International volunteer programs in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, and United Kingdom:

Comparative analysis and future directions

April 2021

Table of contents

Annexes

Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ABV	Australian Business Volunteers
AVI	Australian Volunteers International
AVID	Australian Volunteers for International Development
AYAD	Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development
CDFC	Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada
CECI	Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
CESO	Canadian Executive Service Organisation
COVID-19	Novel coronavirus
DFAT	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Officer
GAF	Global Affairs Canada
ICS	International Citizen Service
ICS2	International Citizen Service Phase 2
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
IVS	International Volunteers and Service
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFAT	New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
Norec	Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation
ODE	Office of Development Effectiveness
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSB	Overseas Service Bureau
UK	United Kingdom
UNV	United Nations Volunteer
V4D	Volunteering for Development
VCP	Volunteer Cooperation Program
Vol4Dev	Volunteering for Development
VSA	Volunteer Service Abroad
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WUSC	World University Service of Canada

Executive Summary

The Australian Government has been supporting Australians to volunteer overseas since the early 1960s. While aspects of the Australian Volunteers Program have evolved over time, the primary modality of sending skilled Australians abroad using a North-South model[1] has remained.

The Australian Government, like other donors researched for this comparative analysis—Canada, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom (UK)—use volunteer programs as a vehicle to promote sustainable development, build relationships, and enhance cultural understanding by strengthening people-to-people links.

Around the turn of the century, some volunteer programs began to **challenge the traditional model of donor-led development assistance and North-South volunteering**. In Norway for example, this meant a significant change in their almost 40 year approach of sending professional Norwegians to less developed countries, shifting to a mutual exchange model of professionals and volunteers.[2] Different models of volunteering predominantly include: South-North volunteering,[3] South-South volunteering,[4] and local volunteering.[5] Of the four countries researched for this comparative analysis—Canada, the UK, and Norway have adopted the models of South-North and South-South volunteering within their programs. The UK also provides opportunities for national volunteering within their Volunteers for Development program implemented by Voluntary Service Overseas.

Each volunteer program has evolved over time, though never at a more rapid pace than in 2020. All programs have needed to **adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic** and consider their approach to volunteering at a time when the movement of people and international travel are severely restricted. All five volunteer programs have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by repatriating volunteers living in a host country and putting future international deployments on hold indefinitely.

Remote volunteering emerged as a common response to the repatriation of volunteers to their home countries due to the pandemic. However, most donors acknowledge that remote volunteering cannot be the sole long-term solution as it is no replacement for face-to-face engagement.

The volunteer programs that use alternate methods to North-South volunteering didn't have to scale back operations to the same extent as those countries that only use this model, such as Australia. This made them slightly **more resilient to the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic** as well as demonstrated their commitment to the **localisation agenda**.

Current trends in volunteering include greater participation in **informal volunteering,** including e-volunteering. This has been made possible through technological advances and social media. Individuals are drawn to these flatter structures, which some see as more dynamic, impactful, and effective.

The increased focus on **local volunteering** and the **localisation agenda** is a common theme in the literature on volunteering. However, the United National Volunteers warns against local solutions being touted as the panacea to addressing marginalisation. They implore that all solutions, including those that involve volunteering, require a nuanced response to be effective.

---

[1] North-South volunteering or exchange refers to the traditional model of sending skilled individuals from a developed country to a low- or middle-income country to share skills and knowledge.

[2] 'South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Action', Norec 2019.

[3] South-North volunteering or exchange refers to participants from a low- or middle-income country traveling to a developed country (usually the donor country) to share skills and knowledge.

[4] South-South volunteering or exchange refers to an individual from a low- or middle-income country travelling to another low- or middle-income country to share skills and knowledge.

[5] Local volunteering (also called community volunteering or national volunteering) involves nationals from their home country undertaking volunteering.

The increase and support of local volunteering is currently being explored through the **Australian Volunteers Programs' Innovation Fund**. One of the roles of the Innovation Fund is to trial new ideas to complement the traditional North-South model of volunteering used by the program. The Innovation Fund is currently supporting 15 different ideas for how the program might use alternate models of volunteering, including ideas that will further explore the themes around local volunteering, youth volunteering and supporting national volunteering infrastructure.

Another structure within the Australian Volunteers Program that supports its ability to respond to change is the **embedded and comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and learning** (MEL) system. This is a standout amongst other donor programs, as a common challenge discussed during the interviews was data collection, triangulation, and aggregation, specifically when assessing people-to-people links and improved diplomatic relations.

While the method of sending skilled Australians overseas has not changed, the program has evolved significantly and adapted to the changing global landscape. Its comprehensive MEL system and institutionalised approach to innovation means it is **well placed to adapt to future challenges** in the volunteering sector.

