

Australian Volunteers



Australian Volunteers Program
Annual Report
July 2020 – June 2021

This report is dedicated to the memory of Ruvanthy Sivapragasam, Program Manager Sri Lanka, and a lifelong advocate for skilled international volunteering. Ruvanthy was deeply cared for, loved and respected by those around her. Ruvanthy lived life to its fullest, loved what she did and who she did it with deeply, shared wisdom and kindness with so many, and brought joy and laughter to everyone around her.



(Cover) **Timor-Leste** Australian volunteer Jess Harries (l) and her colleague Rheumatic Heart Disease Health Care worker Nensia M. Ku (r) at Maluku Timor. Jess volunteered as a Rheumatic Heart Disease & Malnutrition Mentor with Maluku Timor.

(This page) **Sri Lanka** Indian rose-ringed parakeets.

Contents

1. Executive summary	2
July 2020 to June 2021 at a glance	4
3. About the program	8
3. About this report	9
4. Program highlights	10
5. Operating context	12
6. Lessons learned	13
7. Management actions and forward priorities	16
8. Progress towards outcomes	18
8.1. Supporting the development outcomes of our partner organisations	19
Focus Area 1: Remote volunteering	30
Focus Area 2: Partnerships and partner support	32
8.2. Promoting the value of international volunteering	36
Focus Area 3: Innovation	41
Focus Area 4: Diversity and inclusion	42
8.3. Supporting Australian volunteers to gain personally and professionally	44
Focus Area 5: Risk and safeguarding	52
Focus Area 6: Research and learning	54
8.4. Program foundations	57



1 | Executive summary

Over the last 12 months, the Australian Volunteers Program has supported locally-led development of hundreds of partner organisations overseas, including introducing new ways to do so as a result of the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. The program represents the Australian Government's investment in volunteering, mutual learning and skills sharing across cultures, which has been an important part of the Government's aid program for more than 60 years.

At the global level, the program is guided by a [Global Program Strategy](#). This strategy sets out the key components of the program and supports the Australian Government's policy [Partnerships for Recovery – Australia's COVID-19 Development Response](#), which was launched in May 2020. At a country level, the program has three-year plans developed in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). During the year, as DFAT's Aid Investment Plans were replaced by *COVID-19 Development Response Plans*, the Australian Volunteers Program updated its country program plans to ensure continued alignment with DFAT's priorities.

2020-21 has been characterised by the unprecedented impacts of COVID-19 affecting all countries in which the program operates. The program navigated high levels of uncertainty, while also adapting program delivery. During the year, the program supported 343 volunteer assignments, including 32 in-country roles and a further 311 remote assignments. A total of 224 partner organisations were supported with volunteer assignments.

The program also contributed to the capacity development objectives of an extensive group of partner organisations through awarding 102 small grants and facilitating a range of networking and co-learning events.

Promoting reflection and learning are important principles of the Australian Volunteers Program. The program undertakes and commissions research and analysis to understand what is working well and what needs to be improved. During the year, DFAT also commissioned an independent evaluation of the program. The evaluation found that the program was highly relevant to the development needs of overseas partner organisations and has been very effective in supporting partners to achieve capacity development goals.

Notably, it found that:

“There will always be merit in having a development program that shares Australia's skills with partner countries, utilising the traditional model of volunteering we have seen over the past 60 years. Similarly, the changing external environment for volunteering and new challenges in the global environment presents an opportunity to review and recalibrate the current program design and ways of working to strengthen the program's resilience and sustainability”.¹

1. *Independent Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program*, April 2021, TetraTech, page 20.



Tonga Australian volunteer Georgia Lack and her colleagues at the Tongan Ministry of Health during the vaccine rollout. Back row (left to right): Mafi Kovi Fifita, Tainali Ma'asi, Lepeka Folau, Georgia Lack and Siaoisi Fifita. Front row (left to right): Ilaisaane Fakatoumafi, Linda Tutone and Fatafehi Palu. Georgia volunteered as a Health Information Systems Support Officer, supporting the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Tonga.

The program has made significant progress over the last 12 months, including by strengthening partnerships, adapting delivery, and exploring new ways to support local volunteering capacity and future program resilience. The next 12 months will see us continue to adapt and evolve in response to the changing global context, including working with DFAT to take forward their response to the recommendations from the independent evaluation.

The Australian Volunteers Program is a five-year program with a total budget of up to \$190 million. This phase of the program officially commenced on 1 January 2018 and this report captures achievements and lessons from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. The program is managed by AVI, in consortium with Cardno Emerging Markets Pty Ltd and Alinea Whitelum.

July 2020 to June 2021 at a glance

343 assignments

311
remote assignments

32
in-country assignments

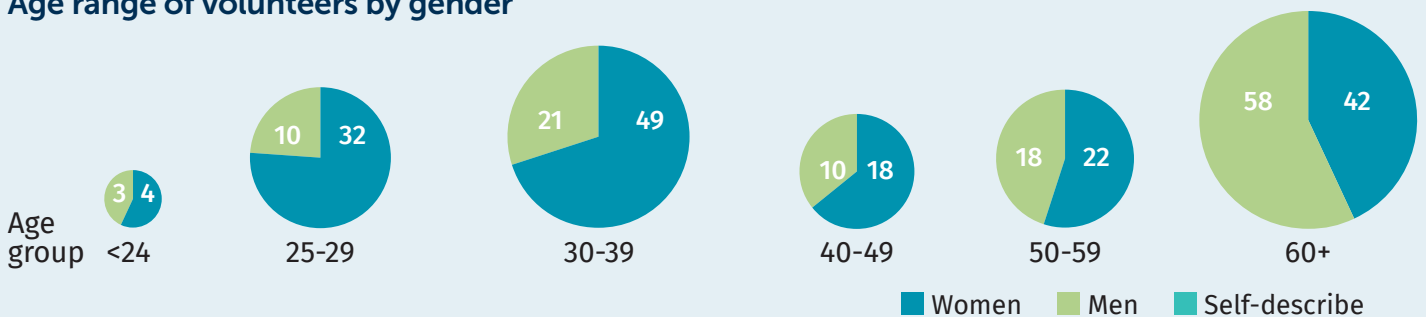
287 volunteers accompanied by **4** approved dependents

2%
volunteers identify as having a disability

1%
volunteers identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

58% women **42%** men **0%** self-describe

Age range of volunteers by gender



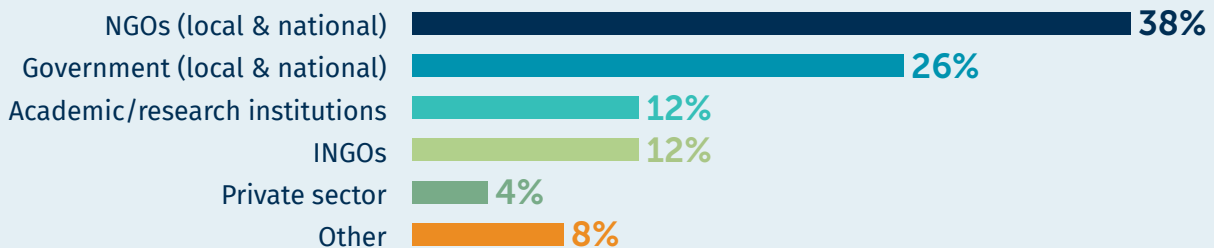
Number of partner organisations supported with assignments

224

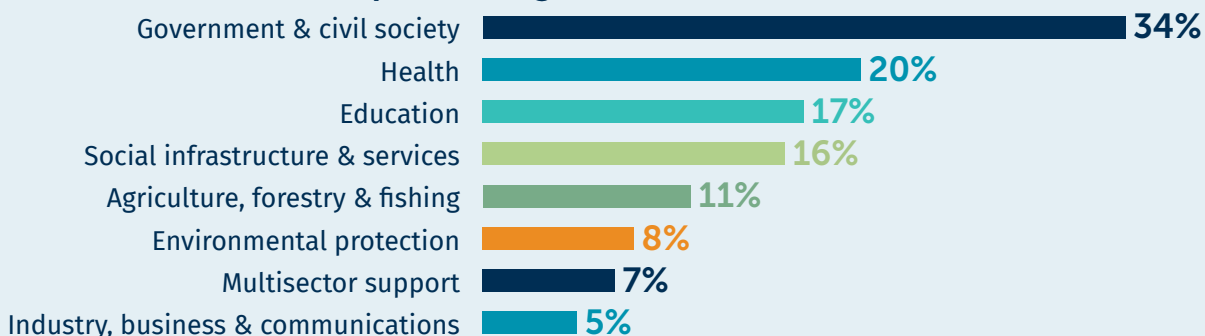
Number of small grants awarded to partner organisations

102

Our partner organisations



Most common sectors partner organisations work in



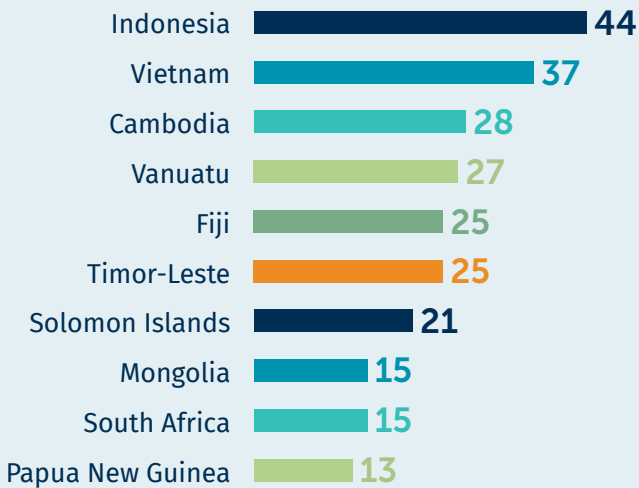
266

assignments started this year

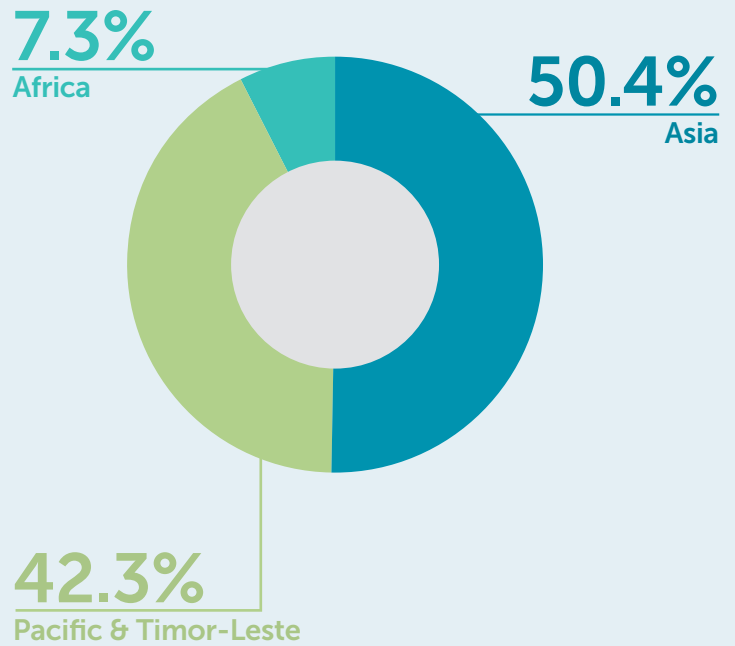
77

assignments continued from previous years

Top ten countries by assignment (out of 26 countries)



Where volunteers supported partners



81% of partner organisations reported good or excellent progress against assignment objectives



74% of volunteers thought they made good or excellent progress against assignment objectives



87% of partner organisations were satisfied or very satisfied with the volunteer assignment



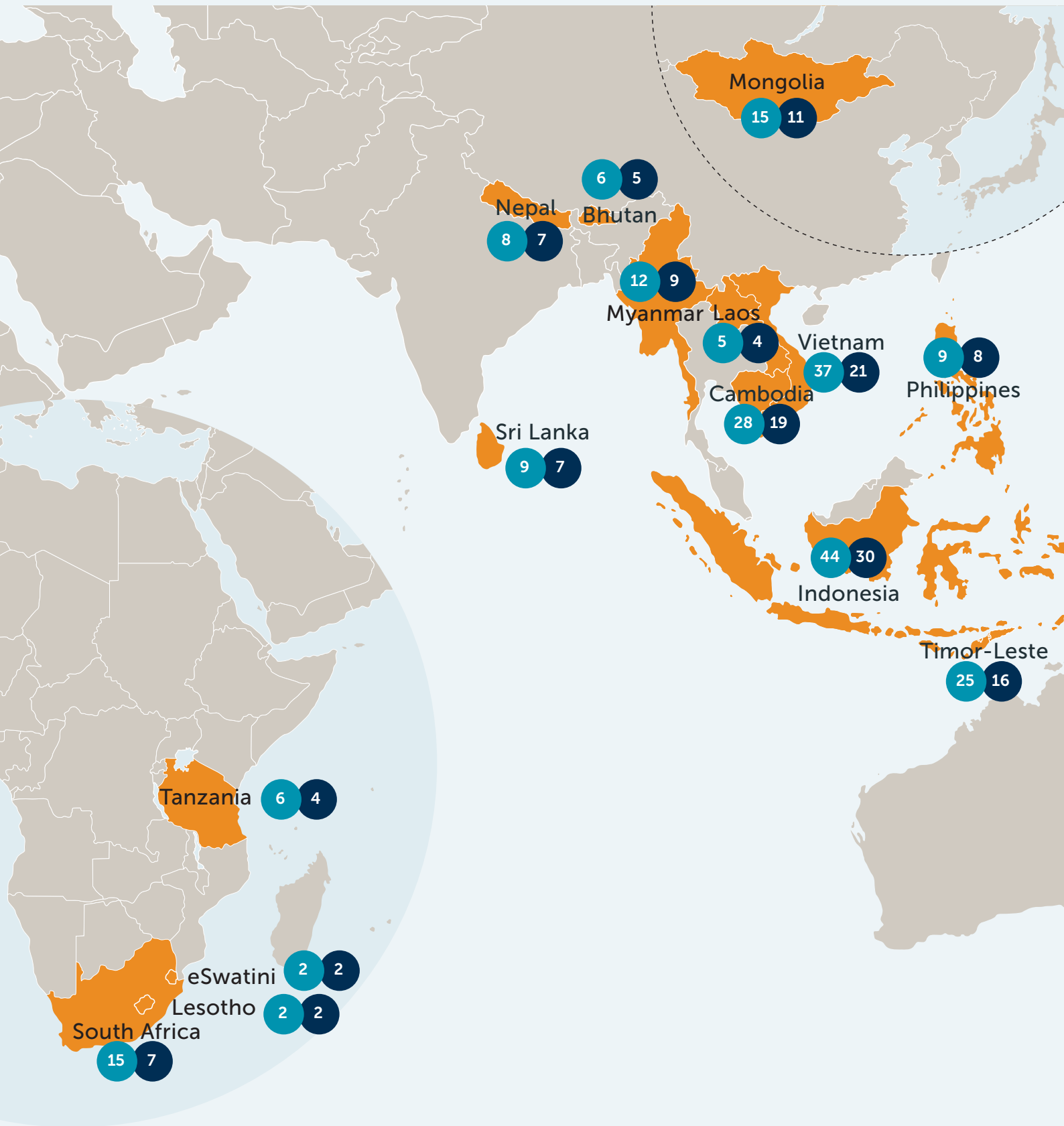
82% of volunteers were satisfied or very satisfied with the program

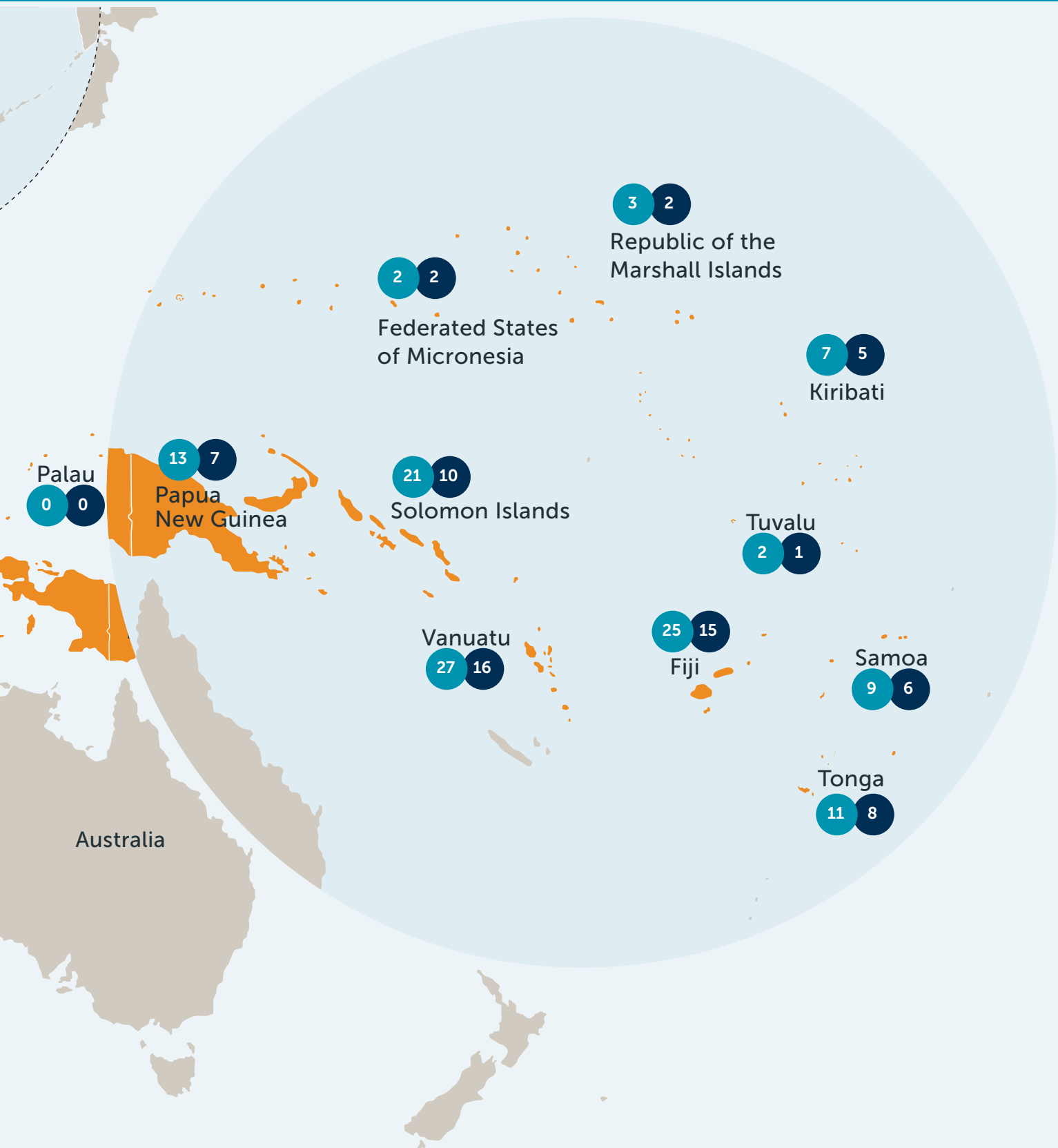


Total expenditure

\$16.5M

Where we operate





- Number of assignments supported July 2020 – June 2021
- Number of partner organisations



2 | About the program

The Australian Volunteers Program supports partner organisations to achieve their own development objectives. Establishing long-term, mutually respectful and valued partnerships with organisations is fundamental to the program's development approach. The program primarily uses international volunteering as a people-centred approach to sharing skills and enhancing cross-cultural understanding.

