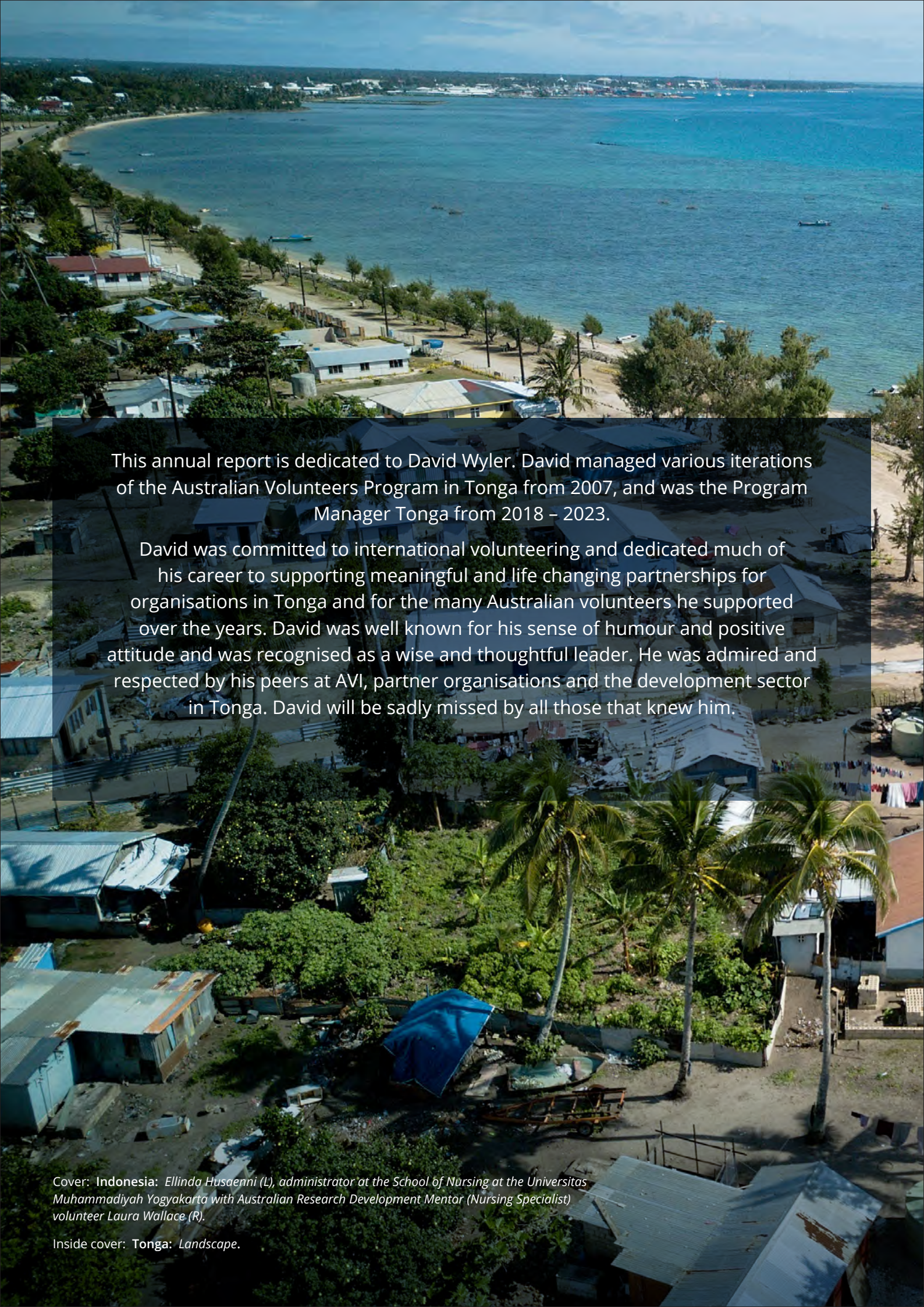


Australian *Volunteers*

**Australian Volunteers Program
Annual Report**

July 2022 – June 2023



This annual report is dedicated to David Wyler. David managed various iterations of the Australian Volunteers Program in Tonga from 2007, and was the Program Manager Tonga from 2018 – 2023.

David was committed to international volunteering and dedicated much of his career to supporting meaningful and life changing partnerships for organisations in Tonga and for the many Australian volunteers he supported over the years. David was well known for his sense of humour and positive attitude and was recognised as a wise and thoughtful leader. He was admired and respected by his peers at AVI, partner organisations and the development sector in Tonga. David will be sadly missed by all those that knew him.

Cover: Indonesia: Ellinda Huseaenni (L), administrator at the School of Nursing at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta with Australian Research Development Mentor (Nursing Specialist) volunteer Laura Wallace (R).

Inside cover: Tonga: Landscape.

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1. Executive summary

The Australian Government has supported skilled volunteering through its international development program for more than 65 years. The Australian Volunteers Program (2018-2027) is the latest chapter in this long-term, sustained support. The program is a unique part of Australia's Official Development Assistance, building people-to-people links across the Pacific, Asia and Africa.

The Australian Volunteers Program connects skilled Australians with a diverse range of partner organisations to support them to achieve their own development goals. By emphasising respectful partnerships through people-centred capacity strengthening, the program contributes to Australia's objective to advance an Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable and prosperous.

The program's key objectives include supporting the goals of partner organisations, promoting the value of volunteering, and fostering cross-cultural connections. By achieving these objectives, the program contributes to building trusted relationships between people and communities, fostering equitable development. The program is deeply committed to working in ways that support local leadership and has a strong and active commitment to gender equality, disability equity and rights, and the inclusion of First Nations perspectives and people.