1 Introduction

For more than 60 years the Australian Government has supported Australians to volunteer overseas to assist the development of lower income countries.[6]

The aim of this comparative analysis is to portray the international experience, compare Australia's approach to that of other countries, and summarise how countries are responding to current volunteering challenges. The report does this by comparing the Australian Volunteers Program with government supported volunteer programs in Canada, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom (UK). The evaluation team undertook a desk assessment of relevant documents for each donor, complemented by interviews with those responsible for managing these programs.[7]

This comparative analysis looks at the ways each donor country approaches volunteering, including North-South volunteering,[8] South-North volunteering,[9] South-South volunteering[10] or triangular cooperation,[11] and local volunteering.[12] The desk review and interviews investigated program objectives and the methods used to achieve intended outcomes, as well as value for money considerations and the potential to use programs to achieve diplomatic influence. The report also unpacks each country's program response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are responding to current challenges. In the final section, this document looks at the trends in international volunteering and reviews the literature on the 'future of volunteering'.

---

[6] Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). 'History of International Volunteering in Australia.' Accessed online 4 January 2021, https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/volunteers/about-the-program/Pages/history

[7] Interviews with donors: Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec, Norway), Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO, UK), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT, New Zealand) and Global Affairs Canada (GAF, Canada) December 2020.

[8] North-South volunteering or exchange refers to the traditional model of sending skilled individuals from a developed country to a low- or middle-income country to share skills and knowledge. This model tends to imply that the expertise is usually one way. Margaret S. Sherraden, Benjamin Lough, and Amanda Moore McBride. 'Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors.' *Voluntas*, issue 19, 2008: 395-421

[9] South-North volunteering or exchange refers to participants from a low- or middle-income country traveling to a developed country (usually the donor country) to exchange skills and knowledge.

[10] South-South co-operation as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) refers to the sharing of knowledge and resources between, typically, middle-income countries with the aim of identifying effective practices. Taken from OECD.org. 'Task Team on South-South Cooperation' accessed online 4 January 2021 https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/taskteamonSouth-Southco-operation.htm. In relation to volunteering or exchange this refers to an individual from a low- or middle-income country travelling to another low- or middle-income country for the purpose of participating in the program.

[11] Triangular cooperation as defined by the OECD refers to a beneficiary partner seeking support to tackle a specific development challenge; the pivotal partner having proven experience in the issue, and sharing its resources, knowledge and expertise; and the facilitating partner helping connect the beneficiary and the pivotal partners, supporting their collaboration financially and technically. Taken from OECD.org. 'Triangular cooperation' accessed online 4 January 2021 http://www.oecd.org/dac/triangular-cooperation/#ourWork.

[12] Local volunteering (also called community volunteering or national volunteering) involves nationals from their home country undertaking volunteering.

2 The History and Evolution of the Australian Volunteers Program

2.1   History

International volunteering in Australia originated in **1951** with the establishment of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme, first sending Australian volunteer students to Indonesia.

In **1961** the Overseas Service Bureau (now Australian Volunteers International) was established to support Australians volunteering overseas. In the same year the Australian Government began supporting international volunteers by providing funding to the Overseas Service Bureau (OSB) as part of the Australian Volunteers Abroad program.

In **1964** the first 14 Australian Volunteers Abroad departed to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, and Nigeria.

Between **1963** and **1996** the Australian aid program provided core funding to select Australian non-government organisations for their volunteer programs.[13]

In **1997** the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) program was introduced, targeting Australian youth aged between 18 and 30.

2.2   Evolution

In **2005**, the Australian Government ran a competitive tender process to deliver two parts of the volunteers program: the AYAD stream and the Volunteers Program. The Volunteers Program was managed by Australian Volunteers International (AVI), Australian Business Volunteers (ABV), and Austraining International (now Scope Global) who were also contracted to manage the AYAD stream.

In **2009** a review of the Australian Government Volunteer Program recommended designing a unified volunteer program. The three successful organisations selected were: AVI, Austraining International, and the Australian Red Cross.

In **2011** the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program was launched. This aimed to streamline the different programs and brands under one identity and standardise the recruitment, management, and volunteer entitlements under the program.

In **2014** the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) completed an independent evaluation of the AVID program. The evaluation found that volunteers make an effective contribution to the Australian Government's development and public diplomacy objectives. All evaluation recommendations were accepted, which led to a focus on further improving the development effectiveness, efficiency, and value-for-money of the program. This included consolidating AVID into a single volunteer program and retiring the youth stream: AYAD.[14]

---

[13] These organisations included: the OSB; the Australian Expert Services Overseas Program; the Paulian Lay Missionary Service; Interserve; Thailand-Australia Youth Ambassadors Program (also managed by OSB); FORESIGHT; Fred Hollows Foundation; The Australian Cranio-Maxillo Facial; and Médecins Sans Frontières.