The program is funded by the Australian Government and forms part of the Government's people-to-people program portfolio, connecting Australians to Australia's aid program and the region.

Over five years, the Australian Volunteers Program aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Partner organisations are supported by Australia to achieve their own development objectives
- Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally
- The public in Australia better appreciates the value of international volunteering

By successfully achieving these outcomes, the Australian Volunteers Program will also contribute to the following broader development and diplomacy goals:

- The Australian Government achieving its development objectives
- Australians becoming more globally literate and connected
- Australian aid perceived positively in Australia and internationally

The program replaced the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program, which concluded on 31 December 2017. The Australian Volunteers Program retains the core elements of AVID, with additional ambitions aimed at enhancing program reach, visibility, impact and value for money.

The Australian Volunteers Program is managed by AVI, in consortium with Cardno Emerging Markets Pty Ltd and Alinea Whitelum. It is a five-year program with an estimated total budget of up to \$190 million.



3 | About this report

This is the fourth annual report prepared by the Australian Volunteers Program. It covers the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. This has been an extraordinary year in the program's history, requiring substantial changes to how the program operates.

The program's annual plan for 2020-21 was written at a time of ongoing global uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the repatriation of hundreds of volunteers to Australia in March and April 2020, the program swiftly adjusted to find new ways of working.

The annual plan outlined how the program would leverage and adapt core program capabilities to support Australia's whole of government approach to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the Indo-Pacific by:

- Maintaining and strengthening partnerships
- Identifying programmatic opportunities and adapting delivery
- Innovating to support local volunteering capacity and informing future program implementation
- Communicating the impact of Australian aid
- Preparing context and country specific approaches to restart mobilisations

The program has strong networks of partner organisations overseas and in Australia, skilled volunteers and experienced in-country teams. With these networks, the program remains well placed to contribute to Australia's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

Despite the changes in context, the program logic and end of program outcomes remain relevant, and progress being made towards the three end of program outcomes is provided in section 8. Following on from a summary of program achievements (section 4) and of the operating context for the year (section 5), section 6 outlines lessons learned. Key management actions for the program to take forward in the year ahead are provided in section 7. Significant cross-cutting issues are addressed in more detail in a number of 'Focus Areas', and examples of projects supported by Impact Fund grants are provided throughout the report.



4 | Program highlights

2020-21 was another extraordinary year for the Australian Volunteers Program. The impacts of the global pandemic could be seen in all countries in which the program operates, affecting communities, partners and staff. Continued restrictions on travel (both international and domestic) have challenged the way we think about international volunteering. Nevertheless, the program made significant progress. We supported hundreds of partner organisations overseas by linking them with volunteers. We also adapted our delivery and found new ways of contributing to locally-led change, including through small grants and co-learning events.

Highlights of the year include:

- Supporting **343 volunteer assignments**, including 32 in-country roles and a further 311 remote assignments across 25 countries. These assignments were delivered by **287 volunteers**.
- Supporting **224 partner organisations** with volunteer assignments to help these partners respond to and recover from the impacts of COVID-19. The program worked with over **80 Australian partner organisations**, including health sector partners to source and support COVID-19 response and recovery volunteer roles.
- **Awarding 102 small grants** to support partner organisations' activities to benefit communities in 23 countries. This included implementing a dedicated grant round to strengthen partner organisations' work in Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI).
- **Adapting many program activities** to be online. For example, the partnership with Researchers in Agriculture for International Development (RAID) moved to an online program enabling researchers from the Vietnam National University of Agriculture and the University of Melbourne to connect through new and exciting ways, experiencing volunteering over an intensive six-week period.
- Delivering **14 sessions under our Global Webinar Series**, which is a program of regular online events to bring our global community of partner organisations, volunteers and staff together. These sessions covered topics such as gender equality in times of COVID-19, grant writing, sports for development, climate action, water security, health, and an inclusion focus on LGBTIQ+.
- Embedding **Indigenous voices and leadership** within formal program structures, with the establishment of the Indigenous Volunteer Support and Advisory Panel, and appointing the first National Indigenous RAVN Representative. The program also procured goods and services through 12 Indigenous suppliers.
- Testing new ideas to support **local volunteering and volunteerism** through the program's Innovation Fund and building the program's innovation capabilities, including by supporting in-country teams to take the lead in exploring new approaches.
- Developing the **partner organisation learning framework including a resource library** available to more than 100 active partner organisations. The library includes resources on diversity and inclusion, child protection and cybersecurity.

Vanuatu Australian volunteer Ben Elliott (middle) is providing training to student paramedics Walter Milligrant Narm (l) and Philimon Kampai (r). Ben volunteered as a clinical instructor with ProMedical Vanuatu.



- Demonstrating, through a range of **program reviews and research**, that the program is having an impact including by responding effectively to the challenges of working in the context of COVID-19; making positive contributions to partner organisations working on human rights in southern Africa; and supporting volunteers who have contributed to partner organisations' gender equality and social inclusion outcomes.
- Providing **training for partners and facilitating workshops** to support their capacity strengthening goals. For example, in the Asia Archipelago region, webinars, training and workshops addressed issues such as diversity and inclusion, child protection and preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH). Over the year, this region hosted over 20 partner focused events, attended by over 250 partner organisation representatives.
- Promoting the program through 19 events in Australia and across the Indo-Pacific region for **International Volunteer Day** with more than 1000 stakeholders attending virtual and in person events. During the year, the program also celebrated **International Women's Day** through a hybrid online and in person event; and generated more than 200 pieces of unique content for DFAT Posts to share via social media.
- Delivering two successful **'Connecting RAVN and Global Alumni' events**, in Melbourne and Brisbane, with over 100 people including returned volunteers, New Colombo Plan alumni, Australia Awards Scholars, representatives from hosting universities, program staff and DFAT representatives. These events provided the opportunity for cross-program engagement and deepening cultural awareness.

In addition, when surveyed:

- 81% of partners reported assignments made good or excellent progress against objectives.
- 87% of partners were satisfied or very satisfied with the volunteer assignment. A higher proportion were satisfied with the volunteer (93%) and 94% were satisfied with the program's in-country management.
- 85% of partners say they were satisfied or very satisfied with the outcomes of their remote volunteering assignment, demonstrating that remote volunteers are effective in meeting the needs of partners.
- 99% of partners stated they would like to host another volunteer.²
- 72% of volunteers thought it was likely or very likely their partner would sustain the initiatives³, compared to 68% in the previous year. This similarity of results to previous years suggests that for volunteers, remote assignments are as likely to lead to sustainable change as in-country assignments.
- 78% of volunteers on remote assignments felt they had learnt new skills that might help them professionally, and/or developed their personal competencies (9% were unsure and 13% felt not).
- 91% of returned volunteers who responded to the RAVN survey⁴ believed that their assignment has helped them in developing their professional skills; and 98% feel that their assignment has helped them to develop their personal skills.

2. From 177 responses from partner organisations that had completed an assignment in the last 12 months.

3. 21% were neutral or unsure, and 8% thought it unlikely.

4. In 2021, the program surveyed members of the Returned Australian Volunteers Network (RAVN). 532 returned volunteers responded (62% female and 36% male), some of whom had volunteered as far back as the 1960s.



5 | Operating context

Over this reporting period, the program continued to operate in an external environment dominated by the uncertainty and the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. Changing partner government policies and uncertain safety and security contexts were largely in response to the ongoing effects of the global pandemic.

Partner government policies

The impact of COVID-19 has dominated partner government policies. Across all program countries, travel restrictions are in place and have changed throughout the course of the year. Border controls, immigration and visa processes continue to limit the movement between and within countries. The requirements for testing and quarantine varies from country to country and commercial flight availability remains constrained. High rates of transmission of COVID-19 continue in many countries, and in some it is worsening, leading to constantly changing government approaches to curb the spread of the virus.

In many program countries there are curfews in place, many are operating with significant restrictions in place which is limiting activities and many offices are closed. As a result, many program staff continue to work from home.

Australian Government priorities

The program continued to support DFAT's strategic objectives as articulated in *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID -19 Development Response*. Our role in response and recovery efforts has enabled the program to provide skills to a diverse range of partner organisations as they respond to the impacts of COVID-19, particularly in the areas of health and inclusive economic growth. In response to the ongoing focus on those neighbours closest to Australia, 84.4% of our volunteers deployed during the reporting period were placed in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

Civil unrest, elections and natural disasters

There was a significant deterioration in the political context in many program countries, leading to civil unrest. National elections in Myanmar in November 2020 led to increased tensions, and on 1 February 2021 the military seized power. The instability in Myanmar has persisted, resulting in a highly volatile and uncertain safety and security environment. Violent protests occurred in Jakarta earlier in the year, and Nepal, eSwatini and South Africa all experienced a deterioration in political situations. Elections in Bougainville in August to September 2020 progressed smoothly. A range of natural disasters also affected program locations, but these events did not impact program continuity.



6 | Lessons learned

Promoting reflection and learning are important principles of the Australian Volunteers Program. The program undertakes and commissions research and analysis to understand what is working well and what needs to be improved. The program's annual reflection workshops provide program staff and DFAT colleagues the opportunity to review findings, share learning and explore evidence of progress.

In the last 12 months, we have learned that:

The program has adapted well.

The global pandemic has challenged the program's approach to implementation, however, the program has seized the opportunity to find new ways of working. An external review of the program's response to the pandemic⁵ highlighted that there were three key elements that enabled a strong response overall. These included: good crisis management and program leadership; strong relationships that were effectively leveraged by the program; and the program's Innovation Fund. This review has helped the program appraise its approach to crisis management and consider what could be strengthened in the future. The review directly informed ongoing work to adapt and improve the program, particularly its remote volunteering modality.

Working remotely has been challenging but has also supported a stronger sense of cohesion between teams.

It has been a difficult year for staff, who have faced lockdowns and working from home arrangements. However, online working has also resulted in a flatter organisational structure, with more interaction between teams. For example, staff feedback suggests that participation at events has been equalised when everyone is online. The year has also seen a shift to more country-led initiatives, which has been welcomed by staff, for example country-led exploration of local volunteering.

Our investment in innovation has made the program more resilient, but there is further to go.

As noted in the independent evaluation, the Innovation Fund has provided a mechanism to support program adaptation. The Fund supported the rapid development of remote volunteering and is providing a mechanism to explore new volunteering modalities including around local volunteering and volunteerism. Interviews with other international volunteering organisations, and external research⁶, highlight how having diversified modalities for volunteering strengthens organisational resilience. The rapid review of the program's response to COVID-19 concluded that the Innovation Fund will continue to be critical to the ongoing success of the program. The review suggested that the ultimate success of the Innovation Fund will rest on its ability to sustainably integrate successful innovations into the program's ongoing work.

5. *Australian Volunteers Program COVID-19 Review Synthesis report*, February 2021, Clare Hanley and Penny Davis.

6. *COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering for Development*. Findings from a study conducted for the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum), February 2021.

The remote volunteering model has, to a large extent, resulted in successful volunteer assignments and supported effective relationships between program stakeholders.

The data on effectiveness of remote assignments is very positive and broadly similar to that of in-country assignments. Several factors have contributed to this success including strong coordination by program teams; partner organisations being ‘volunteer ready’; and volunteers having the right skills and motivation and being flexible and adaptable. Remote volunteering has diversified the range of Australians who might be interested in volunteering, including Australians with skills to offer who are not able to travel overseas. The model also presents opportunities for relationships with new partner organisations, for example in less secure locations. A recent review of remote volunteering⁷ indicates the model has been a success, and makes some useful recommendations, which the program will take forward in 2021-22.

A broader package of support to partner organisations contributes to strengthening organisational capacity.

Supporting partners to achieve their own objectives remains at the centre of the program. The program is now placing volunteers and providing a package of support to partners. This has always been the case to some extent, however it has evolved and strengthened over the last year. This support has included small grants, webinars, networking events, remote volunteering, in-person volunteering, training workshops, and ongoing support and relationships cultivated by in-country teams. The exploratory Volunteering for Development work, which is testing new ways to support local volunteering, provides exciting opportunities to expand the program’s offerings even further.

The program is having an impact.

Through looking at different thematic areas of work, we have found evidence that the program is supporting partner organisations to bring about transformational change⁸. We have traced the contribution of the program to this change, demonstrating how the program has supported volunteers to strengthen organisational capacity that has led to direct improvements in people’s lives. The abilities and attitudes of volunteers is one key part of this. Another is the broader package of support provided through the program, through assignment design and delivery, small grants, and the program’s approach to partnerships. Evidence also suggests that these impacts are sustainable, with the benefits lasting beyond the assignment.

The program is making good progress to achieve its end of program outcomes.

The independent evaluation considered three-years’ worth of data from the program and the findings from multiple studies. The evaluators were mindful that at the time of the evaluation the program was in year four of its five-year contract period and that for almost a third of this period, program activities and outcomes were somewhat limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the evaluation found that the program is making good progress towards achieving its end of program outcomes. Furthermore, it found that the program was successfully supporting partner organisations, providing a transformational experience for volunteers, and supporting Australia’s wider development assistance program⁹.

7. *Review of Australian Volunteers Program Remote Volunteering Model*, July 2021, Iris Low, Leone Tupua and Penny Davis.

8. *Deep Dive Evaluation of Human Rights in Southern Africa*, 2020, Winterford, K., Gero, A., Megaw, T., Cunningham, R., Fee, A. Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS
Gender Equality Synthesis Report: Documenting Australian volunteers’ contribution to advancing gender equality, July 2021, Iris Low and Leaine Robinson.

9. *Independent Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program*, April 2021, TetraTech.

Fiji: Building and enhancing disaster resilience in rural women of Cakaudrove province

Cakaudrove province in northern Fiji is becoming more vulnerable to climate change-induced natural disasters such as persistent flooding, rising sea levels and high intensity tropical cyclones.

Na i Soqosoqo Vakamarama i Taukei Cakaudrove will build the capacity of rural Fijian women in disaster resilience, enhancing their traditional knowledge with modern disaster resilience strategies. The project will help participants to build the knowledge, skills and resources required to support their families and communities to improve sustainable food security.

With the support of the program's Impact Fund, this project will:

- Deliver two-day community-based workshops targeting rural women, and open to young people, men and community elders.
- Establish community food plots to act as nurseries for disaster resilient crops such as kumala, yams, dalo ni tana and via.
- Produce a rural disaster resilience booklet that will include information collected from workshops, traditional knowledge and images of community food plots.



This project will increase participants' knowledge of disaster resilience, strengthening their role in their families and communities as a key resource during natural disasters. Participants will share traditional methods and knowledge that are still practiced or that can be revived.

Bhutan: Nature for all – an inclusive nature garden for people with a disability

The National Biodiversity Centre project will help improve access to the Royal Botanical Garden in Thimphu, Bhutan, for young people living with disability. This project will expand the range of activities available to people living with disability, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic where opportunities to connect and experience nature are limited.

With support from the program's Impact Fund, the project will:

- Deliver sensitisation and awareness workshops on the importance of universal design in nature gardens for people living with disability.
- Design and install braille and audio information interpretations, sign language videos and signs in the botanical garden targeting people living with disability.
- Launch universal design installations, coinciding with the 2021 International Day of People with Disability.

Contact with nature has significant personal, social and wellbeing benefits. This project will enhance disability and social inclusion by making the Royal Botanical Garden accessible to everyone. It will also improve visitors' understanding of the natural environment and nature conservation.



This project will be implemented by the National Biodiversity Centre in partnership with Zhenphen Group, a group for young people living with disability. The project also aims to improve Zhenphen Group's capacity in stakeholder engagement, project management and universal design for people with disability.



7 | Management actions and forward priorities

The program has made significant progress over the last 12 months, including by strengthening partnerships, adapting delivery, and exploring new ways to support local volunteering capacity and improve future program resilience. As we move through 2021-22, the program will strengthen initiatives introduced last year and continue to adapt and evolve in response to the global context.

Key management actions to be taken forward in 2021-22 include:

Supporting partner organisations to respond to and recover from the impacts of COVID-19, strengthening their capacity to deliver positive change.

This includes strengthening our remote volunteering initiative by actioning recommendations from relevant reviews as well as optimising the remote volunteering journey to ensure it is fit for purpose, efficient and continues to contribute to the end of program outcomes.

We will review and strengthen our impact grants by bringing all small grants under one functional area. We will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our grants program, including strengthening our monitoring of outcomes. We will also invest in our partnerships with Australian organisations, and explore new ones, to support the organisational strengthening objectives of our partners.

Expanding our innovation capability to develop additional volunteer modalities and support program resilience.

This includes testing new ways to support volunteering at the local level. Collaborative innovation will be a major focus of this work that will include supporting local volunteers, improving volunteering infrastructure and advocating for the value of volunteering. This body of work will inform how we reimagine and redefine the way we support volunteers and volunteerism. In addition, we will improve our systems and processes to support new ways of volunteering.

Elevating our work on gender equality, disability and social inclusion, and Indigenous inclusion.

We will bring this work together in a small unit, under a new Inclusion Manager position, and elevate it to report directly to the Program Director. This unit will build on the achievements of past years and further sharpen its mandate and impact under a refreshed GEDSI strategy.

Solomon Islands National Referral Hospital staff. Left to right: Marcia Soihaka, Resident Medical Officer, Dr Tom Diko, Emergency Department Registrar and Willie Falebo, Clinical Nurse Consultant.



Supporting our staff, including around working from home.

We expect working from home arrangements will continue in some locations for some time. Staff have shown great resilience in adapting to this way of working and have also identified some benefits around greater cross-program collaboration. We will look at ways to bring staff together (both virtually or face-to-face when safe to do so) to foster team cohesion and learning opportunities. We will, for example, support a quarterly forum for all country program managers to discuss challenges, opportunities and new approaches. We will also review the remuneration and benefits offered to locally engaged staff to ensure consistency and fairness across roles and countries, with any changes to be implemented from 1 July 2022.

Expanding our role in supporting and connecting program stakeholders.

We are a program that connects people, organisations and communities, and we build these connections even in a world challenged by COVID-19. These connections will be strengthened through a range of engagement activities and communications. This will include expanding our Global Webinar Series, establishing Communities of Practice, working to better support the networks of partner organisations and Australian organisations, strengthening the remote volunteering initiative, and holding connection events in Australia.

Taking forward DFAT's response to the independent evaluation recommendations.

The program's first priority is to refresh the program logic. We will work with DFAT to facilitate a high-level review and refresh at the impact and end of program outcome level. We will support the implementation of DFAT's management response to all of the evaluation's recommendations, and also track progress throughout the year. Subject to Australian Government approval to extend the contract beyond June 2022, we will also review and, if required, recalibrate systems, processes and program structures in preparation for the next phase.