The Australian Volunteers Program's Annual Report for 2022-23 marks a year of positive progress, during which the program has supported locally led processes of change, primarily through volunteering. During the year, the program experienced a stronger than anticipated demand by partner organisations for the return of in-country volunteers following the easing of travel restrictions post the onset of the global pandemic.

While the program has been challenged in responding to this demand, it has continued to adapt and find new ways of supporting partners. The program has also continued to examine how we support our partners, and the relationships and ethos that underpin our partnership approach.

In 2022-23, the program recruited, mobilised and supported 362 volunteers to deliver 417 assignments. These volunteer assignments supported 249 partner organisations. In addition, the program helped partners to strengthen their capacity by awarding 33 small grants and facilitating a range of networking and knowledge exchange events such as the Global Webinar Series.

A commitment to the health, safety and security of program participants remained paramount throughout the year. Financially, the program operated within the allocated budget, effectively managing resources to address increased demand and costs.

Program highlights

In this first year of its second five-year term, the Australian Volunteers Program continued to make significant impact. Evidence of the program's impact is detailed throughout this report. This includes evidence which speaks to the program's focus on building respectful partnerships and supporting partner organisations to strengthen their capacity, promoting the value of volunteering, embracing and sharing innovation and learning, and facilitating greater cultural awareness and building stronger connections across countries.

A selection of ten program highlights during 2022-23 are as follows:

- Supporting **249 partner organisations** with volunteer assignments, with the majority of partners (80%) reporting good or excellent progress against assignment objectives.
- Supporting **388 program participants** (including 26 approved accompanying dependents) on **417 assignments**, with 87% of volunteers satisfied or very satisfied with the program.
- Launching **hybrid volunteering**, enabling the program to offer three volunteering modalities to partner organisations. In 2022-23, the program supported **206 in-country** assignments, **195 remote** assignments and **16 hybrid assignments**.
- Awarding **33 small grants** to partner organisations across **11 countries**. In addition, **94 grant projects** were completed and acquitted during 2022-23, with many recipients reporting very positive project outcomes.
- Working with **104 Australian organisations**. Over the year, 10% of all assignments (or 41 assignments) were supported by Australian organisations that partner with the program.

- Delivering **17 sessions under our Global Webinar Series** to more than 900 participants. These sessions showcased a range of partners work in areas such as indigenous cultures and gender equality, and included practical sessions on areas such as child safeguarding.
- Growing **Indigenous Pathways**, including by developing new partnerships with the Torres Strait Regional Authority and WWF-Australia.
- Delivering **successful events** including a major event at the Australian Parliament House in Canberra to mark International Volunteer Day (2022), with keynote address by Senator The Honourable Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs.
- Valuing learning and establishing **three multi-year strategic evaluations** aligned with the end of program outcomes. Additional research undertaken during the year included important work aimed at understanding partners' perceptions of the program's partnership approach and the power dynamics involved in supporting locally led change.
- Exploring how different funding mechanisms could support civil society efforts to grow volunteering in partnership with organisations in Philippines and Timor-Leste as part of the program's commitment to evolving good practice and **embracing innovation**.

Looking forward, the Australian Volunteers Program will continue to deliver a high-quality program which leverages the program's unique offerings, and its partnership, innovations and adaptive capabilities in ways that respond to locally determined needs and align with the Australian Government's International Development Policy. The program's resilience and adaptability, along with its dedication to positive change through respectful partnerships, positions it well for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

July 2022 to June 2023 at a glance

249 partner organisations supported by
362 volunteers delivering **417** assignments

Total budget **\$21.98M**

About volunteers

60.4% women **39.0%** men **0.6%** self-describe

2.2% volunteers identify as having a disability

0.8% volunteers identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Volunteers were aged from **20** years old to **82** years old

26 dependents accompanied volunteers on their assignments

75% of volunteers reporting good or excellent progress against assignment objectives



87% of volunteers were satisfied or very satisfied with the program



About volunteer assignments

195 remote

206 in-country

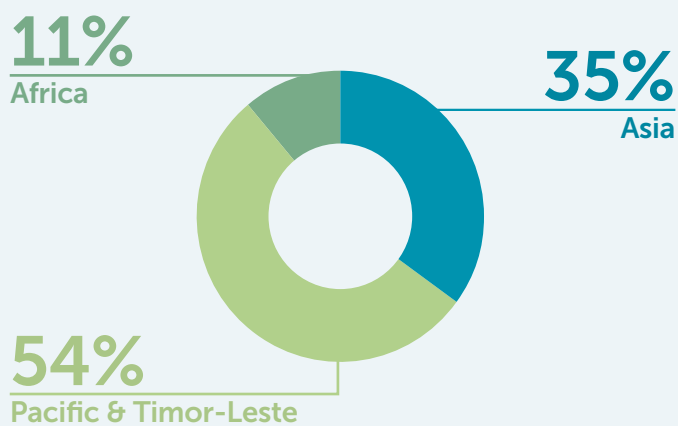
16 hybrid

309 assignments started this year

108 assignments continued from previous years

About partner organisations

Location of partners



80% of partner organisations reported good or excellent progress against assignment objectives

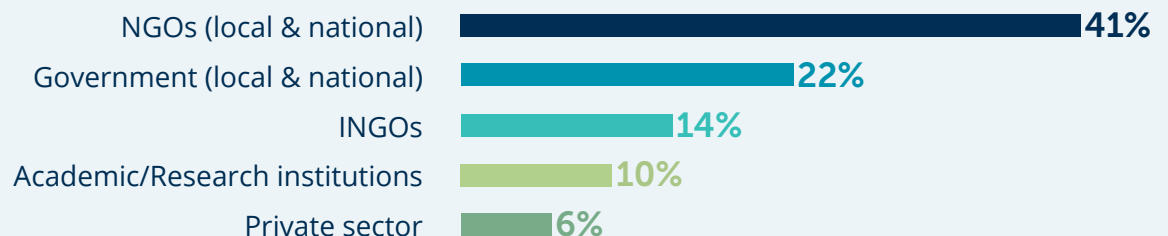


88% of partner organisations were satisfied or very satisfied with the volunteer assignment