[14] DFAT. 'History of International Volunteering in Australia.' Accessed online 4 January 2021, https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/volunteers/about-the-program/Pages/history

2.3   Today

The AVID program concluded on **31 December 2017** and was replaced by the new Australian Volunteers Program (the program), which sets out a ten-year phase of volunteering from January 2018 to December 2027. The program aims to place more than 1000 Australian volunteers each year in 26 countries to support more than 700 partner organisations. The program places at least 97% of volunteers in the Indo-Pacific region and 40% of assignments in the Pacific. The program is currently delivered by AVI in consortium with Cardno Emerging Markets and Alinea Whitelum.

The program has piloted several different volunteering approaches since it commenced in 2018. New and innovative ways of volunteering continue to be trialled through the Australian Volunteers Program Innovation Fund.

Comparing the Australian Volunteers Program to other countries

Country	Australia	New Zealand	Canada	United Kingdom	Norway
Program name	Australian Volunteers Program	Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA)	Volunteer Cooperation Program (VCP)	International Citizen Service Phase 2 (ICS2), and Volunteering for Development (V4D)	Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation
Delivering organisation/agency	AVI	VSA	13 Canadian partner organisations[15]	VSO[16]	Norec[17]
Method/s of programming					
North-South volunteering	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Remote volunteering	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
South-North volunteering			✔	✔	✔
South-South volunteering			✔	✔	✔
Local volunteering			*[18]	✔	

---

[15] Partner organisations include: Canadian Executive Service Organisation (CESO), Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada (CDFC), Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI), Crossroads International, Cuso International, Foundation Paul Gérin-Lajoie (French) (consortium with Éducation Internationale and Fédération des Cégeps), International Bureau for Children's Rights, Oxfam-Québec (French), SUCO (French), UPA Développement international (French), Veterinians Without Borders, WUSC (World University Service of Canada), and Youth Challenge International.

[16] The ICS2 is the youth stream of the UK's volunteering program and delivered by VSO in consortium with Restless Development and Raleigh International.

[17] Norec does reference volunteers on their website but in an interview for this evaluation (December 2020) said their exchange participants aren't considered volunteers.

[18] Support for national volunteering is occurring as part of the COVID-19 response however is not included in the current design of Canada's VCP.

3 Summary of volunteer programs in donor countries interviewed

3.1 New Zealand, Volunteer Service Abroad

3.1.1 At a glance[19]

Funding period	2018–2023
Annual budget	NZD9.1 million (AUD8.5 million)
Annual volunteer target	200
Reach	Pacific, Timor-Leste and Cambodia
Typical assignment length	6 weeks – 2 years (6-month average)

3.1.2 Program summary

VSA—Te Tūao Tāwāhi—is contracted by the New Zealand Government to deliver an international volunteer program. VSA is a registered charity and receives most of their funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). The relationship between VSA and MFAT has been ongoing since the early 1960s when VSA was founded by Sir Edmund Hillary.

The overarching **goals** of the program are to achieve sustainable development outcomes across the Pacific and beyond, and to form enduring relationships between New Zealand and partner countries.

The program is currently under a five-year grant funding agreement (2018-23). The program aims to send approximately 200 volunteers abroad per year or 1000 volunteers over the life of the grant, focusing on the Pacific, Timor Leste and Cambodia. Assignments are based on local needs and designed with the local host organisations. All volunteers are recruited from New Zealand by VSA. While new modalities are being investigated to strengthen aspects of localisation, the program has traditionally employed a **mix of methods all within the North-South model of volunteering**. These include sending skilled Kiwis abroad using one of the following methods: one-on-one relationship with a partner organisation; chain assignments where one volunteer goes from one assignment to the next; group assignments, where a few volunteers are recruited to work with one local organisation; e-volunteering assignments, where volunteers support their local organisation remotely; and pair assignments, where two volunteers take turns to visit a partner and use a complementary set of skills.

Partner organisations include regional and central government agencies, local and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), education and health bodies and individual schools, colleges, and health clinics. They offer both long-term (12 months and over) and short-term (6 week) assignments (including e-volunteering).[20]

MFAT is confident that their program demonstrates **good value for money**. While they admit it is possible to assess the average cost per volunteer by dividing the total number of participants in the program, they note that this is a crude measure and doesn't represent the intricacies of the program. It also doesn't consider that, due to their focus on the Pacific region, economies of scale are unlikely to be achieved as operating costs are often a lot higher.

---

[19] VSA's Annual Review: 'A world with thriving communities. Highlights of our work in the Pacific and beyond, July 2019–30 June 2020'. VSA.

[20] Cited on VSA 'About VSA'. Accessed online 4 January 2021 at https://vsa.org.nz/about-vsa/.