8 | Progress towards outcomes

This section of the report summarises progress made during the year towards the three end of program outcomes.

There are three sub-sections, reflecting the three end of program outcomes and their related intermediate outcomes:

- Partner organisations are supported by Australia to achieve their own development objectives
- Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally
- The public in Australia better appreciates the value of international volunteering

A fourth sub-section covers the program's foundations and the systems and activities that have supported the work of the program overall.

Evidence of progress toward program outcomes, and intermediate outcomes, is drawn from a range of sources, including:

- Research and evaluation activities commissioned by the program and DFAT
- Feedback provided by volunteers and partner organisations on each assignment
- The program's management information system

It should be noted that the majority of feedback received from volunteers and partner organisations is in relation to remote assignments rather than in-country assignments. Data is compared with previous years where relevant. However, this is in effect comparing different volunteering modalities (in-country and remote) and comparing two very different years in terms of the external context. There have also been some minor changes to the assignment evaluation forms for remote assignments and questions asked. Caution needs to be taken when looking at trends over time.



8.1 Supporting the development outcomes of our partner organisations

The global context has severely impacted the partner organisations that the program supports. Many of our partner organisations have struggled to continue operating due to various restrictions and additional pressures, and many have been at the forefront of helping their communities cope.

Throughout the pandemic, the program has strived to stay connected to its partner organisations, and has developed new ways of supporting them, including through remote assignments, small grants, providing more resources online and building connections between organisations.

End of program outcome: Partner organisations are supported by Australia to progress their development objectives

The program supports hundreds of partner organisations, which work across a wide range of thematic areas. The Global Program Strategy identifies three thematic areas, aligned with Australian Government priorities, which act as lenses through which to view program impact. During the year, the program commissioned an in-depth evaluation in the human rights impact area, which focused on South Africa.

This has been complemented by another study that explored one of the program's key cross-cutting themes, looking at how partner organisations in 16 countries have progressed their objectives related to gender equality.

In addition, DFAT commissioned an independent evaluation of the program, which also provides evidence as to the achievement of this end of program outcome. This evidence builds on studies conducted in previous years to show how the program supports partner organisations.

The independent evaluation noted that:

“the program is generally very effective in supporting partner organisations to achieve their capacity development goals across a range of impact areas. The partner organisations consulted for this evaluation were unequivocal in their view that participation in the program strengthened their capacity. They cited many examples of capacity development outcomes at individual, organisational and sectoral levels, in relation to cross-cutting issues of gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) and across the program's impact areas.”¹⁰

The **human rights impact area evaluation** found strong evidence¹¹ that partner organisations in southern Africa progressed their development objectives in human rights. Two main pathways were taken. Partner organisations most commonly sought to progress realisation of human rights by increasing access to services for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. They also advocated on behalf of disadvantaged groups and influenced broader community attitudes towards advancing human rights. Ninety-five per cent of sampled partner organisations agreed that the Australian Volunteers Program had made a strong contribution to progress achieved in human rights in southern Africa.

The evaluation also found strong evidence of impacts in human rights for beneficiaries of partner organisations. Impacts were often described as life changing. For example, partner organisations, with support from volunteers, have improved care for children living with disability by supporting parents.

10. *Independent Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program*, April 2021, TetraTech, page 5.

11. *Deep Dive Evaluation of Human Rights in Southern Africa*, 2020, Winterford, K., Gero, A., Megaw, T., Cunningham, R., Fee, A. Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS.



Vanuatu Aleesha Kalulu (l), Assistant Surveillance Officer, and Australian volunteer Christopher Gauthier-Coles (r) at the Vanuatu Ministry of Health. Christopher volunteered as a COVID Procurement and Information Management Support Officer.

Gender equality research conducted in 2021¹² was based on 32 case studies of partner organisations covering 16 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The research found that partner organisations improved their capacity in gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. Ninety-four per cent of partner organisations showed positive changes relating to gender equality. Partner organisations strengthened their capacity at individual, organisational and networking levels, and are using their enhanced capacity to drive transformative change.

Partner organisations achieved the greatest improvement in their capacity to deliver interventions that aimed to end violence against women and girls. This was followed by interventions in women's leadership, decision making and participation at community, national and political levels. In addition, small grant funding from the program was highly valued by partner organisations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Impact Fund supported partners to provide information and services to women and vulnerable communities about the links between COVID-19 and violence, and accurate health information for communities, particularly those in remote locations or without internet connections.

These studies also provided a number of recommendations on how the program can further improve the support provided to partner organisations. Sections 6 and 7 of this report on lessons learned and forward priorities include responses to some of these recommendations.

Intermediate outcome: Partner organisations have strengthened their capacity and gained from the program

A total of 224 partner organisations were supported with volunteer assignments during the year. At the end of each assignment, partners were asked to assess the extent to which assignment objectives were achieved or not. From 180 completed evaluation forms, 81% of partners reported assignments making good or excellent progress against objectives, and 9% making less than satisfactory progress. This compares with 84% of partners assessing progress against objectives as good or excellent in the previous reporting period, 2019-20. These results are positive considering the very difficult operating context and the move to remote volunteering in the majority of cases.

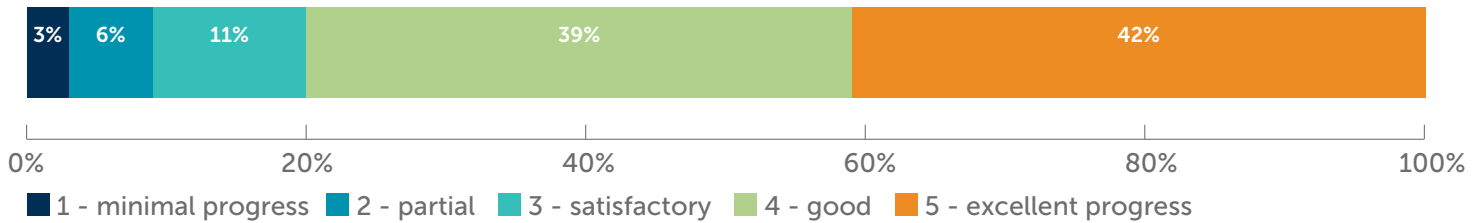
In providing feedback on assignment objectives, the most common comments given by partners were about the positive nature of the assignment and successful completion of objectives. Of the more challenging aspects of assignments, feedback can be grouped into three key themes. The most common related to the duration of assignments being too short to achieve objectives, or challenges caused by delays outside the partners' control (approximately 38% of all written comments).

12. *Gender Equality Synthesis Report: Documenting Australian volunteers' contribution to advancing gender equality*, July 2021, Iris Low and Leaine Robinson.



Vanuatu Medical supplies at ProMedical Vanuatu.

Partner organisation assessment of progress against assignment objectives (n180)



The challenges of remote assignments (either the effectiveness of some part of the assignment being compromised by remote working, or the assignment objectives being less suitable for remote assignments) were mentioned by approximately 25%. Challenges relating to the practicalities of the assignment (such as internet access, time zones or language barriers) were mentioned by 12%. For organisations that had a volunteer repatriated, and then a remote assignment aiming to continue similar objectives, there was often a sense that remote assignments were more challenging or not as useful. Further discussion of remote assignments is provided in Focus Area 1: Remote volunteering.

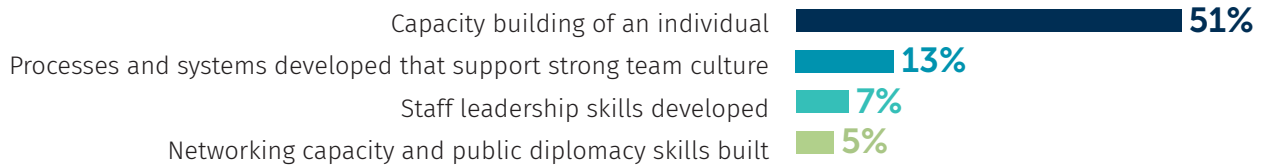
Volunteers were asked to report how they have supported capacity within their partner organisation. This can be at three levels: supporting individual staff within an organisation; supporting organisational development (such as improving systems or developing policies); or supporting at the systemic level (how an organisation connects with the wider systems and networks it operates in). Most volunteers reported supporting partner capacity at more than one level. From 118 completed evaluation forms, volunteers most commonly reported strengthening capacity at the organisational level (77%).

Strengthening partner capacity at different levels - as reported by volunteers (n118)

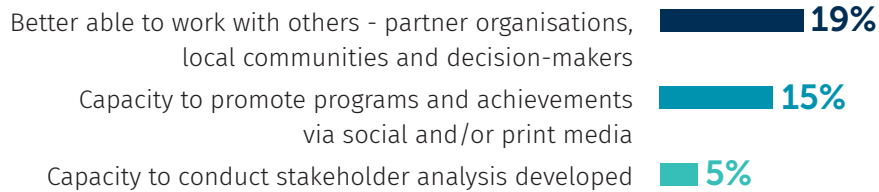


Volunteers reported on specific outcomes which they feel their assignment has achieved in each of these three broad areas

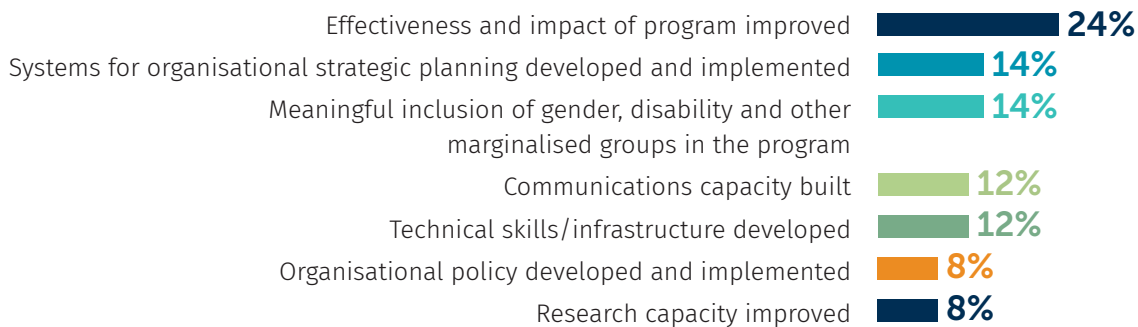
Individuals



Systems and networks



The organisation, its beneficiaries and stakeholders



Examples of change at different levels reported by our partners:

Strengthening the skills of individuals

'[The volunteer] has been very supportive and helpful with the work that he's been doing for the Ministry of Commerce. He does mentoring in smaller groups and one on one with the counterpart through Zoom and email. Staff gained so much knowledge and skills out of the support provided by [the volunteer] especially around understanding the different templates and the process of the Micro, Small to Medium Enterprises Program.'

- Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration, Solomon Islands

'[The volunteer] helped train our project manager to sufficiently understand the financial aspect of managing and reporting. He also engaged in supporting our core leadership team to reach out and achieve significant financial support and network to help us through the most difficult time of COVID-19.'

- Fargreen, Vietnam

Strengthening systems and networks

'[The volunteer] proved to be a crucial advisor and intermediary in the rapid development of isolation facilities at Vera Cruz, Tasi Tolu and Tibar. This involved a high level of cooperation with Ministry of Health counterparts, and imparting her unusual skills mix of clinical knowledge, electrical engineering and facility management. [The volunteer] was also involved in supporting the development of further COVID-19 training content that was used nationally, and in supporting the restructured Family Medicine Program as a clinical supervisor. [The volunteer] balanced the very complex interplay between Ministry of Health, Integrated Crisis Centre, health partners, and the Australian Government, building constructive relationships and fostering effective communication and cooperation.'

- Maluk Timor, Timor-Leste

'[The volunteer] excelled in creating a database with key contact information to build networking capacity and public diplomacy skills. Her support in building capacity of the programme lead was satisfactory and she made a good contribution to the programme's capacity to conduct stakeholder analysis. [The volunteer] was excellent in creating networking opportunities by, for example, organizing attendance to the opening of parliament and state of the nation address.'

- South African Institute of International Affairs, South Africa

Vanuatu: Improving facilities to support COVID-19 response

The Vila Central Hospital Emergency Department currently has one large room that is used as a staff room, a change room, a storage room, and a teaching area. This space is currently not fit for purpose and has no running water or air conditioning.

The Vanuatu Ministry of Health will improve the staff, storage and teaching room in the Vila Central Hospital's Emergency Department, which will support staff to prepare and respond to COVID-19 situations more effectively.

With the support of the program's Impact Fund, this project will:

- Build a staff change room.
- Purchase shelving and storage boxes to organise equipment and supplies in the storeroom.
- Install a kitchen with running water so staff can wash their hands and prepare meals.

The project will allow staff to organise and monitor supplies of critical items equipment so they are easily accessible in an emergency. It will also allow them to prepare and respond to COVID-19 situations more effectively.

Staff will have a comfortable place to teach and learn during weekly education sessions, which include training on infection prevention and control sessions to inform their COVID-19 response. They will also have a private change room to ensure they can adhere to infection control principles, especially when working with potential COVID-19 patients.

With a fit for purpose kitchen area, the staff can prepare nutritious food to keep their energy up during a busy shift. Ultimately, this project will improve the quality of patient care and staff morale, providing the facilities for staff to do their work effectively.

Strengthening the organisation, its beneficiaries and stakeholders

'The project team worked at the school with the school staff to implement activities in compliance with the COVID-19 prevention guidelines in preparation for the school reopening. The guidelines and action plan were developed, integrated local perspectives in addition to the school staff in a series of stakeholder meetings. These meetings led to local knowledge from stakeholders from the Ministry of Education, the National Health Center, and the District Emergency Department being incorporated into the final guidelines. Their input helped build local legitimacy of the guidelines and local ownership of the final product.'

- The Asia Foundation, Mongolia

'Overall, [the volunteer] has done an excellent job during remote working with CIRD. He's shown his abilities, enthusiasm and expertise in the job in terms of training, promoting, building capacity for CIRD staff. We have learnt the concept of GIS, applied GIS in the project model called Langur community conservation area. The knowledge was seen in editing and building research reports and proposals. The donor has approved our new research proposal which were guided and edited by this volunteer. During the working, he has attended and shared his comments at an important workshop held by Mekong Regional Land Governance where CIRD is an active member.'

- Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development (CIRD), Vietnam

'The volunteer worked with two multimedia staff. They prepared their stories and write ups, and have it edited by the volunteer. Through this volunteer assignment, the news is greatly improved, and transmission is improved, that it now reaches a wider audience. More talk-back shows, more online topics on TV. She has also helped the staff to think outside the box. For example, if the Government agreed to allocate so much money to say Ministry of Health. The volunteer would encourage staff to also visit the outlying medical outlets, communities and seek their opinion on how the money would be spent. So instead of just reporting on the allocation, they also provide the opinion of others, as to how funds should be spent. The volunteer developed and redesigned the website, and worked with a local IT company with the rebranding. The local counterpart staff are more independent now and more comfortable in sourcing their own news, building their own stories and publishing online.'

- Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation, Vanuatu

Partner organisation satisfaction (n171)

Overall satisfaction with assignment



Satisfaction with volunteer



Satisfaction with program's in-country management



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Dissatisfied (1 or 2) ■ Neutral (3) ■ Satisfied (4 or 5)

While partner organisations recognised challenges with assignments during the year, particularly with adapting to new remote assignments, overall satisfaction ratings were very high. From 171 partner organisations providing feedback, 87% were satisfied or very satisfied with the assignment. A higher proportion were satisfied with the volunteer (93%) and 94% were satisfied with the Australian Volunteers Program. This reinforces written feedback given by partners, expressing that even when an individual assignment did not work out, there was usually a positive appreciation of the program and efforts made to achieve positive outcomes.

The most common reasons for positive feedback can be grouped together as:

- Good assignment progress (63%)
- Good personality or attitude of the volunteer (40%)
- Good support from the program (31%)
- Volunteer had the right skill set for the assignment (24%)

Where partners expressed dissatisfaction, the following reasons were given:

- Limitations of remote assignments (5%)
- Assignment did not progress as planned (4%)
- Insufficient assignment duration (4%)
- Lack of, or unclear, communication from volunteer or program (3%)

Of 177 responses from partner organisations that had completed an assignment in the last 12 months, 99% stated they would like to host another volunteer.

At the end of an assignment, volunteers were asked how likely it is they think that their partner organisation will be able to sustain the initiatives the volunteer has been working on. Seventy-two per cent of volunteers thought it was likely or very likely their partner would sustain the initiatives (compared to 68% in the previous year). Twenty-one per cent were neutral or unsure, and 8% thought it unlikely. The similarity of results to previous years suggests that, for volunteers, remote assignments are as likely to lead to sustainable change as in-country assignments.

Data on sustainability from volunteers can be compared to results of a survey of partners conducted as part of the human rights impact areas evaluation in southern Africa. From an anonymous sample of 18 partners, 56% thought it likely or very likely that changes would be sustained over time, 33% assessed there to be a 'medium likelihood' and 11% assessed it as being unlikely.

Partner organisations reporting they would like another volunteer (n 177)



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ No ■ Yes (and already in the pipeline) ■ Yes (but nothing organised yet)

Timor-Leste Australian volunteer Jess Harries and her colleagues at Maluk Timor. Seated (left to right): Nensia M. Ku, Jess Harries and Januario do Santos. Standing (left to right): Dr Joaquina de Sousa M. and Ricardo Flavio. Jess volunteered as a Rheumatic Heart Disease and Malnutrition Mentor with Maluk Timor.



Intermediate outcome: Partners have a strategic rationale for participating in the program and provide a safe and productive work environment

Questions of alignment and relevance have been explored through external research and evaluation activities. The human rights impact area evaluation in southern Africa identified that the partners the program was supporting were relevant to the broader 'system' of human rights at the national level, addressing key policy issues relevant to the context. It also found that the program was well aligned to this work, principally by recruiting volunteers who had the right skills, personal competencies and approach to work with partners on human rights issues.

Similarly, the gender equality research carried out during the year reported that partner organisations have contributed to their country's national gender equality commitments. The research also found that partner organisations' achievements in gender equality are aligned with the program's gender equality, diversity and inclusion strategy.

Volunteers were asked to what extent they see the assignment they have completed as having been a good fit for the partner organisation's current priorities. Eighty-seven per cent of volunteers reported that their assignment was a good fit, 9% were neutral, and 4% disagree.

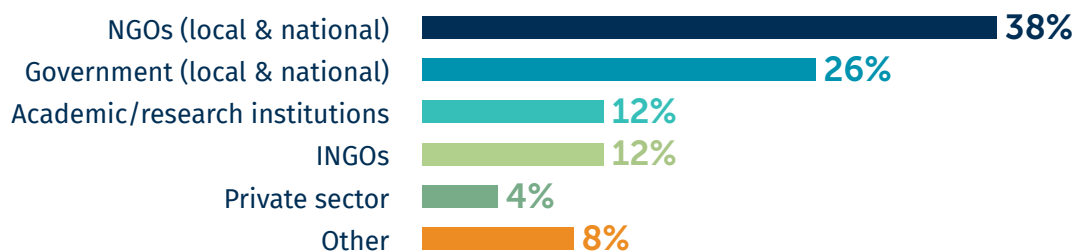
Given the small number of in-country assignments, data on the proportion of volunteers who report that their partner organisation provides a safe and productive work environment is not given. However, the larger sample of remote volunteers were asked if they felt their partner organisation had the resources (funds, workforce) to benefit from a volunteer placement. Seventy-seven per cent of volunteers agreed this was the case, 17% were neutral, and 6% disagreed.