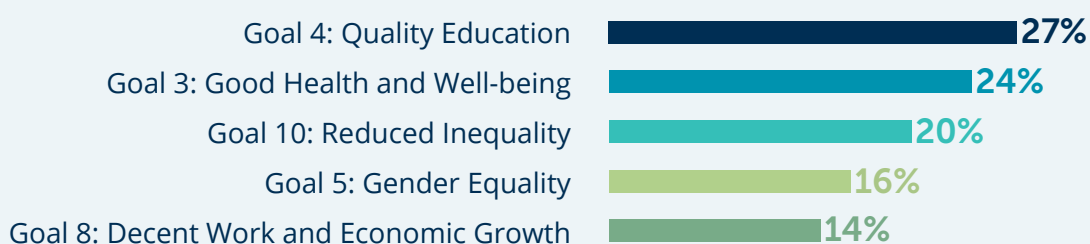


33 partners received small grants

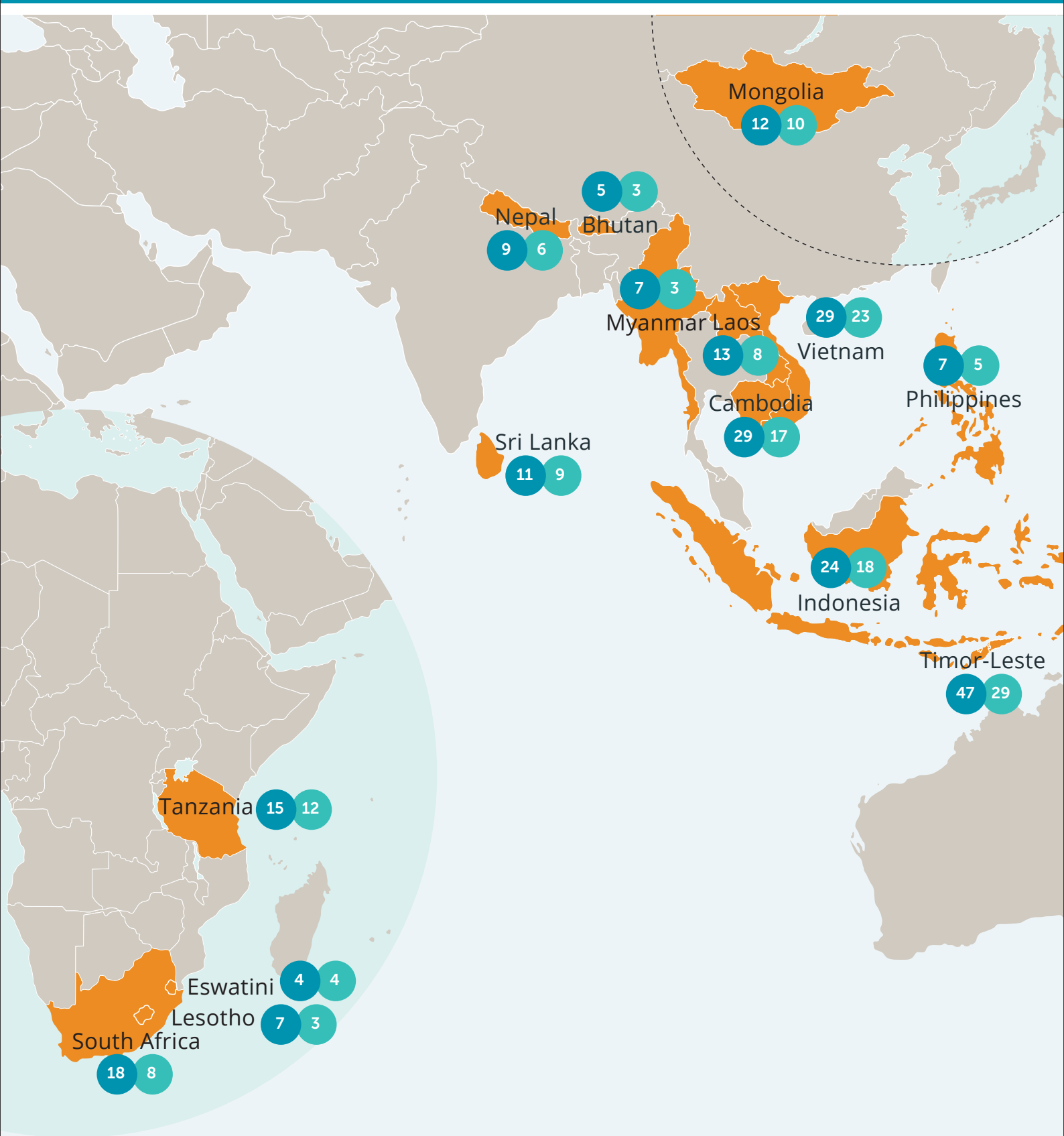
Our partner organisations

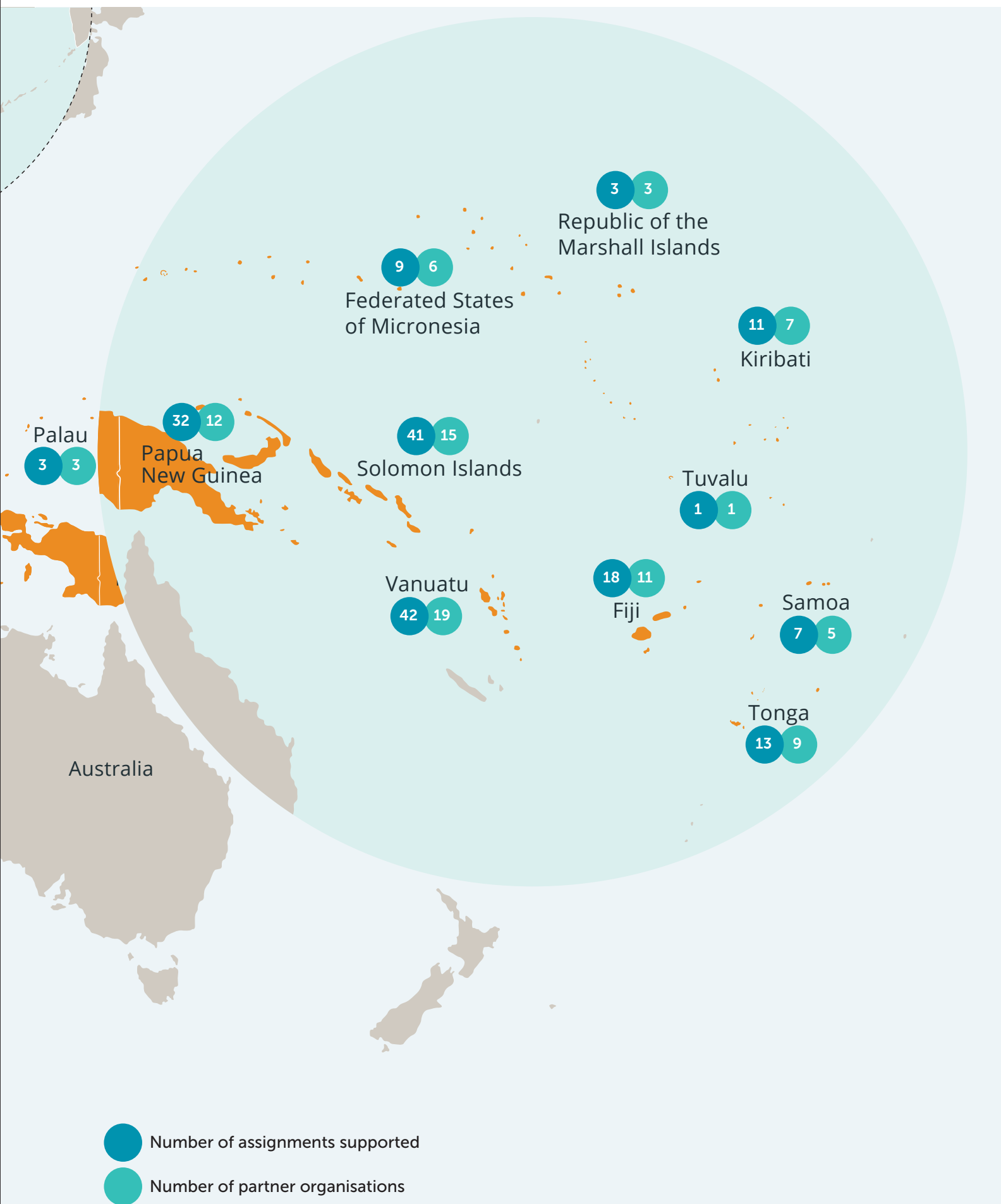


Top 5 SDGs that partners contribute to



Where we operate (2022 - 2023)





2. About the program

The Australian Volunteers Program develops long-term, mutually respectful partnerships with organisations across the Pacific, Asia and Africa to contribute to locally led change and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Australian volunteers have supported overseas partner organisations to achieve their development goals for more than 65 years. The Australian Government's Australian Volunteers Program continues this rich history.

The program matches skilled Australians with organisations in developing countries to help those organisations to deliver on their own development objectives. The program uses international volunteering as a people centred approach to capacity strengthening. The program is part of the Australian Government's people-to-people program portfolio, connecting Australians to Australia's aid program and the region.

The Australian Volunteers Program aims to:

- Support partner organisations to progress their development objectives
- Increase key stakeholders' appreciation of the value of volunteering, in Australia and partner countries
- Increase program participants' cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries

Through successfully achieving these outcomes, the Australian Government aims to strengthen mutual relationships with people and communities across the Pacific, Asia and Africa that contribute to achieving equitable development outcomes.

The program highly values First Nations perspectives and knowledge, and seeks to increase Indigenous participation in international volunteering. The program is also committed to human rights, gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), and works to increase the diversity of volunteers and organisations we partner with.

The Australian Volunteers Program started in 2018 and is managed by AVI, in consortium with DT Global and Alinea International. In July 2022 the program started its second five-year term to 2027, with a refreshed program logic and a total five-year budget of up to AUD \$130 million.

