19 was handled. Nevertheless, there are several learning points and individual negative experiences. Some examples of areas for learning are below.

I continued as remote volunteer. [The organisation] paid me the allowance I would have been paid in (assigned country). This allowance does not cover the cost of food in the (home country) so to continue volunteering I needed to use my savings - I have no income. In (assigned country) I could live on the allowance.

My organisation had safeguarding policy and duty of care - I saw the principle guides of this policies applied to the barest minimum however, regional support was good. The challenge was with my volunteering organisation not following the organizational principles in handling my situation.

Some challenges were also highlighted by the VIOs

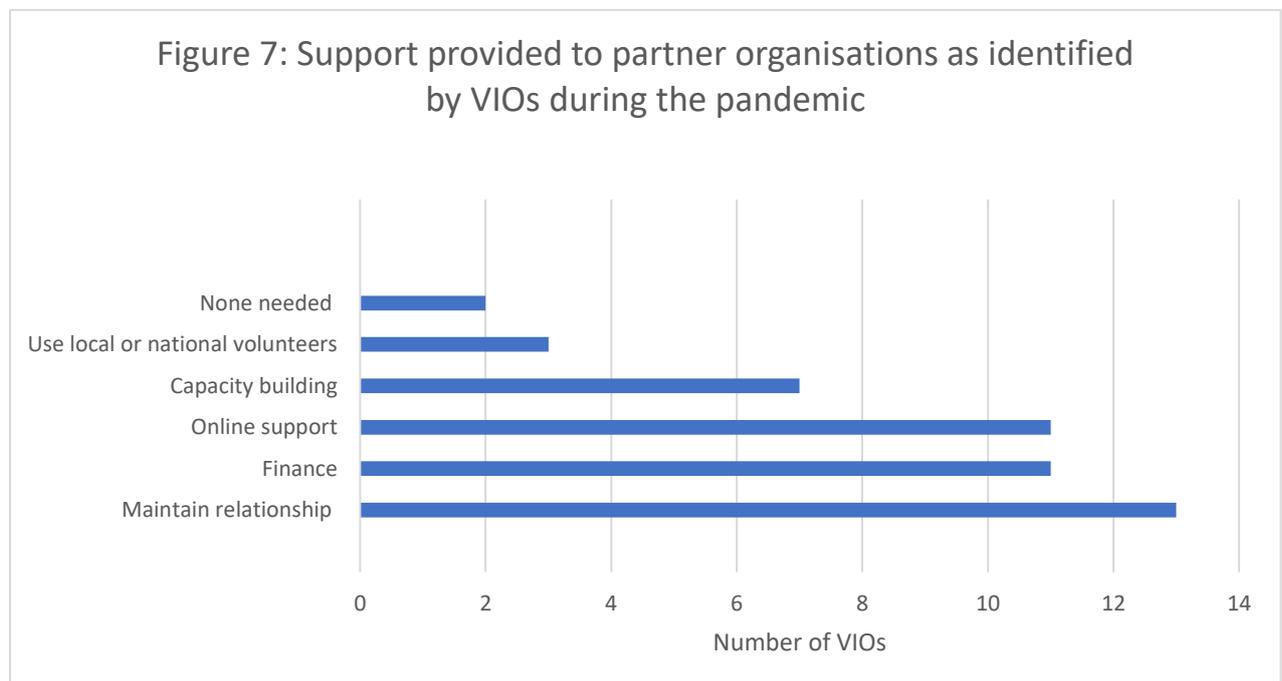
Our community volunteers remain on the ground to date. The greatest challenge has been the fear of contaminating the Cov-19 virus. The other challenges have been inadequate resources, the digital divide and efforts to reach out with relevant information, the ever-widening need gap among communities and the severe economic impact occasioned by Covid.

Pivoting to an online serve delivery model was not easy. Our staff, programme partners, volunteers and even participants went through a steep learning curving. There were connectivity issues and for some countries, it was not possible to pivot online due to the lack of digital infrastructure.

Section 2 Perspectives on partner organisations' experience

This part of the survey aimed to complement the fieldwork undertaken with the partner organisations. It focused on the VIOs' and volunteers' experiences of COVID-19 in respect of what happened to their partner organisations.

VIOs were asked to explain their approach to supporting partner organisations and primary actors after discontinuing volunteer assignments (where applicable). They were asked to explain to what extent they continued to work with those partners. 35 VIOs replied to this question and their answers categorised as shown in Figure 7 below.



The key finding is that nearly all VIOs were looking to engage, support and/or develop partner organisations in one or more ways, with capacity building, finance, remote online support and maintaining the relationship cited as the main areas.

