

Australian  
Volunteers

Australian  
Aid 

Australian Volunteers Program  
Global Program Strategy  
2024-2027



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Cover: **Papua New Guinea** Australian volunteer Melissa Fleming (left) and Sales Support Officer Rocka Manua (right) demonstrating a model Solar powered water pump system at Solar Solutions PNG in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Solar Solutions PNG Ltd aims to improve quality of life for local communities by providing access to affordable, safe, reliable, clean and environmentally friendly energy. Melissa supported Solar Solutions through her Sustainable Development Team Mentor role.

This page: **Fiji** Partner organisation Vivekananda Technical Centre provides education and training on agricultural strategies and best practice for local farmers.

# Foreword

Australian volunteers have been contributing to development and diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific region for over 65 years. Since the 1960s, the Australian Government has proudly supported more than 17,000 Australians to volunteer overseas, working alongside hundreds of partner organisations to progress their development goals.

The current phase of the Australian Volunteers Program commenced in 2017 as the latest chapter in this significant history. In its first five-years, the program supported more than one thousand partner organisations with 2,336 volunteer assignments, delivering positive development outcomes for partner organisations and the communities they serve.

In its second term, the program gives effect to the core commitments outlined in Australia's International Development Policy (2023). The policy commits Australia to working together with our partners overseas to build more genuine and respectful partnerships. It places emphasis on the need for Australia's development cooperation to be anchored in our strengths, including by embedding the perspectives of First Nations Australians, and by building on the strengths of our partners. It seeks to advance core issues of gender equality, climate change and disability equity and rights.

Globally, the Australian Volunteers Program is valued for its partnership approach, which starts from a position of respecting partners' deep contextual and cultural knowledge and expertise. The program works with partners to jointly determine how the program can support them to strengthen their organisation to deliver against their own objectives. Our approach recognises that organisational strengthening is a long-term, complex process that must be locally owned.

The program connects skilled Australians and Australian organisations to our development program and the region. It has a unique value in the Australian community, as it enables a diverse range of Australians to work together with the Pacific family, and across Asia and Africa in support of equitable development.

Australian volunteers are highly valued for their skills and experience. There is considerable mutual benefit to the individuals and the organisations they work with. They learn and grow personally and professionally from the experience, enriched through cultural immersion, forging strong links and making enduring friendships.

Without the dedication and commitment of Australian volunteers, who willingly give their time, energy, knowledge and skills, there would be no Australian Volunteers Program. We acknowledge their contribution.

We are proud to launch this refreshed strategy to provide an ongoing platform for the next generation of Australian volunteers.



**Jan Adams AO PSM**  
Secretary  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



**Melanie Gow**  
CEO  
AVI



# Introduction

**The Australian Volunteers Program is a visible expression of the Australian Government's commitment to building respectful partnerships across countries. It sees international volunteering as a valuable approach to international development cooperation, and as a powerful means to support achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

The program matches skilled volunteers with organisations across the Pacific, Asia and Africa and supports those organisations to achieve their own locally determined objectives. The program works in ways which value volunteering and it embodies a sense of global citizenship, bringing people together to tackle shared challenges and pursue shared aspirations.

Since the 1960s, the Australian Government has invested in skilled international volunteering to support locally led change, deepen cross-cultural understanding, and create mutually beneficial connections between people. The Australian Volunteers Program is the latest chapter in this long and rich history.

## Strategic focus for the program

This Global Program Strategy sets out the strategic direction, guiding principles and priorities for the Australian Volunteers Program (2024-2027).

The strategy sets out clearly *what* the program seeks to achieve and, importantly, *how* it seeks to work. It provides the necessary basis for past and prospective volunteers, partner organisations and governments to understand how they can engage with the program and what they should expect in implementation.

Above left: **Papua New Guinea** CUFA PNG focuses on financial development, including micro-enterprises, social enterprises, employment placement programs and financial literacy education for children and adults. Australian volunteers Mikaela O'Neil and Kerrie Noad supported CUFA through assignments focused on GEDSI monitoring, evaluation and learning and children's financial literacy.

In this photo, CUFA PNG staff and Australian volunteers are participating in a brainstorming session on Pathways for Community Financial Literacy, at the CUFA offices in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Left to right: Finance and Administration team member Dicana Dogo, Australian volunteer Mikaela O'Neil, MEL Officer Tyson Malken, Operations Manager Naomi Kuapaitam, Australian volunteer Kerrie Noad, Lead Trainer Susan Viraniat and Project Officer Jehu Lakatani.

Above right: **Vietnam** GreenViet is a not-for-profit organisation working to conserve ecosystems and endangered species in Vietnam's Central and Central Highlands regions. Australian volunteer Tony Le Nguyen's role as Program Development Mentor (Environment) is supporting GreenViet to raise awareness and protection of the environment, ecosystems and wildlife in Vietnam.

In this photo, Tony (centre) is working with the team producer Phan Phi Vuong (right) and Hoang Tieu Ha (left) at a rehearsal of GreenViet's fund raising ceremony in Da Nang, Vietnam.

# Our approach

The Australian Volunteers Program's overarching goal is to support locally led change and the realisation of the SDGs.

Skilled, global volunteering promotes cultural understanding through connecting people and forming partnerships between communities and organisations. The program helps to connect Australians to Australia's development program and the region, and to connect a growing network of people across the region through the shared value of volunteering to support locally led change and social justice.

The overall objective for the program is to strengthen mutual relationships with people and communities across the Pacific, Asia and Africa that contribute to achieving equitable development outcomes. To achieve this objective, the program aims to deliver the following end of program outcomes:

## Partner organisations are supported to progress their development objectives

- The program works with a diverse range of partners across countries in the Pacific, Asia, and Africa.
- Mutually respectful and valued partnerships are central to our approach.
- The program starts from a position of respecting our partners' existing strengths and works with them to identify how best the program can support them to achieve their own goals.



## Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering

- The program works to promote volunteering, and the role of volunteering as an effective means of contributing to equitable development.
- The program explores innovative models of volunteering, shares knowledge, generates evidence of impact and contributes to peer learning about effective volunteering.
- The program seeks to support our partners, volunteers, alumni and the Australian Government to promote the benefits of volunteering to their networks in Australia and internationally.

## Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries

- Skilled, well-supported and strategically placed volunteers are at the heart of a successful volunteering program. The program is intentionally inclusive of and accessible to a diverse range of people.
- The program supports volunteers who have the right skills, attitudes and attributes to complete effective assignments from which the volunteer and partner organisation mutually benefit. This reciprocity enables volunteers to gain both personally and professionally.
- Through their assignment, program participants gain greater cultural awareness and establish enduring connections across the region.

