



Volunteer Groups Alliance

2025 HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

Final Report

July 2025

I. ABOUT THE 2025 HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was held from Monday, 14 July, to Wednesday, 23 July 2025, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. This includes the three-day ministerial segment of the forum from Monday, 21 July, to Wednesday, 23 July 2025, as part of the High-level Segment of the Council. The last day of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC was on Thursday, 24 July 2025. The theme for this year was:

“Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind”.

In the forum, participants were able to further discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explore actionable policy guidance for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at all levels.

The HLPF in 2025, without prejudice to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs, also reviewed in-depth review of: SDG 3 (good health and well-being); SDG 5 (gender equality); SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth); and SDG 14 (life below water). The four review sessions will also explore how we can strengthen the means of implementation and partnerships (SDG 17) to achieve these Goals.

For 2025, 35 voluntary national reviews (VNRs) were presented at HLPF, with a Compilation of Main Messages available with the underlying review documents via the UN’s HLPF database.

- In 2025, 23/35 countries (66%) mentioned volunteering in their VNRs
- In 2025, 16/35 countries (46%) reported the integration of volunteering into development plans, policies, and strategies

II. VGA INVOLVEMENT IN ADVANCE OF THE HLPF

One of the VGA's three Areas of Focus under our 2025 Action Plan is "HLPF Global Engagement." Beginning in February 2025, members of VGA with the Coordinator began preparing for the HLPF. In March 2025, a draft sectoral position paper was shared with the membership for edits and feedback, which were incorporated into the final draft. The executive summary and full paper were submitted and shared with others through Discussion Papers on the Theme of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Submitted by Major Groups and Other Stakeholders.

III. VGA INVOLVEMENT AT THE HLPF AND SIDE EVENT

Representing the Volunteers Stakeholder Group, VGA had several formal opportunities to engage with the HLPF, including the right to 1) organize side events and 2) speak at thematic roundtables and comment during thematic reviews.

VGA Side Event

On Tuesday, 15 July, VGA held a very successful online side event as part of the HLPF on "IVY 2026: Shaping the Future of Volunteering and Sustainable Development." Held at the Idealist Headquarters office in New York City, we had a hybrid meeting with nearly 20 in-person and 10 online participants in the Zoom meeting, a recording of which can be found at https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/xOJG9cbnKnIPx_JJj14pGB2gjWrAtUkhs5T4BIL5pblx0XHIdC29Wa1WjflSEzKh.vrn0ko5o_4b1J-E4?startTime=1752581676000 (Passcode: fw5gs=%?).

The side event included a lively discussion from participants on how we can provide better enabling environments so that volunteers can significantly contribute to development. Participants discussed how to emphasize the power of volunteers and encourage greater investment in volunteering. We were able to:

- To gather insights from global volunteer leaders, stakeholders, and youth on how to strengthen volunteering for sustainable development.
- To prepare for the UN's upcoming **International Volunteer Year** and inform the **call to action**.
- To share successes, challenges, and strategies for empowering volunteers

Key themes discussed included:

1. **Recognition and Policy Integration**

- Need for better **recognition** of volunteering's value in achieving SDGs.
- Advocacy for embedding volunteering into **national policies and international frameworks**.

2. Youth Engagement

- Young people are central to the future of volunteering.
- Calls to make youth volunteering part of **career development** and **leadership pipelines**.
- Emphasis on **co-creation**: involving youth not just as implementers, but as **designers** of volunteer projects.

3. Volunteer Impact and Empowerment

- Volunteers want to see **tangible outcomes** and know their efforts matter.
- Volunteering is a path to **resilience, empathy, and social transformation**.

4. Barriers and Solutions

- **Funding gaps, limited visibility, and lack of coordination** cited as challenges.
- Suggestions included:
 - Strengthening collaboration between NGOs and grassroots groups.
 - Developing **platforms for knowledge exchange** and peer learning.
 - Encouraging formal structures (e.g., focal points) for volunteer inclusion.

5. Technology and Innovation

- Emphasis on using **digital tools**, especially in Africa, to expand volunteering reach.
- Caution against **digital exclusion** and the importance of maintaining human connection.

6. Inclusivity and Representation

- Concern over performative volunteering vs. **meaningful engagement**.
- Highlighted the need for better **tracking** and **recognition** of informal and community-based volunteer efforts.
- Importance of including marginalized voices, such as seniors, rural youth, and informal volunteers.

Action points to consider included:

- Strengthen **global networks** to amplify volunteer voices.

- Link local volunteer efforts to **UN and governmental decision-making** and policy advocacy.
- Support **enabling environments** where volunteer work leads to real, sustainable change.
- Cultivate **empathy and community**, not just output-driven models.
- Prepare for **International Volunteer Day (December 5, 2025)** as the launch of the **International Volunteer Year for 2026** to elevate the movement.

SGBF Side Event

VGA partnered with Saudi Green Building Forum (SGBF) on their online side event on Wednesday, 16 July on “Globalizing Sustainability: Training for Green Jobs Through the Ages of Globalization.” VGA coordinator **David Styers** was a panelist discussing how volunteers contribute to enabling SDGs acceleration.

Interventions

VGA also successfully had members providing interventions. For the session “Transformation from the ground up: Acting at local level,” Golden’s **Sam Fankuchen** was a [speaker from the floor](#) with [comments](#) on volunteers delivering all 17 SDGs. SGBF’s Faisal Alfadl was a [lead discussant](#) for “Regional perspectives on SDG implementation” providing [solutions](#), such as volunteer-driven regional knowledge networks that connect proven community-based practices with institutional policy and financing pathways. MY World Mexico’s **Karol Arámbula** represented VGA as a Major Groups and other Stakeholders speaker for the ECOSOC session covering the following key points:

- With sustainable development under threat from war, inequality and climate change, the commitment of more than a billion volunteers worldwide stands as a powerful force to accelerate progress toward the 2030 Agenda —the only roadmap to a livable future.
- The millions of people who serve their communities and that I have the honor to represent here today are mobilizing, organizing, campaigning, and stepping in as development cooperation and multilateralism are undermined.
- With the founding of the United Nations eight decades ago, we envisioned and shaped a new world. With that ideal, we expected the world to be in a much better place. A world in which human rights would be guaranteed, our planet would be protected, and genocide would be just a page in our history.
- Unfortunately, this is not our current reality. Climate change threatens our existence. Inequality devastates our societies, and genocide and mass atrocities take place with all impunity and complicity. The United Nations faces the cruel reality of becoming powerless, restricted, and if the trend continues, extinct.

- The UN80 Initiative seeks not only to improve efficiency but also to reassert the value of multilateralism at unprecedented times. It is clear that neither the Member States nor the United Nations can achieve this alone. You need us, but we cannot do it if you are looking at us as enemies or obstacles.
- We call upon you to strategically and consistently engage with us—your citizens and community-based leaders—who are actively transforming societies and addressing the crises that define our challenging realities. Only through sustained collaboration can we co-create the solutions needed to confront global challenges and shape a more just, resilient, and inclusive future.

And, **Karol** was able to meet with the outgoing and incoming Presidents of ECOSOC as part of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders delegation to review this past year and discuss wishes for the year to come, including increased support and space for civil society at the UN.

