

Australian Volunteers

Challenges

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Funding volunteering activities
in Mongolia

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Exploring how funding can be used to support volunteering in Mongolia

Complete

Dec 2021 - June 2024



Cover image: Volunteer Laura McKenna, Youth Integrity Officer, presents to colleagues at Transparency International, Mongolia. Photo: Teagan Glenane.

Summary

The program funded four initiatives addressing different volunteering infrastructure needs in Mongolia to better understand how funding could be used as a mechanism for supporting volunteerism.

- Funding the English translation of [volunteers.mn](#) in partnership with National Mongolian Volunteering Organisation (NMVO), a project initially developed through the 'Exploring Volunteering for Development' innovation workstream.
- Co-funding 'All for YOUth, YOUth for All,' a four-year project led by Caritas, in partnership with the Mongolian Youth Council and Centre for Citizenship Education. One of the four goals of the project is to promote volunteerism among youth and connect volunteers to volunteer-seeking organisations.
- Commissioning research into volunteering in Mongolia and sharing insights with key government and non-government stakeholders.
- Hosting two consultation workshops that brought together key volunteering stakeholders to discuss and progress national volunteering priorities.

Our objectives

- Better understand what support volunteering organisations may want from the program.
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- Discover what existing opportunities there might be for accelerating volunteering in Mongolia.
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- Explore how funding can be used as a support mechanism for accelerating volunteering.

Our approach

In line with our broader workstream approach of 'working with the willing' during the initial discovery phases of the Global Volunteering Accelerator, we drew on existing relationships with NMVO and Caritas and identified opportunities for support, working with them to scope initiatives and monitoring their progress.

In December 2022, NMVO launched the English-language translated version of [volunteers.mn](#); and throughout the same year, the 'All for YOUth, YOUth for All,' delivered the following outcomes:

- engaged volunteers in the project activities and promoting volunteerism
- advocated for key recommendations to be reflected in policy documents
- offered networking and exhibition opportunities for volunteer involving civil society organizations (CSO)
- supported NGOs to adopt and use volunteer management guidelines and tools.

'All for YOUth, YOUth for All' made improvements to the user experience of a volunteer website aimed at young people, which is awaiting launch. Australian volunteer, Zach Conn, supported Caritas on the implementation of some components of this project. You can watch Zach talk about his experience as a volunteer in this [Facebook video](#) from the 'I Volunteer, Do You?' event, which was funded through this project. His work on this project was also profiled for a podcast and blog article for the International Volunteering Cooperation Organisations (IVCO) 2023 Conference (Appendix 1).

The program commissioned a local researcher who surveyed 52 organisations in Mongolia and conducted in-depth interviews capturing data on the political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors affecting volunteering in Mongolia. This study deepened our understanding of the enabling factors that strengthen the capacity of partner organisations in Mongolia for national volunteers, beneficiaries, and larger communities. Refer to Appendix 2 for a summary of this research.

Following this research, the program hosted two consultation workshops that brought together government and non-government organisations with an interest in progressing national volunteering in Mongolia:

- The workshop on 23 October 2023 presented recent research findings, which served as a foundation for a discussion on how the legal environment and regulatory framework could be strengthened and what support could be required for improving and promoting volunteerism in Mongolia (Appendix 3).
- The workshop on 31 May 2024 presented and facilitated discussions on the definition of volunteering in Mongolia and the application and adaption of the Global Volunteering Standard in the national context (Appendix 4).

What we've learned so far

- Civil Society Organisations in Mongolia face challenges accessing sustainable funding, which impacts their capacity to host and support volunteers.
- Funding is an effective mechanism for supporting targeted volunteering activities, particularly in partnership with other international funding bodies.
- Organisations are interested in receiving support in training and resource delivery, advocacy and promotion, volunteer program delivery, and website development, as well as opportunities to network with international organisations.
- Improving youth volunteering is a priority for some organisations.