The program's three end of program outcomes are strongly inter-connected and mutually reinforcing. All outcomes are underpinned by the program's guiding principles (see page 8).

Left: **Vanuatu** The Vanuatu Paralympic Committee (VPC) provides opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sport, seeking outcomes including healthier lifestyles, expanding networks and friendships. VPC also seeks to improve community perceptions about the ability, not the disability, of people living with disabilities. Australian volunteers Asha Boehula and Margaret Johnson supported VPC to provide opportunities for people with disability to participate in sport through "come and try" games days. In this photo, Asha (left) coaches Deline Bong (right) in javelin at a VPC event in Luganville.

# Program logic

This program logic guides the implementation of the Australian Volunteers Program.





## Shared benefits

We value the mutual benefits that can be gained through responsible international volunteering, including to individual volunteers, to Australia and to the partners we work with.

Benefits to our partners	Benefits to Australia	Benefits to volunteers
Communities and partners are supported to achieve their own development objectives.	Volunteers deepen and strengthen Australia's relationship with our neighbors in the Indo-Pacific region.	Volunteers connect with Australia's development cooperation program and the Indo-Pacific region through volunteering.
Long-term partnerships between organisations overseas and in Australia support positive social change that is locally led.	Volunteers bring a deep cultural understanding back to Australia to share with friends, family and employers at home.	Volunteers gain a deep cultural understanding from working alongside colleagues in an organisation overseas.
The Australian Volunteers Program is aligned with partner priorities and supports action towards the SDGs.	As a unique part of Australia's development cooperation, the program contributes to advancing an Indo-Pacific which is peaceful, stable, and prosperous.	Volunteers develop lasting connections, and gain valuable experience and skills, through international volunteering.

Above: **Cambodia** Australian volunteer Danielle Vellucci (right) and Executive Director of OIC Cambodia Chenda Net at the OIC Cambodia office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Through her volunteer role as Early Childhood Speech Therapy Mentor, Danielle has supported OIC Cambodia to establish a speech therapy clinic within Cambodia's National Paediatric Hospital. The clinic provides speech therapy services for children, as well as observation opportunities, coaching and training. Two National Paediatric health professionals are training to be speech therapy assistants.

# Program at a glance

The Australian Volunteers Program fosters strong, mutual relationships between Australia and communities globally to contribute to achieving equitable development outcomes.

The Australian Volunteers Program aims to:

- Support partner organisations to progress their development objectives.
- Increase key stakeholders' appreciation of the value of volunteering in Australia and overseas.
- Increase program participants' cultural awareness and create mutually beneficial connections across countries.

The program matches a broad range of skilled volunteers with partner organisations, including government agencies, civil society organisations, academic institutions, regional or international institutions, and multilateral organisations. Our partner organisations also access a range of other support mechanisms from time to time, such as small grants, global and in-country workshops and networking, and linkages with Australian organisations.

Over five years:

**2000**

assignments completed by Australian volunteers

**>500**

partner organisations

**26**

countries across the Pacific, Asia and Africa

**>40%**

of assignments in the Pacific

**\$130M**

total budget of up to \$130M

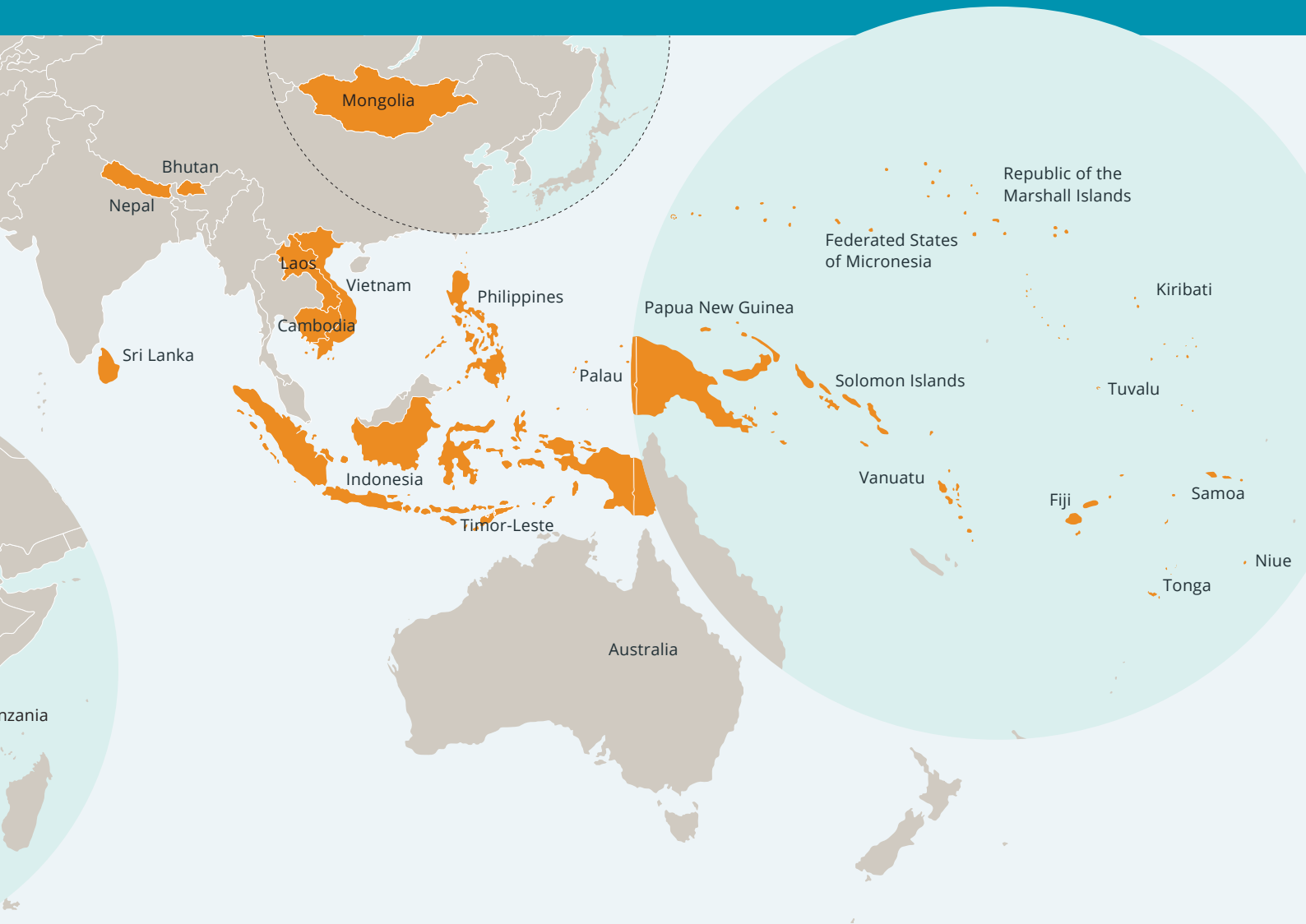


**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

The Australian Volunteers Program supports locally led change and the realisation of the SDGs.