Our Program Logic

GOAL

Global volunteering supports locally-led change and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

OBJECTIVE

Australia has strong, mutual relationships with people and communities across the Pacific, Asia and Africa that contribute to achieving equitable development outcomes

END OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Partner organisations are supported to progress their development objectives



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



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



INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Partner organisations have strengthened their capacity and gained from the program

Partner organisations have a strategic rationale for participation in the program, provide a safe and productive working environment, and contribute to quality assignments

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

The benefit of volunteering is recognised and promoted by partner organisations, Australian organisations, volunteers and DFAT to their networks

Innovations, learning and program achievements are promoted and shared in the international volunteering and development community by the program and key stakeholders

Innovative approaches to, and alternative models of volunteering are designed and tested to expand the program's reach and adaptive capability

Program participants gain professionally and personally

Volunteers complete their assignment well and learn from their partner organisation

The program is inclusive of and accessible to a diverse range of people

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Value
volunteering



Support
locally-led
change



Grow strong
relationships
and partnerships



Evolve
good practice
and embrace
innovation



Enhance
diversity
and inclusion



Ensure
accountability and
value learning

3. About this report

This is the sixth annual report prepared by the Australian Volunteers Program. It covers the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. This was the first year of the program's second five-year term, and the first year of reporting against a refreshed program logic.