The **program is highly valued on the ground** by both local communities as well as diplomatic missions. The benefits of the VSA program are vast due to the deep networks that have and continue to be built in-country because of New Zealand volunteers living and working alongside locals. It can also give New Zealand **reach and exposure** where they have no formal presence or other bilateral programs. For example, volunteers working in regions with limited official New Zealand presence can help to provide current contextual understanding and perspectives which could otherwise be difficult to gain.[21]

The program also provides a **greater understanding within New Zealand about the benefits of the aid program and how it works**. It is recognised that these are significant benefits to the program however articulating and measuring them is a challenge.

---

[21] Interview with MFAT, (December 2020).

3.2   Canada, Volunteer Cooperation Program

3.2.1   At a glance[22]

Funding period	2020-2027
Annual budget	CAD60 million (AUD61 million)
Annual volunteer target	1400
Reach	50 countries with a focus in Sub-Saharan Africa
Typical assignment length	2 weeks – 2 years

3.2.2   Program summary

Canada's VCP provides opportunities for skilled Canadians to participate in Canada's international development program. Global Affairs Canada financially contributes to 13 projects implemented by 15 volunteer partner organizations[23] who recruit, train, and deploy a broad range of volunteers in developing countries. The program uses several **approaches to volunteering** including the 'traditional' North-South model, the South-North model, South-South model, and e-volunteering. These approaches have been included in previous iterations of the program however the VCP design stipulates that the vast majority (90%) of placements are North-South, noting this proportion has been reduced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The two overarching **objectives** of the program are to build local capacity in-country and engage Canadians in international development within Canada. The second objective is thought to be furthered by the diverse number of Canadian volunteer partner organisations contracted to deliver the program.

Placements can be over a short or long period, from two weeks to up to a year, and include pre-departure and re-integration training: assignment length can go up to two years. There are some virtual volunteering opportunities. The VCP (2020-2027) aims to deploy more than 10,000 Canadian volunteers to 50 developing countries.[24]

All international development projects funded by Global Affairs Canada have a **cost share component** of at least five per cent.[25] For the VCP, it represents an approximate average of 41% because volunteer time is included as in-kind support and costed at up to CAD200 per day. Due to this large proportion of in-kind support from volunteers, the program is considered **value for money** as this is significantly cheaper than programs that use technical assistance. The program does not collect an average cost per participant. Value for money is a consideration when choosing Canadian organisations to participate in the program.

The program is **not used as a diplomacy tool**. The program recognises that volunteers living and working abroad tend to promote Canadian values. However, this is not the purpose of the program but an additional benefit, specifically where Canada does not have any diplomatic presence in-country, as the program contributes to positive relationships in countries where Canada's bilateral program is minimal.

---

[22] Government of Canada. 'Volunteer Cooperation Program.' Accessed online 4 January 2021 https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/study_work_travel-etude_travail_voyage/volunteer_cooperation_program-programme_cooperation_volontaire.aspx?lang=eng and interview with Global Affairs Canada (December 2020).

[23] CESO, CDFC, CECI, Crossroads International, Cuso International, Foundation Paul Gérin-Lajoie (French) (consortium with Éducation Internationale and Fédération des Cégeps), International Bureau for Children's Rights, Oxfam-Québec (French), SUCO (French), UPA Développement international (French), Veterinians Without Borders, WUSC, Youth Challenge International.

[24] Government of Canada. 'Volunteer Cooperation Program.' Accessed online 4 January 2021 https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/study_work_travel-etude_travail_voyage/volunteer_cooperation_program-programme_cooperation_volontaire.aspx?lang=eng

[25] Government of Canada. 'Policy on Cost-Sharing for Grant and Non-Repayable Contribution Agreements' July 2019. Accessed online 4 January 2021 https://www.international.gc.ca/development-developpement/partners-partenaires/bt-oa/cost_sharing-partage_couts.aspx?lang=eng

The large number of Canadian volunteer partner organisations has made it somewhat challenging to aggregate results at a program level. While the program shares a common program logic, each organisation has their own way of reporting against indicators, so it is difficult as a program to aggregate results. The intention is to address this in the new program.

3.3 United Kingdom, International Citizen Service and Volunteer for Development programs

3.3.1 At a glance[26]

Funding period	2015 – 2021	2017-2021
Volunteer stream	ICS2 (Youth Volunteering Scheme)	Volunteering for Development (V4D)
Annual budget	£21.1 million[27] (AUD35.4 million)	£15.4 million[28] (AUD26.9 million)
Annual volunteer target	2015-2018: 7,000	1300[29]
	2018-2020: 3,000	
Age range	18–25-year-old volunteers	18+
	23-35-year-old Team Leaders	Typically mid to late career for international and national volunteers
Reach	33 developing countries since 2015, now revised to seven[30]	24 developing countries
Typical assignment length	12 weeks	1 month – 2 years

3.3.2 Program summary

The UK's FCDO[31] provides two schemes for international volunteering: 1) International Citizen Service (ICS) Phase 2, the youth volunteering stream delivered by a contract (2015-2021), and 2) the Volunteering for Development (V4D) programme delivered through a grant mechanism. ICS2 came to its planned end in February 2021. Both programmes are delivered by VSO, an international development organisation that specialises in volunteering and partnerships. The ICS is delivered in consortium with Restless Development and Raleigh International.