# Where we operate















## Sharing skills and knowledge

A wide range of professional skills are needed to contribute to sustainable development outcomes. Most partner organisations require volunteers with qualifications and demonstrated professional experience.

Equally important are personal attributes and qualities such as respect, humility and cross-cultural literacy.

The sectors our volunteers most commonly work in include:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Health                            |  Agriculture, forestry and fisheries               |
|  Education and training            |  Law and justice                                   |
|  Community and social development  |  Gender equality and child protection              |
|  Communications and media          |  Public policy, economics and financial management |
|  Business, marketing and tourism   |  Engineering                                       |
|  Disaster and emergency management |  Information technology                            |

# Our guiding principles

The Australian Volunteers Program is guided by a set of high-level principles that underpin how the program works. They guide our collective efforts, inspire action, and frame the results that we seek to achieve. These principles ensure that we work in ways that:



## Grow strong relationships and partnerships

Establishing long-term, respectful, and equitable partnerships between individuals, communities and organisations is central to our approach. We value the role responsible volunteering plays in fostering people-to-people connections and building diverse and inclusive partnerships. The program is committed to strengthening relationships across our region and globally.

## Support locally led change

The program supports our partners to progress their own locally determined objectives. We start from a position of respecting their deep contextual and cultural knowledge and expertise. We work together to jointly identify how best the program can support them to further strengthen their organisation. We recognise that capacity strengthening is a long-term, complex process that must be locally owned.

## Value volunteering

Volunteering offers a valuable approach to international development cooperation. We value volunteers who are open to mutual learning and skills exchange, and who are committed to contributing to partners' priorities in support of locally led change. We recognise that volunteering plays an important role in action towards the SDGs and reflects a unique aspect of Australian society.



### **Evolve good practice and embrace innovation**

The program is committed to being recognised as a leader in global volunteering through professional, innovative, reflective, and adaptive management. We embrace new ideas that are contextually relevant, and bring successes to scale through the program.

### **Enhance diversity and inclusion**

The program takes a strengths and rights-based approach to ensure it is inclusive and accessible to a broad range of volunteers and partners. We work to be fully supportive and inclusive of people from a range of backgrounds, with diverse perspectives, identities, and abilities. We prioritise gender equality and women’s rights, and disability inclusion, recognising that doing so is essential to achieve sustainable and equitable development outcomes. We are committed to expanding and strengthening participation of Australia’s First Nations people in international volunteering, offering new opportunities for wisdom sharing and cooperation.

### **Ensure accountability and value learning**

We are committed to operational and programmatic excellence, through continuous improvement in our ability to document, analyse and measure results. The program, its partners and participants are mutually accountable. We promote learning, reflection and knowledge exchange across and between all partners to ensure that we deliver on our outcomes and support improved practices.

# The impact we can make

The Australian Volunteers Program strives to have a positive impact through and with the partners we work with. To be responsive to their priorities, and to support Australian and partner government objectives in each country, the program works across a broad range of thematic areas.

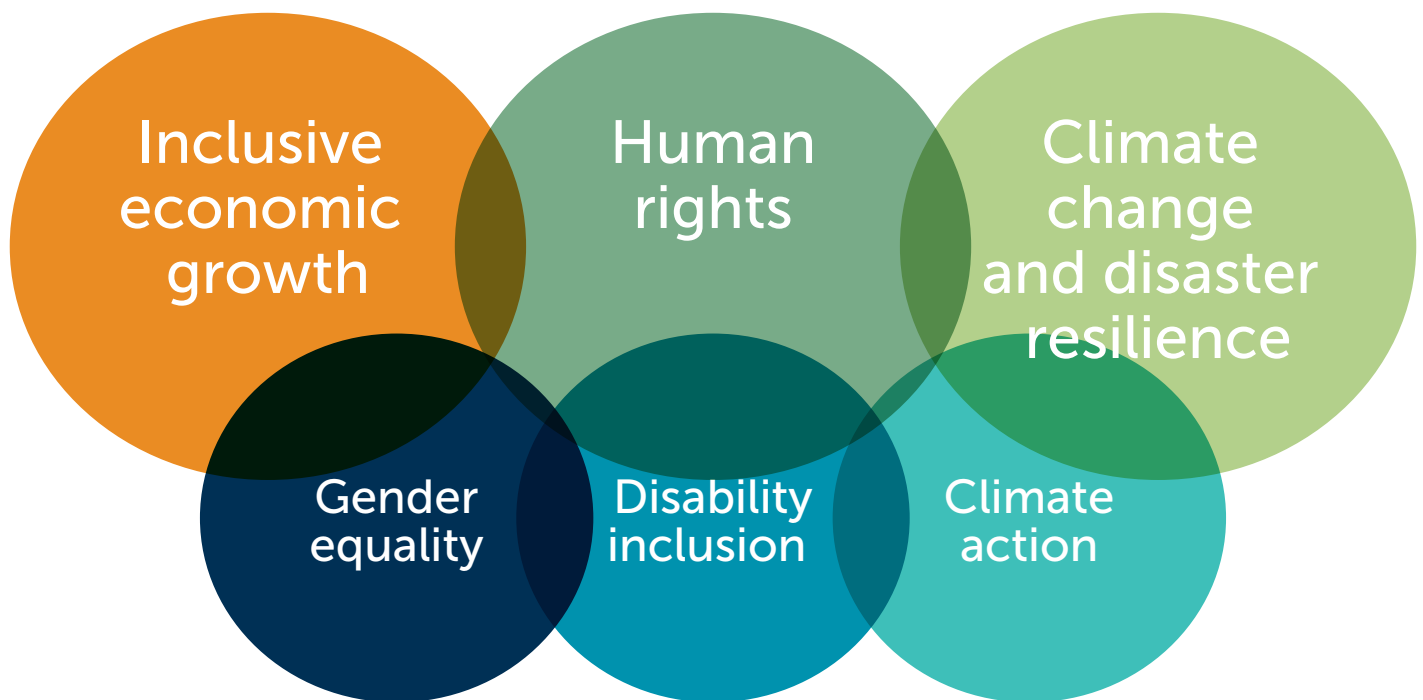
The first phase of the program focused on three impact areas:

- inclusive economic growth
- human rights (including gender, disability and LGBTQIA+)
- climate change; disaster resilience; food security.