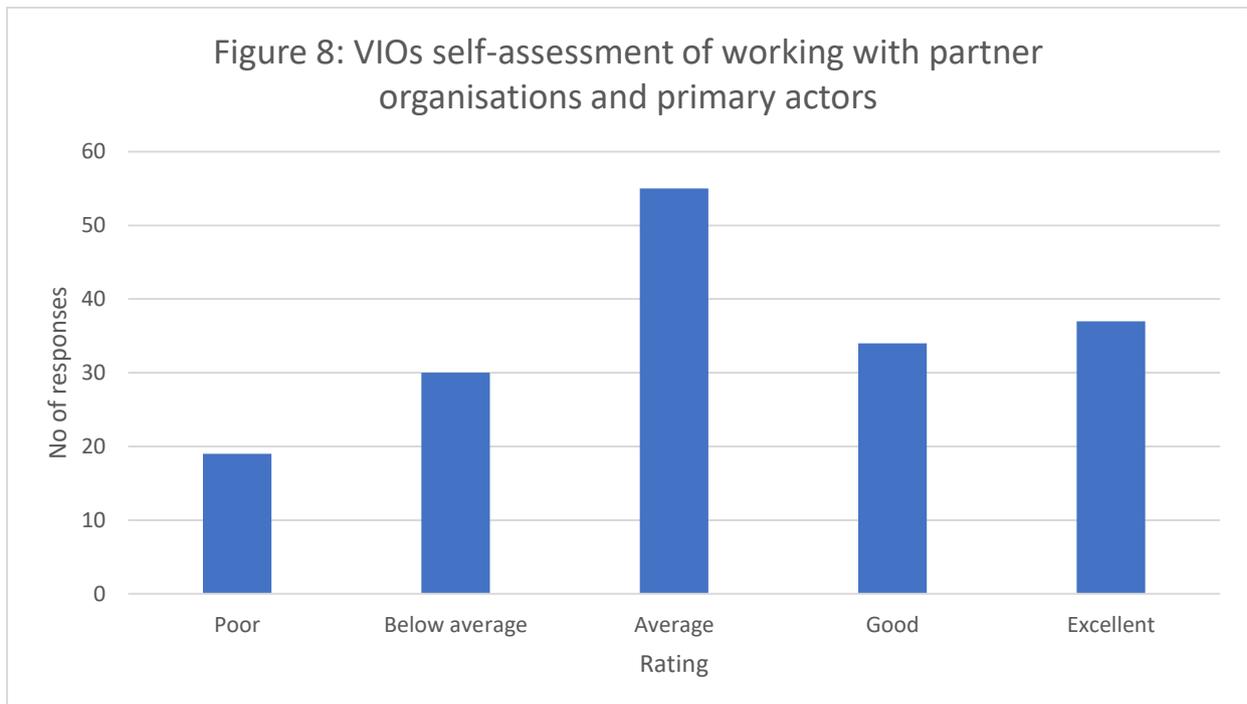
VIOs were asked to assess their performance of working with partner organisations and primary actors during the COVID-19 crisis against five different criteria:

- Developing a strategy with partner organisations to continue without volunteer support
- Providing ongoing volunteer support to partners by other means, e.g. online/remote support
- Securing additional resources, including financial support, to offset the impact of losing volunteers

- Support for partners and primary actors to address the challenges of COVID-19
- Identifying new partners to deal with the emergent challenges of the pandemic.

The largest number of VIO responses was 'average' as shown in Figure 8.¹⁶ The most successful rating given by VIOs to their own performance concerned volunteering by other means and support around COVID-19 issues. The least successful concerned other forms of support to offset the impact of losing volunteers.

It was quite difficult to continue supporting partner organisations in the volunteer program except On-line support by our volunteers, since most of our staff members evacuate the host countries too. Therefore, we provided support (like providing equipment, materials, etc.) mainly besides the volunteer program.