Launched in 2010, the ICS was intended to provide an opportunity for all **young British people**, regardless of background, to help tackle poverty locally and globally. This program supports young people from the UK and overseas (at a ratio of 1:1) to volunteer on 12-week placements that directly address the Sustainable Development Goals. A key aspect of the program is that British participants must **fundraise** 10% of the assignment cost. All placements must achieve a positive contribution to poverty reduction and sustainable development outcomes in the host country, enhance the personal and social development of volunteer participants, and build skills for each volunteer so they better understand international development and act as agents of social change within their own communities and beyond.

---

[26] International Citizen Service Phase 2, United Kingdom, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Development Tracker, Annual Review 2020. Accessed online, 4 January 2021 https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-204894/documents and Volunteers for Development, United Kingdom, FCDO, Development Tracker, Annual Review 2020. Accessed online, 4 January 2021 https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-GOV-1-300083/documents.

[28] Average over four years

[29] Approximately three quarters of expert participants are national volunteers and one quarter international volunteer participants (from the UK).

[30] Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

[31] FCDO represents the merge of two previous government bodies: Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The merge occurred in September 2020.

The V4D grant supports the delivery of the UK Aid strategy using British and international expertise to improve basic services and livelihoods for vulnerable and extremely poor people. In recent years V4D began using a **blended model of volunteering**, recruiting different types of volunteers (community, national, international, corporate, and youth) to deliver change. VSO programs are often designed to address specific issues and include different types of volunteers who each play a distinct but vital role.[32] Volunteer placements can be as short as one month or up to two years long. Programmes utilise international and national volunteers. The **increased focus on local volunteers** (also called community volunteers) is based on lessons from humanitarian responses, where locally led volunteer responses are crucial.[33]

Value for money is a key consideration of the program and is assessed based on efficiency, economy, effectiveness and equality. Attempts are made to keep costs low while recognising that some objectives require additional costs, for example ensuring diversity in program participants. As these programs use blended models of volunteering, some modalities are cheaper (e.g. local volunteers compared to international volunteers), so it is difficult to get a like for like comparison with other international volunteer programs or develop an average cost per participant.[34]

The people-to-people links from V4D help to develop **thriving partnerships with institutions** both within the UK and overseas. Both programs help to **demonstrate what UK Aid is delivering** to the UK public. ICS and V4D volunteers bring new skills and **knowledge back to the UK** after volunteers have completed their assignment, including the domestic social action element of ICS, "Action at Home". The V4D program benefits from two-way skills transfer. For example, an educational tablet software developed for use in Malawi was later adopted in UK primary schools.[35]

ICS has created a global network of socially active global citizens.

---

[32] Janet Clark, 'Harnessing blended volunteering to reduce harmful traditional practices', March 2020, VSO.

[33] Interview with FCDO (December 2020).

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

3.4   Norway, Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation

3.4.1   At a glance[36]

Funding period	2019
Annual budget	NOK200 (AUD30.6million)
Annual volunteer target	1000[37]
Age range	18 – 35 years
Reach	25 countries across African, Asia and Latin America
Typical assignment length	12 months

3.4.2   Project summary

Norec is an executive body under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They aim to support the achievement of the overarching goals of Norway's development policy. This is done through **facilitating reciprocal exchange of employees and volunteers** with international partners across multiple sectors including government, civil society, and the private sector. This model of exchange (as opposed to only sending individual experts from Norway) was launched in 2001 and is now integral to how the program contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals. A key component of the model is that the exchange is driven and managed by the partners themselves, while Norec facilitates the process. In 2018, Norec facilitated the exchange of more than 600 participants between partner organisations in Norway and across 25 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin-America. All projects supported by Norec are initiated and established locally by the organisations involved.

Norec uses a **mixture of approaches** to facilitate their program, including North-South/South-North exchanges and South-South exchanges. South-South exchanges comprise more than 50% of Norec's program. Reciprocal exchange constitutes the foundation of the program, where each partner sends one or more participants each way for the purpose of mutual learning.[38]

The program **does not operate with a cost per participant measure** but instead looks at the impacts and ability of the design to reach intended goals. Norec said it would be possible to use the overall financial cost of the program and divide it by participants however this would be a crude measure.[39]

The focus of each assignment is cultural exchange. Participants in the North-South and South-North exchanges **share Norwegian values and culture** through the cultural exchange. In the South-South exchanges, exposure to Norwegian values and culture is limited. Cultural exchanges enhance **people-to-people links**, which is especially the case when most participants are youth. Their participation in the program tends to be a life shaping experience which fosters strong bonds and affiliations with a second country and tends to result in participants having a global citizen mindset.[40] The program is set up to facilitate two-way information exchange and mutual learning, and challenge the perception that learning only goes from North to South.