The second phase will continue this focus, while giving particular priority to:

- gender equality
- disability inclusion and
- climate action

to support delivery of Australia's International Development Policy.



Together, these will guide choices and activities across the program including identifying partner organisations, developing assignments, volunteer recruitment, and collecting evidence of impact to share stories about program achievements.

Over the life of the strategy, the program will seek to increase the proportion of partners we work with on gender equality, disability inclusion and climate action. In addition, the program will work with volunteers and partners to strengthen the focus on these core issues within all assignments, recognising that the SDGs are not attainable unless development benefits are shared equitably by all.



## Thematic impact areas

Inclusive economic growth	Human rights	Climate change / disaster resilience / food security
<p>The program supports inclusive economic growth to address inequalities through education and training, women’s economic participation, youth engagement, and strengthened legal and regulatory frameworks.</p>	<p>The program supports initiatives to promote and protect human rights, particularly related to gender, disability, LGBTQIA+ and child rights. The program supports efforts to uphold international human rights standards.</p>	<p>Recognising that climate change is the greatest shared threat to all countries, and that this contributes to increasing vulnerability to disasters and food insecurity, the program supports partners working to respond to the accelerating risk, through environmental protection, mitigation, and adaptation.</p>

Above: **Vanuatu** The Vanuatu Society for People with a Disability (VSPD) works, through service delivery and advocacy, to foster an environment that enables people with disabilities to access the rights, services and opportunities to participate fully in life in Vanuatu.

Through her role as Program Implementation and Clinical Support Mentor, Australian volunteer Beatrice Spring, supports her colleagues to develop their skills and confidence to provide early intervention programs for children aged 0-6 years. Together, they aim to support children develop their independence skills so they can transition to school alongside same-aged peers.

Pictured at the VSPD office are Data Officer Isaac Wokot Turriss (left), Beatrice (centre) and Community Engagement Officer Christelle George (right).

## CASE STUDY

# Women empowered to face climate change head-on

Women continue to be disproportionately impacted by global crises, including the climate crisis. The program is committed to gender equality and women's empowerment, and to supporting partners to address the increasing impacts of climate change.

Pemberdayaan Perempuan Memerangi Kemiskinan (PPMK) strives to empower women in the Bantul district of Java, Indonesia. PPMK hopes for a world in which all women and children are free from poverty. The organisation works with about 200 women in Bantul, providing microfinancing to enable the women to run successful small businesses to support themselves and their families.

The Australian Volunteers Program has partnered with PPMK for almost a decade. Through this long-term partnership, three Australian volunteer Rural Project Advisors have supported PPMK's organisational strengthening, and a small grant has enabled the organisation to deliver a climate change project.

In the Bantul district, the community is heavily impacted by climate change. Eighty per cent of the district's population are farmers, and they are struggling with the effects of unpredictable weather patterns.

*'Previously we knew that October to March is the rainy season and April to September is the dry season, but today it's not like that'*, says Sulastri Miharja, PPMK's Director.

*'Farmers cannot predict what crops they will plant, and when difficult things happen, like long dry seasons or extreme rain, it means their crops fail. I've seen these changes for four or five years already, but the last two years have been very bad. I've seen many farmers' crops failing.'*

*'For example, farmers are planting peanuts during the dry season, but suddenly the high rainfall comes early which inundates the fields and the peanuts rot.'*

Seeing this impact on the community, Sulastri and her team at PPMK implemented a program to educate and upskill women to manage the effects of climate change. PPMK selected 30 women to take part in a climate change project, made possible with the support of a small grant from the Australian Volunteers Program. Through a series of workshops and in-person home visits, the women learnt about organic farming, the importance of planting trees, soil health, waste management and the impacts of climate change.

Sulastri says before the project, the women were not aware of how climate change was impacting the environment and farming, or the consequences of burning waste and disposing of garbage in the river.

One of the most successful parts of the project was supporting the women to set up organic vegetable gardens and organic composting in their own homes. The women used existing plastic products in their houses to create the gardens and learnt about separating organic from non-organic waste to make compost.



Left: PPMK program participants preparing the soil for planting crops.



*'Having organic vegetable gardens in their own home, they can reduce their expenses to buy vegetables – this is the best part,' explains Sulastri. 'Food is very expensive right now.'*

Ms Surani, a project participant who grew an organic vegetable garden, says she valued making new friends and gaining new experiences, along with the practical elements.

*'Most importantly, I gained more knowledge about the climate and farming. All the new methods I learned of how to plant vegetables better I practice at home,'* she says.

*'Agriculture is important to me, I have a small rice field, so I can directly use the information I learned in the workshop. The rice field helps me feed my family.'*

Another positive outcome of the project were the connections the women made. PPMK set up a WhatsApp group to share information about climate change, gardening and waste.

Where participants didn't have smartphones, other members of the group made sure to share the knowledge with them personally. The women are continuing to use the group chat to keep up to date on each other's gardens, composting and their small businesses.

*'The women are now advertising the different products they make and sell with each other through the WhatsApp group,'* says Sulastri.

PPMK also hosts regular meetings at the office for the project participants to share ideas, knowledge and progress.

It's not just the women who took part in the project who have benefited from their new knowledge and experiences. PPMK gave the women resources to share what they learnt with their partners, families and neighbours. PPMK estimates about 120 people in total have been reached through the project.

A key part of the project's success was its sustainability. Armed with knowledge and skills about climate change, organic gardening and composting, the women will continue to help their community manage the impacts of the climate crisis for a long time to come.

*'It's not only for a short time; this will have a long-time impact,'* says Sulastri. ✨



## Opportunities and partnerships

**The Australian Volunteers Program provides a unique opportunity for volunteers and Australian organisations to work with partner organisations overseas to support locally led development and poverty reduction in our region.**

### **Partner organisations**

Growing long-term partnerships and developing plans together is central to our approach. Trusted relationships and documented plans ensure a shared understanding of the objectives of a partner organisation and identify areas where the program will be of most value.