Ensuring accountability and promoting learning is one of the program's guiding principles, and this report represents one way in which the program aims to fulfil this principle. It is structured to provide an update on progress against each of the program's three end of program outcomes, and the principles that underpin the program.

Following on from the operating context for the year (Section 4), this report documents lessons learnt over the last year (Section 5) and highlights key management actions for the program to take forward in the year ahead (Section 6). Evidence of progress toward intermediate and end of program outcomes is covered in Section 7.

Separate 'Focus Areas' aim to demonstrate the program's commitment to its guiding principles. In the current report, the focus is on three principles: growing strong relationships and partnerships; evolving good practice and embracing innovation; and enhancing diversity and inclusion. Additional case studies throughout the report aim to further illustrate how the program is supporting our partners' work.



Cambodia Hak Limheang, trainer at Moto Doctor supervises students at the organisation's Siem Reap workshop. Moto Doctor is a full-service mechanical shop run in collaboration with This Life Cambodia.

4. Operating context

While the external operating context during the reporting period remained challenging due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on global economies, there was a notable stabilisation in some aspects of the operating environment. Throughout the year domestic restrictions imposed in previous years due to COVID-19 were lifted. While global mobility has not yet returned to pre-COVID-19 levels, there was a steady increase in travel to all countries in which the program operates. Medical evacuation and relocation capacity improved, though medical capacity in some locations for outpatient and inpatient care was strained.

The demand from partners for in-country volunteers has been high and has placed pressure on the program's resources, which have been further stretched by increases in costs across key operational areas (i.e., travel and insurances). Inflationary and cost-of-living pressures presented challenges for governments and communities; and in many countries the security environment deteriorated due to an increase in political, social, health and economic challenges.

Partner government policies

The economic impacts of the global pandemic continue to dominate partner government policies. Over the course of the reporting period, travel restrictions were lifted with the resumption of commercial flights. Inflationary pressures and increases in cost-of-living presented economic challenges for many partner governments. These stresses and shocks placed pressure on partner governments while also supporting a continued need for our programming.

Australian Government priorities

The Australian Volunteers Program continues to contribute to meaningful impact through people-to-people connections and as a unique part of Australia's development cooperation program. In line with a change in government in May 2022 the program continued to support the government's foreign policy and development priorities, including in the areas of climate change, gender equality and First Nations policy.

External context – other

During the reporting period there was some deterioration in the political, social, and economic contexts in some countries. Global economic stresses continued, largely due to the ongoing impacts of the global pandemic but further exacerbated by the ongoing effects of the war in Ukraine. Inflationary pressures and cost of living increases continued to present challenges for many communities in countries where the program operates.



Timor-Leste Elga da Silva Maria (L), President of Juventude ba Dezenvolvimentu Násional (JDN) with Jescia Nelinha Da Silva Ximenes (Centre), JDN volunteer Nutrition Educator and Alianca Fernandes (R), JDN activist. JDN is a youth-led, community-based organisation in Dili, Timor-Leste.

Political and social challenges continued in Myanmar. DFAT reviewed the program in Myanmar and identified that the safety and security risks to staff and partner organisations outweighed the benefits of continued program activities in that country. As such, the program ceased all operations in Myanmar.

The heightened security environment in Sri Lanka continued to be an operational barrier, though there was some stabilisation towards the end of the reporting period. Political escalations and flashpoints continued in Nepal, Tanzania and South Africa. In the Republic of Marshall Islands, a State of Emergency was declared following disruptions to air cargo, potentially impacting medical and food supplies.

There were several significant natural disasters during the year, with an increase in wet conditions and reported increase in mosquito-borne diseases, particularly in the Asia Pacific region. Two cyclones made landfall in Vanuatu in Q3, causing significant damage to infrastructure and severe disruption.

In July 2022, Monkeypox virus was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organisation. This was carefully monitored throughout the reporting period, with no cases reported on the program. Cyber threats continued to dominate the external operating environment and necessitated increased activities to secure AVI's systems and monitor vulnerabilities.

5. Lessons learned

Responding to changes in the operating context and our own desire to adapt and improve, the program continues to learn and evolve. Over the last 12 months, through our research, evaluation and reflection processes, we have gained the following insights.

Partner organisations want the support of skilled volunteers

With the easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions, partner organisations have been keen to welcome back in-person volunteers to their workplaces and communities. The demand from partners has been high and placed pressure on the program's resources, which have been further stretched by the global financial context. Remote assignments are still seen as valuable by many stakeholders, but in this changing context the program is learning how to balance efforts to promote and support different types of assignments. We have also started learning about the challenges and opportunities of the flexibility offered by hybrid assignments.

Partners want volunteers with cultural sensitivity

Partner organisations value the technical skills volunteers bring. Equally, if not more, important to partners are volunteers' cross-cultural competencies. This has always been the case, and the program has many decades experience to draw on balancing multiple different factors in volunteer selection and promoting global literacy. The importance of sensitising volunteers to issues of power and privilege has become even more apparent in recent years. This forms an important part of the volunteer learning journey, and an area where the program will continue to learn and adapt.

Volunteers want to connect and learn

Relationships are at the heart of any assignment, and any development program. Relationships and how we form them have also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the social restrictions that people faced. Volunteers are clear in their feedback that they want more support in establishing relationships with partners, and for the program to facilitate peer support and networking opportunities amongst volunteers past and present. Volunteers also value the relationships they have with program staff in-country, and some would appreciate more regular contact to help them manage their assignment effectively.