---

[36] Norec, Yearly Report (2018). Accessed online, 4 January 2021, https://www.norec.no/en/about-norec/organisation/reports/

[37] In the last few years Norec has reached between 600 and 700 participants. This target was part of their vision for 2023 however is unlikely to be achieved given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the program.

[38] 'South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Action', Norec (2019).

[39] Interview with Norec (December 2020).

[40] Ibid.

4 Changes in 2020: Adapting to COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all donors interviewed said they have made huge modifications to their volunteer programs. Most notably, volunteers have been **repatriated** to their home countries and new volunteer deployments have been **put on hold indefinitely**. Remote volunteering (sometimes referred to as e-volunteering) emerged as another prominent theme. Most programs have enhanced the opportunities for full time, **remote volunteering** and some donors are considering how this model can be continued and potentially expanded in a post COVID-19 setting. All donors acknowledged the value in face-to-face volunteering as a core aspect of relationship building and people-to-people links.

Another theme emerging from the interviews was that programs that use a suite of models did not experience the same level of 'shut-down' during the pandemic as those who implement a traditional North-South volunteering approach. Some suggested that alternate models of volunteering, for example South-North, South-South, or local volunteering, demonstrate a commitment to the **localisation agenda** and a more sustainable and locally led approach to programming. However recent research from FORUM suggests that there hasn't always been an equal commitment of care and support for volunteers participating in South-South programs, for example willingness to repatriate them during the COVID-19 pandemic.[41]

4.1 New Zealand COVID-19 Response

The deployment of volunteers is temporarily on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions. All volunteers in country were repatriated to New Zealand in March 2020 due to the risks of the pandemic and impending border closures. Some repatriated volunteers have continued aspects of their assignments remotely from New Zealand. The e-volunteering component of the program, which has been part of the program since 2013, has now expanded due to COVID-19. However, this still relies on an established relationship with the partner organisation. Volunteers are continuing to be recruited and added to a 'talent pool' of prospective volunteers that will be deployed when possible. However given the uncertainty of the future, the program is not expecting an immediate return to the number of volunteers sent prior to the pandemic and is looking into innovative ways to continue to build people-to-people links and work with Pacific and Timor-Leste communities.

4.2 Canada COVID-19 Response

Having recently undergone a new design, the decision was made to continue the program but to do so more flexibly. The pandemic resulted in repatriating Canadian volunteers and pausing the deployment of new Canadian volunteers. The pandemic created some unexpected opportunities to operationalise the localisation agenda. For example, the target of 90% North-South volunteers has been relaxed, there is an increase in e-volunteering taking place, South-South volunteering, and even local volunteering (which is not a part of the current program design) is continuing. Further, thematic funds are being used more flexibly to support local organisations. The program expects to learn lessons from these adaptations however the intention is that these are temporary measures and once international travel can resume, the program will continue under the current design.

---

[41] Perold, H, Mati, JM, Allum, C, & Lough, BJ (2021). 'COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering for Development. Part 1: Research Report. Findings from a study conducted for the International Forum for Volunteering in Development'. International Forum for Volunteering in Development. Accessed online 23 April 2021 https://forum-ids.org/covid-19-and-the-future-of-volunteering-for-development-research-report

4.3   UK COVID-19 Response

The ICS2 program is no longer operating overseas placements due to the pandemic. Between March 2020 and the closure of the current phase in February 2020, it has instead empowered ICS volunteers and alumni from the UK and developing countries to help respond to COVID-19 in their home country. The V4D program has been able to continue some operations, for example through community and local volunteering, even in times of restricted movement. Some international volunteers remained on placement through the pandemic, providing crucial support to vulnerable communities. This is seen as an unintended benefit of using a suite of volunteering methods. In responding to COVID-19, V4D has increased the contribution of these volunteers while others continue to work remotely, after having returned to their home country. Many former ICS volunteers are using skills developed on placement in developing countries to support the UK COVID-19 response, demonstrating the value of UK Aid. VSO is adapting their approach and developing innovative ways of remote and online volunteering due to the pandemic.

4.4   Norway COVID-19 response

Almost all Norwegian participants living abroad under this program returned to Norway in early 2020. However approximately 70% of the South-South participants continued their exchanges, as did most South-North participants who were living in Norway. The pandemic has shown that, to some extent, remote volunteering can be a substitute to physical travel, which has the added benefit of reducing the carbon footprint of the program. However, Norec noted that physical exchange, while currently on hold, is still very much a core aspect of the program and likely to resume when international travel is possible. The pandemic has meant that there is more digital capacity building, which is likely to remain a large part of the program going forward.

All donors agreed that these unprecedented times have forced them to critically assess how their volunteer programs are responding to local needs and examine how to further implement the localisation agenda.