Supporting potential partner organisations to successfully host a volunteer is an important part of our commitment. This involves investing in the quality of the relationship, as well as a range of due diligence checks, including workplace health and safety, and safeguarding.

It also involves working collaboratively with local partners to promote good practice through sharing resources and participating in workshops.

While volunteer assignments are the primary means of our support to partners, the program understands that small amounts of well-targeted support can often make a big difference to local initiatives. The program periodically offers small grants to partner organisations in support of the volunteer's assignment. Ongoing learning and networking opportunities are also available to partner organisations to connect them with others locally, regionally and in Australia to share experience and resources.

Above: **Vanuatu** Project Finance Officer Meriam Nash (left) and Australian volunteer Sadia Abdullah at the Department of Water Resources offices in Port Vila, Vanuatu. The Department of Water Resources is responsible for delivering, maintaining and ensuring water supply for Vanuatu. Sadia is a volunteer civil engineer with the Department. She has valued exchanging knowledge and skills with the passionate team who are working towards Vanuatu's goal to ensure safe and secure access to water for all communities by 2030.





## Australian organisations

Australian organisations can strengthen their existing efforts to support countries in our region or forge new partnerships by becoming a partner of the Australian Volunteers Program.

From government departments to community-based organisations, industry groups, the private sector, and associations — we know that Australian-based organisations can support partners that are creating positive social change in our region.

Australian organisations can be involved in the program in a range of ways, including:

- Working with overseas partners to support the development of volunteer assignments
- Supporting professional mentoring opportunities between their staff, volunteers, and overseas partners
- Assisting with the recruitment and selection of volunteers, by promoting assignments to existing networks and referring suitable candidates to the program
- Sharing knowledge and resources
- Promoting the program and the value of volunteering.

The benefits to Australian organisations of partnering with the Australian Volunteers Program can be many, including:

- Contributing to locally led development outcomes in countries in our region
- Strengthening their support to their in-country partners
- Providing volunteer opportunities to their staff
- Supporting existing networks or developing new partnerships
- Strengthening global literacy, cultural competency, and influence in neighbouring countries.

Above: **Vietnam** Through Australian Volunteers Program's partnership with Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA), RAID (Researchers in Agriculture for International Development) and the Crawford Fund, a unique multi-phase project supporting agricultural research has developed. The project began with six Australian volunteers and VNUA researchers coming together for an online research and leadership program in 2020. The researchers continued to collaborate online and, in 2023, five Australian volunteers travelled to Vietnam to work in person with VNUA researchers, sharing knowledge and skills through field visits, workshops and activities. The multi-faceted partnership will continue to deliver the project online and in-country.

Left to right: Dang Tran Thuc Hien from VNUA, RAID member Nguyen Thi Duong Nga, Australian volunteer Mai Chi Do, Australian volunteer Megan Williams, Bui The Khuyh from VNUA, Australian volunteer Anh Tung Pham, Australian volunteer Camilla Humphries and Pham Thi To Dieu from VNUA, in a watermelon field in Bac Giang province.

# Volunteers

**A diverse range of skilled volunteers are supported to connect with Australia’s international development cooperation program and countries in our region. Volunteers have the opportunity to use their knowledge, experience, empathy, and humanity to make a difference to people’s lives.**

Volunteers share their skills and expertise, working in collaboration with colleagues in partner organisations where they are placed. The most successful volunteers have many soft skills, including integrity, self-awareness, and resilience, and are conscious of cross-cultural sensitivities. At the same time, volunteers gain greater cultural awareness and create mutually beneficial connections across countries. Volunteers often form enduring friendships with people in Australia’s region and develop a deeper understanding of how to work across cultures.

For younger volunteers, gaining international experience can develop new competencies and professional networks. For older volunteers, the program can present an opportunity for change within a long-established career or a new direction in retirement.

All volunteers are supported during their assignment by an experienced in-country management team and receive pre-assignment briefings, country orientation and language training (if required). Volunteers are also provided allowances that reflect whether they are undertaking an in-country, remote or hybrid volunteering assignment.

For in-country and hybrid assignments, volunteers receive return airfares and relevant visas, comprehensive insurance, medical assessments and vaccinations. Volunteers also receive comprehensive security information as part of their preparation and access to 24-hour emergency support.

Partners and children can accompany volunteers on in-country assignments in most countries. On longer assignments, financial support is available for dependents who are Australian citizens or permanent residents.




A Code of Conduct sets out the standards of individual behaviour expected of all program participants while on assignment.

Participation in the Australian Volunteers Program ensures that volunteers are able to volunteer responsibly, working with known partner organisations who have appropriate policies and practices in place to ensure the health and safety of staff and communities, especially vulnerable adults and children.

For more information, visit the program’s website at: [www.australianvolunteers.com](http://www.australianvolunteers.com)

## Volunteering Modalities

The program offers several volunteering modalities to better support our partners and reflect the diversity of our participants.

<b>In-country support</b> 	<b>Hybrid volunteering</b> 	<b>Remote volunteering</b> 
<p>Volunteers travel to the partner country and support partners on the ground. Program participants build strong connections and gain greater cultural awareness when in-country.</p>	<p>Volunteers undertake a combination of in-country and remote volunteering. This modality offers partners and volunteers the flexibility to transition from in-country to remote (or remote to in-country) on the same assignment and with a single set of objectives.</p>	<p>Volunteers connect with and support partner organisations online from home. This smaller percentage of assignments are targeted to volunteers who are unable to travel in-country or where evidence shows that a remote assignment would be most beneficial.</p>



# Alumni

**The Australian Volunteers Program's vibrant Alumni network plays an important role in promoting the program and advocating for the value of global volunteering.**

The Alumni supports former volunteers to maintain connections with their partner organisation and host communities long after their assignments have finished.

The Alumni network is driven and led by alumni and is open to any past volunteers. It offers a range of engagement opportunities that relate to the three key objectives of the Alumni program:

## **Value volunteering**

We support past volunteers to advocate for the program, increase appreciation of the value of volunteering and share their volunteer experience with their personal and professional networks.

## **Cultural awareness and connections across countries**

We provide past volunteers opportunities to increase cultural awareness and maintain connections across countries. This includes connections with other past volunteers, prospective volunteers, partner organisations overseas and in Australia, international and local volunteering agencies, Australia Awards scholars and New Colombo Plan alumni.