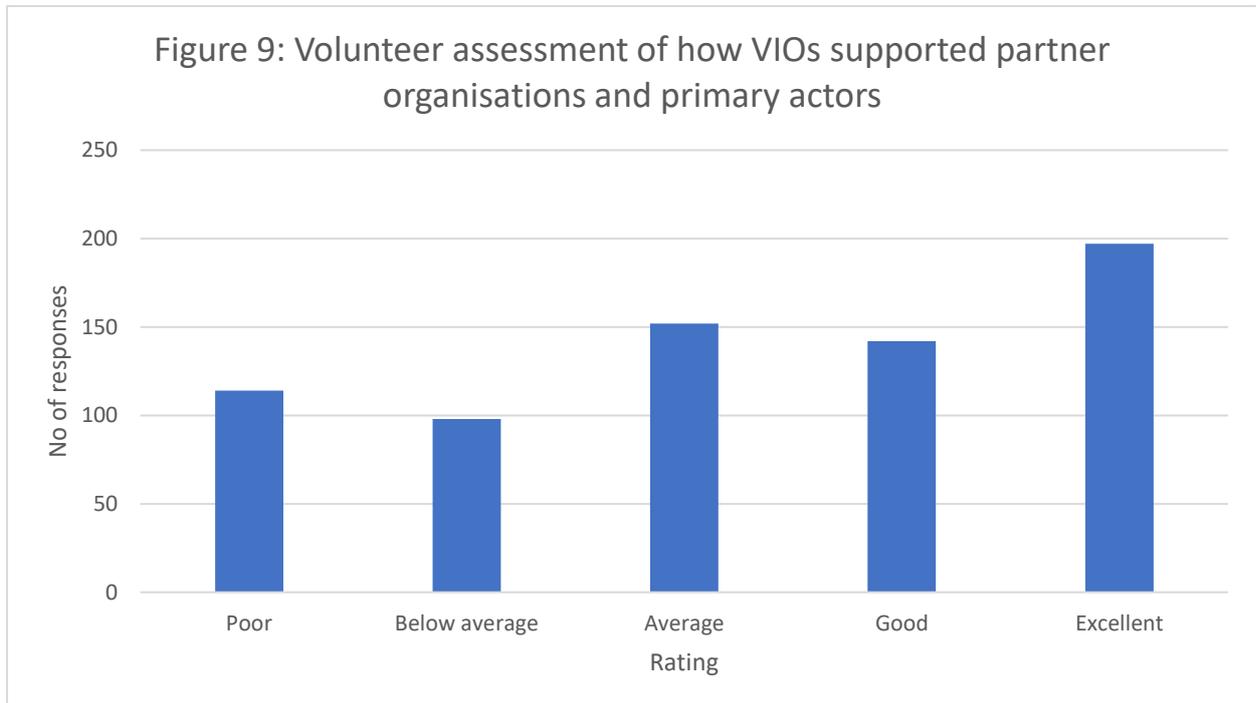


In the volunteer survey the same question was asked against the same criteria to identify the perspectives of volunteers. These results are shown in Figure 9.

Interestingly, the volunteers appear to have assessed the IVCO performance more highly than the VIOs rated themselves, with the highest overall score being

¹⁶ VIOs were asked to rate performance against the five different criteria and the results have been combined, which are shown in Figure 8. The number of VIO responses against each criterion ranged from 34 to 36 for each criterion. In total 175 responses were made.

'excellent'.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the rating of 'poor' was relatively higher and evenly spread across all five criteria.



Overall, VIOs responded with a positive self-assessment of how they engaged with partner organisations and primary actors as a result of the impact of the pandemic. Volunteer responses tended to reinforce this view, but there are suggestions where there could be improvements. This is an area taken up in the next section.

Section 3 Perspectives on the future

3.1 How could VIOs do better?

The two surveys sought qualitative information about what VIOs could have done better in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. VIOs were asked "what could have been done differently in your organisation's handling of volunteers?" and the same question about partner organisations and primary actors. Volunteers were asked

¹⁷ Again note that volunteers were commenting on seven specific IVCOs and not the VIOs as a whole. The number of volunteers responding on each criterion ranged from 119 to 166. The highest individual "excellent" score was 59/166 for "Providing ongoing volunteer support to partners by other means, e.g. online/remote support."

“how could your volunteering organisation have handled the COVID-19 situation better?” The option was given of making up to three key points.

The results from the VIO survey in respect of partner organisations and primary actors are shown in Figure 10.¹⁸ The areas identified most are communications, which extends from internal communications between head offices and country offices to volunteers and partner organisations; and variations in programme interventions, covering areas such as online support and programme focus. Enabling partner organisations to access resources also features strongly. Better planning and better systems also feature, as does a recognition that VIOs could improve how they work with others in these situations. Some VIOs had specific areas where they could improve in addressing the challenges of any future pandemic.



The volunteer survey outcomes are shown in Figure 11¹⁹. The largest and overwhelming response (56 volunteers) indicated they had no suggestions. For most of these it was matched by positive comments about the ways in which IVCOs had managed the issues around COVID-19.