- Technology-related projects are not suitable for short-term funding as longer-term technical support is required.
- The perception and understanding of volunteering can be a limiting factor.
- Organisations engaged in volunteerism in Mongolia experience a range of policy, institutional and funding challenges.

Appendix 1 - Getting ready for IVCO 2023 with a podcast and blog post on youth volunteering in Mongolia

"Young Mongolians, who make up a third of the total population, are often interested in volunteering but are unsure how to find volunteer opportunities."

— Zach Conn, Australian volunteer for Caritas Czech Republic

We were proud to see the work of the Innovation Hub and our partners in Mongolia featured in a blog post for the International Volunteering Cooperation Organisations (IVCO) 2023 Conference.

The theme of the conference was 'A New Generation of Volunteers as Changemakers' and is a great fit for the All for YOUth, YOUth for All project in Mongolia. This four-year European Union-funded project is delivered by Caritas Czech Republic, the Mongolian Youth Council, and the Center for Citizenship Education, with support from the Australian Volunteers Program.

In the blog article and accompanying podcast, Australian volunteer, Zach Conn, shared Czech Republic Caritas' experience participating in two innovation projects: Global Volunteering Accelerator and Growing Volunteering at the Community Level. Our partner organisation and Zach explored how the All for YOUth, YOUth for All project leveraged the opportunities presented by the new and evolving volunteering space in Mongolia and fostered connections between youth and organisations seeking volunteers.

Appendix 2

Summary Report on Volunteering in Mongolia



australianvolunteers.com

The Australian Volunteers Program
is an Australian Government initiative.

Australian
Aid 

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

Volunteering plays an important role in assisting countries to make progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), however there is often limited data available on the type and nature of volunteering in each country. The Australian Volunteers Program commissioned research into volunteering to strengthen our understanding of the volunteering in Mongolia. This study deepened our understanding of the enabling factors that strengthen the capacity of partner organizations in Mongolia for national volunteers, beneficiaries, and larger communities. The following document provides a concise overview of the research findings, to obtain the complete report, please contact mongolia@australianvolunteers.com.

1.2. Key Findings

Here's a brief summary of the key findings of the research:

- **Government Perception:** Volunteerism data is starting to shape the Mongolian government's understanding of volunteer activities.¹
- **Youth Development:** Volunteerism plays a crucial role in promoting youth development policies, although public awareness of its importance remains low.
- **Volunteer Statistics:** As of 2021, there are approximately 21,480 volunteers in Mongolia, contributing nearly MNT 4.4 billion to the economy. However, comprehensive statistics and gender-disaggregated data are lacking.²
- **Gender Disparity:** Women in Mongolia perform more unpaid work, while men contribute more official volunteer hours.³
- **Community Perception:** Volunteering is often viewed as a compulsory duty at the community level, resembling past practices like subbotniks.
- **Types of Volunteering:** Organization-based volunteering is dominant in Mongolia, with a focus on legally recognized, formal, and structured International NGOs.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic Impact:** Participation in remote volunteering surged due to the pandemic, with volunteering in community development becoming more popular, followed by youth development and education.
- **Recognition and Stability:** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the recognition of volunteering's value, with Mongolia ranking in the top 10 countries for volunteer participation and levels of volunteering remaining relatively stable despite the pandemic.⁴

1.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made seven recommendations at three social levels:

1. Individual Level:

- a. Foster know-how, innovation, and a willingness to help others.
- b. Enhance communication and social media skills, fundraising, and grant writing abilities.

2. Community Level:

- a. Strengthen volunteer infrastructure in Mongolia by incorporating culturally-rooted volunteering models.
- b. Provide support for accessing government and international programs.

3. System Level:

- a. Update the definition of volunteering.
- b. Establish a gender and age-specific national volunteer database.
- c. Integrate the impact of volunteerism into The National Development Policy 'Vision 2050 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)2030.