## **Professional and personal development opportunities**

The Australian Volunteers Program's principle to ensure accountability and value learning is reflected in the Alumni's efforts to foster learning and reflection through a range of professional development activities, such as knowledge exchange webinars and communities of practice.

Above left: Attendees at an Australian Volunteers Program Alumni event bringing Australia Awards scholars and New Colombo Plan alumni together with Australian volunteers to connect, share and learn.

Above right: Australian volunteer Dr Eleanor MacMorran speaking at an event to celebrate International Volunteer Day at Australian Parliament House, 2022. Eleanor volunteered with Maluk Timor as a HIV Clinical Mentor. She shared why she values volunteering: "Volunteering isn't only about sharing skills, it's about sharing solidarity."

## CASE STUDY

# Connecting First Nations Australians and Pacific communities

The Australian Volunteers Program is committed to expanding and strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in international volunteering and connecting First Nations people and organisations with communities across our region, particularly in the Pacific. This commitment is realised through the work of our Indigenous-led initiative—Indigenous Pathways.

Indigenous Pathways strives to be inclusive, equitable, flexible and strengths-based in its approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations, and our overseas partners.

We provide culturally safe, flexible and tailored support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in the program. We collaborate on projects that are mutually beneficial and build meaningful relationships across cultures, and we work to ensure that projects are culturally appropriate, from both Indigenous Australian perspectives and Pacific perspectives.

Through the Indigenous Conservation Knowledge Exchange, four Indigenous Australian women working in conservation shared their Traditional Knowledge and experience with women rangers and communities in Solomon Islands. Indigenous Pathways designed and delivered the exchange in partnership with WWF-Solomon Islands, WWF-Australia and the Indigenous Women's Rangers Network (WREN).

The exchange aimed to strengthen locally led conservation in the Pacific, and for Indigenous Australian and Pacific Island women working in conservation to identify common challenges and opportunities to support one another.

Rosie Goslett-King, a proud Saltwater and Freshwater Budawang woman of the Yuin Nation, took part in the volunteer exchange. Rosie is the Indigenous Women Rangers Network Coordinator at WWF-Australia.

*'When women are involved in conservation, we know that it's not just the environment that benefits. There are healthier people, healthier families, healthier communities, and that flows onto a healthier economy, and a healthier social landscape,'* says Rosie.

Rosie was joined by Azarnia Malay, Cindy-Lou Togo and Mary Blyth for a month-long visit to Solomon Islands. Coming from the Illawarra (southeast New South Wales), Murganella (West Arnhem Land), Kuku Yalanji country (far-north Queensland), and Dambimangari (Western Australia), the women say they learnt just as much from the experience as they were able to share.

During the project, the volunteers visited three communities in Solomon Islands' Western Province, sharing their diverse experiences of conservation and they learnt about local conservation efforts, traditional fishing methods and approaches to food security.

Below: Suweni District Representative Lainiana Tagakina (left) and Australian volunteer Aunty Rose (right) during the handicraft workshop run by SVTC as part of its Women's Economic Empowerment Program.



*'The exchange allowed the Solomon Islands communities to share our simple yet effective ways of doing conservation work with limited to no resources,'* Eve Aihunu, Solomon Islands Program Manager, explained.

The volunteers noticed there were many common challenges between their own communities back home and the communities they visited. These challenges include conservation being a male dominated industry, remote community challenges, such as housing, food security and domestic violence, getting people in charge to listen to grassroots organisations, and a lack of support from bureaucratic agencies.

Minnie Rafe, the Community Based Fisheries Management Programme Coordinator at WWF-Solomon Islands, says the exchange had a significant impact on the women in the communities that took part.

*'The exchange has really helped to encourage local women to see the important role that they can play in protecting their resources and environment,'* says Minnie.

Indigenous Pathways has also facilitated cultural exchange and connection between Torres Strait Islanders and iTaukei (Indigenous) Fijians. This connection was sparked when Australian Volunteers Program staff visited the Torres Strait Islands to explore opportunities to connect Torres Strait Islanders with Pacific communities.

During the community engagement visit, the program delegation met Rosaline Tomsana, known as Aunty Rose, a Kaurareg Traditional Owner and Kala Lagaw Ya speaker from Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Torres Strait.

Aunty Rose has worked in many sectors throughout her life, but her true passion is jewellery making and passing on knowledge to others. She uses techniques that have been passed down from her mother and grandmother.

*'I've been making jewellery with beads since I was five years old. Back then, it was all about survival. Jewellery was a source of income for my family, and we all learnt how to do beading,'* says Aunty Rose.

Program staff saw an opportunity for a cultural exchange between Aunty Rose and partner organisation Na I Soqosoqo Vakamarama i Taukei Cakaudrove (SVTC) in Fiji. SVTC is a community organisation run by and for iTaukei women of Fiji's Cakaudrove province.

The organisation engages with women across 134 villages, and aims to enhance the status of iTaukei women, as well as preserve and strengthen traditional values, cultural practices and arts throughout their province.



With Aunty Rose excited to volunteer, Indigenous Pathways staff worked hard to ensure she felt well supported and had a culturally safe experience, as it was her first time travelling overseas.

A year after the first connections were made, SVTC was excited to host a series of workshops for their members, with Aunty Rose sharing her skills with more than 50 women, aged from 18 to 70 years old.

The effects of economic empowerment were directly visible, with workshop participants advertising their newly made jewellery on social media and selling pieces even as the workshops were taking place.

Inter-generational connections were also formed, as younger women sat side by side with older women, chatting and connecting during the workshops, something SVTC's President, Adi Kavuu Fong said is a rare occurrence.

Aunty Rose felt an instant connection with the women from SVTC.

Reflecting on her experience, Aunty Rose explained that *'One thing about islanders is that they can be scared to step out of their own comfort zone. I was the same, but it's good that I went to Fiji, I learnt a lot from everyone and it's a good lesson to take back... It helps that there are plenty of similarities between us; the way we dress, the way we speak, the weather and even some of the same food and veggies.'*

*'I made so many good friends and had such an amazing experience. Everyone was so keen to learn, and I really enjoyed sharing my skills.'* she says.

These Indigenous Pathways projects have forged strong connections between the Indigenous Australian volunteers and the Solomon Islands and Fijian people and communities they worked with. Together, we are exploring how we can build on these relationships and projects. ✨



# Diversity and inclusion

The Australian Volunteers Program is committed to ensuring that global volunteering is inclusive of and accessible to people from a range of backgrounds, with diverse perspectives, identities, and abilities. We seek to broaden and diversify the range of organisations involved and the range of people able to undertake volunteer assignments, recognising that doing so will enhance the diversity in and effectiveness of the program as a whole.