Asked about the challenges experienced completing a remote assignment, 4% of volunteers mentioned not having the equipment they needed to work effectively from home. Six per cent of volunteers felt that their partner organisation lacked the resources (for example, staff, budget, transport) needed to complete the assignment well. Eighteen per cent reported that internet access was poor or too expensive, and 22% of volunteers reported that reimbursable costs were too low. These issues, and others, are explored further in Focus Area 1: Remote volunteering.

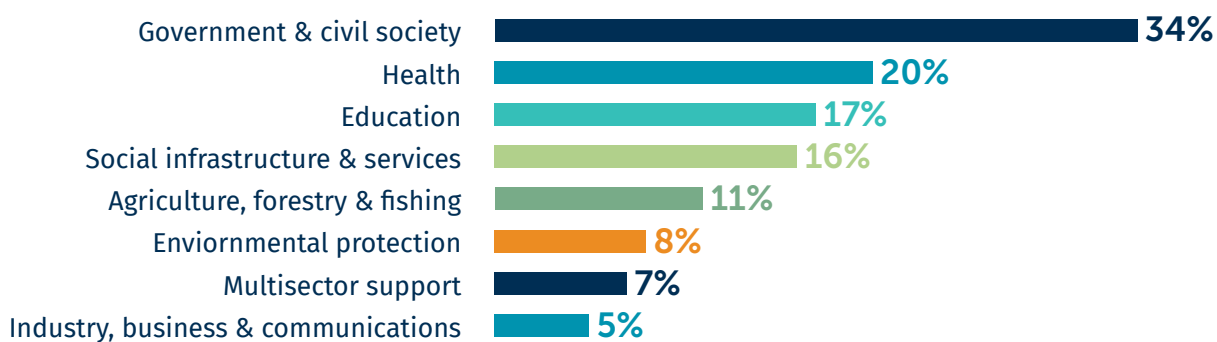
Vanuatu Vila Central Hospital staff (left to right): Nurse Aide Adenise Meltemal, IPC nurse Graham Tasso, Australian volunteer Dani Clark and Emergency Nurse Roselyn Morribo. Dani volunteered with the hospital as an Emergency Response Registrar.



Types of partner organisations



Sectors our partners work in



Intermediate outcome: Relevant and diverse partnerships with partner organisations are established, maintained and supported by DFAT, the program, and Australian organisations

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a reduction in the overall number of partner organisations supported with assignments during 2020-21. Despite this, the broad range and diversity of partner organisations has been maintained.

The types of organisations supported are similar to previous years. The proportion categorised as 'government and civil society' is larger than in previous years, in part due to refinement in how the program codes and analyses this data. Of the 34% categorised under 'government and civil society', most have either a focus on human rights, are women's equality organisations and institutions, or have a focus on ending violence against women and girls.

Partner organisations contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals



The size of each SDG logo is a visual representation of the proportion of partner organisations contributing to that goal.

Partner organisations are also categorised according to their alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Australian Government's development policy *Partnerships for Recovery – Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* and performance assessment framework were launched in May 2020. These outline Australia's approach to tackling COVID-19 in the region and pivoting the development program to focus on the pandemic.

During the year, as DFAT's Aid Investment Plans have been replaced by *COVID-19 Development Response Plans*, the program's Country Program Plans have been updated, to ensure continued alignment with DFAT's priorities. At the global level, there is clear alignment between the program partners' areas of work and DFAT priority areas, most noticeably in health but also in economic recovery, gender equality and ending violence against women and girls.

Maluk Timor, Timor-Leste

The program's support to Maluk Timor in Timor-Leste is an example of how the program has supported partners to respond to the pandemic.

The Timor-Leste Ministry of Health has pivoted many of its existing community health programs and resources to focus on COVID-19 planning and response. Timor-Leste's medical system is now better prepared to identify and respond to COVID-19 cases.

National case management triage guidelines are in place, an isolation facility has been established at Vera Cruz, and frontline health workers from every hospital and community health centre in Timor-Leste have been trained in COVID-19 and infection control. The establishment of hand-washing stations, and distribution of PPE and other supplies to health centres is also assisting with infection control throughout the country.

Maluk Timor worked closely with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and its National Institute of Training to support the development of the national case management and triage guidelines. Maluk Timor developed the COVID-19 training package with MoH, which was delivered nationwide over three weeks in April. Maluk Timor also supported the MoH to establish the isolation facility, which included the relocation of Maluk Timor's HIV Centre.

As a result of this support, Maluk Timor's relationship with the MoH has been strengthened, and it considered a trusted partner. This has had an ongoing positive impact on Maluk Timor's other health programs, including the HIV program.

The Australian Volunteers Program supported Maluk Timor throughout this period, with five in-country volunteers and two Impact Fund grants. Dr Eleanor MacMorran, an infectious disease specialist, contributed to the national case management guidelines and assisted with development and implementation of training on COVID-19 for front line health workers. She was also instrumental in relocating the HIV Centre and ensuring the service kept operating throughout the state of emergency. Jess Harries ensured the rheumatic heart disease clinic remained operational when the state of emergency restricted travel between districts. She also supported implementation of the triage training and contract tracing.

Dr Nikki Msuo supported the establishment of the isolation facility at Vera Cruz, contributing her unique mix of medical and engineering skills to advise on refurbishments required to make the centre operational. Dr Xhian Meng Quah and Dr Xiaying Mandy Wu also worked with Maluk Timor, and the MoH, to provide professional development for Timorese doctors and other primary care clinicians to enhance their roles as educators and leaders in their fields.

COVID-19 and the state of emergency impacted testing, treatment and education on HIV, and the provision of essential primary health care services for rheumatic heart disease patients. Maluk Timor was awarded two Impact Fund grants to support ongoing delivery of these health services.



Timor-Leste Rheumatic Heart Disease Dr Joaquina de Sousa M. (l) and Australian volunteer Jess Harries (r) at Maluk Timor.



Timor-Leste Australian volunteer Dr Eleanor MacMorran (l) and Dr Bonifacio da Silva de Jesus (r). Eleanor volunteered as a HIV Clinical Mentor at Maluk Timor.



Timor-Leste Family Medicine Registrar Dr Nelson V. Cardoso (l) and Australian volunteer Dr Nikee Msuo. Nikee volunteered as a Clinical Management Mentor at Maluk.

Focus Area 1: Remote volunteering

The Australian Volunteers Program launched its remote volunteering initiative in May 2020 as one of the program's key responses to the challenges presented by COVID-19. Remote volunteering builds on the Innovation Fund's Open Volunteering prototypes (2019-20), which involved a mixed mode of in-country and home-based volunteer work.

The remote volunteer initiative required significant effort to quickly develop and scale-up. The rapid development of remote volunteering involved a phased roll-out. The first assignments were limited to Australian volunteers who had been repatriated. The final phase, open public recruitment, started in November 2020. From July 2020 to June 2021, 242 remote volunteer assignments had started.

A rapid assessment of remote volunteering was conducted in 2020. This noted that remote volunteering had been implemented "in a very short time frame, without any major issues or challenges", and provided "a positive picture of the model and its implementation."¹³

The rapid review was followed by a more in-depth assessment in June 2021.¹⁴ This assessment asked if and how remote volunteering is supporting partner organisations to deliver their development outcomes, and also explored the motivation and diversity of volunteers involved. While the majority of the data presented in this annual report relates to remote volunteer assignments, this section focuses on findings and learning from this in-depth study.

Effectiveness for partner organisations

Overall, the review found that partner organisations are benefiting from their engagement with remote volunteers. Eighty-five per cent of partners reported that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the outcomes of their assignment, demonstrating that remote volunteers are effective in meeting the needs of partners. Partner organisation staff have gained knowledge, skills and confidence to better deliver their work and have developed stronger team connections within their organisations. They have also improved their capacity to network and connect with local and international stakeholders and mobilise resources. Partners are more strategic with their work and are adapting to the changing operating context of COVID-19 locally and internationally.

The high level of partner satisfaction, and the multiple benefits of remote volunteering they have experienced, suggest the remote volunteering model is:

- Relevant to partner organisations' capacity development needs.
- Effective in supporting partners to be adaptive and to deliver their development objectives.

Partner organisations are motivated to engage remote volunteers to meet a range of staff and organisational capacity development needs, and to seek technical advisory support to deliver effective programs.

Diversity of volunteers

The review found that there are some changes in the diversity of remote volunteers, although with a relatively small sample size, changes are indicative at this stage. Data suggests remote volunteering may be less attractive to younger people who may be looking for in-country experience as a career stepping-stone, and to those with trade certificates whose skill set may be difficult to share remotely. Remote volunteering does, however, appear to be more attractive to the 30 to 39 age cohort who are settled in their careers, and those over 60 who are looking for opportunities to give back.

The review recommends the program considers expanding its outreach and advertising, as the program may not currently be reaching enough Australians to be able to attract the diversity of volunteers it is striving for. This finding is consistent with the program's mid-term research into Australian public opinion of international volunteering, which found that most of the participants in the research realised that remote volunteering was something that they could personally contribute to but were unaware of this unless prompted.¹⁵

Experiences of volunteers

Remote volunteers are motivated to assist partner organisations and contribute to international development, and they are generally satisfied with their assignments and are experiencing personal and professional benefits. The ability to support the needs of partner organisations is very rewarding, particularly when there is shared learning and volunteers can feel and see that they are making a difference in the lives of individuals and organisations. Program initiatives such as Impact Fund grants are enabling volunteers to further support partners to implement small projects based on identified needs.

13. *Review of remote volunteering – Australian Volunteers Program*, November 2020, Luke Passfield.

14. *Review of Australian Volunteers Program Remote Volunteering Model*, July 2021, Iris Low, Leone Tupua and Penny Davis.

15. *AVP Mid-Term Research (Australian public's perception of international volunteering)*, June 2021, Roy Morgan.



The challenges experienced by partners and volunteers provide an opportunity for the program to further strengthen the remote volunteering model. Common challenges and/or limitations that impact the ability of remote volunteers to meet outcome objectives, include: communications; balancing assignment with other commitments; time-zone differences; staying motivated; availability of counterparts; delays beyond the volunteer’s control; and low reimbursable costs.

Lessons learned

The remote volunteering model has, to a large extent, resulted in successful volunteer assignments and has enhanced effective relationships between program stakeholders. Several factors have contributed to this success: strong coordination of efforts maintained by program teams; partner organisations being ‘volunteer ready’; and volunteers having the right skills and motivation, and being flexible and adaptable.

There is potential to further adjust and improve the remote volunteering model processes and implementation. These include:

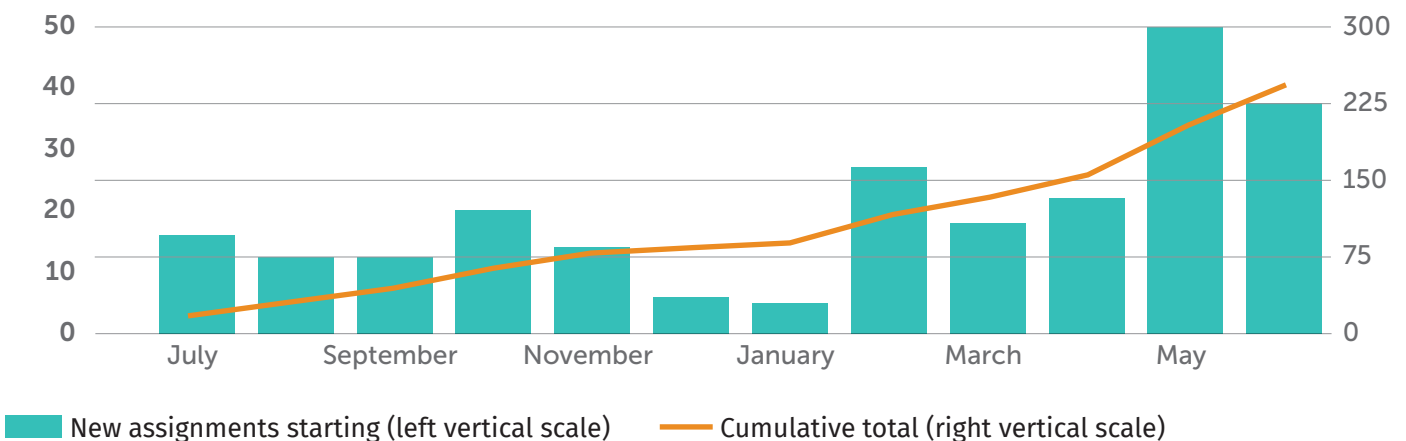
- **Streamline recruitment** and onboarding processes for remote volunteers.
- Provide consistent, ongoing communication and **support to remote volunteers** through the program’s in-country teams.
- Ensure the program is **managing expectations of volunteers** in relation to allowances, including reiterating the concept of volunteering.
- Review the costs and **allowances for language classes**.
- Consider **expanding the timeframe** for assignments with clear and longer-term outcomes.

- Expand the program’s **outreach to different audiences** who would not be interested in in-country volunteering but might be interested in remote assignments.
- Effectively resource and coordinate efforts between the program teams in Australia, regional offices and country teams, to ensure it translates to partner organisations and remote volunteers receiving the **best possible support and access to program services**.
- Ensure discussions on assignment objectives consider how **location specific challenges** will be managed.
- **Clarify roles** during assignment development and hold **regular assignment health-checks** between in-country program teams, partners and volunteers to ensure assignments are progressing as planned.

Many of these points are already being worked on by the program or are in the annual plan for 2021-22.

While there are challenges associated with remote volunteering, and it has required a shift in approach from volunteers, partner organisations and staff, the data shows that remote volunteers can achieve their assignment objectives and partners do benefit from remote assignments. For some volunteers with previous in-country experience, there is a sense that remote volunteering is less satisfactory. There are also opportunities in remote volunteering, such as appealing to a wider range of Australians, which show it to be a valuable addition to what the program can offer volunteers and partner organisations.

Growth of remote volunteering over 2020/21



Focus Area 2: Partnerships and partner support

Over the past 12 months volunteers worked with 224 overseas partner organisations. In addition, the program worked with more than 80 Australian partner organisations.

One of the key functions of the program is the provision of support to overseas partner organisations to achieve their own development goals. This is primarily achieved through the contributions of skilled volunteers as part of their assignment processes. Support is also provided to partner organisations in a range of other ways.

Small grants

The program's **Impact Fund offered grants** of up to AUD \$10,000 to existing partner organisations to support their critical work in relation to specific themes. The initiative was intended to help strengthen the capacity and work of partner organisations during a time when the program was not able to provide the usual volume of support through in-country volunteer assignments. It was also based on the understanding that small grants can make a big difference to local development initiatives.

The program provided additional support to partner organisations that were less experienced in submitting grant applications. This resulted in more applications from Pacific countries than in previous rounds.

During the year, two rounds of Impact Fund grants were active. The initial round focused on general COVID-19 responses, with 23 grants awarded across 13 countries to a total of AUD \$214,562.

Grants in this round supported initiatives including:

- COVID-19 awareness raising including the development of videos, theatre performances and general awareness campaigns with a focus on preventing the transmission of COVID-19.
- Production of face masks and hospital uniforms, which were sold domestically and internationally, providing vital income during a critical time.
- Other initiatives included: helping families to grow their own food, enhancing their resilience and self-sufficiency; training to improve nutrition for people of all ages through the promotion, production and consumption of perennial vegetables at the family, school and institutional levels; and provision of emergency food packages.

The second round of Impact Fund grants focused on supporting practical projects which strengthen partner organisations' work in the areas of:

- GEDSI
- Climate action, food security and disaster resilience

In the second round, 59 grants were awarded across 21 countries to a total of AUD \$561,622.

In addition to the Impact Fund grants, ten volunteers were awarded **COVID-19 response grants** to support their partners in direct response work in Cambodia and Vanuatu (five each) totalling AUD \$48,338. The Returned Australian Volunteer Network (RAVN) also provided support to partner organisations through a competitive process that resulted in the awarding of '**Go Back<>Give Back**' grants of AUD \$10,000 each to ten partner organisations. Program alumni (returned volunteers and remote volunteers who have completed their assignments) and their partner organisations were supported to co-design and deliver projects that, through working together, would support the achievement of partner organisation development objectives.

In 2020-21, 102 small grants were awarded to partner organisations in 23 countries, with a total value of AUD \$924,524.

Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Workshops

The program developed and piloted a MEL webinar series in Sri Lanka and Tanzania, with 28 partner organisations participating. The series aimed to support partner organisations to increase their understanding of, and improve practice in monitoring, evaluation and learning. The process was very well received with 94% of the partner representatives who provided feedback indicating a desire for similar knowledge-sharing opportunities in the future.

Based on the feedback and experience of the pilot process, the content was adapted to suit local participants' knowledge, experience, and needs in Vietnam. Thirty-six participants from 14 organisations participated in the webinar series in Vietnam, with an average attendance of 24 attendees per session. Pre- and post- training feedback in Vietnam demonstrated an improvement in participant understanding on most of the topics covered in the course.

Grants awarded by country

Bhutan	3
Cambodia	13
eSwatini	1
Federated States of Micronesia	1
Fiji	5
Indonesia	11
Kiribati	3
Laos	1
Lesotho	2
Mongolia	5
Myanmar	2
Nepal	1
Papua New Guinea	2
Philippines	2
Samoa	4
Solomon Islands	1
South Africa	4
Sri Lanka	3
Tanzania	9
Timor-Leste	11
Tuvalu	2
Vanuatu	10
Vietnam	6
Total	102

Global Webinar Series

The Global Webinar Series is a program of regular online events which bring together the global community of partner organisations, volunteers and staff, aiming to share knowledge and build connections across the program.

Each session has a specific theme or area of work, with two different **partner organisations leading discussions** to showcase their work. The sessions are delivered at different times to accommodate most time zones across the program. Accessibility is increased through online captioning services and, on request, an Auslan interpreter.

Partner organisation workshops and resources

A range of support processes were undertaken by in-country teams across the program. For example, in Papua New Guinea, seven partner organisation focused events took place. In Fiji, a workshop co-hosted by Atlassian, explored how the program and Atlassian could support partner organisations to build their digital literacy. In the Asia Archipelago region, webinars, training and workshops addressed issues such as diversity and inclusion, child protection and PSEAH. Over 20 partner focused events, attended by over 250 partner organisation representatives were delivered in this region.