¹ Government of Mongolia, GOM. (2020). *Action Plan For 2021-2030 of Mongolia's Long-Term Development Policy 'Vision 2050'*. Retrieved from: <https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail/15406>

² Undral, G. Chairperson, Network of Mongolian Volunteer Organizations. Dec 5, 2022. *Speech on International Volunteer Day with Australian Volunteer Program*. UB. Retrieved from: www.ivolunteer.mn.

³ National statistics office, NSO. (2020). *National time use survey*. UB. p-35

⁴ CAF (2021). *World giving index 2021, a global pandemic special report*.

2. Background

Traditional Roots: Historically, volunteering in Mongolia was intertwined with familial and nomadic lifestyles. Communities supported each other through tasks like herding and moving, reflecting a cultural emphasis on mutual aid.

Early Formalization: The Mongolian Red Cross Coalition initiated the country's first official volunteer programs in 1939 prior to the Japan and Mongolian War. However, this spirit of volunteerism waned under communist rule, with state-organized labor replacing voluntary efforts.

Post-Communist Era: Following the fall of the communist regime, Mongolia saw a resurgence of interest in volunteering, though the transition was challenging. Local engagement has been limited with international organizations playing a more significant role in national development efforts.

Legal Recognition: In 2017, the Mongolian Parliament passed the Law on Promoting Youth Development, that officially recognized and supported volunteering for the first time in Mongolian history. This legislation marked a significant milestone in the country's approach to volunteerism.

3. Purpose

The research sought to:

- Examine the current state of volunteerism in Mongolia, its relevance, and its developmental impact.
- Analyze the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental (PESTLE) factors that influence volunteerism in Mongolia.

The study offers valuable insights into the current state of volunteerism in Mongolia, underscoring its significance in advancing development. By assessing the PESTLE factors, it facilitates a deeper understanding of the volunteering landscape, thereby informing strategies aimed at strengthening volunteerism and its positive impacts on development in Mongolia.

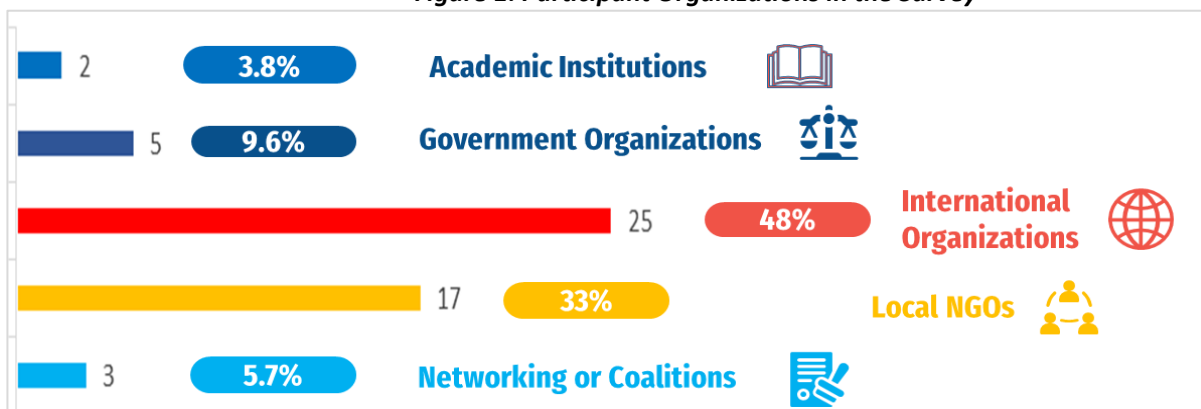
4. Methodology

The review used qualitative techniques, including data analysis and interviews with key informants from governmental and non-governmental organizations. It focused on recent changes and general trends in volunteering in Mongolia, considering factors like government policies and technological advancements.

A human rights-based approach ensured inclusive participation across various sectors, while a PESTLE analysis assessed the key factors impacting volunteering.