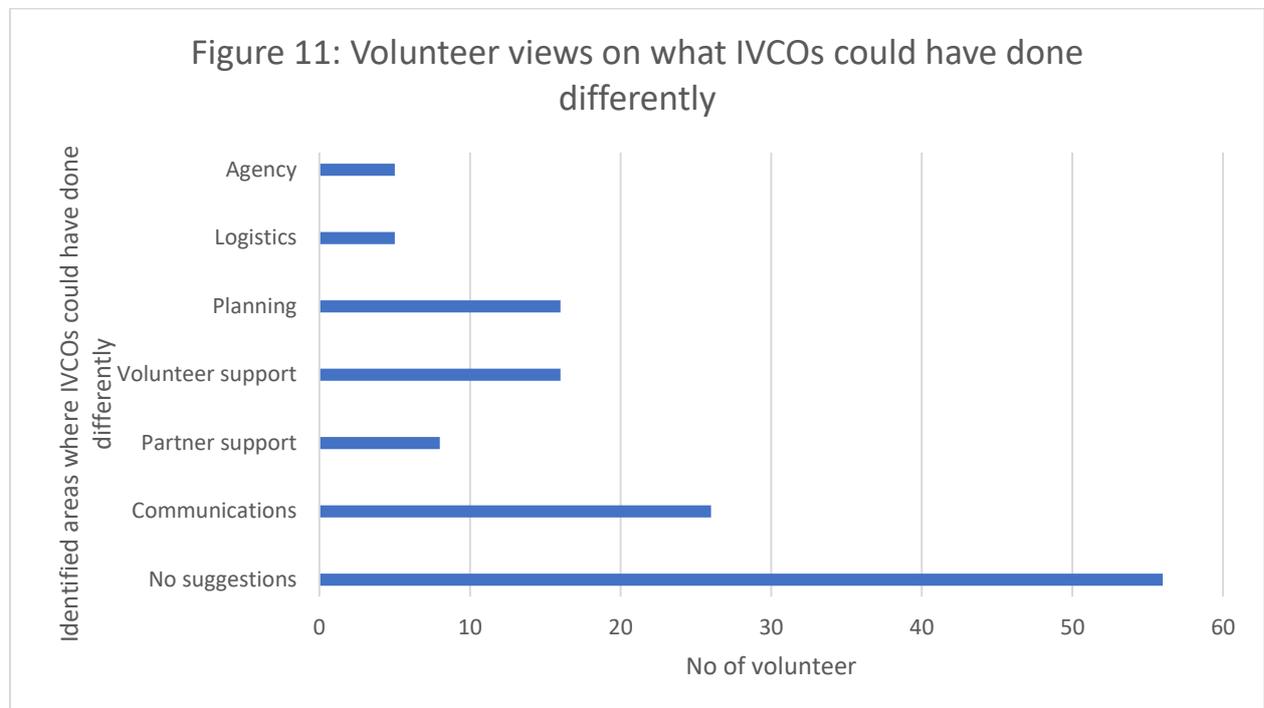
Attention can then be focused on areas where improvements could be made, and the largest area was better communication – within the IVCO; between the IVCO and the volunteers; between IVCOs and partner organisations. This ranged from the general approach to communication to specific examples.

This matched the VIO self-assessments, where -as seen above - communication was a main area for improvement. Better systems and better planning also feature strongly for both VIOs and volunteers as areas for improvement, as does partner support.

¹⁸ Some 29 VIOs responded to this question. Where their response covered more than one area this was entered against all areas to which the response applied.

¹⁹ 135 volunteers responded to this question.

One area that arose for volunteers, though not for VIOs, was the issue of agency – that volunteers were not offered a choice, with severe consequences. This also links to issues raised in volunteer support.



In general, I think that skills development and capacity building are the most effective ways of volunteering / coworking. This has not changed so much through COVID-19. But it would be great if sending organizations could develop concrete plans on guaranteeing the security of their volunteers and their family members in any kind of emergency situation. It would further great, if there was any kind of emergency help fund to assist organizations to continue their work, protect their workers and quickly deliver (temporary) humanitarian aid/ prevention measures, when an acute crisis breaks out.

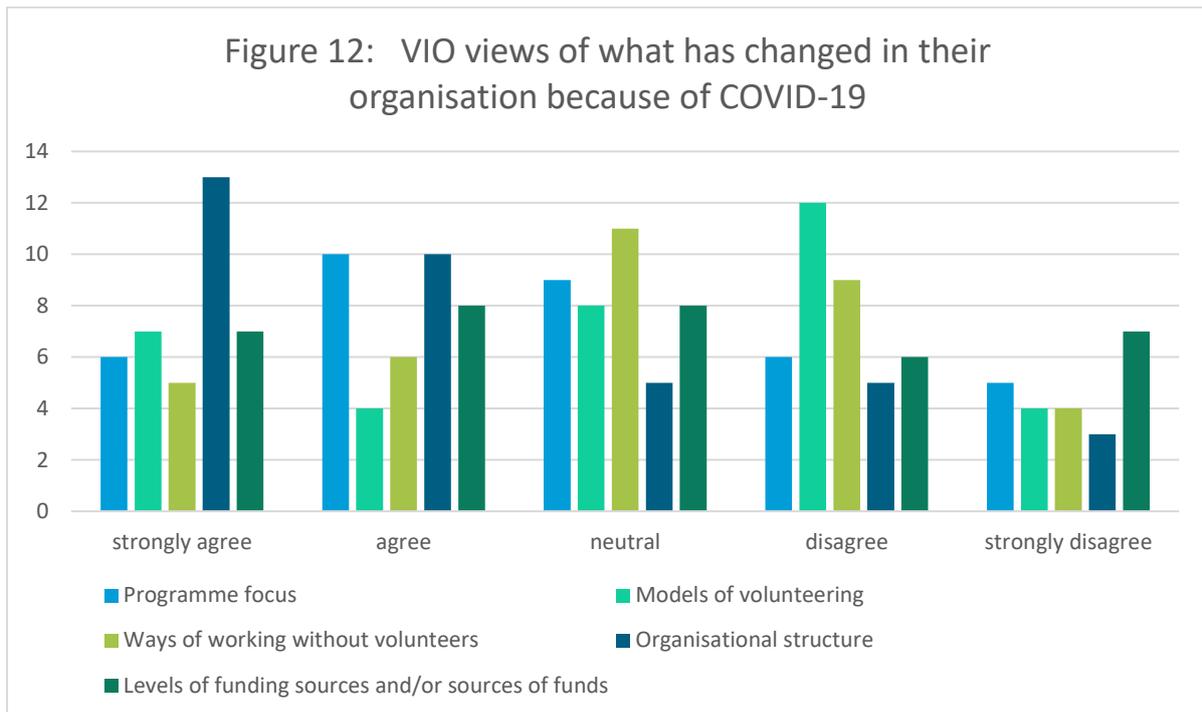
Despite being frustrated with the organisation's approach to getting volunteers out I also respect how new the environment was and how little training anyone had in the field of pandemics. That said, moving forward, the organisation needs to consider its priorities and if the volunteers are the experts in the field, then the organisation needs to act that way as well, and listen to their advice in the moment.