Month	Global webinar focus	Partner country	Number of participants
August	Impact of COVID-19 on gender	Kiribati	52
		Indonesia	49
September	Grant writing	Marshall Islands	47
		Myanmar	62
October	Sport for development	Papua New Guinea	27
		Lesotho	21
November	Climate action	Papua New Guinea	25
		Vietnam	23
March	Water	Samoa	21
		Cambodia	28
May	LGBTIQ+ inclusion	Indonesia	26
		South Africa	19
June	Health	Vanuatu	39
		Tanzania	20



Activities were often co-facilitated by partner organisations or Australia-based colleagues. For example, a partner organisation webinar series was developed by the Southern Africa (South Africa, eSwatini and Lesotho) in-country team and supported by colleagues from Australia where required. Topics included an introduction to the program; the program's approach to diversity and inclusion; protecting children through strong policy; managing risk and security; and looking at rights and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

“Great presentations and content, very relevant to the work we are doing. Excellent topic choices”

- Partner organisation

Online PSEAH workshops were delivered for partner organisations, with six partners involved in Southern Africa, 37 in Indonesia, and 20 in Mongolia. The event in Mongolia generated public interest and was featured on national television.

The program also developed an online library of resources for partner organisations. This library includes the resources available to volunteers, with additional resources for partners, including content on:

- Getting ready for a volunteer
- Remote partnerships and tips for remote work
- Partnership plan processes
- Inclusive meetings

Australian Organisations

Over the last 12 months, the program's long-term partnerships have become more crucial than ever. Our network of partners across the globe continue to add value to the program and offer new and exciting ways to bring fresh ideas and networks to help us continue to diversify, evolve and innovate.

The program continued to maintain its portfolio of Australian partners, which the program classifies as promotional, collaborative, and strategic. The program has worked with many of these partners to understand their changing situation and evolving needs. Partner engagement has included supporting essential roles in-country, building new and innovative models that can deliver impact remotely, and supporting the identification of remote volunteers. Australian organisations referred and supported 24 volunteers undertaking in-country and remote assignments.

We have continued to engage with our vibrant group of **collaborative partners** and have sought opportunities for them to engage and add value to the program. A particular focus has been working with our **health sector partners** to source and support COVID-19 response and recovery volunteers.



The R4D Challenge introduction session, with participants joining from the Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA), University of Melbourne, RAID and the Australian Volunteers Program.



We worked with the Australian College of Medicine to support the referral of essential volunteers including emergency medicine nurses, advisors, educators and registrars, and new remote roles such as Emergency Medicine - Advanced Trainee. Our partnership with the Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security has supported an Epidemiologist in Samoa and an Archive Development Mentor and Health information systems support officer working remotely.

We have also worked with Australian partners to adjust assignments from in-country to remote volunteering. We worked with long-term partners such as **Engineers Without Borders (EWB)** to develop and deliver a pipeline of remote volunteers to support partners working in sectors such as WASH. We also provided many of our remote volunteering opportunities to our sector partners to promote the roles through their networks and work with us to source suitable applicants.

The program has continued to engage with a small number of **strategic partners** that are identified by both DFAT and the program. We have formalised a partnership with the **Green Global Growth Institute (GGGI)** and continue to work on the development of projects with them across the Pacific. We have also pivoted the partnership providing remote volunteering roles in GGGI's in-country offices, such as a Monitoring and Evaluation specialist in Indonesia, with more roles in development.

The program successfully pivoted the partnership with **Researchers in Agriculture for International Development (RAID)** to shift the R4D Challenge (Researchers for development) from face-to-face volunteering to online. Working with the Vietnam National University of Agriculture, University of Melbourne and RAID, the program developed new and exciting ways to experience volunteering in a COVID-19 world. Six Australian volunteers partnered with a research counterpart in Vietnam to collaborate remotely on their agricultural research interests. The participants came together for weekly workshops over six weeks. These interactive sessions worked through core research steps required in agriculture and development, including designing surveys, tools for data collection, managing community engagement, and data visualisation. There was a secondary focus on building remote collaboration and English language skills. The program continues to work with RAID on the next iteration.

A key focus during the year has been to develop a **new partnership with Atlassian**. The program and Atlassian share a common recognition of the value of volunteering and a commitment to support international volunteering. The partnership with Atlassian has identified a new way that the program can engage with corporate volunteers through Atlassian's Engage for Good program. The partnership aims to explore ways the program and Atlassian can collaborate to contribute to the end of program outcomes and Atlassian's corporate social volunteering mandate. Over the past year, the program worked closely with Atlassian to co-design opportunities for their staff. This work has informed the next phase of the partnership with Atlassian, looking at matching remote skilled Atlassian staff with a small group of partner organisations.



8.2 Promoting the value of international volunteering

A wide range of public diplomacy activities were delivered in 2020-21 to support the delivery of the program's annual plan, including:

- Communication and engagement activities with program stakeholders
- Promoting remote volunteering
- Raising awareness of the contribution skilled international volunteering makes, particularly in response to the pandemic

During this period, the program delivered a successful International Volunteer Day (IVD) campaign, an International Women's Day (IWD) event and an online event featuring Paralympian Kurt Fearnley AO. The program also conducted mid-term research on Australian public opinion of international volunteering. The contribution of skilled international volunteering was shared through increased social media, an enhanced program website, traditional media, conferences, targeted newsletters, and video content. Volunteers and partners were supported to share their stories. Many of these activities also contributed to the program's recruitment marketing objectives, including promoting remote volunteering to existing and new audiences.

See section 8.3 for information on the program's alumni program – the Returned Australian Volunteers Network.

End of program outcome: The public in Australia better appreciates the value of volunteering

Progress towards this end of program outcome continued to be impacted by the pandemic during this period.

Ongoing constraints on public diplomacy activity have negatively impacted the program's efforts to increase broad awareness of the program and understanding of the value of volunteering, and the program's ability to attract Australians to participate in the program.

The program commissioned research to update our understanding of **Australian's perceptions of international aid and volunteering**. This research compared the 2021 results to 2018 baseline indicators data and explored how recent external factors have impacted these views. The research was quantitative (survey of 1300 Australians) and qualitative (5 focus group discussions).¹⁶

The percentage of respondents who believe the Australian Government should increase overseas aid to help reduce global poverty increased from 46% in 2018 to 56%. Seventeen per cent of survey respondents indicated that their views on whether the Australian Government should increase aid to developing countries had changed in the last 12 months. Of these respondents, 76% indicated that the topic of most influence for this change was COVID-19, followed by the impacts of climate change (70%), the Australian bushfires (68%), threats to democracy (64%) and social issues such as Black Lives Matters and women's rights (56%).

The research indicated a positive shift in interest and support for international volunteering. The importance of the Australian Government supporting international volunteering has increased from 66% in 2018 to 71% in 2021, and 54% personally valued the role international volunteering (similar to the 2018 response of 53%).

16. AVP Mid-Term Research (Australian public's perception of international volunteering), June 2021, Roy Morgan.

Australia Beth Eggleston (on stage), from the Humanitarian Advisory Group, facilitated a panel discussion with Dr Nguyen Thi Nga from Vietnam National University and agriculture researcher and volunteer, Anh Pham (both onscreen), at the program's International Women's Day event, March 2021.



Forty-one per cent of survey respondents were interested in international volunteering. This included receiving information about these initiatives, and supporting and participating in volunteering.

This is significantly higher than in 2018 (28%), indicating a sizeable demand for information about international volunteering. Respondents were also interested in considering online or remote volunteer work to support communities overseas (23%).

Awareness of the program has declined from 36% in 2018 to 22% in 2021. While the research did not examine why awareness has declined, it can be presumed that the pause in a range of awareness raising activities (including a broad awareness advertising campaign, proactive media and the planned program conference) from late 2019 has contributed to this decline. Additionally, external factors have dominated information sources throughout the last 18 months.

The research also provided insights into the groups of Australians that are interested in receiving more information about international volunteering, what sort of information they want and where they receive information. This information will inform the program's approach to public diplomacy, communications and attracting a more diverse cohort of Australians to participate in international volunteering.

Intermediate outcome: Volunteers, partner organisations, Australian organisations and DFAT promote the benefits of volunteering

The unique and authentic stories of our volunteers and partners are the best way to demonstrate the benefits of skilled international volunteering. The program continued to support stakeholders to share the impact of skilled international volunteering.

Volunteers

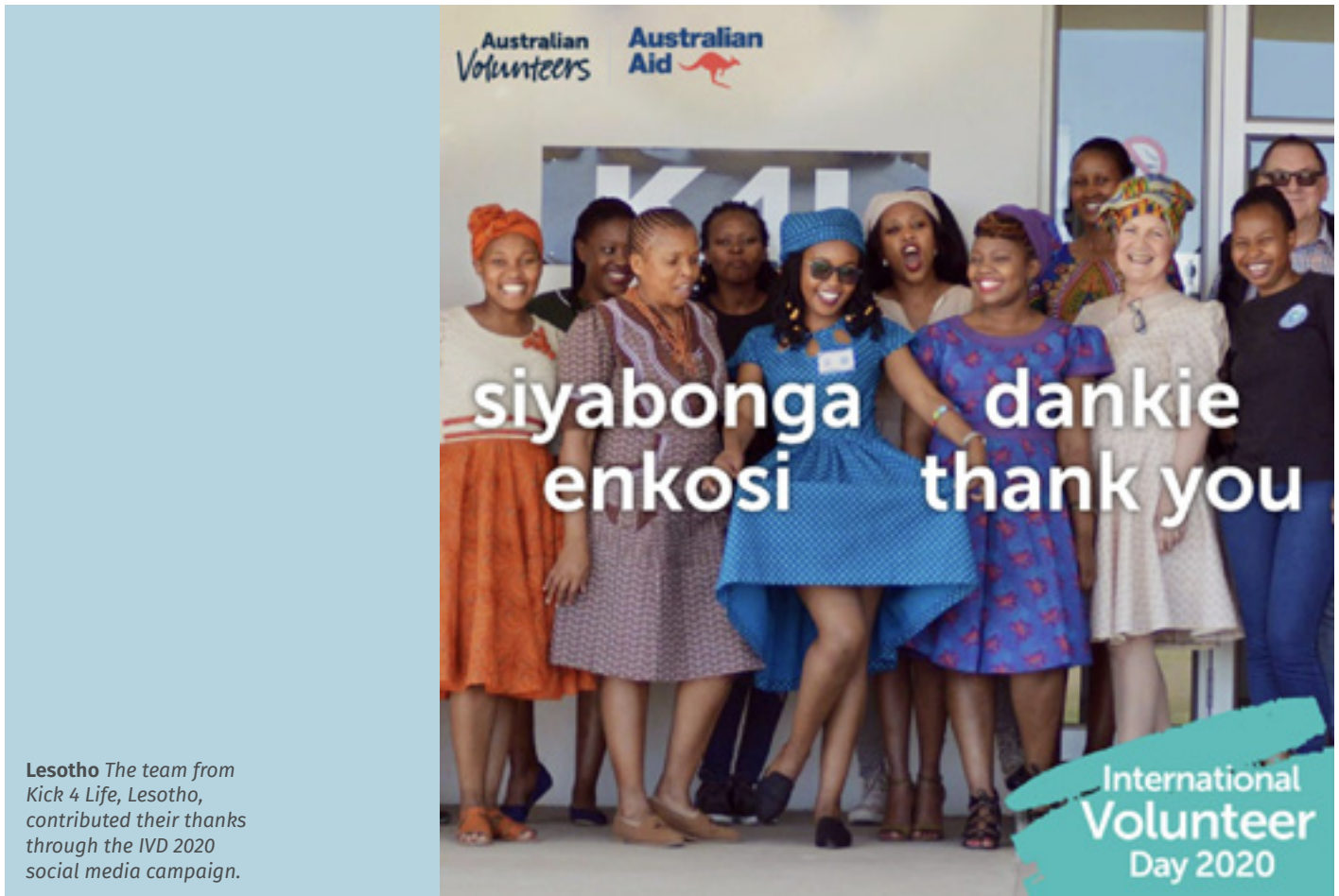
Volunteers – current and returned – continued to play a significant role in promoting the value of volunteering. The program supports volunteers to engage in a range of public diplomacy activities throughout their volunteer journey. In this period, we supported many remote volunteers to share their experience. These stories supported the promotion of remote volunteering to existing and new audiences. Public diplomacy guidance provided to volunteers included social media and photography guides.

The program's unique **Stories for Home project** aims to support volunteers to share their experience by providing story ideas and communications training throughout their volunteer journey. The project continued in this reporting period, with story briefs sent to repatriated volunteers and remote volunteers. The repatriated volunteers shared their [leaving and returning stories](#). There was limited response from remote volunteers. A short survey was sent to a range of volunteers to learn more about their experience with Stories for Home, and how it can be adjusted to continue to support storytelling in the new global context.

Partners

Partners, both overseas and in Australia, also contribute to promoting the program and the value of volunteering to their networks through a range of activities including workshops, IVD events, social media, and media engagement.

Delivering more events online provided opportunities for partners to share their experiences and achievements. The program's **International Women's Day hybrid event** included an online panel discussion with Dr Nguyen Thi Nga from Vietnam National University and agriculture researcher and volunteer, Anh Pham, who shared their insights as women leaders, particularly in agricultural research. The hybrid event was attended by 70 people in Melbourne, with 90 people joining online from across the Indo-Pacific. The successful delivery of the IWD event has provided a template for delivering more hybrid events to engage and connect stakeholders.



Lesotho The team from Kick 4 Life, Lesotho, contributed their thanks through the IVD 2020 social media campaign.

The Stories for Home approach was extended to partner organisations, inviting them to share messages for IVD. Partners from all countries contributed [‘thank you’ messages](#) as part of the IVD theme, which were shared on social media. The program’s social media and photography guides were also shared with partners.

DFAT

The program supports DFAT, in Canberra and overseas, to leverage the program to achieve public diplomacy outcomes. This support continued in the reporting period through events and content production and provision.

The program increased the volume of social media content produced for DFAT Posts. There has been good uptake of the content, and program staff are gaining greater understanding of each Post’s preferences. The program generated more than 200 pieces of unique content for Posts, and Posts shared more than half of this content. The program recognises the value of this content to DFAT and will continue to provide high quality content in the coming year.

The program worked closely with DFAT Canberra to develop case studies on COVID-19 response volunteers. This included interviews and photo shoots with volunteers and partner organisations. A video about the program was also produced to increase awareness and understanding of the program within DFAT.

Intermediate outcome: Innovations, learnings and program achievements are promoted and shared

The program is committed to sharing knowledge and showcasing achievements through a range of activities and communications. Digital communications, including social media, videos, newsletters and the program’s website, and traditional media were used to raise awareness of the program.

Building on the implementation of remote volunteering in May 2020, the program increased **promotion of remote volunteering** to potential volunteers and partner organisations. Brochures and [videos](#) were produced to increase awareness and understanding of remote volunteering. Remote volunteer stories were also shared extensively on the program’s and DFAT’s social channels.

Remote volunteering information sessions were delivered online and in-person, reaching several hundred potential volunteers. The website was developed to include remote volunteering, and assignments were reactivated in December 2020 to support remote volunteering being open to all Australians. Website content was enhanced and updated, including on the Talent Pool, the Impact Fund and the countries where we operate.

The program continued to produce a range of targeted newsletters to inform and engage stakeholders with program activities and opportunities. The average open rate for all program newsletters continued to be high, indicating program stakeholders value these regular updates.

- Program Newsletter – partner organisations, Australian organisations and volunteers on assignment (average open rate 44%)
- Staying Connected – repatriated and delayed volunteers (67%) (This newsletter was phased out and recipients encouraged to join the Talent Pool and RAVN)
- Assignment Alert – program supporters and potential volunteers (67%)
- RAVN News – Australian volunteers who have completed assignments (32%)

The program continued to develop rich multimedia content. Photo shoots were completed in Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu with COVID-19 response volunteers and their partner organisations. Videos were produced for a range of purposes and audiences, including promoting remote volunteering and celebrating IVD. Videos also highlighted the significant contribution of volunteers, from [responding to HIV and AIDS](#) to supporting [deaf education](#). The program increased accessibility through adding Auslan interpretation or audio descriptions to key program videos.

Social media analytics provide useful insights into program recognition and sentiment towards the program. While total engagement was lower than pre-pandemic periods, compared with other similar international volunteer organisations the program continues to receive more engagement from followers/fans on every social media platform. The program has also increased followers/fans on all social media platforms, whereas other organisations lost followers on some of their platforms.¹⁷ Across all program social channels, there was an average 24% increase of followers/fans.

'AusVols' continues to be an important element of the program's brand identity. The number of volunteers, partners and Posts tagging the program continued to be high. When combined with the program's social activity, this resulted in 1,278 social mentions of 'AusVols' globally. This reporting period has seen 'AusVols' share of voice increase significantly when compared to other people-to-people programs in Australia.¹⁸ The program received 67% of social mentions across monitored social media sites, an increase from 51% in the previous 12-month period.

Social media sentiment towards the program remains positive, with average 94% positive sentiment across program social channels. There was some negative sentiment related to Australians being unable to return to Australia, and some recurrent negative themes, including anti foreign aid, racism, and international conspiracy theories (climate change denial and anti-vaccination).

In close consultation with DFAT, the program continued to limit proactive **media activity**. In response to the bushfire crisis in Australia the program ceased pitching to all media outlets, and this position has continued throughout the pandemic. The program carefully monitored media and worked closely with DFAT to respond to each media request. Over the reporting period, 29 articles about the program were shared by 89 media outlets, including ABC radio and SBS language radio (the high number of outlets is mainly due to syndicated articles). In-country media associated with IVD resulted in 13 media hits in eight countries.

Intermediate outcome: The program is recognised and respected by key stakeholders

A key program principle is developing and fostering strong relationships and partnerships. These relationships are strengthened through a range of activities and communications to ensure program stakeholders are connected and engaged with the program.

The program aims to engender the respect of a range of stakeholders including the Australian public, the Australian Government, program partners, and the international volunteering and development community. Activities that promote the value of volunteering and showcase program achievements and innovation, as outlined above, contribute to these stakeholders gaining better understanding of the program.

17. Engagement on Australian Volunteers Program social channels compared with PeaceCorps (US) and VSA (NZ).

18. Share of voice data compares the Australian Volunteers Program (including ausvols and AVP) with New Colombo Plan and Australia Awards (in Australia only).



Timor-Leste International Volunteers Day event Left to right: Jose de Sousa (Australian Volunteers Program), David de Jesus, Secretary of State for Youth and Sport, Australian volunteer Dr. Xhian Meng Quah, Australian volunteer Jess Harris, Mrs. Idelta Rodrigues, President of Natioba Scout, volunteers supporting the event Juvencia and Maria, Lidalia de Lemos (Australian Volunteers Program) and Grace Pitanuki (Australian Volunteers Program).

International Volunteer Day

Each year, the program delivers an **International Volunteer Day** campaign to engage our stakeholders. The IVD 2020 campaign included events, content creation, social and traditional media engagement. In recognition of the challenges faced by Australian volunteers, partners and their communities, the program's theme for IVD 2020 was 'Thank You'. Thank you was a simple, positive message that resonated with our stakeholders during this time of uncertainty and change. It was a chance for our volunteers, partners and staff to express their gratitude to each other.