A nation-wide survey was conducted from late September to mid-November 2022, as well as face-to-face interviews held with government and volunteer organization members.

Figure 1: Participant Organizations in the Survey





5. Findings

5.1. Political factors

Laws and policies significantly shape the landscape of volunteerism in Mongolia, either hindering or facilitating its development. Volunteerism, a cornerstone of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), plays a crucial role in enhancing civil society participation and social inclusion. Despite the substantial growth and democratization of NGOs since 1990, the legal framework has not evolved sufficiently to meet their evolving needs.

Collaboration between government agencies and NGOs can mutually benefit both parties by improving government initiatives, fostering community engagement, and enhancing social cohesion. In response to Resolution No.11 enacted in 2017, laws related to volunteering were revised, including the Law on Promoting Youth Development and the Law on Disaster Protection. However, ambiguities persist regarding volunteer definitions and regulations.

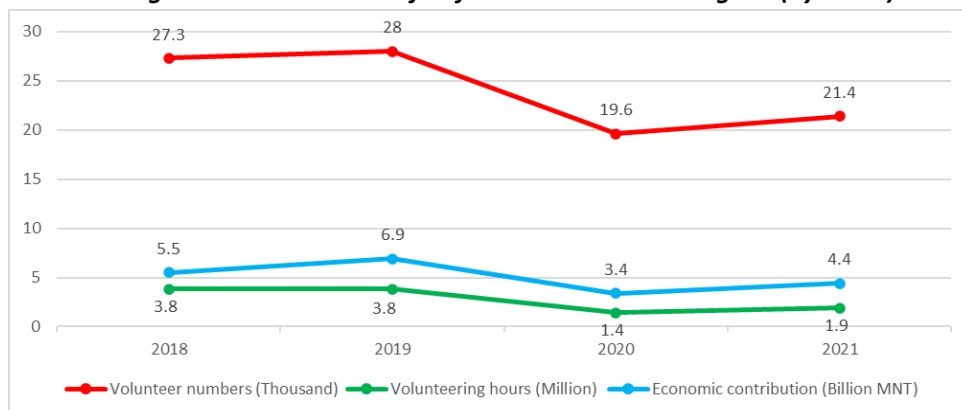
The government's efforts to integrate volunteer initiatives with national development goals, such as Vision 2050 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, underscore volunteering's economic and societal value. Despite official recognition, further revisions to laws and policies are necessary to support volunteerism effectively in areas like labour relations, health, and taxation. This includes protecting local NGOs from operational challenges through tax exemptions, which can contribute to both individual skill development and the realization of Vision 2050.

5.2. Economic factors

The UNV emphasizes that volunteering benefits individuals and communities, contributing significantly to the economy. However, Mongolia faces economic challenges, including weak recovery, high inflation, and increased demand for foreign currency rates due to global events such as the war in Ukraine and Zero-COVID policy in China.

Economic factors, such as inflation-driven cost increases, impact local NGOs and their beneficiaries, affecting the availability and motivation of volunteers. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, leading to a significant decline in participation in onsite volunteering activities.

Figure 2: Economic Benefit of Volunteerism in Mongolia (by Years)⁵



⁵ Source: Government of Mongolia. (2019). *Mongolia Voluntary National Review Report 2019: Implementation of the sustainable development goals*. p 47. Ulaanbaatar; Undral, G. Chairperson, Network of Mongolian Volunteer Organizations. Dec 5, 2022. *Speech on International Volunteer day with Australian Volunteer Program*. UB. Retrieved from: www.ivolunteer.mn

NGOs in Mongolia struggle to secure funding, relying on various sources such as membership fees and projects funded by governments or international organizations. While local NGOs provide basic support to volunteers, financial constraints limit their ability to offer insurance.

Female youth unemployment remains high in Mongolia, with a significant portion of volunteers being youth. Despite the economic benefits of volunteering, challenges persist, including the unpaid household work burden disproportionately borne by women.