Not all volunteers have the same experience

Overall satisfaction rates of program participants remain high. Research conducted during the year has highlighted improvements over time, but also that not all volunteers have the same experience on assignment, and that certain groups of people continue to be both underrepresented and less positive about their experience on assignment. Reaching specific audiences takes time and must be based on genuine engagement. There is a lot that the program is proud of doing to support diversity and inclusion, but we also recognise the need to be more intentional in our approach.



Fiji Members of Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei Cakaudrove (SVTC) with Indigenous Pathways volunteer, Rosaline Tomsana (seated, bottom right), during a handicraft workshop run by SVTC as part of their Women's Economic Empowerment Program. Rosaline Tomsana, known as Aunty Rose, is a Kaurareg Traditional Owner and Kala Lagaw Ya speaker from Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Torres Strait.

We have much still to learn from First Nations approaches to international collaboration

Through Indigenous Pathways, we have seen the value of prioritising culturally safe and inclusive approaches. We have also learnt that building strong partnerships requires an emphasis on equity. First Nations ways of working recognise the importance of balancing power dynamics and ensuring that all partners have an equal voice in decision-making.

By focusing on the unique strengths and capabilities of each partner, Indigenous Pathways fosters collaborative growth and mutual benefit. Understanding that building mutual understanding and trust takes time is key. Indigenous organisations new to international engagement may require an extended period of relationship-building before progressing to more active partnership phases. Rather than focusing solely on quantitative metrics like volunteer numbers, success should be measured in terms of the strength and mutual benefit of emerging partnerships.

Capacity strengthening is political

How capacity strengthening is defined and measured matters. Capacity strengthening can be seen as perpetuating colonial attitudes and assumptions of deficiencies in organisation, or as formalising processes, corporate structures and 'capacities' of organisations in ways that depoliticise more transformative agendas. We continue to learn how to navigate the politics of capacity strengthening. It requires an approach rooted in partnership, local empowerment, and adaptability to diverse contexts. It starts by listening to our partners and supporting their strengths, and we've learnt from them that we can go further in engaging with them strategically and collaboratively.

6. Management actions and forward priorities

Looking ahead, the Australian Volunteers Program will continue to deliver a high-quality program which leverages the program's unique offerings in ways that respond to, and offer value in, a complex global environment.

The program's annual plan for 2023-24 responds to the policy context and implementation environment. The policy context will be largely shaped by the Government's International Development Policy (released in August 2023) and the subsequent finalisation of the program's Global Program Strategy. This policy context presents opportunities for the program, given the strong alignment of the program with the Government's key commitments as articulated in the policy.

The implementation environment will be heavily influenced by the expected strong demand for volunteers, particularly in-country volunteers. This high demand for in-country volunteers, when combined with cost increases across the program's operations, will result in continued pressure on the program's available budget, requiring close management and monitoring throughout the year.

Key management actions and priorities to be taken forward in 2023-24 include:

Being a visible expression of the Government's commitment to build stronger partnerships founded on mutual trust and respect by supporting partner organisations to strengthen their capacity to deliver positive change.

In 2023-24, the program will continue to work with a diverse range of partner organisations, providing a range of support including (but not limited to) deploying volunteers to strengthen their capacity to better progress their own objectives. During the year, we anticipate supporting up to 488 volunteer assignments, with 58% of these focused on the Pacific region, Timor-Leste and Indonesia.

Demonstrating the value of volunteering and volunteerism, by sharing learning, innovations, evidence of impact and stories.

Our public diplomacy and communications activities will focus on engaging key stakeholders in the value of volunteering and supporting the program's commitment to GEDSI. A key priority for the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team will be on progressing the program's strategic evaluation agenda which includes three major multi-year evaluations aligned to the program's three end of program outcomes. Learnings from Indigenous Pathways and the program's Innovation Hub will also be shared with national and international stakeholders.



Solomon Islands Strength and Conditioning Coaches Mary Teasanau (L) and Joachim Rande (Centre) with Australian volunteer Strength and Conditioning Coach Jack Doyle (R), at the Solomon Islands National Institute of Sport, Honiara.

Continuing to enable Indigenous Pathways to expand its impact, and strengthening efforts to improve gender equality and disability inclusion with a more intentional focus at the global and country level across the program.

The program highly values First Nations perspectives and knowledge and seeks to increase Indigenous participation in international volunteering. In 2023-24, Indigenous Pathways will continue to lead and advocate for thoughtful and intentional programming, that centres First Nations ways of working.

The program is committed to gender equality, and disability and social inclusion, and works to increase the diversity of volunteers and organisations we partner with. In 2023-24 and throughout this second term (2022-2027), the program will intentionally increase its efforts in gender equality and disability equity and rights, across the suite of program offerings, including the proportion of partners working in these areas.

Refining remote and hybrid volunteering modalities to strongly complement in-country volunteering, providing partner organisations and a diverse range of Australians with meaningful and flexible ways to share skills and knowledge and build strong connections across cultures.

In 2023-24, the program will offer three volunteering modalities (in-country, remote and hybrid) to our partner organisations. Over the course of the year, we will refine and improve our remote and hybrid modalities, including through work by the program's Innovation Hub. During 2023-24, the program aims to support the return of in-country and hybrid volunteers in all program countries for the first time since before the pandemic commenced.

Case Study

GreenViet Biodiversity Conservation Center, Vietnam



Left: Australian volunteer Tony Le Nguyen, Environmental Program Development Mentor at the GreenViet Biodiversity Conservation Center, speaks with visitors at the Center.

Top right: Tony at lunch with his GreenViet colleagues.

Bottom right: Tony (L) meeting with colleague Vo Ho Que Anh (R).

GreenViet Biodiversity Conservation Center is a non-governmental organisation founded in 2012 to conserve ecosystems and endangered species of flora and fauna in the Central and Central Highlands regions of Vietnam. GreenViet's focus areas include research and consultancy, communication and education, and policy advocacy.