The program hosted a virtual IVD event. This was the first time the program held a truly global event to celebrate IVD. The event continued the 'Thank You' theme, and included a discussion with a volunteer and their partner colleague in Mongolia. More than 150 guests from over 15 countries attended the event, representing partners, volunteers, staff, DFAT, AVI Board and consortium partners. Most attendees were from Australia, Mongolia and Indonesia, with 13 program countries represented.

The program delivered 19 stakeholder engagement events in Australia and across the Indo-Pacific region, with more than 1,000 stakeholders attending virtual and in person events. IVD events in program countries were delivered with other volunteer sending agencies, DFAT Posts, national government agencies, and ranged from partner workshops, photo exhibitions to community volunteering initiatives.

The IVD 'Thank You' theme was featured across social media by sharing messages of thanks from partners, volunteers and staff. An [IVD video](#) was produced featuring four volunteers sharing what they are grateful for. The video was shown at events and shared extensively on social media. Content packages were prepared for DFAT Posts, including country specific media releases and social content. Eighteen Posts shared the program's IVD content.

Conferences

Due to the pandemic, many conferences were postponed or adjusted to be delivered online. As a result, the program participated in three conferences to promote the program to diverse audiences, including the occupational therapy and emergency medicine sectors.

The program attended and presented at the **IVCO 2021 conference**, with the theme 'Volunteering for Climate Action'. The program presented a panel on how partners and volunteers supported the ban of single-use plastics in Vanuatu, and shared a range of content on climate change responses at the virtual exhibition. Australian volunteers participated in several panel discussions. The program also supported DFAT's sponsorship and participation in the conference.

Focus Area 3: Innovation

The Innovation Fund's key priority in 2020-21 was exploring localisation through the Volunteering for Development workstream, and building the program's innovation capabilities. A greater number of program staff were directly involved in creating and testing new ideas.

Exploring localisation

The Volunteering for Development workstream explored the key question: *How could the program create alternative forms of volunteering or support volunteerism in the countries where we work?*

The approach started with our in-country teams taking part in an ideas generation process. The teams submitted ideas that responded to the key question by identifying volunteering opportunities or needs within their local context. Twenty-eight ideas were generated and considered for selection by the Innovation Pathway Group, with ten going forward to an innovation discovery and design process, and four proceeding directly to being funded for delivery.

Teams took control of exploring their ideas, with support from a coach from our innovation partner, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), and an innovation connector. The innovator connectors were seconded from across the program to work with teams to identify synergies or help resolve common barriers. By framing the work as learning and developing insights, teams had the opportunity to define their own goals. The teams and their managers reflected positively on the empowerment, engagement and learning that occurred due to this approach.

Explorations moved at varied pace across countries, depending on the complexity of the idea and disruptions due to COVID-19 or other factors, but several ideas are likely to proceed to live prototypes in the coming year. The ideas engage a range of stakeholders, including government, local health centres, youth, Australia Award alumni, partner organisations, remote communities, local NGOs, universities and university students/graduates, national volunteers, remote Australian volunteers, national volunteering organisations, retirees, and rural farmers.

Based on the learning from the Volunteering for Development activities and the program's desire to explore greater scale opportunities, the program developed a concept paper for a Global Volunteering Accelerator to commence in 2021-22. The accelerator approach will work with national governments and volunteering peak bodies where there is interest in the program supporting them to grow volunteering and strengthen their volunteerism infrastructure.

Mainstreaming and optimising remote volunteering

Having led the iterative development of remote volunteering in response to COVID-19, the Innovation Fund mainstreamed remote volunteering through a phased handover and change management process. The necessity of rapidly scaling remote volunteering accelerated this process and generated useful insights on how the program can effectively incubate and mainstream products. Once the remote volunteering product was mainstreamed, the Fund continued to explore how the experience of remote volunteering could be innovated and improved on, with early prototyping of a matching model for volunteers and partners in Indonesia.

Innovation infrastructure and capability

This year saw the Innovation Fund transitioning from its early phases of testing and developing the ways the program can do innovation, into a new phase of consolidating and strengthening the innovation structures and capability of the program. Two cohorts of the Social Innovation and Development course, complemented with a podcast series and workbook, engaged partner organisations, volunteers and staff to think about how to apply ideas of systems, experimentation and participation to their own work. Work commenced on a communications strategy and MEL approach that will be implemented in 2021-22.

Other innovation workstreams

The Fund continued to explore other innovation opportunities, including:

- Exploring how networks are activated and sustained, with a Volunteer Support Network prototype connecting remote volunteers with each other.
- Challenging our stakeholders to consider what the future of volunteering might look like in 50 years through the online Speculative Futures exercise. Although not highly successful at generating future ideas for the program, the exercise produced useful learning and insights about how our stakeholders think and engage with future thinking and created a library of activities that can be deployed in the future.

Focus Area 4: Diversity and inclusion

The program continued to strengthen its approach to diversity and inclusion. This work is underpinned by the program's commitment to gender equality, disability and social inclusion, and Indigenous inclusion.

Indigenous Pathways

Indigenous Pathways aims to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture are celebrated as an integral part of the Australian Volunteers Program, through inclusive, equitable, flexible and strength-based approaches. Indigenous Pathways progressed significantly, with all major foundational elements of the framework established, deepening engagement and enhancing the program's commitment to Indigenous cultural safety.

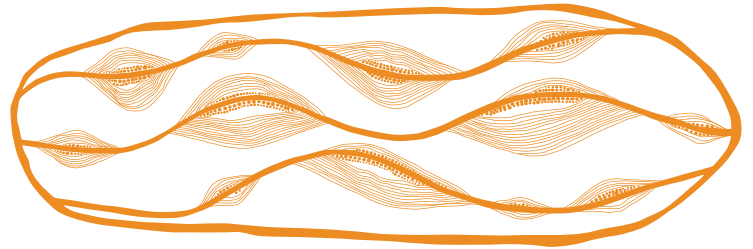
There was a strong focus on increasing the visibility of Indigenous Pathways, both with Indigenous audiences and in-country staff. The visual identity was strengthened by developing a wordmark, and tailoring external communications during dates of Indigenous significance. Cultural awareness training, developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, was delivered to 58 staff working across all 26 countries to increase knowledge of Australia's First Peoples and the unique skills and knowledge they can share with partner organisations.

The program embedded Indigenous voices and leadership within formal structures. This included establishing the Indigenous Volunteer Support and Advisory Panel and appointment of two Indigenous panel members. A new Indigenous identified role also saw the appointment of the first National Indigenous RAVN Representative. These two significant functions provide ongoing advice, guidance and support to the program and current and returned Indigenous volunteers.

Indigenous volunteer participation remained steady, at 1.3% of remote volunteers. Tailored assignment matching through the Indigenous talent pool, and support from the Indigenous Volunteer Support and Advisory Panel was available to Indigenous volunteers.

In preparation for targeted partnership development and piloting of an intensive remote group assignment in 2021-22, consultations were undertaken with in-country teams to determine focus sectors for Indigenous Pathways, that support locally-identified needs and align with areas of Indigenous strength and expertise. Place-based community engagement was conducted in Mparntwe/Alice Springs in the lead up to the formal launch of Indigenous Pathways, including meetings with five local Aboriginal organisations. Initial partnership discussions also commenced with Community First Development and WWF Australia.

The commitment to expanding opportunities for Indigenous Australians and connecting with community-controlled organisations extended to suppliers, with 80% of suppliers directly engaged for Indigenous Pathways activities being Indigenous owned and operated businesses.



Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)


This year the program continued to strengthen its approach to GEDSI to ensure it is inclusive and accessible to a broad range of partner organisations and skilled Australians. In 2020-21 the program's work was evidence-based, building on the reviews undertaken in 2019-20 and continuing to prioritise research and engaging with those with lived experience.

The program focused on foundational work by establishing working groups and developing [statements of intent](#) outlining its commitment to gender equality, disability inclusion and diverse SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) inclusion. Recognising the significant impact of small grants, the program ran a dedicated grant round to strengthen partner organisations' work in GEDSI. Forty-one grants were awarded, representing AUD \$387,934 going to partner organisations to support their inclusion work.

Gender Equality

Intentional gender mainstreaming was progressed through targeted learning and development initiatives for volunteers, and support and research into gender-focused partner organisations.

In 2020-21 the volunteers' learning life cycle was reviewed and amended to include more gender equality learning and development opportunities. Pre-departure briefing and learning now has a dedicated gender focus within the inclusion sections. A video was produced targeting volunteers whose assignments may not explicitly include gender equality to encourage them to consider the gender inequality they may encounter while on assignment, both in-country and remotely.



A workbook was also developed, with support from a gender consultant, which provides volunteers with an understanding of the socio-ecological model and how to implement it in their assignment.

The program delivered PSEAH and gender equality workshops for partner organisations, and webinars on topics such as gender and diverse SOGIESC inclusion. In addition, the program commissioned a significant piece of gender research. The research analysed how Australian volunteers contribute to the achievement of partner organisations' gender equality objectives.

Researchers investigated the:

- Achievements of partner organisations to advance gender equality, based on case studies from Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.
- Contribution of Australian volunteers to the achievements of the partner organisations in gender equality.
- Lessons and recommendations for the Australian Volunteers Program.¹⁹

As a result of the research, the program will further strengthen its gender equality approach through enhanced partnerships, mobilisation of resources, and support to volunteers.

Disability Inclusion

Disability inclusion has been a strong feature of the program, with a history of supporting volunteers with disability and disabled people's organisations to fully participate in the program. To ensure the program maintains this strength, especially during the pandemic, the program continued to offer Access and Inclusion Plans to all volunteers, including remote volunteers, and supported disability inclusion workshops for partner organisations.

Recognising the importance of lived experience in disability inclusive development, the program established the Disability Inclusion Working Group. The working group includes staff and a returned volunteer who identifies as a person with disability. The working group assists in planning and implementing activities that drive disability inclusion.

In May, the program hosted an online event with keynote speaker Kurt Fearnley AO. More than 60 attendees heard from Kurt, gold medallist Paralympian, about his journey and the individuals who have been part of his journey. To ensure the prioritisation of accessibility, the program engaged CBM Australia to provide technical support and guidance and review key program documentation.

Diverse SOGIESC Inclusion

The program progressed a number of activities to make the program safer and more inclusive for staff, volunteers and partners with diverse SOGIESC.

With the support of Edge Effect, training on the rights, needs and strengths of people with diverse SOGIESC in development settings was delivered to 16 staff over six weeks. The training was tailored for the Australian Volunteers Program and explored key development challenges faced by people with diverse SOGIESC and guidance for working on issues within a rights and strengths-based framework.

To ensure diverse SOGIESC volunteers are provided with relevant information prior to deployment, the program commissioned Edge Effect to develop a country profile for each of the program's 26 countries. The country profiles outline the legal and policy context for people with diverse SOGIESC, as well as discrimination, cultural attitudes and other societal factors that may impact the safety of diverse SOGIESC volunteers. The country profiles will form the basis of Volunteer Pride Guides and act as an information point for staff.

A diverse SOGIESC Working Group was established with a significant number of staff choosing to join and participate in activities, including developing the Diverse SOGIESC Statement of Intent. Given the interest shown by staff, a Community of Practice will be established to provide a platform for staff, volunteers and partners to support peer learning and program improvements.

19. *Gender Equality Synthesis Report: Documenting Australian volunteers' contribution to advancing gender equality*, July 2021, Iris Low and Leaine Robinson.



8.3 Supporting Australian volunteers to gain personally and professionally

Over the year, 287 volunteers have been on assignment, with four approved dependents accompanying a volunteer in Vanuatu. Of the volunteers, 58% were female and 42% were male, with none choosing to self-describe. The youngest volunteer this year was 21, and the oldest was 81. Two per cent of volunteers identified as having a disability and 1% of volunteers identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

There are some early indications that remote volunteering may alter **volunteer demographics**, although it is too soon to draw firm conclusions. The review of remote volunteering suggested that without the in-country experience, remote volunteering may not be as attractive to young people who are looking for in-country experience and intend to use volunteering as a stepping-stone to a career in international development, as evident by the reduction of applicants with Bachelor degrees and in the age cohort 20 to 29.

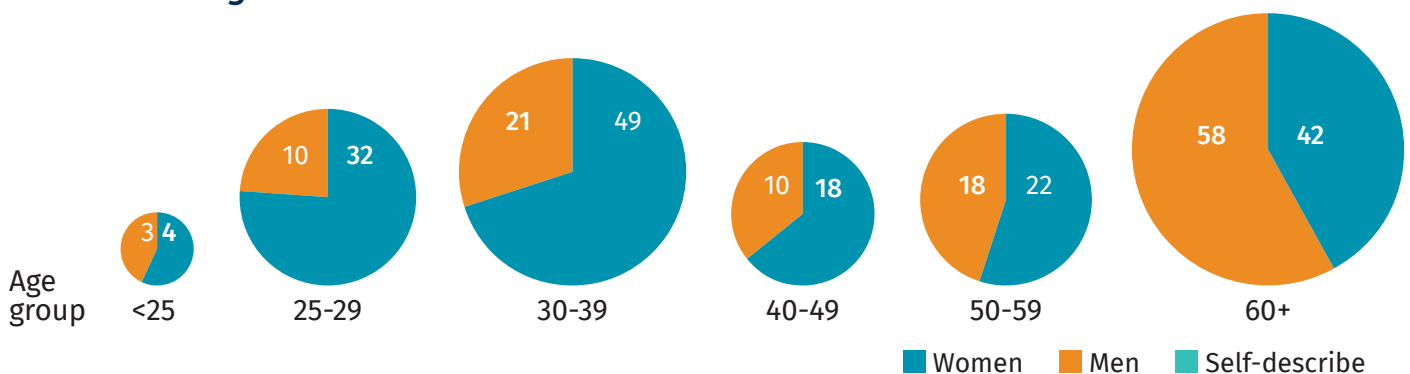
Australians between 30 and 39 years who are settled in their careers, and those over 60 years who are looking for opportunities to give back, appear to be attracted to remote volunteering. Additionally, this may indicate that this is a cohort who typically would not be available for in-country volunteering but are now more able to participate without leaving their homes or their full-time jobs.

Due to the remote nature of the model, there are some skill sets which cannot as effectively be shared without the face-to-face contact, as suggested by a reduction in applicants with trade certificates, as well as those with other qualifications such as specialised certificates or associate degrees.

Most assignments (93%) were under six months duration. This is very different to previous years, and is a direct result of the large proportion of remote assignments. Remote assignments have been limited to a three month period, although following feedback from partners and volunteers this is now being reviewed.

The proportion of assignments by volunteer profession is very much in line with previous years, with community and social development, education and health together accounting for 51% of all assignments.

Gender and age of volunteers



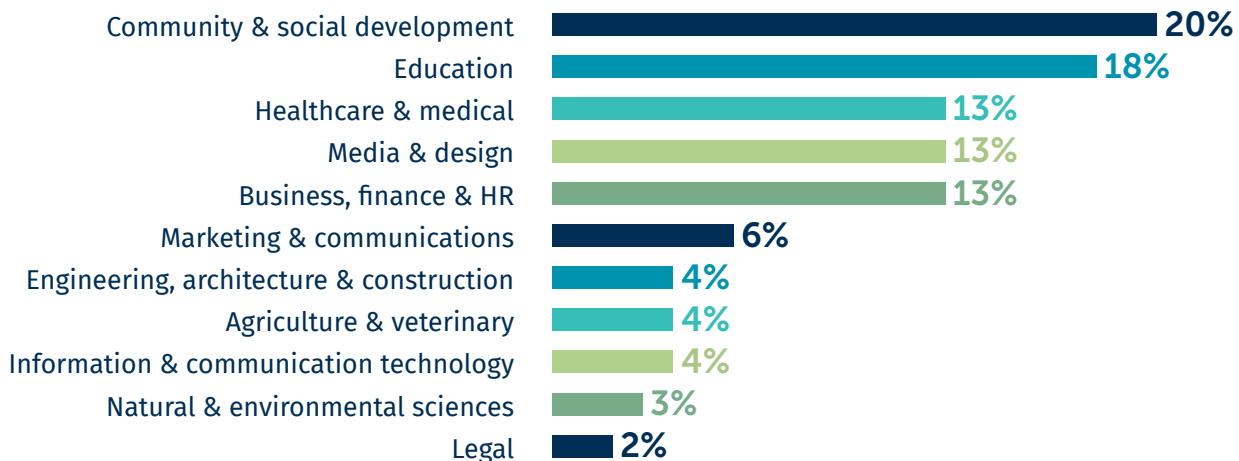
Vanuatu ProMedical Vanuatu's Student Paramedic Philimon Kampai (l) and Australian volunteer Paramedic Elise Davey (r).



Duration of assignments



Most common professions of volunteer assignments



End of program outcome: Australian volunteers gain personally and professionally

To assess the extent to which volunteers are gaining personally and professionally from the program over the long-term, the program is running a **longitudinal study** tracking the experiences of 55 volunteers.²⁰

The most recent phase of the study interviewed all participants at the end of their volunteer assignment. It addressed participants' in-country experiences, self-reported learning and changes, perceptions of in-country support from the program, and the perceptions of 38 participants who returned home in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

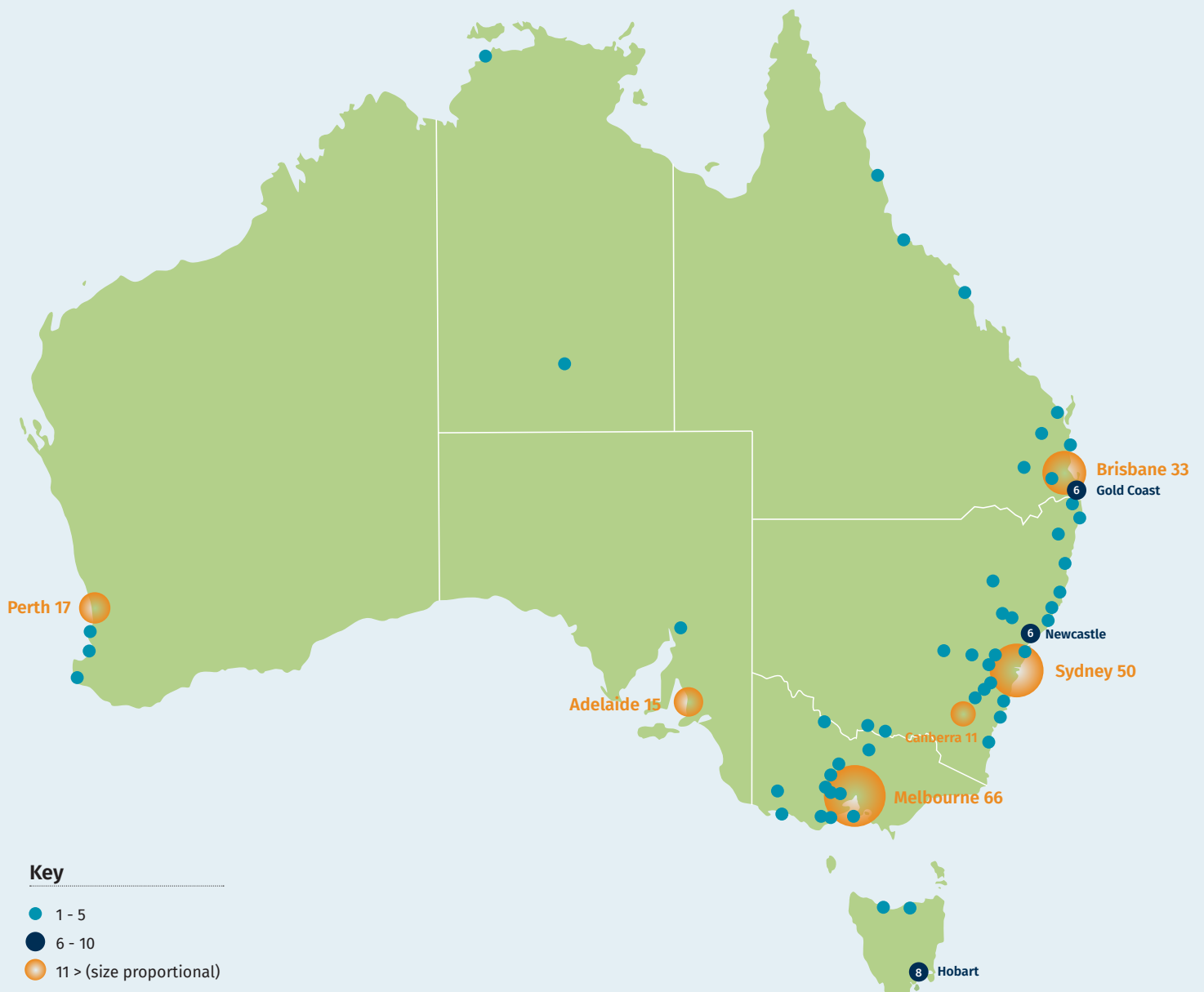
The study has provided useful feedback on volunteers' experiences in-country. It also provides evidence as to progress towards this end of program outcome.