The economic return on government investment in national volunteer programs underscores the significant gains from volunteering. Civil society organizations stress the broader economic and social value of volunteering beyond labor relations and services provided.

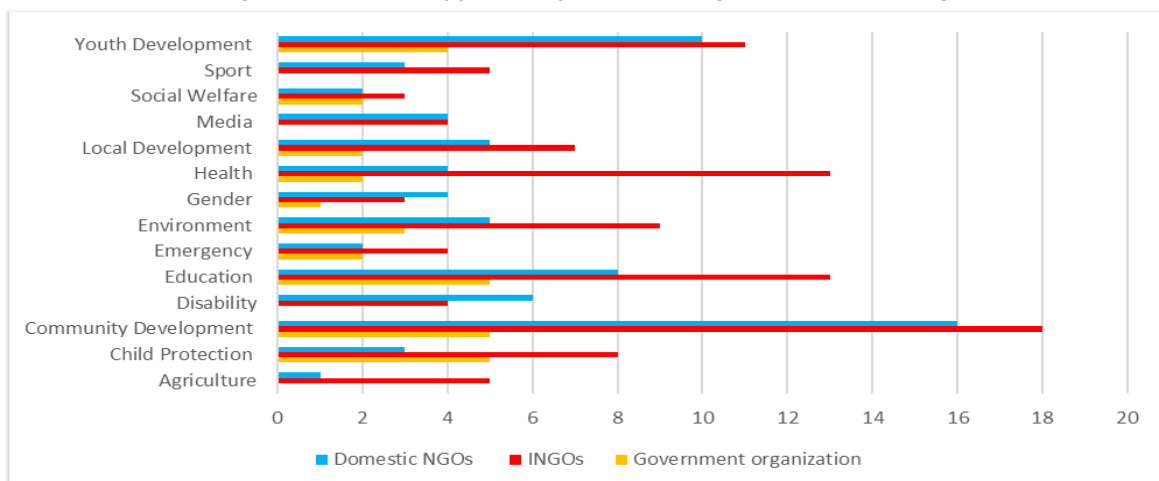
There is a concerning trend of decreasing female volunteer participation due to unpaid household responsibilities as they get older, which highlights the need to promote volunteerism and increase women's involvement to achieve SDGs and government development goals.

5.3. Social factors

Volunteering thrives on individuals' drive to enact change within their communities, fostering stronger societal bonds through increased participation. In Mongolia, organization-based volunteering predominates, with individual volunteering being comparatively limited due to cultural or traditional factors.

Irrespective of a nation's development status, volunteering serves as a potent force for societal advancement, benefiting both the economy and society, as evidenced by the Government Voluntary Report (GOM, 2019). However, there remains scope for enhancing the capture of key performance indicators to better reflect volunteering timing, frequency, and gender distribution.

Figure 3. Sectors Supported by Volunteering Initiatives in Mongolia



Comparatively, organization-based volunteering has seen an uptick since the UN Volunteer Report of 2018⁶, yet women's participation remains smaller than in direct volunteering, underscoring gender-based disparities (UNV, 2018). Persistent gaps in volunteering data include frequency, gender, and age disaggregation.

Gender-based volunteering patterns are influenced by factors such as women's disproportionate engagement in unpaid domestic work and declining labor force participation rates. Additionally, there exists a lack of awareness and support for women's involvement in volunteering, leading to diminished recognition and value for their contributions.

Female volunteering would benefit from initiatives aimed at empowering informal female volunteers through training and recognition, as well as further research aimed at comprehensively understanding volunteering dynamics by gender and age.

⁶ United Nations Volunteers UNV (2018). *Current Estimates and Next Steps. The Scope and Scale of Global Volunteering*. UN

Effective partnerships with volunteers and organizations also play a crucial role in volunteer retention and satisfaction. Nevertheless, ensuring sustainable volunteer activities and fostering skill development among volunteers remains an ongoing challenge.