3.2 What has changed in VIOs due to COVID?

VIOs were asked for their views on what had changed in their organisation due to COVID-19 against five different areas:

- Programme focus
- Models of volunteering
- Ways of working without volunteers
- Organisational structure
- Levels of funding sources and/or sources of funds.

The results of the survey are shown in Figure 12. It is interesting to note how VIOs have identified changes in organisational structure as a key area of change, while models of volunteering are an area where change is not seen as taking place. There is also some suggestion of programme focus being reviewed.



although some new ways of working are put in place, there is also a strong fear for change. Some things which in the past would take ages to change, now suddenly changed quickly, for others there is still strong resistance.

COVID-19, somehow is good for some organization to step back and prepare for its new future opportunities and new director. Restructuring, revisiting and reforming into the proper systematic.

3.3 Does it affect whether volunteers will volunteer in the future?

79% of volunteer respondents stated that the experience of the COVID-19 crisis had not changed their interest in volunteering in the future. However, 49 volunteers offered additional comments which suggests this response is more nuanced than might appear at first sight.

For some volunteers, the experience clearly strengthened their commitment.

It has increased. Definitely increased seeing how much impact we achieve as volunteers in making the world fairer for everyone.

Positive change... I gained more interest in volunteering.

Others reflected on their choice and circumstances of volunteering in the future. The issues raised concerned personal circumstances, the focus of volunteering activity, and in a few cases disenchantment at the organisation they had volunteered with.

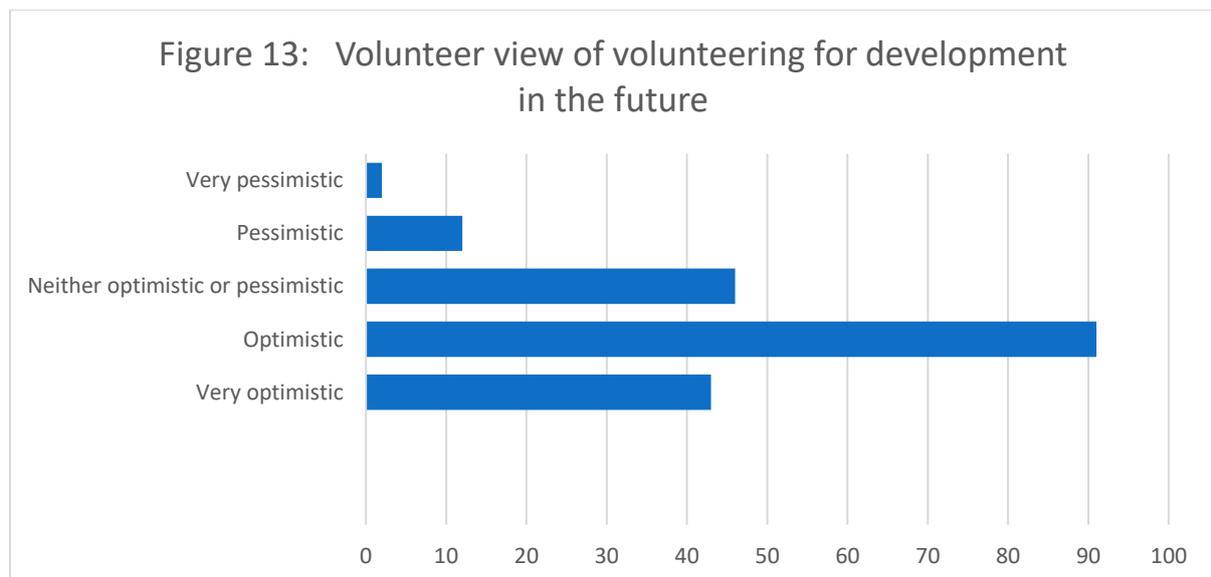
I would rather volunteer in my own community in future.