5 Trends and future directions in international volunteering

There are two typical ways to think about international volunteering and service (IVS)*[42]* programs:

> *Proponents suggest that IVS encourages large numbers of ordinary people to get
> involved in global affairs, and to promote global peace, international understanding,
> and make tangible contributions to the well-being of people around the world.
> Critics contend that IVS tends toward imperialism, reinforcing existing inequalities,
> or at best, is ineffective in the face of grave global challenges.[43]*

In the supporters' scenario, benefits are felt by both receiving organisations and communities as well as the volunteers themselves. However, in the critics' scenario, host organisations and communities receive little benefit from international volunteers. Instead volunteers and sending countries gain 'an international perspective and a career boost' which maintains the status quo and does nothing to reduce poverty.[44] Running parallel to this is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the operationalisation of the localisation agenda and the Doing Development Differently manifesto, which all challenge the charity approach to aid and development. The next obvious question is: '*What does all of this mean for international volunteering and the Australian Volunteers Program?'*

The United Nations Volunteer (UNV) 2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report focusses on the **benefits of local volunteering** and its ability to strengthen community resilience.[45] The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) 2018 Global Review on Volunteering discusses the opportunities of 'globalisation' and addressing interconnected issues as a global community rather than using only local volunteering. However they also recognise that there is no single picture of volunteering and one of the significant challenges is the **lack of diversity** in the base of volunteers to represent the communities they support.[46] One suggestion to address this is to provide increased opportunities for local involvement as well as reimburse those who participate, specifically those with caring responsibilities or those living in the Global South.[47]

Compounding this lack of diversity are the multifaceted and complex challenges facing our increasingly networked world and the importance for Australian and international NGOs to adapt.[48] This is relevant for volunteer-sending organisations (and the donors who fund them) given that 'if we don't adapt…we risk running irrelevant programs, unwanted by the communities we work within'.[49] Krishnan contends that responding to this requires **genuine implementation of the localisation agenda** where NGOs **facilitate an enabling environment** that allows

---

[42] IVS is defined as 'an organized period of engagement and contribution to society by volunteers who work across an international border, in another country, or countries. IVS may be sponsored by public or private organizations, it is recognized and valued by society, and volunteers receive little or no monetary compensation. This definition excludes volunteering within national boundaries, as well as mutual aid and military service. Sherraden 2001, as cited in Margaret S. Sherraden, Benjamin Lough, and Amanda M. McBride. "Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors." *Voluntas*, issue 19, 2008, p. 398.

[43] Ibid, citing UNV 2002 and Brav et al 2002; Roberts 2004; Simpson 2004; Plews and Stuart 2007.

[44] Ibid p. 414

[45] UNV State of the World's Volunteerism Report: The thread that binds. Volunteerism and community resilience, 2018. Accessed online 10 January https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV_SWVR_2018_English_WEB.pdf

[46] IFRC Global Review on Volunteering, Geneva 2016. Accessed online 10 January https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/1301100-Global%20Review%20on%20Volunteering%20Report_EN-LR.pdf

[47] Shaun Hazeldine, 'Rethinking the future of volunteering?' Thought Pieces, December 5, 2018. Accessed online on 4 January 2021 https://future-rcrc.com/2018/12/05/rethinking-the-future-of-volunteering/

[48] Aarathi Krishnan, 'Localisation and the future of Australian NGOs and INGOs', Australian Centre for International Development National Conference 2016: Australia Ahead of the Curve. An Agenda for International Development to 2025: a compilation of think pieces.

[49] Ibid.

emerging economies to implement their own development and aid programs. This argument aligns with the increased focus on **local volunteering** to further locally led and demand driven development. However, the UNV report warns against local solutions being the panacea to addressing marginalisation and stresses that all solutions, including those that involve volunteering, require a nuanced response.[50]

An overview of the literature also uncovered **volunteering trends in Australia**. Curtin University found that while time spent volunteering is decreasing, 'micro-volunteering' is becoming more popular as this allows people to commit for a short period of time. The study also notes that the motivation for younger volunteers is to develop their own skills and employability whereas older people volunteered to utilise their skills, engage socially and give back.[51] The 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia report confirms a strong commitment to volunteering and willingness to continue. However the roles people want to volunteer in and the roles that are offered are not well aligned.[52] The report also showed an **increase in informal volunteering,** which is similar to the IFRC's finding that the majority of volunteering is done outside of formal institutions. This has been made possible through technological advances and social media. Individuals are drawn to these flatter structures, which some see as more dynamic, impactful, and effective.[53]

Both the desk review and donor interviews for this comparative analysis revealed a general uncertainty about the future of international volunteering. Despite this, there were some common themes as well as consensus among donors that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced a discussion about **different ways to deliver volunteer programs**, specifically the use of remote volunteering, how programs can better implement the localisation agenda, and how programs adapt to and manage unprecedented change. Supporting the focus on the **localisation agenda** are the results from the 'Perspectives on COVID-19' survey.[54] In this survey, both volunteer-sending organisations and volunteers reported the expected decline of in-person volunteering and the volunteer organisations that facilitate these programs. They also reported that this decline will likely be replaced by an **increase in national and local volunteering** rather than online volunteering post COVID-19.