There is a burgeoning interest among youth in volunteering, underscoring the necessity for enabling frameworks for both volunteers and organizations, and promoting volunteering through education, particularly in schools, would help nurture a culture of volunteerism.



5.4. Technological factors

The widespread use of mobile phones and the Internet, driven by digital technology advancements, has accelerated technological progress. Across various sectors and regions in Mongolia, organizations are leveraging these advancements to enhance their strategies and processes. However, the UNDP noted that the COVID-19 pandemic widened Mongolia's digital gap as well as exacerbating existing socioeconomic, educational, and gender disparities (Mavag, 2021). This digital divide disproportionately affects individuals in poor and rural areas and contributes to the educational inequalities more prevalent amongst girls and young women.

During interviews, it was noted that many NGOs have improved their digital literacy. Some NGOs have implemented virtual counseling services for children in need, while others collaborate with rural schools to provide virtual museum visits. The Network of Mongolian Volunteering Organizations is actively developing a website, ivolunteer.mn, to promote volunteering and manage volunteer activities through a centralized database.

All survey participants agreed that technology played a crucial role during the COVID-19 lockdown, enabling NGOs to organize remote training and orientation for volunteers. However, there's a pressing need to strengthen the digital capacity and skills of marginalized groups to foster their engagement in volunteering. Moreover, efforts should be made to increase men's and women's participation in community development decision-making processes.

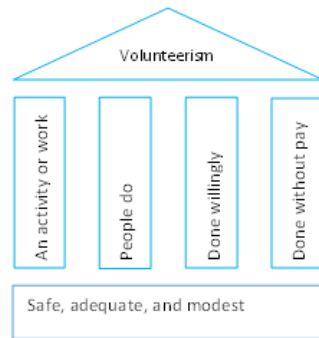
5.5. Legal factors

Strengthening self-regulation mechanisms within NGOs is crucial for their institutional dynamics, encompassing both internal operations (project implementation, internal regulations, human resources, financial policies, etc.) and external engagements (financing sources, community involvement, activity direction). In Mongolia, NGOs operate under two forms as per the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). According to the Ulaanbaatar Statistics Department, there are 24,524 NGOs registered in Mongolia since 1993, with 75 being international NGOs. NGOs constitute 14% of the total legal entities in Mongolia, according to statistics (NSO, 2021).

The legalisation context, encompassing labor relations and legislative compliance, is critical for NGOs. Organizations must stay update to date on legislative changes to ensure adherence to national laws and international human rights standards. Therefore, mainstreaming volunteering in Mongolian legislation and policies is important to officially acknowledge volunteers' work and protect their rights under the law. A strong legislative context will also foster a favourable environment for volunteering and ensure volunteering is sufficiently recognized for its contribution to Mongolia's development.

Legislation on volunteerism should recognize the legal status of volunteers. The research showed varied perceptions of volunteering among the organizations surveyed. Some NGOs treat volunteers akin to full-time employees, while others exploit volunteer labor for profit-driven purposes, highlighting the importance of legal clarity and ethical guidelines. This underscores the need for a clear and shared understanding of volunteerism's fundamental characteristics and activities that is aligned with human rights principles.

Figure 4. Defining volunteerism according to the ILO



Several human rights organizations advocate for government intervention in volunteerism, emphasizing the need for a coordinated national approach. However, government officials have not provided definitive plans beyond budget allocations for conferences or campaigns related to volunteerism.

Mainstreaming volunteering through national legislation and policy will help mitigate against the rapid changes in employment and labor relations brought about by pandemic-related measures. Revised labor codes must align with international norms and conventions, ensuring protections for workers, including child protection policies, SEAH regulations, and personal leave entitlements.