I got burned. I am blacklisting (organisation) in any of my volunteering plans in the future.

I am still interested in a possible future assignment, but would assess well where and how, especially being a parent of young children.

3.4 Volunteering for development in the future

Volunteers were asked about their overall view of volunteering for development in the future in the context of the challenges posed by COVID-19. Their view is shown in Figure 13.²⁰



²⁰ A total of 194 volunteers responded to this question

For those who were pessimistic there was the opportunity to offer ideas for what might be different in the future. Many of these contributions focused on on-line learning and remote volunteering, but the vision of how this would play out varied.

Online learning platforms. We have the technology to help, teach and share our knowledge with others.

I believe Covid-19 is not here to stay. After a while it will be gone and things will go back to normal again. Therefore, we should just find a New Normal on Volunteering amidst the pandemic, which afterwards will be forgotten when the international exchange programmes will resume. So, for now, volunteering should also focus on capacity building and skills development. Skills development and capacity building should be done also through online exchanges.

one thing is sure is remote support is not a satisfactory experience

And there were also some more radical comments:

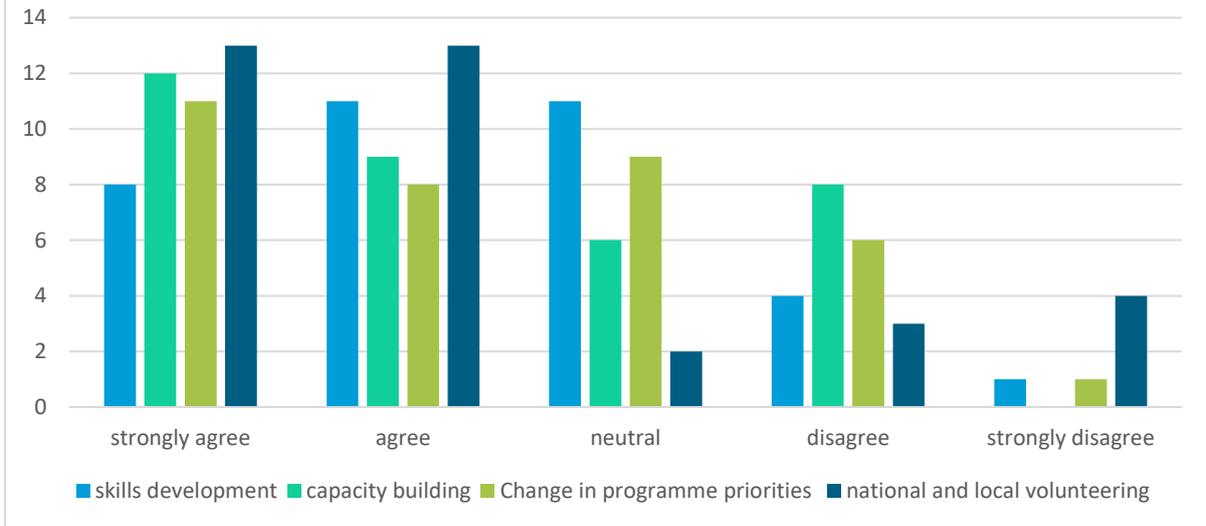
Better investment in local staff, which is more sustainable anyway and does not perpetuate power imbalance of white supremacist and colonial legacies.

The shape of volunteering for development in the future was also explored. The next questions focused on specific areas as the focus for volunteering for development in the future. These areas were

- A heightened focus on skills development
- A heightened focus on capacity building
- A change in programme priorities where volunteers are assigned
- A heightened focus on national and local volunteering

The VIO survey results are shown in Figure 14. The area of most expected change is in the expansion of national and local volunteers in future activity. At the same time, the focus of the work as capacity building presents more strongly than skills development, while changes in programme focus are also strongly indicated.

