

**UN****Volunteers**

In FACT: The Online Volunteering Service

www.onlinevolunteering.org

Underlying all activities of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme today is the commitment to support sustainable human development globally through the promotion of volunteerism; to embrace and promote volunteer action in all its diversity; and to enhance opportunities for all people to participate. Within the overarching framework of the Millennium Development Goals, UNV's work focuses on three broad areas: mobilizing volunteers; stimulating national policy development on volunteerism; and international advocacy.

In recent years, UNV has launched several initiatives to respond to demand and opportunities for engaging a wider group of citizens to volunteer for development both locally and internationally. While UNV continues to assign some 5,500 UN Volunteers every year to support communities and organizations in programme countries, it also hosts and manages the Online Volunteering (OV) service.

Established in March 2000, the OV service connects organizations working in or focused on developing countries with a diverse, abundant pool of people from all over the world who possess a variety of talents, skills and expertise. For many of the participating organizations, online volunteers present a tremendous and much-needed resource by helping the organizations to stretch on-site resources even further, serve more people, and build upon their capacities in a variety of skills.

Online volunteers also benefit from this exchange. It is a perfect channel for people who want to volunteer, but cannot take time off work or studies, be away from their families or other commitments. Not only do they learn about other cultures and countries, they also gain knowledge on the many issues faced by those living in the developing world. By volunteering online, they can exercise skills they are learning in school or in the workplace. It also provides the opportunity to take on roles and assume responsibilities not always provided by their professional or academic life. It may equally grant an expatriate to reconnect with and provide help to his or her country.

While online volunteers are active in many diverse activities, some examples of their work include providing online tutorials in various academic and technical areas, offering professional expertise and advice, researching topics and gathering related data, building databases, editing and preparing press releases and proposals, creating web pages, designing brochures and newsletters, managing other online volunteers, and translating documents.

To date, this initiative has involved some 600 organizations. An estimated 30,000 people have joined the OV service, with more than half engaging in an assignment. Reaffirming UNV's commitment to promoting South-South cooperation, approximately 55 percent of the organizations participating in the OV service are based in the developing world, as are 45 percent of the online volunteers.

"Online volunteering helps to harness the wealth of willingness, resources and commitment that exists in the volunteer world. So often, people want to help, but simply don't know how to get involved. The OV service provides a way that is both simple and accessible for such people and, yet, changes lives in very practical ways."

Global Hand, an NGO based in Hong Kong

"It's a unique experience, not only because you help, but also because you get acquainted with areas and problems that you only hear about on the news. You also start having great contact with people you didn't really know before."

Online Volunteer in Germany with the African Youth Foundation

To find out how you can start making a difference online, please visit: <http://www.onlinevolunteering.org>

Based in Bonn, Germany, UNV is the UN organization that supports sustainable human development globally through the promotion of volunteerism, including the mobilization of volunteers. As a part of its activities, each year, UNV provides the opportunity for over 7000 skilled and experienced professionals, 70 percent coming from developing countries, to support peace, relief and development initiatives in some 150 countries. In addition, it engages thousands of other individuals in the work of the United Nations through www.onlinevolunteering.org, and manages the WorldVolunteerWeb, a global volunteering portal that serves as a knowledge resource base for campaigning, advocacy, information dissemination and networking.

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