5.6. Environmental factors

Environmental elements such as weather patterns, air quality, climate variations, waste management, and sustainable practices have a profound impact on organizations. For example, extended cold spells in Mongolia contribute to elevated levels of air pollution in urban centers like Ulaanbaatar, adversely affecting the health of children. Measures introduced by the government, such as subsidies for coal briquettes during the COVID-19 crisis, aimed to mitigate these challenges. However, inadequate public monitoring resulted in heightened pollution levels in 2022.

Mongolia is experiencing accelerated rates of warming, leading to an increase in natural disasters like floods, heatwaves, and droughts, which further exacerbate poverty and migration. Collaborating effectively with volunteers and volunteer organizations is essential for disaster preparedness and adapting to climate change. Strengthening the management capabilities of civil society organizations, with support from the government, is crucial for effectively addressing these pressing issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of volunteering, with international organizations halting volunteer programs while local volunteerism has surged. However, there has been a notable 30% decline in onsite volunteer participation following nationwide lockdowns in 2020.

Civil society organizations have the potential to contribute significantly to addressing environmental concerns through partnerships with authorities and advocacy initiatives. Although some NGOs collaborate with the government to deliver public services, this practice is not widespread. Ongoing civil service reforms seek to clarify the allocation of services to NGOs, thereby enhancing civil society's role in SDG implementation. Volunteers are instrumental in advancing SDGs.

6. Recommendations

The study investigated the current state of volunteering in Mongolia and found that formal recognition of volunteering is relatively new for many local NGOs, international volunteer organizations, and volunteers in Mongolia. Experts in Mongolia also pointed out that community attitudes and knowledge about volunteering are important factors.

To ensure the continued success of volunteering and its sustainability, there's a need to rethink and strengthen volunteer infrastructure, as well as develop models of volunteering that are rooted in local culture. It's also crucial to foster sustainable partnerships between **volunteers, organizations, and other stakeholders**.

To support volunteers effectively, **research institutions and statistical agencies** should collaborate closely with volunteer-involved organizations to collect data on volunteering in a sensitive, coordinated, and localized manner. This data should then be used by stakeholders to enhance support for volunteers.

Furthermore, **government agencies** should enhance cooperation with various entities to gather gender- and age-segregated volunteer data and evaluate the contribution and impact of volunteerism on the National Sustainable Action Plan and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

7. Study limitations

Interviews were solely conducted with program staff of volunteering organizations. No interviews were conducted with volunteers. Therefore, this conclusion is limited to the scope of our research and does not encompass countrywide or local volunteer perspectives.

8. Acknowledgements

The completion of this report was made possible through funding provided by the Australian Volunteers Program. The author extends gratitude to all participants for their valuable comments and to the experts who contributed to the development of interview questionnaires and methodology. Special thanks to David Sharman-Selvidge, Regional Director for East Asia; Claire McClelland and Karla O'Connor, Innovation Leads; Huong Tran Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Coordinator for East Asia; and Munkhtuul Sodnomtseren, Program Manager for Mongolia. The survey was finalized in December 2022.

The Australian Volunteers Program expresses our appreciation to an external researcher Chantsalsuren Mavag for their research contributions and to the participating organizations in the study.