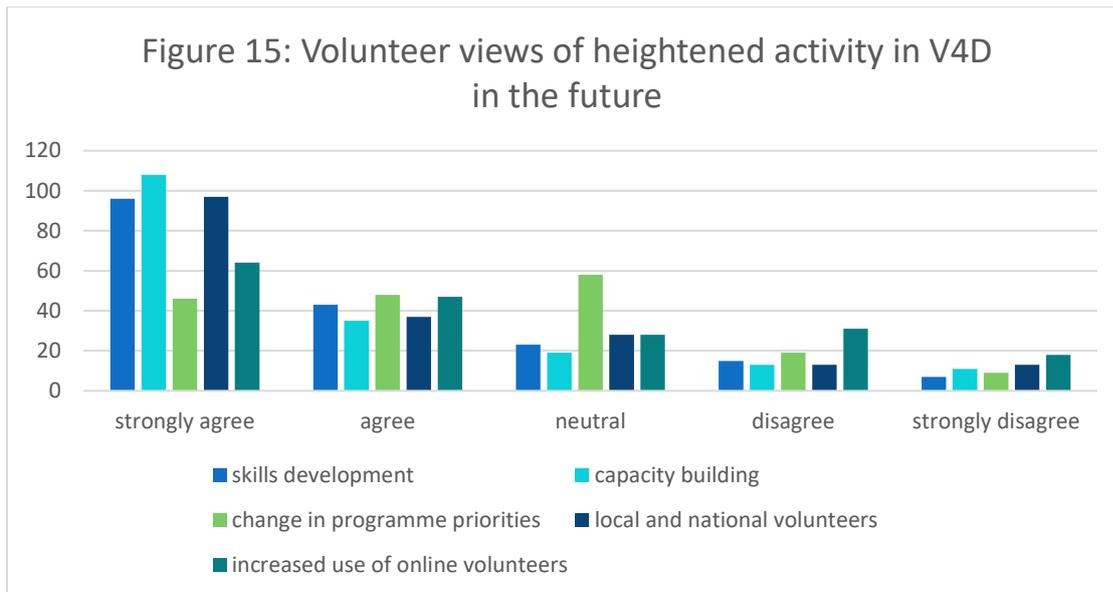
Figure 14: VIO views of the heightened activity of V4D in the future



I see more blended placements in our future: remote volunteers partnered with community/national volunteers to deliver capacity building support; partners having access to a combination of volunteer and funding support in one 'package'; more short term, targeted placements than we had before as volunteers are nervous about making long-term commitments overseas and/or are not financially stable enough to commit to long term placements.

Also, on South-South volunteers - so more multidirectional.

The outcomes of the volunteer survey are shown in Figure 15, which also included an additional question on online volunteering. It is interesting to note how many volunteers 'strongly agreed' with all propositions for the focus of volunteering in the future. Within this, the change in programme priorities was the least of the likely directions. Capacity building, skills development and the use of national and local volunteers were strongly agreed as likely to be heightened in the future by more than 50% of respondents. At the other end around 20% did not agree there would be an increased use of online volunteers.



I think online support is great, but for the work I did you need to be on the field 90% of the time, so no online support programme would come even close to that level of support. Also, there is no proper internet coverage everywhere and definitely no financial means for national volunteers to afford that!

Whilst I am in support of remote volunteering, I think that it takes away from the personal / human interactions and may thwart the effectiveness of true capacity strengthening. I think where one has had a good deal of prior in person involvement with a PO makes for more successful outcomes.

Climate change is real - there is need to create paradigm shift from disaster management to sustainable environmental development that are free from serious health hazards and environmental related diseases.

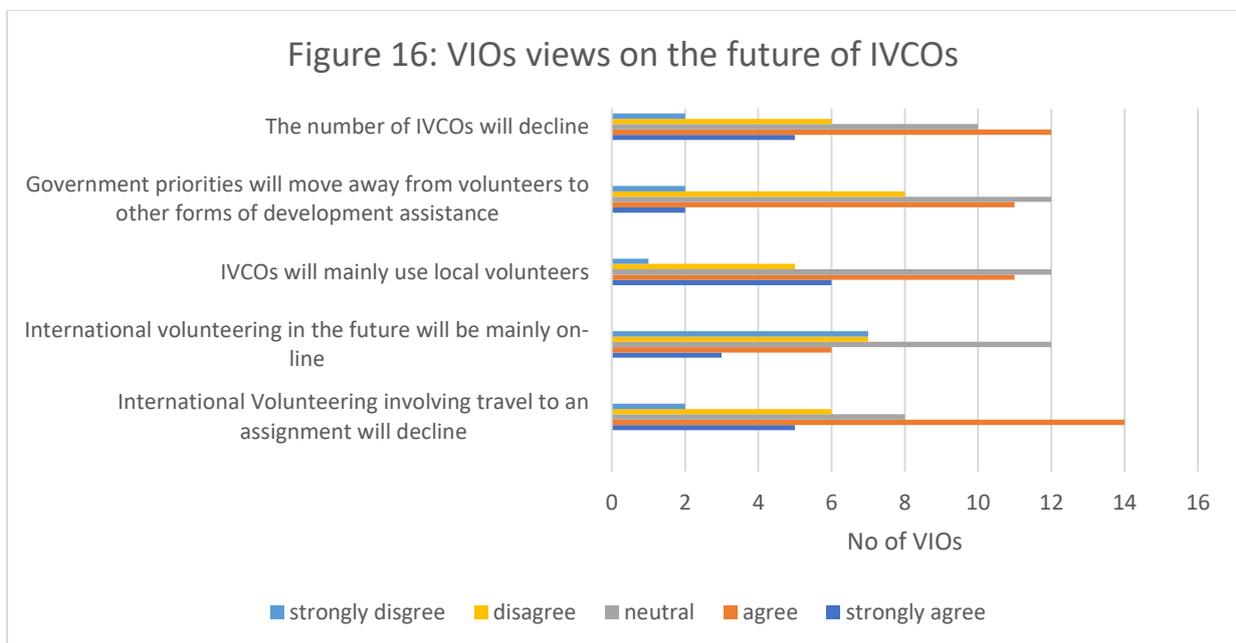
My pessimism is directly related to the ongoing pandemic and our ability to travel safely. Once (If!) we have a vaccine, perhaps my enthusiasm for the future of volunteering will change. I'm also acutely aware as I write that the same developing countries in which we volunteered are now experiencing devastating effects on their local economies. There will be a lot of work to do in the future. Will we be up to it?