GreenViet is currently providing an environmental education program to 30,000 local students to promote the conservation of the rare brown-shanked douc monkey in the Son Tra peninsula of Da Nang city. A joint program between GreenViet and Da Nang University is providing a new way to educate children and young people about protecting the environment and local endangered species.

Vietnamese Australian volunteer Tony Le Nguyen supported GreenViet through an in-country assignment working as an Environmental Program Development Mentor.

Tony helped develop innovative approaches to incorporating arts and creativity into GreenViet's educational program, providing students from the Arts Faculty at Da Nang University with an engaging, educational experience.

Tony also contributed to improving GreenViet staff's communication and networking skills. As a native Vietnamese speaker, he provided valuable feedback and guidance, helping the organisation to develop effective communication strategies and materials to engage supporters and key stakeholders. He also assisted GreenViet in successfully securing a grant that funded essential conservation tools.

According to GreenViet, Tony's deep understanding of Vietnamese culture and bilingual skills helped enable effective collaboration and implementation of new ideas, helping to further strengthen the collective efforts of the team. With Tony's support, Green Viet have strengthened their organisational capacity and feel better positioned to achieve their development goals.

7. Progress towards outcomes

This section of the report details progress towards the program's end of program outcomes and related intermediate outcomes over the last year.

The program's end of program outcomes are:

- Partner organisations are supported to progress their development objectives
- Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering
- Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries

A fourth section reports on the systems and activities that support the program overall.

Now in its sixth year, evidence of program progress often speaks to the higher end outcomes of the program logic and achievement of end of program outcomes. However, as the program logic was refreshed in the previous financial year, it is also relevant to report on intermediate outcomes.

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

- Research and evaluation activities exploring specific elements of the program in depth
- Monitoring data and feedback provided by volunteers and partner organisations on assignment
- The program's management information system

With a greater number of assignment modalities (in-country, remote, and hybrid assignments) now offered by the program, the complexity of data increases. Disaggregating all assignment data by modality (as well as other key variables) would provide a large amount of information that, while useful for internal analysis, would be overwhelming in an annual report.

For the program (and in this report) an assignment is the key unit of analysis, irrespective of modality. Where it is relevant, data is given for in-country and remote assignments separately, though not for hybrid assignments as too few have been completed during the reporting period to use for analysis.

7.1 Supporting the development outcomes of our partner organisations

During the year, demand from partners for volunteers has increased, as the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic recede and countries and communities globally face cost of living, climate and many other interrelated challenges. While the program has been stretched in meeting demand, it has also continued to adapt and find new ways of supporting partners. The program has also continued to examine how we support our partners, and the relationships and ethos that underpin our partnership approach.

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

The Australian Volunteers Program is proud to work with partners across an extremely wide range of development sectors, and to support them to achieve equitable development outcomes.

Previous evaluations focussed on different thematic areas have each highlighted how partners working in different fields have progressed their development objectives. During the year, the program continued this approach, with a thematic analysis of how the program is supporting partner organisations working on disability inclusion.

This research was based on in-depth case studies with 19 partner organisations in 15 countries.¹ It found that partner organisations are progressing their development objectives in disability inclusion and have strengthened their capacity in multiple areas. Through their strengthened capacity, partner organisations are transforming the lives of people living with disability at community, national, and policy levels.

Key areas where partner organisations reported progress toward outcomes include:

- Promoting inclusive, barrier-free environments for people living with disability through increased advocacy, and accessible programs and services
- Improved health and wellbeing for people with significant disabilities
- Improved education outcomes for children with disabilities

- Improved economic outcomes for people with disabilities
- Improved care and protection of children with disabilities
- Increased capacity and visibility of Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) in advocating the leadership and decision-making roles of people living with disability

The research found that partner organisations are advancing the rights of people living with disability by addressing their practical needs through increasing access to quality services, advocating for their right to influence more inclusive policies and systems, and changing community attitudes that discriminate against people living with disability.

"How does [disability inclusion] happen? It has to be a partnership approach. As with many NGOs around the world, in particular those working on disability, we are under-resourced. The benefit of an added resource – you can't put a price to it and especially when it is has been a quality resource (like the volunteer was). By providing a resource you allow an organisation to grow and to learn."

~ Partner organisation, South Africa

The Australian Volunteers Program was seen to have contributed in a significant way to partner organisations progressing their development objectives. The majority (89%) of partner organisations reported that the support provided by Australian volunteers has enabled them to progress disability inclusion in their programs.

1. The study was conducted by researchers in Fiji, including a team member with lived experience of disability. *Australian volunteers' contribution to achieving disability inclusion in partners' programs*, July 2022, CoLAB Consulting and Pacific Disability Forum

From the perspective of partner organisations, the program has contributed in two main ways: through skilled, culturally-aware Australian volunteers, and through other program components including small grants, the program's partnership approach and flexible assignment support. In all the case studies, partner organisations highlighted the contribution of the volunteer's interpersonal skills, attitude and approach. These personal qualities are a critical factor to enable positive change and are highly valued by partner organisations.

"The Australian Volunteers Program is filling a huge gap for OPDs [Organisations of People with Disabilities] who are usually under resourced to recruit many qualified staff. This is crucial support as many of the OPDs of and for persons with disabilities need capacity building and capacity development in order to better serve their members. For example, Samoa does not have specialists who can diagnose the impairment or impairment level of individuals, and this is an area that [volunteers] have supported us with."

~Partner organisation, Samoa

The way in which the program supports its partners is in many ways as important as the result of that support. Over the last year, the program has continued to diversify and increase the flexibility of the support it provides and has also been reflecting on the nature of its partnership approach and the power dynamics involved.² Research commissioned on how the program supports locally led change is described in more detail in the Focus Area 1: Partnerships.

