



Call for Papers for Open Access Special Issue

“Volunteering and Sustainable Development – Intersections, Tensions, and Transformations”

Special Issue of [Voluntaris](#) – *Journal for Civic Engagement and Voluntary Services in the Context of the UN International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development (IVY 2026)*

Submission deadline for abstracts: **October 15th, 2025**

Submission deadline for accepted articles: **March 31st, 2026**

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2026 the **International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development**. This proclamation is embedded in a broader policy discourse that emphasises the role of volunteers in implementing the 2030 Agenda and calls for their stronger integration into development strategies. Volunteers are increasingly portrayed as key actors in collective action and social transformation. This framing is echoed not only in political rhetoric but also supported by a growing body of research. Studies in diverse contexts have documented the contributions of volunteering to resilience, inclusion, and locally driven change. At the same time, the concepts of “volunteering”, “sustainability”, and “development” are neither neutral nor universally defined—they carry political, historical, and cultural meanings that invite scholarly reflection.

This **Voluntaris Special Issue, in the context of IVY 2026**, offers a space to examine, affirm, challenge, or reframe such narratives in light of empirical evidence, (critical) theory, and diverse practical experiences. The aim is to curate a collection that reflects the current global plurality of scientific perspectives on the complex and evolving intersection of volunteering, sustainability, and development.

The International Year marks not only the 25th anniversary of the first International Year of Volunteers (2001) but also the 55th anniversary of the UN Volunteers Programme. It officially invites scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to reflect on the meaning, practices, and politics of volunteering. **To contribute to this global momentum, Voluntaris—in collaboration with an internationally recognised editorial team of leading experts— is preparing a special issue to be published in the second half of 2026.** The editors come from diverse regional and disciplinary backgrounds and have all conducted extensive research and practical work in the field of volunteering and development. This issue will bring together scholarly research, critical debates, and practice-based insights to explore the intersections of volunteering and sustainable development.



Aims and Scope

The special issue aims to:

- Unpack the **theoretical, conceptual and practical relationships** between volunteering and sustainable development.
- Reflect on the **integration of volunteering in national and global development agendas**.
- Examine contexts in which volunteering is **not explicitly framed as development**, yet functions as a driver of social change, solidarity, or transformation, sometimes aligning with, but also at times resisting or redefining dominant development discourses.
- Offer a space for **critical engagement, empirical investigation, and innovative approaches** to volunteering in/for development in diverse contexts.

We particularly welcome contributions that:

- Theorise the **shifting meanings of “volunteering” and “sustainable development”** and their historical, political, and epistemological entanglements.
- Examine volunteering’s **roles in advancing—or complicating—the SDGs**, including the MDG–SDG shift in recognition of volunteers, achievements to date, limits of “business as usual,” and lessons or implications for the post-2030 era.
- Critically assess the **infrastructures, inequalities, and exclusions** that shape who can volunteer, how, and with what recognition.
- Explore **informal, community-based, and Indigenous forms of volunteering**—especially across the Global South—and their intersections with, or resistance to, formal systems.
- Analyse **the roles, incentives, and interrelations of key actors—NGOs, governments, philanthropic foundations, and the private sector**—in shaping volunteering ecosystems and partnership models (e.g., PPPs, corporate/employee volunteering). **Examine** how funding flows, accountability mechanisms, and power asymmetries influence collaboration and outcomes, and what this implies for working with partners with different priorities.
- Investigate the **current state of digital volunteering** and analyse, to what extent expectations in volunteering have been fulfilled.
- Address the **impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) on both development work and volunteering**: How might AI reshape civic action, volunteer infrastructures and relationships? What risks or opportunities does digital transformation and AI bring for inclusion, participation, or power asymmetries in volunteering and global development?
- Engage **postcolonial, feminist, and intersectional perspectives** on transnational volunteering and on volunteering–development relations
- Analyse volunteering rooted in **activism, solidarity, or mutual support**—how these practices both contribute to and contest dominant “development” paradigms, foregrounding care, reciprocity, and transformative logics that may lie alongside, beneath, or beyond institutional development agendas.
- Investigate how **volunteering is practiced and instrumentalized in fragile, conflict-affected, or increasingly populist/illiberal settings**, including co-optation for governance, surveillance, or security under banners of development or resilience.



- Evaluate the **role of volunteering in climate action and ecological transitions**, including just-transition approaches that center community participation, protection, and support in the face of ecological risks.
- Examine **how volunteerism is represented and instrumentalized in global development institutions and campaigns** (UN, NGOs, philanthropy): what is made visible, valued, or silenced, and with what effects.
- Trace the **legacies and trajectories of International Year declarations**, including the symbolic and material impacts of IYV 2001 and IVY 2026, and their local uptake or contestation.
- Reflect **on the futures of volunteering amid intersecting crises** (climate, pandemics, conflicts), and question whether “development” should remain the guiding concept—or whether alternative frameworks and imaginaries better capture volunteering’s roles ahead.

Types of Contributions

We invite submissions in the following categories (maximum length will be communicated with the acceptance letter):

1. **Scientific articles:** Empirical, theoretical, or practice-based research advancing understanding of volunteering and sustainable development.
2. **Perspectives, debates, and practice reflections:** Commentaries, essays, and shorter contributions from scholars, practitioners, or policymakers. This category includes debate pieces, viewpoints, and innovative practice insights highlighting lessons learned, emerging issues, or underrepresented perspectives regarding the topics of the issue.

About the Journal

[Voluntaris](#) is a peer-reviewed academic journal focused on voluntary services and civic engagement, published biannually by Nomos Verlag (Germany). It serves as a platform for actors in science, practice, and policy, aiming to foster exchange between scholarly research and applied perspectives. **The special issue on the IVY 2026 will be published in English and made available both in print and as an open-access online edition.**

Submission Details

- **Deadline for abstracts (max. 300 words):** October 15th, 2025
- **Notification of acceptance:** November 30th, 2025
- **Full paper submission deadline:** March 31st, 2026
- **Revision by Authors following reviewers comments:** June-July 2026
- **Publication date:** September/October 2026

Please send your **abstract and a short biographical note** (background, institution/current affiliations) to: IVY26@voluntaris.de

We look forward to submissions from across disciplines and sectors, especially those that challenge boundaries, amplify marginalised voices, and push the conversation on volunteering and development forward. **Join us in shaping this special issue as a timely and critical contribution to IVY 2026!**



Promoting Equity in Knowledge Production

We are seeking funding to provide modest honoraria or publication-support funds for selected contributors who face financial barriers to publishing (e.g., scholars and practitioner-researchers based in the Global South or working in under-resourced/precarious settings). We expect to confirm availability and modalities at the time acceptance letters are issued. If you wish to be considered, please indicate this briefly in your submission cover note; requests are confidential and will not affect peer review or editorial decisions.

Editorial Team

- **Dr Cliff Allum**, Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.
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