The program recognises inequalities in gender, race, disability, and sexuality and is committed to removing barriers and increasing the participation of diverse individuals. The program also recognises that individuals with intersecting identities are more likely to experience discrimination. Work environments for volunteers and partner organisations must be inclusive and safe, and all those engaged with the program must be safe from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. As such, the program is committed to safeguarding and strengthening the capacity of our partners to improve their own safeguarding practices and policies.

We are equally committed to supporting partners to achieve their development priorities in gender equality, disability, and social inclusion for the benefit of their communities.

## Gender equality and women's rights

The program prioritises gender equality and women's rights, recognising that doing so is essential for effective and equitable development.

We partner with, and learn from organisations working for gender equality and the rights of women and girls in all their diversity, acknowledging that supporting locally led efforts toward achievement of the SDGs is not possible without addressing gender inequality and promoting the rights of all. The program aims to increase the number of gender-focused partner organisations we support while also finding opportunities to assist other partners to mainstream gender equality into their work.

Top left: **Fiji** Teachers, Sereana Kunadua (left) and Veron Vernita, using puppets as teaching aids at Lautoka School for Special Education, Fiji. Serena is hearing impaired and was a student at the school herself before becoming a teacher.

Bottom left: **Timor-Leste** Partner organisation Juventude ba Dezenvolvimentu Násional (JDN) is a youth-led, community-based organisation in Dili, Timor-Leste. Left to right: President of JDN, Elga da Silva Maria, with colleagues Jescia Nelinha Da Silva Ximenes, volunteer Nutrition Educator, and Alianca Fernandes, JDN activist.

Above right: **Vanuatu** Vanuatu Society for People with a Disability's weekly sitting volleyball event brings people with disabilities together to socialise and play the sport.



### LGBTQIA+ equality and inclusion

Advocating for the equal rights of LGBTQIA+ persons is a human rights priority for the Australian Government. The program seeks to include volunteer assignments focussed on the inclusion and equality of people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and partnerships with organisations working to address legal discrimination and social stigma against LGBTQIA+ people and communities.

### First Nations Australians

Indigenous Pathways provides culturally safe, flexible, and tailored support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participating in the program.

First Nations Australians are uniquely placed to combine their personal and professional experiences with an understanding of the importance of culture, communication, trusted partnerships and locally led development.

The program is committed to providing opportunities to connect Indigenous people and organisations from Australia, with organisations and communities internationally, to collaborate on projects that are mutually beneficial and build strong relationships across cultures.

### Disability inclusion

The program recognises that disability-inclusive development is essential for equitable achievement of human rights and the SDGs. The links between disability and poverty are clear, with intersectional disadvantage increasing for women, the LGBTQIA+ community, children, and other marginalised groups.

We prioritise disability inclusion across the program, and particularly through targeted partnerships with organisations of people with disabilities and disability focused volunteer assignments. The program supports an active and central role for people with disabilities, recognising the importance of ‘nothing about us without us’.

Above left: **Solomon Islands** Indigenous Australian volunteer Cindy-Lou Togo (centre) discussing a map of marine use zones and how they are managed, with rangers from Pusiju community. Cindy volunteered in Solomon Islands as part of the Indigenous Conservation Knowledge Exchange. Top right: **Indonesia** CIQAL Foundation (Center for Improving Quality Activities in the Life of People with Disabilities) supports people with disabilities in Jogjakarta, Indonesia, through delivering economic empowerment and advocacy programs. Pictured are CIQAL’s Program Manager Dr. Arni Surwanti (left) and Finance Manager Ida Ayu Putu Sudiartini (right). Bottom right: **Fiji** Indigenous Australian volunteer Rosaline Tomsana, known as Aunty Rose, delivering a handicraft workshop for SVTC members. Left to right: Lainiana Tagakina, Vanioni Merkula, Talica Marama, Tulia Dikila, Lainiana Tagakina, Sereana Ratolo and Aunty Rose.

## CASE STUDY

# Empowering the deaf community and sign language interpreters in Mongolia



The Australian Volunteers Program knows that disability-inclusive development is good development. We recognise that people with disabilities have much to offer across disability-specific work and all sectors that our partners work in. People with disabilities and their representative organisations can greatly contribute to the program's understanding and practice of disability-inclusive development.

The program has facilitated a powerful partnership between the Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters (MASLI) and Australian volunteers Ramas McRae and Rebecca Ladd. Ramas, who is deaf, and Rebecca, who is hearing, are sign language interpreters who have worked together for a number of years.

Through three volunteer assignments, Rebecca and Ramas have worked with MASLI to train sign language interpreters, empower deaf leaders and advocate for Mongolian sign language to be officially recognised by the government.

Rebecca and Ramas heard about the Australian Volunteers Program while interpreting together in Canberra. They found an assignment with MASLI to support with training sign language interpreters and decided to apply together. It is unusual for two people to jointly apply for an assignment - but MASLI and the program saw the opportunity in what the duo offered.

Ramas and Rebecca's first assignment was online. The main goal was to support MASLI in setting up a professional sign language interpreter training course - the first of its kind in Mongolia. Rebecca and Ramas worked with the team to develop a curriculum for sign language interpreters, based on their own experience and other countries' curriculums.

*'A key focus was sustainability,' says Ramas. 'We wanted to establish a system that was sustainable for (MASLI), where they were able to take the reins.'*

Another central part of the assignment was supporting MASLI with its advocacy work to have Mongolian sign language recognised as an official language in the country. This is something that the Mongolian deaf community has been working towards since 2013.

During their first assignment, Rebecca and Ramas met online with MASLI's sign language interpreter teachers each week to develop the curriculum, lesson plans and the teachers' skills. In a separate weekly online meeting, the volunteers discussed the sign language legislation with members of the Mongolian deaf community. Rebecca and Ramas did extensive research to find examples of other countries' legislation to share with the group.

The President and one of the founders of MASLI, Soyolmaa Lamjav, says Ramas and Rebecca's contributions to the Mongolian deaf community have been remarkable.

*'I truly appreciate both Ramas and Rebecca for committing to this process and for really taking into consideration the Mongolian situation... It has been a wonderful collaboration,' she says.*

Ramas and Rebecca's second assignment was hybrid - including two weeks in Mongolia with the team at MASLI as well as online support. Being in Ulaanbaatar gave the volunteers the opportunity to demonstrate a classroom environment for the interpreter trainers.