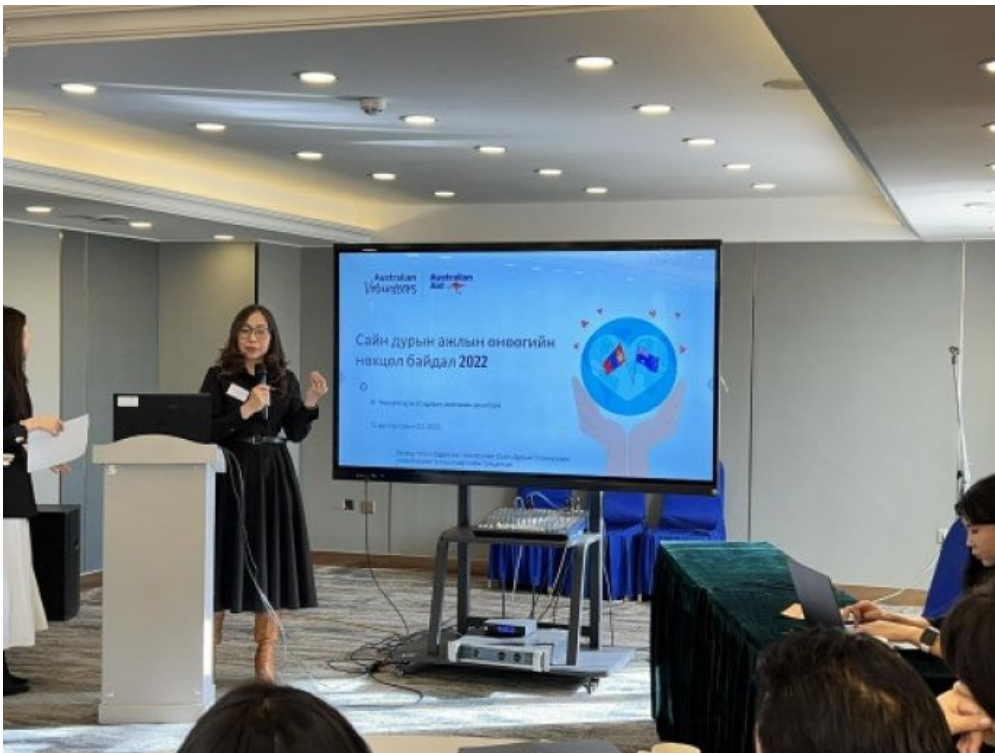
Appendix 3 - Volunteerism consultation workshop in Mongolia

On 23 October 2023, the program hosted a workshop in Ulaanbaatar that brought together diverse stakeholders to discuss volunteerism in Mongolia.

For many participants, it was the first time they'd been invited to contribute to this conversation, and there was a real sense of energy in the room with representatives eager to share their insights and experience.

The workshop included presentations from independent researcher, Ms. Chantsalsuren Mavag; Chair of the Network of Mongolian Volunteer Organizations (NMVO), Ms. Undral Gombodorj; and Founder of the Mongolian Volunteer Centre, Ms. Tsevelmaa Batchuluun. They delivered findings from recent research that served as a foundation for an important discussion on how the legal environment and regulatory framework could be strengthened, and what support could be required for improving and promoting volunteerism in Mongolia.

[Watch this short clip from the Mongolian National Broadcaster](#) to learn more about this event and how it contributed to the program's Global Volunteering Accelerator initiative.





Appendix 4 - Collaborative workshop to strengthen the foundations of volunteering in Mongolia

On 31 May 2024, the program hosted a collaborative workshop on 'Strengthening the Foundations of Volunteering in Mongolia,' which brought together 33 representatives from 23 organisations, including volunteer-involving organisations, government representatives and international organisations.

The workshop consisted of two parts: presentations and discussions on the definition of volunteering in Mongolia; and the application of the Global Volunteering Standard in the national context.

Ms. Saranchuluun, Founder of Achilles International Mongolia and lecturer at the Public Health School of the Mongolian National University of Health Science, provided an informative presentation on volunteering definitions that served as a foundation for a rigorous group discussion to define volunteering in the Mongolian context. Participants arrived at a consensus with the following definition (which has been translated into English):

Volunteering is the time voluntary giving for the public good, regardless of financial gain.

Ms. Undral, Chairwoman of the Network of Mongolian Volunteering Organisations, presented on the Global Volunteering Standard, explaining how volunteer-involving organisations can adopt the standard in full or in part to learn, improve and align their organisation with a comprehensive set of good practices. This presentation served as a foundation for further discussion on the opportunities the Global Volunteering Standard presents and what actions should be taken to localise this standard. The group developed an agreed list of shared activities to that could be taken forward to the Government of Mongolia following parliamentary and local elections.