More than half of the sample of volunteers feel their future career prospects have been enhanced by their assignment, while 11 (20%) attributed their enrolment in formal programs of study to their experiences on the program. An additional four reported a change in direction of planned study programs due to their involvement.

20. *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase 2)*, October 2020, UTS Business School.

Volunteers around Australia

Volunteers came from across Australia, in line with the population as a whole. Thirty-one per cent of volunteers were from New South Wales, 29% from Victoria, 18% from Queensland, 7% from Western Australia, 6% from South Australia, 4% from both Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, and 2% from the Northern Territory.



Solomon Islands *The National Referral Hospital is the largest hospital in the Solomon Islands and is the national referral hospital.*



Participants also reported a range of learning outcomes that they attributed to their assignment. These included cultural, professional and interpersonal acumen, as well as personal development outcomes like resilience and patience. Almost half of these outcomes could be classified as contributing directly or indirectly to the program's long term goal that Australians are more globally literate and connected.

Most learning outcomes were linked to activities that participants observed or undertook in the workplace, including performing roles that were unfamiliar, that involved greater responsibility, or that were not normally associated with participants' professional area. Their involvement in capacity development activities (e.g. mentoring, coaching) was a small but important part of this. Participants' experiences outside work (e.g. immersion in a foreign culture, informal discussions) were also places where their cultural acumen and self-awareness, in particular, were developed.

In 2021, the program surveyed all members of the Returned Australian Volunteers Network, and received responses from 532 people (62% female and 36% male), some of whom had volunteered as far back as the 1960s.

- 91% feel that their assignment helped them in developing their professional skills.
- 98% feel that their assignment helped them to develop their personal skills.

The most frequently mentioned professional skills respondents reported gaining through their assignments were: interpersonal communication; mentoring and coaching skills; language skills; and people and project management skills. Regarding personal changes, the most frequently mentioned were: improved cultural awareness; a better understanding of particular countries or contexts; greater awareness of the international development sector; and gaining new interests and friendships.

Of volunteers on remote assignments over the previous year, 78% felt they had learnt new skills that might help them professionally, and/or developed their personal competencies (9% were unsure and 13% felt not).

Intermediate outcome: Volunteers (current and returned) promote greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections between partner countries and Australia

As well as gaining personally and professionally, it is clear that a high proportion of volunteers develop strong connections with the countries where they have supported partner organisations. **The RAVN survey** also showed that:

- 90% of respondents have maintained an interest in international aid and development since completion of their assignment.
- 93% of respondents reported that their assignment helped them to develop a stronger interest and sense of connection to the people and country where they volunteered.
- 93% of respondents believe that their volunteer experience has increased their understanding of development and humanitarian challenges.
- 72% of respondents are still in contact with their partner organisation or a local colleague who they worked with.

The enduring nature of the connections forged is shown by the high proportion of returned volunteers from several decades ago who are still in contact with their partner organisation. Thirty-six per cent of those who volunteered between 1960 and 1990 are still in touch with their former colleagues.

Of all those who are still in contact, most remain in contact through social media or email (90%). A large proportion have continued to provide informal professional mentoring to former colleagues (47%); have provided remote technical support on specific activities (38%); visited while on holidays (38%); supported the education of former colleagues in some way (29%); or helped fundraise for their partner organisation (23%).

Respondents also provided useful feedback about their engagement with the program and ideas for strengthening the network in the future, which the program will take forward in the year ahead. Thirty-seven per cent of the respondents have been engaged in program activities over the last 12 months, supporting work to promote greater cultural awareness and build connections between countries.

Australia Participants at the 'Connecting RAVN and the Global Alumni' event, Melbourne, April 2021. The event brought Australia Awards scholars, New Colombo Plan alumni and returned volunteers together to connect, share and learn.



In 2020-21, RAVN continued to engage returned volunteers, providing opportunities for professional and personal development, and ongoing connections. During the reporting period, RAVN offered returned volunteers a range of activities and events to stay connected with each other, their partner organisations and the program. RAVN grew from approximately 7,100 to 7,800 members in the reporting period, including, for the first time, remote volunteers who completed their assignments.

RAVN links returned volunteers and other program stakeholders to foster connection, learning and community. In 2021, RAVN delivered two successful **'Connecting RAVN and Global Alumni' events**, in Melbourne and Brisbane. Over 100 people attended the events, including returned volunteers, New Colombo Plan alumni, Australia Awards Scholars, representatives from hosting universities, program staff and DFAT representatives. These events provided the opportunity for cross-program engagement and deepening cultural awareness. It also helped to strengthen the program's links with the other people-to-people programs – the Australia Awards and New Colombo Plan – enabling the programs to identify other opportunities to collaborate.

“My partner and I connected with a couple of Australian Awards scholars. We want to both maintain our connection with our Asia Pacific neighbourhood and make sure the scholars are welcomed into the Australian culture and life while they are here.”

- Returned volunteer attendee at the 'Connecting RAVN and Global Alumni' Melbourne event

Online seminars were also delivered, including sessions on 'international volunteering and your career' and 'working across borders in a pandemic'. Presenters from partner organisations were able to engage with returned volunteers through these online seminars.

A core objective of RAVN is to be a network which is driven and valued by returned volunteers. Supporting our volunteer **RAVN Representatives** to deliver activities is key to achieving this objective. The RAVN Representatives were supported to plan and deliver activities, resulting in the successful delivery of 28 in-person or online events across Australia.

The RAVN **Go Back<>Give Back** initiative is a celebration of the ongoing connections between returned volunteers and their partner organisations. In 2021, ten partner organisations and their former volunteer were each awarded a grant of AUD \$10,000 to co-design and deliver a small project. The projects, which will be implemented throughout 2021, include: COVID-19 safe processes, hygiene and equipment; inclusive economic development; nutrition; and women's empowerment through recognition, economic inclusion and education.

Intermediate outcome: Volunteers complete their assignments well and have a positive volunteering experience

Volunteers are asked to assess the extent to which they feel they have achieved their objectives when they complete an assignment. Of those who answered during the reporting period, 74% of volunteers rated the progress towards their objectives as 'good' or 'excellent', 20% as 'satisfactory', and 6% as less than satisfactory. This is a slightly less positive assessment than provided by partner organisations (81% positive), which is a common trend. In the previous reporting period, 73% of volunteers rated progress as 'good' or 'excellent'. This is surprisingly consistent, given the pivot to remote assignments and the operating context all have faced during the year.

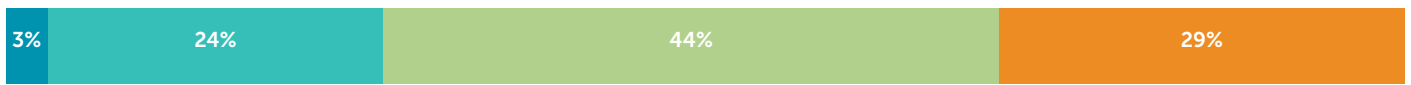
There is little difference in these ratings between female and male volunteers, with females providing an average positive rating of 73% compared to males with 75%.

Progress on achieving assignment objectives – reported by volunteers (n161)

All volunteers



Female



Male



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

1 - minimal progress 2 - partial 3 - satisfactory 4 - good 5 - excellent progress

There are no major differences across age groups apart from slightly above average ratings among volunteers below 29 years of age (81%) and below average ratings in the 40 to 49 age category (67%).

All volunteers who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or as having a disability, rated their progress as either good or excellent. However, the sample size for these groups is too small to draw meaningful conclusions.

Volunteers are asked about the most successful or beneficial aspects of their assignments. The importance of relationships, mutual support and learning are clear from the results.

Most assignments are completed successfully, but some finish early. This year, 5% of assignments were classified as 'early returns'.

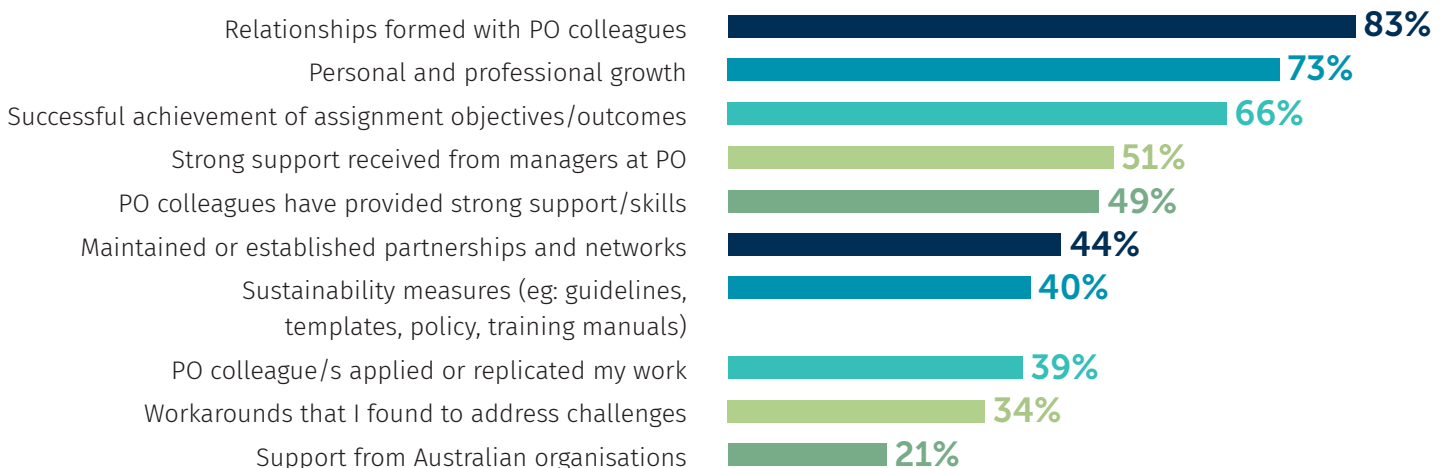
This is less than the previous year, but remote assignments have likely changed the dynamic and likelihood of early returns. Around half of the 17 assignments that finished early (47%) were due to personal reasons (volunteer health issues, the volunteer leaving to pursue other opportunities, or for other personal reasons).

Most other early returns were due to logistical challenges faced by in-country volunteers. Uncertainties about changing travel restrictions and limited flight availability prompted some volunteers to return early. Of the remaining cases, one volunteer completed their objectives ahead of time; in one case the partner organisation and volunteer agreed the assignment objectives could not be met; and in another case the volunteer could not be provided access to internal IT systems so was unable to complete their assignment.

Proportion of assignments that finished early or were extended



Most successful or beneficial aspects of assignments – reported by volunteers



Overall, volunteers on assignment during the year have reported high levels of satisfaction, consistent with the previous year of the program. Satisfaction rates with assignments were 74% (those satisfied or very satisfied). Overall satisfaction with the program was 82%, compared to 86% in the previous year.

There are no differences in satisfaction ratings according to the sex of the volunteer apart from for the overall satisfaction score. This was 85% for males and 80% for females. The numbers for volunteers identifying as having a disability or as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are too small to draw conclusions. In both cases, people identifying as such provided satisfaction scores of 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'.

There is some variation in overall satisfaction rates by age, with lower scores of 75% for both the 30 to 39 and 40 to 49 age categories, and higher satisfaction ratings for those in older and younger age groups.

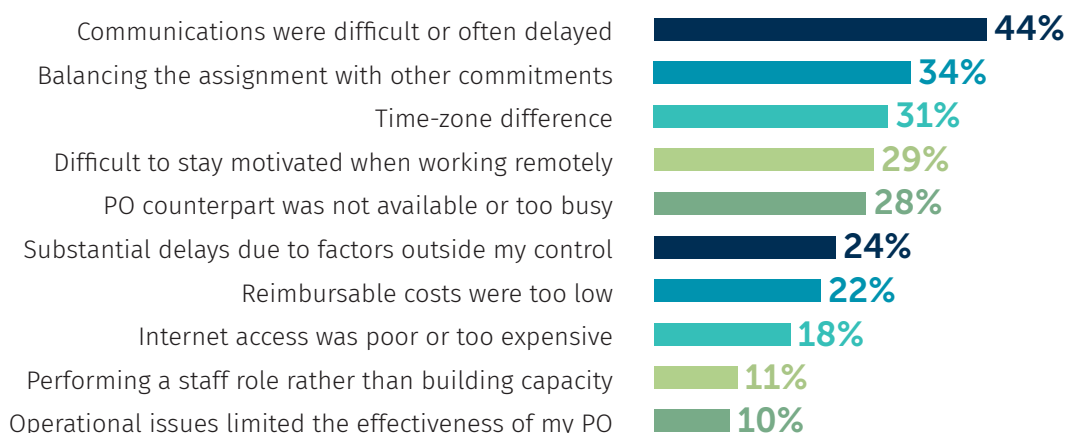
The program has a duty of care for volunteer safety and well-being. For remote assignments, the nature of this has changed, and standard indicators on volunteer satisfaction with the management of the safety and security in-country are not relevant. For the 32 in-country volunteers, only 13 answered the question relating to safety and security management. Of those, 100% were satisfied (38%) or very satisfied (62%) with the safety and security management provided by the program.

From the detailed feedback given by volunteers on the reasons for their satisfaction, the most frequent positive comments related to the assignment being a rewarding experience, having good and supportive relationships with partner organisation staff, and making good progress on assignment objectives.

Reasons for lower satisfaction were most often due to the remote nature of the assignment, assignments not progressing as planned, assignments being too short, or communication issues with the program and/or partner organisation staff.

Volunteers on remote assignments were asked how the program could improve the experience. Many reiterated their appreciation of their partner organisation and the program. Constructive feedback was given on several areas, many relating to the challenges mentioned above: allowing longer assignments, improving communications from the program, the need for clearer assignment objectives or objectives better attuned to the realities of remote working. Many volunteers reiterated their desire to continue supporting their partner organisation and hopes for being able to work with them in-country in the future.

Challenges to achieving their assignment objectives – reported by volunteers



Volunteer satisfaction (n181)

Satisfaction with assignment



Satisfaction with relationship with partner organisation



Satisfaction with the program



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ 1 - very dissatisfied ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 - very satisfied

Federated States of Micronesia: Women’s menstrual pad sewing and outreach program

Many families from the Mortlocks and Northwest regions of Chuuk have established their home on Weno to attend school, find work and to seek medical assistance. Some women on Weno have limited access to opportunities for skill development or income generation.

The Chuuk Women’s Council will support women in Mortlocks and Northwest communities to produce reusable fabric menstrual pads. Participating women will improve their literacy, numeracy and small business skills, and access health and food security support services.

With the support of the program’s Impact Fund, the project includes:

- Outreach to identify suitable candidates for the project.
- Skill development and training.
- Support for participants to develop their own small businesses and purchase equipment.

Participating women will have a sustainable means to generate an income, increasing their self-confidence and self-worth. It will also help young women in the broader community, who will be less likely to miss school or other community events during their menstrual cycle through access to menstrual pads.



Focus Area 5: Risk and safeguarding

Child protection and safeguarding

This year the program consolidated its child protection approach in response to the changing risk environment due to the impacts of COVID-19, through strong engagement with partners, support for volunteers and staff, and resource development.

The program's in-country **Child Protection Focal Point program** played a key role in supporting partner organisation compliance, policy strengthening, and raising awareness. Focal Points continued to exchange knowledge and ideas through cross regional information sessions to ensure that the program's strong commitment to local capacity development continues. This year, 42 partner organisation child protection policies were reviewed against DFAT minimum standards.

In Indonesia, the program delivered three online webinars to participants from over 50 partner organisations, with engaging discussion on policy benefits, best practice standards, and policy monitoring. Webinars were also delivered for South Africa partners.

In October 2020, Mongolia program staff delivered two policy workshops for partner organisations, inviting discussion on risks, policy benefits and best practice policy development. Due to a Member of Parliament attending the workshop in Ulaanbaatar, the program was asked to share information on Australia's child protection policy implementation and statutory requirements in relation to labour laws. With support from DFAT, a consolidated list of resources was shared. In June 2021, new provisions in Mongolia's labour laws were announced, which included a requirement for all companies in Mongolia to have a child protection policy. Through collaboration and partner engagement, the program has had an important impact in supporting national child protection system strengthening.

In Kiribati, the program's partnership with the Broadcasting and Publications Authority has had significant impact on promoting child protection nationally. As part of the 25th anniversary of Kiribati's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the program worked with the national broadcaster to develop and disseminate safeguarding messages via radio. As a result of this initiative, key child safeguarding messages, including an invitation for adults to speak out for children's safety, are now disseminated across Kiribati on a daily basis.



Mongolia: Partner organisation participants discuss child protection policy at a workshop in Ulaanbaatar.



AVI's **Child Protection Policy** was updated to remain responsive to contemporary risks. Definitions were expanded to include online grooming, safety of notifiers was highlighted, and restrictions were applied to visiting children's residential care centres.

Incident Reporting and Child Rights posters were developed for staff, volunteers and partners, to increase awareness of reporting obligations, and survivor needs. A **Child Protection Policy Workbook** was published, with guidance on policy development, reporting, image publication, and policy monitoring.

The pivot to remote volunteering included the need to re-examine child safeguarding awareness, in acknowledgement of the increased online risk. Volunteer induction was strengthened to include information on the impact of COVID-19, with scenarios which prompt volunteers to consider online risks and reporting obligations.