*'It was about modelling and leading the way for the Mongolian sign language interpreter trainers to see how deaf and hearing people can work together,' says Ramas.*





*'Every day (was) fully booked out - meeting lots of people, presentations, socialising,' says Ramas. 'When I got home, I was utterly worn out. But it was an amazing experience. I felt privileged to be able to enjoy their culture. What really struck me is deaf people's lives (in Mongolia), and how they live each day and enjoy every moment.'*

Soyolmaa says one of the biggest impacts of the volunteers being in Mongolia was for the sign language interpreters and members of the deaf community to meet Ramas in person.

*'Ramas as a sign language trainer and teacher and interpreter as well as being a deaf person himself, was a real role model to Mongolian deaf people and (the) deaf community.'*

With Ramas and Rebecca's support, MASLI has pioneered systemic change by introducing a train-the-trainer program designed for deaf individuals aspiring to become sign language interpreter trainers. This model has the potential to be replicated in other countries where the program operates - something Rebecca and Ramas are in strong support of.

The volunteers also supported MASLI with successfully applying for a small grant from the program to support three deaf women and a sign language interpreter to attend the World Federation of the Deaf Congress and World Association of Sign Language Interpreters Conference in South Korea in 2023.

The four delegates then shared what they learned with 50 deaf women, sign language-interpreting students and interpreters through a series of workshops in Mongolia.

*'It was a privilege to have this grant, to extend the impact of the volunteers' involvement to the Mongolian deaf community as well as the deaf women and girls' lives,' says Soyolmaa.*

In their third assignment with MASLI, this time remotely, Rebecca and Ramas supported MASLI with some pilot testing to determine the level of sign language interpreters, as Mongolia does not yet have licensing or certification for interpreters. They also provided leadership training to deaf and hearing Mongolian sign language interpreters, and supported MASLI to build a stronger partnership with the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters.

*'We wanted (MASLI's) systems, their empowerment, and their betterment to continue, for them to feel confident to sustain themselves,' says Ramas. 'And I'm happy to see where they're at, and I'm happy to be hands off and just check in every now and again.'*

Rebecca says one of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering with MASLI has been working in a team with Ramas.

*'There's no question about that,' she says. 'We were able to capitalise on each other's skills.'*

*'I've been very privileged in the opportunities that I've had working with the deaf community, and what I really want to see is the betterment of the deaf community worldwide, so to be able to contribute to that in a small way is really rewarding,' she adds.*

*'But as someone who can hear, it's important that the lead is taken by a deaf person.' \**

# Learning and continuous improvement

**Learning, innovation and continuous improvement are critical to strengthening global volunteering and increasing the value and impact of the program for our stakeholders. By actively thinking about the future of global volunteering and building the program's adaptive capability, the program is positioned to be responsive to strategic opportunities and risks.**

The program identifies opportunities, facilitates the development of new models and innovative approaches to volunteering and develops an evidence-base for potential changes or new modalities. We take a collaborative approach that seeks to use and build on the strengths of our partners, volunteers, staff and stakeholders, with a focus on mutual learning.

The Australian Volunteers Program makes a significant investment in monitoring and evaluation activities with a strong focus on learning and accountability. Evidence is generated and reflected on by a range of program stakeholders. We seek feedback and learn from our partners to continuously improve program performance.

We share our knowledge with partners and the Australian public. We also share this knowledge with other international volunteering organisations to contribute to the global dialogue on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of skilled global volunteering.

## Performance management

Consistent with the Australian Government's performance and delivery framework, we are transparent and accountable in how we measure and improve the effectiveness of the Australian Volunteers Program.

The program has a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework which sets out how we assess the performance of the program.

The framework identifies the evidence that will be generated to enable:

- accountability to program partners, the public and the Australian Government
- program performance and management decision-making
- learning, continuous improvement and contribution to the volunteer community
- communications to promote the value of volunteering

Right: **Timor-Leste** The Associação Halibur Deficiência Matan Timor Leste (Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired Timor-Leste / AHDMT) raises awareness about the issues facing people who are blind or visually impaired, aiming to create a more inclusive and respectful society in Timor-Leste.

In this photo, AHDMT's Director, Gaspar Afonso (left), Media Officer, Elionora Guterres (centre) and Internal Director Gabriel Ponciano De Sousa (right) working together at AHDMT's office.

In addition to regular monitoring, we invest in evaluative activities to provide a deeper understanding of specific aspects of the program. Our approach also emphasises learning and reflection to make sense of program evidence and to test whether we are on the right path to achieving our desired outcomes.

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework is regularly reviewed and updated as the program adapts and learns more about how to best monitor and evaluate our performance. In addition to the program's internal evaluative work, the Australian Government independently assesses program performance.

## Risk Management

The program is implemented in compliance with relevant Australian Government legislation and policies, including those related to child protection and the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH). The program also has robust health, safety and security practices in place to fulfil its duty of care to program participants. There is a comprehensive risk management framework in place which ensures continued attention to and management of emerging and ongoing risks at global and country levels.



# Glossary

## Australian organisations

Australian organisations (AOs) are organisations that partner with the Australian Volunteers Program. AOs engagement in the program ranges from promoting the program to their networks to supporting volunteers on assignment or working with partner organisations to develop assignments.

## LGBTQIA+

The abbreviation LGBTQIA+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning and asexual persons, and is intended to include all persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sex characteristics.

## Partner organisations

The Australian Volunteers Program works with partner organisations in the Pacific, Asia and Africa. These include government agencies, local or international civil society organisations, academic institutions, regional or international institutions, and multilateral organisations.

## Program participants

Australian Volunteers Program participants (or program participants) includes volunteers and approved accompanying dependents.

## Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Australia has joined all other United Nations member states in committing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs.

# Photography

Photos in this strategy celebrate the diversity of Australian volunteers, partner organisation colleagues, and local communities where the Australian Volunteers Program operates.

## Credits

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Page 17 (right): Sarah Friend

Page 18 (left): Walter Gerard

Page 18 (right): Alice Tamang

Page 20 (top left): Darren James

Page 20 (bottom left): Harjono Djoyobisono

Page 20 (right): Darren James

Page 21 (left): Alice Tamang

Page 21 (top right): Harjono Djoyobisono

Page 21 (bottom right): Walter Gerard

Page 22: Henry Smith

Page 23: Supplied by Rebecca Ladd

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