The increase and support of local volunteering is a constant theme in the literature and one that is currently being explored through the **Australian Volunteers Program Innovation Fund**. One of the roles of the Innovation Fund is to trial new ideas to complement the traditional North-South model of volunteering used by the program. Volunteering for Development (Vol4Dev) is a work stream under the Australian Volunteers Program Innovation Fund, which began in early 2020 and accelerated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Vol4Dev explores the key question of '*How might the Australian Volunteers Program create and support alternative forms of volunteering, or support volunteerism?'* The Innovation Fund is **currently supporting 10 different ideas** for how the Australian Volunteers Program might use **alternate models of volunteering**, including ideas that will further explore the themes around local volunteering, youth volunteering and supporting national volunteering infrastructure, among others.

Canada, the UK, and Norway are already using a suite of volunteering/exchange approaches. This has arguably resulted in increased **resilience to the impacts of COVID-19** in a larger proportion of their programs.[55] While some assignments supported by Australia and New Zealand were able to pivot or continue, this did not occur to

---

[50] UNV State of the World's Volunteerism Report, 'The thread that binds, Volunteerism and community resilience', 2018. Accessed online 10 January https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV_SWVR_2018_English_WEB.pdf

[51] Volunteering Trends Study, Curtin University, Western Australia and Chorus, 2019. Accessed online 10 January 2021 https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/news/Volunteering-Trends-Study-2019

[52] Volunteering Australia and PricewaterhouseCoopers. 'State of Volunteering in Australia: Help Create Happiness', April 2016. Accessed online 10 January https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf

[53] IFRC Global Review on Volunteering, Geneva 2016. Accessed online 10 January https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/1301100-Global%20Review%20on%20Volunteering%20Report_EN-LR.pdf

[54] Interim Report: Perspectives on COVID-19. The experience of volunteers and volunteering involving organisations in the 2020 Pandemic. Perold, Allum, Lough, and Mati. October 2020.

[55] For example, Norway and the UK's programs have high proportions of local, South-South and/or south-north methods that reduced their need to repatriate as many volunteers occurred in the Australian Volunteers Program response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

the same extent given the reliance on the North-South model of volunteering and decision to return volunteers to their home countries. It could be argued that reliance on the North-South model of volunteering in the program makes it less resilient to unprecedented changes like that experienced in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a counter point is the existence of the Australian Volunteers Program's Innovation Fund, which has been able to quickly adapt to trial new approaches to volunteering at an appropriate scale. The Innovation Fund is used to develop an evidence base that supports taking ideas to scale, which is an effective way of responding to emerging challenges.

Another structure within the program that supports its ability to respond to change is the **embedded and comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and learning** (MEL) system. This is a standout amongst other donor programs. A common challenge discussed during the interviews was data collection, triangulation, and aggregation, specifically when assessing people-to-people links and improved diplomatic relations. The Australian Volunteers Program's MEL system will provide the evidence needed to understand the impacts of the program and its contribution towards end of program outcomes, and therefore form an excellent basis for decision making about the future of the program and adapting to a changing external environment.

In the words of Powell and Bratovic 'you get the impact you program for'.[56] The Australian Volunteers Program uses a tried and tested modality that has been achieving its 'win-win' objectives of supporting development while strengthening people-to-people links for more than 60 years. This is not to say that the program has remained stagnant. While the method of sending skilled Australians overseas has not changed, the program has evolved significantly and adapted to the changing global landscape. Its comprehensive MEL system and institutionalised approach to innovation means it is **well placed to adapt to future challenges** in the volunteering sector.

---

[56] Powell and Bratovic (2007) as cited in Margaret S. Sherraden, Benjamin Lough, and Amanda M. McBride. "Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors." *Voluntas*, issue 19, 2008, p. 400.

Annex A

Interview questions for donor interviews

1. Please provide a brief overview of your volunteer/exchange program, including any distinguishing features (e.g. desired outcomes, modalities, partners, sources of funding)

2. Please outline your agencies' views on the relationship between volunteering and soft power / diplomatic influence

   o   How is this expressed in the design of the program?

3. Please outline how the program design considers efficiency and value for money

   o   Does your agency have data on the average cost of program expenses per volunteer/participant? Can this be shared with the evaluation team?

4. What changes/adaptations, if any, has your program made due to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or other global movements e.g. the localisation agenda?

   o   Will these be ongoing?

5. What does your agency see as the future direction of volunteering?