



# Australian Volunteers Program in Bhutan

In 2020-21 the Australian Volunteers Program in Bhutan supported five volunteers and five partner organisations. Partner organisations in Bhutan embraced the concept of remote volunteering for the first time.

*'The volunteer was open, understanding and very accommodating.'*

– Partner organisation spokesperson

In 2020-21 in Bhutan, the program supported:

**5**  
partner organisations

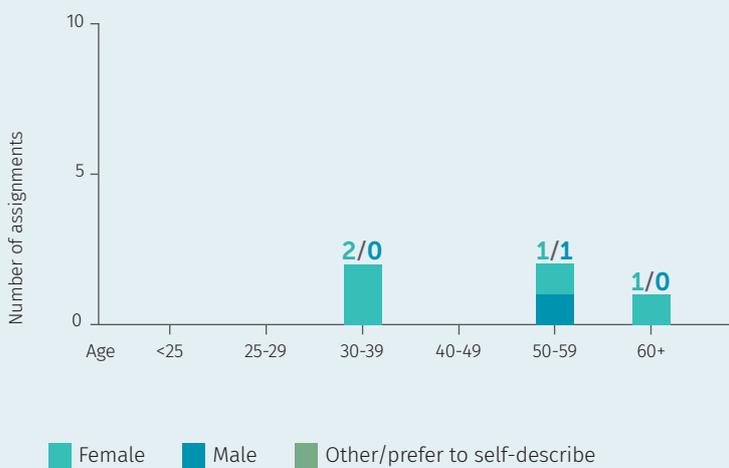
**3**  
partner organisations with Impact Grants

**5**  
volunteers

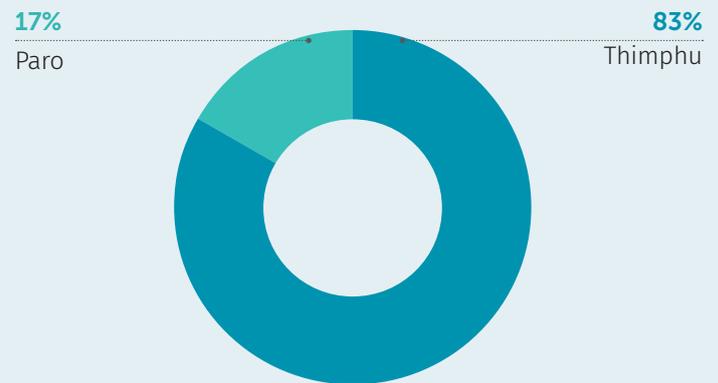
**6**  
remote assignments

## Gender and age of volunteers

Women 80% Men 20%



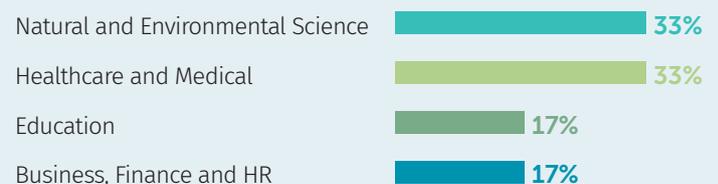
## Location of assignments



## Most common types of partner organisations



## Most common professions of volunteers



In 2020-21, in accordance with Australia's COVID-19 Development Response Plan, the Australian Volunteers Program supported partner organisations to implement their response and recovery efforts, aligned with Bhutan's local and national priorities.

The program focused on supporting partner organisations with remote volunteers in this period, providing strategies to help improve communication with volunteers and progress assignments. Bhutanese partner organisations embraced remote volunteering, particularly where volunteers already had an established working relationship with the partner organisation.

Six remote assignments supported five partner organisations in 2020-21, including the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, National Biodiversity Centre, Khesar Gyalpo University for Medical Sciences, Drug Regulatory Authority, and Wangsel Institute for the Deaf.

Most of the partner organisations supported work within the health and education sectors, and most assignments were with local and national government organisations.

Three partner organisations received a small grant from the Australian Volunteers Program Impact Fund: the National Biodiversity Centre, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour and Human Resources.

The program in Bhutan also established a partnership with Edith Cowan University and RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture, Empower Women), a non-governmental organisation that creates empowering opportunities and support for women and children.

During this time, the program celebrated and promoted international volunteering in Bhutan through regular social media posts, including for International Volunteer Day. A Bhutanese magazine ran a story about the program and remote volunteering in Bhutan.



*Tiffany Casey volunteers as a Student Counsellor at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, Thimphu, Bhutan. The institute aims to tackle youth unemployment by developing students' life and entrepreneurial skills. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono.*

## Spotlight on The National Biodiversity Centre

The National Biodiversity Centre (NBC) in Bhutan promotes effective biodiversity management and contributes to international efforts on biodiversity conservation. With support from the Australian Volunteers Program, the Centre enhanced its ability and capacity to do this important work.

Between 2017 and 2021, Australian volunteers, Danielle Northey, Karunya Prasad, Hugh Stahel and Maggie Wheeler worked at the Centre. With Danielle's assistance, the Centre achieved its five-year target of 1,500 users for the Bhutan Biodiversity Portal, which provides open access to biodiversity information for students, researchers, amateur naturalists and policy decision makers. Danielle also helped launch awareness campaigns including Busy Butterfly BioBlitz and the Wild River BioBlitz and was instrumental in promoting International Biodiversity Day in Bhutan.

As well as improving data inputs to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, Karunya trained staff at the Biodiversity Information Management Program and Royal Botanical Garden in Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping.

Hugh worked with the Animal Gene Bank, supporting the NBC's cattle embryo cryoconservation program from trials to implementation. Maggie supported the Plant Genetic Resource Program, including laboratory work to introduce rare Bhutanese orchids to the Royal Botanical Garden. She also assisted with growing a vulnerable wild rice species from tissue culture and initiated work on the eradication of lantana and other invasive species.

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