Risk context

2020-21 was characterised by the unprecedented impacts of COVID-19 affecting all program countries. The program navigated extremely high levels of uncertainty during the year, focused on the immediate needs of program continuity and responding to DFAT requests to mobilise Australian volunteers to support partner organisations respond to the impacts of COVID-19.

The program's risk management approach reflected a crisis management footing during quarter one, and over time adjusted to strategic, programmatic and operational approaches. The program embedded new ways of working, which included an accompanying shift in risk tolerance levels.

The program navigated the challenges of supporting crucial adaptations to programming while ensuring appropriate controls are in place to address risks across the range of modalities, including supporting remote volunteering.

A range of safety and security events compounded COVID-19 transmission, government restrictions and contraction in the commercial transport sector. Political and civil unrest impacted program locations including Myanmar, Indonesia, Nepal, eSwatini and South Africa. Natural disasters also impacted program locations, including Timor-Leste, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga and Indonesia. These events were capably managed by in-country staff with the support and advice of Regional Directors and the Global Risk and Security team.

The program established a deployment decision framework, underpinned by detailed risk monitoring at country level. This approach was managed globally by the Global Risk and Security team with support from Regional Directors.

The risk monitoring and deployment decision framework aligned with key risk indicators and phasing approaches set out in the program's **COVID-19 Response and Recovery Support Plan**, and assisted with the setting of risk thresholds and broader risk appetite for in-country deployments.

The program reviewed and revised core risk, health, safety and security documents at the global and country level, producing new templates for the **Global Risk Management Plan**, incident reporting procedure, country security plans and the country risk and security assessments. The new templates address changes in the risk environment due to COVID-19, as well as recommendations from the program's reviews into gender equality, disability and social inclusion. New learning and development materials were developed for both remote volunteers and in-country volunteers.

The program introduced significant changes to the deployment process, and instituted stricter controls over deployments including the tightening of pre-deployment medical screening thresholds. New processes were implemented to support deployments to Papua New Guinea, including periodic checks on medical evacuation capacity. The program has benefited from appropriate insurance for the duration of the financial year.

Due to the significant reduction of overseas deployments, the number of reported incidents is significantly lower than preceding financial years. There were 45 safety, security and safeguarding incidents during the reporting period.

Focus Area 6: Research and learning

Each year the program holds a series of **reflection workshops**, for all staff to collectively take stock of the previous year, review feedback from partner organisations and volunteers, and consider ways to improve the program in the year ahead. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the reflection workshops were held online for the first time. The program adjusted the agenda and process to adapt to the new format. While it was disappointing to not gather in person, being online did present some advantages. It enabled greater participation, encouraged the program to find new ways to engage staff and reduced the program's carbon footprint.

The 2020 workshops were particularly timely for the program to review the repatriation of volunteers in March 2020. Reflecting on progress over the last 12 months of the program, participants felt that the program had largely met the aspirations of the 2019-20 annual plan, despite having only three quarters of the year to do so before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the repatriation of volunteers and move to remote volunteering.

The key lessons and recommendations that were collated from these workshops, as well as program research, include:

- Deep, long-term, respectful relationships with local partners continue to be fundamental to program implementation and achievements.
- The program has enduring relevance to Australian aid priorities and is also highly adaptable.
- Volunteer safety and security is our number one priority and the program lived up to its expectations during the repatriation.
- Volunteers make an impact and build enduring relationships.
- Connecting partner organisations through workshops is beneficial.
- Partnership plans reflect partner capacity needs and there has been substantial progress in the roll-out, but there is room to improve the plan template and process.
- Capturing program impact through research and evaluation requires a clear focus but is possible.
- Connecting with and caring for staff remains a priority in this uncertain context.
- The program is successfully supporting volunteers, DFAT Posts and in-country teams to promote the program. However, raising awareness of the value of volunteering in Australia has been limited by the impacts of the pandemic and the Australian bushfires.

Much of the **research and evaluation activity** from the year has been mentioned elsewhere in this report. To summarize key studies:

- A rapid review of the program's response to COVID-19 was commissioned to assess how the program was responding to the global crisis. The review looked at a small number of assignments directly supporting COVID-19 responses in-country; at remote volunteering as a new form of volunteering for the program; and at how the program's Innovation Fund helped the program respond.
- The longitudinal study of Australian volunteers continued, following a cohort of 55 volunteers. In its most recent phase, participants were interviewed during or shortly after the end of their assignment.
- The program continued its series of 'deep dive' evaluations of the global impact areas, with a study focussing on partner organisations working on human rights in southern Africa.
- The program commissioned an independent assessment of the program's value for money, the first of its kind ever conducted of the Australian international volunteering program. It considered an appropriate approach to measuring value for money and a preliminary analysis based on this approach was carried out as a proof of concept.
- Research was conducted on how Australian volunteers contribute to the achievement of partner organisations' gender equality objectives. It looked at 32 case studies across 16 countries, and made recommendations for improvements to strengthen engagement with gender equality by partner organisations and volunteers.
- A public opinion survey was conducted in Australia in 2021, as a follow-up to baseline research carried out in 2018. It explored Australian perceptions about international aid and volunteering, and how recent external factors have impacted these views. It also measured the program's brand recognition and recommends how it can increase awareness of international volunteering.
- At the end of 2020-21, a more in-depth review of remote volunteering was conducted. The review aimed to understand to what extent remote volunteering, as a new modality for the program, was supporting the program deliver its outcomes.



During the year, there was also an independent evaluation of the program commissioned by DFAT. This rigorous evaluation looked at all aspects of the program, to assess its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and consider future directions. The evaluation found that since commencement in 2018 the program has generally been:

- Very effective in supporting partner organisations to achieve capacity development goals
- Relevant to the strategic objectives of Australia's development assistance program
- Developing capacity outcomes at individual, organisational and sectoral levels
- Able to improve brand recognition and contribute to some degree to Australia's 'soft power'

And that partner organisations and volunteers generally perceive that the program:

- Was a 'transformational' or 'life-changing' experience for volunteers
- Faces the most significant risk and challenge from COVID-19 related travel restrictions
- Is highly relevant to the development needs of overseas partner organisations²¹

The evaluation made a number of recommendations to DFAT. The program is now working with DFAT to implement those recommendations.



Vanuatu Australian volunteer John Foley (l) delivering Primary Trauma Care training for colleagues at the Vila Central Hospital: (left to right) Nurse Jean Noel, Intern Registered Nurse George Ben, Registered Nurse Emergency Department Janet Sade and Medical Intern Nafisha Naaz Nisha. John volunteered as a Critical Care Nurse Educator.

21. Independent Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program, April 2021, TetraTech.

Timor-Leste: Decent work for domestic and vulnerable workers

Domestic work and home-based work are growing as a source of income for women, most of whom come from limited educational and socio-economic backgrounds. This work is excluded from the Labour Code of Timor-Leste, making these women vulnerable to economic exploitation, physical and sexual abuse.

The Working Women's Centre project will empower potential domestic workers and home-based workers by providing access to information, referrals and public advocacy. With the support of the program's Impact Fund, this project will deliver outreach workshops in Ainaru and Covalima, targeting villages with women in agriculture and high levels of economic disadvantage. The workshops will equip women with knowledge and resources to access work with reasonable working conditions and legal protections. The sessions will include education on vocational, advocacy and organising skills, so that women can advocate to be recognised as workers. These workshops will also raise awareness of issues facing women workers in Timor-Leste with decision makers and partner organisations.



Workshops will be designed in consultation with domestic workers, home-based workers and community leaders. This will involve community consultation, engagement and focus group discussions in each municipality. Promotional materials will also be produced to support collective action, including a community radio show.

Cambodia: Freedom film and graphic novel: protecting girls from exploitation in Cambodia

In Cambodia, women's and girls' access to resources and opportunities is often limited. Research shows that women approach solving social problems like exploitation and trafficking differently because they have uniquely different experiences to men. Young women can become individuals of influence if they are provided with education and protection.

AusCam Freedom Project (AusCam) will produce a film and graphic novel to raise awareness of violence towards girls and young women in Cambodia, with support from the program's Impact Fund. This builds on the 2020 Freedom Film project, which produced a short film about gender inequality, preventing exploitation and promoted access to a crisis hotline.



The film and graphic novel will help educate girls and their families about the realities of seemingly harmless job opportunities and identify actions that girls can use to stay safe, stay in school and pursue a more gender-equal future. These materials will raise awareness of violence that young women and girls face, offer support through a new crisis messaging service, and provide access to educational and leadership opportunities at AusCam.

Vulnerable girls can access support for crisis relief including health support, psychological first aid and legal protection through the crisis messaging service. Girls who qualify will be enrolled into AusCam's Shine Centre program, offering tailored educational opportunities and support.

Project activities will include:

- Producing a new Freedom Film and graphic novel.
- Hosting workshops at schools.
- Launching the film and graphic novel online and in schools.
- Providing relief packages to girls who call or message the crisis hotline.

These activities will build AusCam's capacity to reach young women at risk, and help ensure that girls can access support to improve their educational outcomes and resilience.



8.4 Program foundations

Program governance

The program has well established governance arrangements. The Program Management Group (PMG), chaired by DFAT, is the primary governance body responsible for strategic oversight of the program. The PMG met twice during the year, in December 2020 and June 2021. In addition to this forum, the program also supports the Contract Management Group, which is tasked with operational coordination and contract management. This committee is chaired by DFAT and meets quarterly. Meetings were held in July and October 2020 and January and April 2021.

Progress meetings between DFAT Canberra and the Program Director and Deputy Program Director have continued throughout the year, providing an opportunity for ongoing dialogue on a range of issues across the program. These regular meetings continue to support effective and positive working relationships.

In addition to these governance arrangements, the program has an advisory group, made up of senior representatives from the three consortium group partners, AVI, Cardno and Alinea Whitelum. The Consortium Group is chaired by an AVI board member and is tasked with ensuring there are strong and collaborative partnerships between consortium members to support high quality implementation of the program. The Consortium Group met four times during 2020-21.

Annual planning and ongoing implementation

The annual plan is the main operational document which guides program implementation. It outlines key approaches, activities, timelines and budget for the coming year. The program's senior leadership team committed significant time and effort into development of the 2021-22 annual plan. This included meaningful consultation across the program to develop key activities to be supported throughout the year.

The annual planning process commenced in April 2021 with high level policy and strategic discussions with DFAT's Assistant Secretary (Humanitarian, Response, Risk & Recovery Branch). Throughout April and May discussions continued between program staff, and also with DFAT to ensure the plan reflected an agreed approach for 2021-22 and aligned with DFAT's overall strategic approach.

The draft annual plan was delivered as agreed on 25 June 2021. With some minor adjustments, the annual plan was approved by DFAT at the PMG held on 30 July 2021.

In-country teams continued to focus on activities to support partner organisations respond to and recover from the health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Building on an understanding of how COVID-19 is impacting partner organisations, our teams worked together to determine effective ways that the program can best support these organisations.

Timor-Leste HIV counsellor *Joaninha H. dos Santos Soares (r)* and Australian volunteer *Dr Eleanor MacMorran (l)*. Eleanor volunteered as a HIV Clinical Mentor at Maluk Timor.



In-country teams supported partner organisations to develop in-country assignments specific to COVID-19 response and recovery roles. During the reporting period, the program supported 32 in-country roles in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Cambodia. Our teams also supported 311 remote assignments across 25 countries. Through these two distinct modalities, the program ensured activities were ongoing and continued to support locally-led capacity development of partner organisations.

The program continued to procure goods and services as per Commonwealth Procurement Rules and as outlined in the program's Operations Manual. Of particular note, in 2020-21 the program procured goods and services through 12 Indigenous suppliers with a total value of AUD \$70,967.

The effective delivery of activities relating to public diplomacy; monitoring, evaluation and learning; and partnerships and innovation continued throughout the year. Program activity costs accounted for AUD \$2.6 million in 2020-21.

There was also a significant investment to support partner organisations respond to the impacts of COVID-19 through small grants. In 2020-21, 102 grants were awarded to partner organisations in 23 countries, with a total value of AUD \$924,524.

Volunteer services

A key focus for 2020-21 was to support efficient and effective recruitment and mobilisation of in-country COVID-19 response volunteers and remote volunteers. Online pre-departure briefings continued throughout the year, adopting small group sessions wherever possible. Newly developed Preparing to Volunteer sessions were also offered to all remote volunteers prior to commencement of their assignments.

Key achievements this year include:

- Under the FLEX initiative, 14 Global Webinar Series sessions were delivered.
- A new Learning Management System was implemented which has further enhanced the program's ability to provide professional learning and development content to program participants and partner organisations.
- An online police check was introduced and the existing reference check system was enhanced to improve the efficiency and timeliness of receiving reports.
- Navigating COVID-19 restrictions to deliver a face-to-face Returned Volunteer workshop, which included content adjusted to a more humanitarian/health context for volunteers.
- Learning content (online learning and pre-departure briefing) was refreshed in line with changes to the global context, including an increased focus on risk and security.
- The partner organisation learning framework was developed, and a resource library is available to more than 100 active partner organisations.



Solomon Islands Australian volunteer Frances Kennedy (l) and her National Referral Hospital colleague Rowena Nunu (r), Supervising Pharmacy Officer. Frances volunteered as an Emergency Nurse Advisor.

Finance

Program expenditure for 2020-21 was AUD \$16.5 million. Due to the complex nature of the program budget and the uncertainty regarding international travel restrictions, there were several re-forecasts during the year. Against the March 2020 re-forecast of AUD \$17 million, the annual expenditure of AUD \$16.5 million represented a 3% underspend. The key variances to the annual plan budget were largely driven by the impacts of COVID-19, which presented operational challenges for the program, such as ongoing travel restrictions.

Management Systems and Processes

The ongoing development and enhancement of the program's management systems and processes continued in 2020-21. AVI's finance manual was updated and training was provided to relevant staff. AVI continued to roll out mandatory training in child protection, PSEAH and fraud, through its human resources management system.

The program's Management Information System dashboard is continuously being improved so the program can provide accurate and timely reporting of real-time data as well as historical program data. Dashboards and reports were developed in response to internal and external stakeholder reporting requests. Data accuracy continued to be a focus throughout the year, with ongoing data cleansing activities.

Human Resources

At 30 June 2021, the program is supported by 126 staff, of which 83 are based overseas and 43 are based in Australia. Our overseas cohort includes three expatriates.

Our Regional Directors continue to lead our in-country teams. We have four who continue to work from their regional base, in Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Indonesia. Our Regional Director responsible for East Asia is working in Australia until it is safe for him to return to the regional hub in Vietnam.

No new roles were recruited for the program. Some roles were hibernated in response to changed workloads and some staff pivoted into other roles to ensure we fully utilised existing and capable expertise.

There were 15 resignations from program-funded positions in this reporting period, including the Finance Manager, the Overseas Operations Manager and a Regional Director (Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati).

Staff training continued to be delivered throughout the year, mainly online due the lack of opportunity for face-to-face gatherings. There was a strong focus on staff health and well-being as the impacts of COVID-19 continued to be felt across the team.

Philippines: Sustainable food security for the deaf community

The Welcome Home Foundation supports the Filipino deaf community through education and outreach. The Foundation will strengthen food security by supporting the expansion of its current gardening curriculum. It will fund a new greenhouse and upgrade of current facilities. Students will learn how to grow their own vegetables using applicable gardening techniques, through in-person and online classes.

With the support of the program's Impact Fund, this project will:

- Construct a greenhouse that is designed to withstand changing weather patterns and increased rainfall.
- Purchase and plant high quality vegetables, bamboo and tree seedlings.
- Upgrade existing garden plots and facilities.
- Purchase a laptop and internet connection for online classes.

Trainers will teach essential gardening techniques to students so they can use these skills at home. This will help students to provide food for their families, while lowering their monthly food expenses. Students will also learn about waste management and recycling organic waste through the on-site worm farm.



This project will empower people who are deaf or hard of hearing by improving their skills to naturally grow their own food and provide an alternative source of income. It will also strengthen students' confidence as they prepare to enter the job market.

The project will also increase the capacity for the Welcome Home Foundation to produce vegetables and fresh fish throughout the year, and provide surplus produce for nearby communities.

South Africa: Disability awareness campaign

People with disability continue to be marginalised and misunderstood in South Africa. The QuadPara Association Western Cape aims to dispel myths and preconceived perceptions about wheelchair users in South African communities.

This project, supported by the program's Impact Fund, aims to educate school children about people living with disability at an age when they are likely to be more open-minded. It will deliver art workshops in schools to show children how to confidently interact and engage with wheelchair users, improving their understanding and acceptance of people with disabilities.

The project includes visits to 12 schools to:

- Share success stories from people with disability, and explain the challenges faced by wheelchair users.
- Display mouth paintings by QuadPara Association Western Cape members.
- Teach students how to interact with wheelchair users.
- Highlight the importance of accessible environments for wheelchair users.
- Demonstrate the importance of positive lifestyle choices.



The project team will include three wheelchair users, their carers and a driver who will travel to three rural regions in the Western Cape province. The QuadPara Association Western Cape will work with the Western Cape Department of Education to ensure that the project targets schools where positive messages about wheelchair users are most needed.

Participants will be equipped with the knowledge required to confidently engage with wheelchair users. The information shared will dispel misconceptions about people with disabilities in the community, improving understanding and acceptance in their communities.

List of abbreviations

GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
IVD	International Volunteer Day (December 5)
IWD	International Women's Day (March 8)
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer and other gender, sexually diverse or body diverse characteristics
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
PO	Partner organisation
RAID	Researchers in Agriculture for International Development
RAVN	Returned Australian Volunteer Network (the Australian Volunteers Program's alumni program)
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, and sex characteristics
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

Photography credits

Cover	Clementino Amaral	Page 37	Harjono Djoyobisono
Inside cover	Harjono Djoyobisono	Page 40	Clementino Amaral
Page 3	Supplied by Georgia Lack	Page 45	Niki Kuautonga
Page 11	Gina Kaitiplel	Page 46	Bill Nicholson
Page 15 – top	Darren James	Page 47	Derol Konofilia Sanga
Page 15 – bottom	Harjono Djoyobisono	Page 48	Harjono Djoyobisono
Page 17	Derol Konofilia Sanga	Page 51	Darren James
Page 20	Niki Kuautonga	Page 52	Australian Volunteers Program
Page 21	Niki Kuautonga	Page 55	Niki Kuautonga
Page 25	Clementino Amaral	Page 56 - top	Henry Smith
Page 26	Gina Kaitiplel	Page 56 – bottom	Harjono Djoyobisono
Page 28	Clementino Amaral	Page 58	Clementino Amaral
Page 29	Clementino Amaral	Page 59	Derol Konofilia Sanga
Page 34	Australian Volunteers Program / RAID	Page 60 - top	Cam Suttie
		Page 60 – bottom	Matthew Willman

australianvolunteers.com

[#ausvols](https://twitter.com/ausvols)

[@ausvols](https://www.instagram.com/ausvols)



The Australian Volunteers Program
is an Australian Government initiative.