4 The future of IVCOs

Finally, VIOs were asked to consider the long-term future of IVCOs. The following propositions were put forward and respondents asked to indicate their views on a scale of 1 to 5 ranging from 'strongly agreed' to 'strongly disagreed'. The propositions were:

- International volunteering involving travel to an assignment will decline
- International volunteering in the future will be mainly online
- IVCOs will mainly use local volunteers
- IVCOs will focus on developing volunteer infrastructure
- Government priorities will move away from volunteers to other forms of development assistance
- The number of IVCOs will decline.

The response of the VIOs can be seen in Figure 16. Most VIOs were either felt neutral on the issues or agreed mildly, both gaining 54 responses overall. Those respondents strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing were relatively small in numbers and combined only accounted for 20% of the total responses.



The key detailed findings are as follows:

- 19 VIOs thought international volunteering involving travel would decline compared to 8 who disagreed
- 17 VIOs thought IVCOs will use mainly local volunteers compared with 6 who disagreed
- 9 VIOs agreed that international volunteering would become mainly online compared with 14 who disagreed
- 13 VIOs thought government priorities would move away from volunteering compared with 10 who did not
- 17 VIOs thought the number of IVCOs would decline compared to 8 who disagreed.

Such views may not be easily consistent. But taken together, there is sense among many that traditional in person international volunteering and the IVCOs that facilitate these placements will decline. However, many believe that these traditional forms will be replaced by local volunteers rather than by online volunteers.²¹

There were three additional comments that are worth highlighting:

The well-established need to move with speed to build upcoming IVCOs, especially those found in the Global South. Enhanced partnerships will be appropriate.

There is a need to provide a multiple offer of volunteer assignments which will allow more people to volunteer in different ways.

We, as a volunteer organization shall find the better way and solution on how to work in this field in future properly and in a good professional manner.

Postscript: A final word from a volunteer

It is fairly stressful COVID19, especially knowing the poorer quality health care systems here and the low adherence to safety precautions among the general public and even local partners. I am so thankful (organisation) allowed us the option of mostly working from home as a bunch of my colleagues have been quarantined in a town nearby. It is scary to think of being forced into quarantine by the government, and also a bit frightening to think of the backlog in testing. It is hard, too, with vacation/leave time because you are stuck inside all day and that is not really a rest. There has been a lot of work I have been able to get done with my local organizations - but they are struggling to grapple with adjusting to new restrictions with the pandemic.

o o 0 o o o

²¹ In this context "local" is used to mean both national and community volunteers

Annex 1: List of participating VIOs

- 1 Crossroads International
- 2 KOICA
- 3 Volunteer Involving Organizations Society
- 4 Oxfam-Québec
- 5 National Volunteering Council of Mozambique - CNV
- 6 CECI
- 7 Cuso International
- 8 Volunteers Involving Organisations Network
- 9 United Nations Volunteers
- 10 UNV
- 11 Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- 12 Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk
- 13 Nepal Friendship Society
- 14 ACTIONAID HELLAS
- 15 VSO
- 16 German Doctors e.V.
- 17 Singapore International Foundation
- 18 AFS Interkulturelle Begegnungen e.V.
- 19 ijgd Hildesheim
- 20 Experiment e.V.
- 21 SERVE
- 22 EIL Intercultural Learning
- 23 ADRA Deutschland e.V.
- 24 VNB e.V.
- 25 Norec
- 26 Macau New Chinese Youth Association (MNCYA)
- 27 Australian Volunteers International
- 28 ComMutiny - The Youth Collective
- 29 International Volunteers for Peace (Australia)
- 30 Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS) / Student Volunteers Foundation
- 31 WUSC
- 32 Huam Jai Asasamak Association
- 33 SUCO
- 34 ICYE
- 35 ASSOCIATION JSA
- 36 Students Volunteer Foundation Malaysia
- 37 International Volunteer HQ