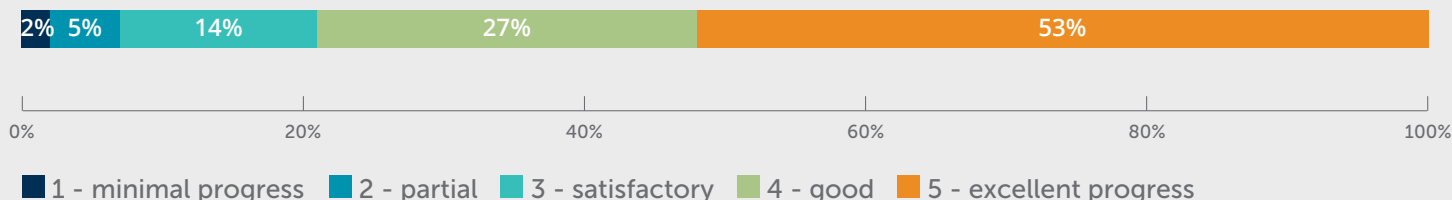
A separate study commissioned by the program during the year looked at the added value of the program's Impact Fund to partner organisations³. It found that the small grants program was enabling partner organisations to expand their existing work and enhance organisational or program effectiveness. Grants were commonly used by partner organisations to develop new programs and or projects, and to enhance their program delivery. Further information on the Impact Fund is provided on page 24.

Recommendations from these research reports on how the program can strengthen the support to partner organisations are reflected earlier in this report; see section 5 on lessons learned and section 6 on management actions and forward priorities.

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

249 partner organisations were supported with volunteer assignments during the year, a slight reduction on the 265 partners supported in the previous year. Of this year's partners, 39% hosted more than one assignment. Based on feedback received from partners on completed assignments, 80% of partners report that assignments made good or excellent progress against their planned objectives (from 176 evaluation forms completed by partner organisations). That proportion compares to 82% in the previous year, and was slightly higher for in-country assignments (83%) than for remote assignments (77%).

Partner organisation assessment of progress against assignment objectives (n176)



2. Partnerships, power and supporting locally led change, December 2022, CoLAB Consulting

3. Impact Fund Evaluation Report, March 2023, Synergistiq

There is a wide range of assignment objectives that have been accomplished, spanning a variety of different development sectors. Regardless of sector, all assignments are required to have a common objective to include all people directly affected by the volunteer assignment in the partner organisations and community using strategies that promote gender equality, disability and social inclusion. 84% of partner organisations rated progress against this common GEDSI objective as good or excellent, a higher proportion than for assignment-specific objectives.

Volunteers can be strong advocates for gender equality, disability and social inclusion and the program aims to support this. What these GEDSI-focused assignment objectives look like and how volunteers approach them varies considerably, as the two quotes from partner organisations, both with volunteers working in the health sector in Vanuatu, illustrate:

"[The volunteer] was active in improving ProMedical's participation in LGBTQI+ training and has been working in improving ProMedical Staff's understanding and reducing bias with this community group."

~ProMedical, Vanuatu

"One of the volunteer's biggest strengths was to build up women and get them involved in sports. Women who had never been to the gym, were going to the gym. She went beyond her assignment objectives to support the Sports Office/Department wherever possible to organise women's sports events."

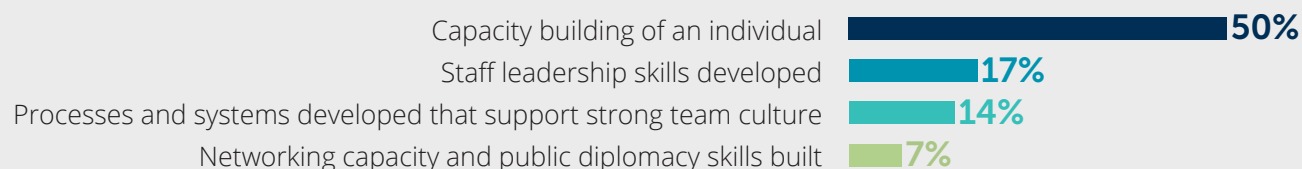
~Wan Smolbag Theatre, Vanuatu

In assignment evaluations, most partner organisations' feedback centred around how objectives had been achieved through collaborative working; commenting on how the volunteer had developed the skills of the partner organisation's staff; and the positive working relationship between staff and the volunteer.

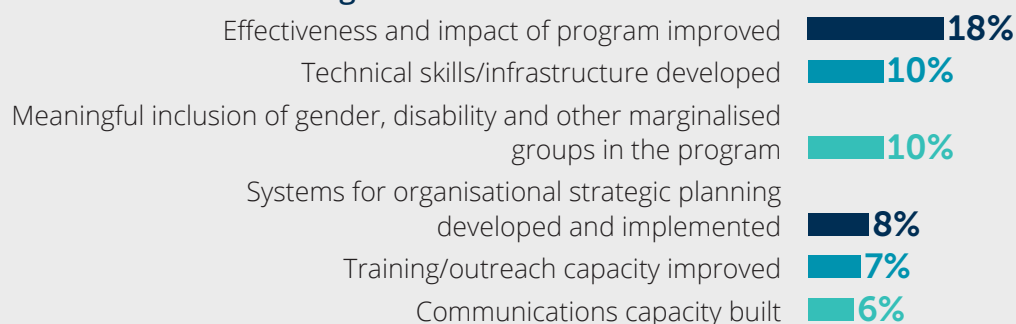
Where objectives were not met, it was due to delays or insufficient time to complete objectives; or external factors outside anyone's control from political instability to delays in national budgets being passed; or specific issues with a volunteer such as an assignment ending early. Some partners reported challenges with internet connectivity or the nature of remote working that also lessened the effectiveness of some assignments.

Volunteers reported on specific outcomes that they feel their assignment achieved across the three broad areas:

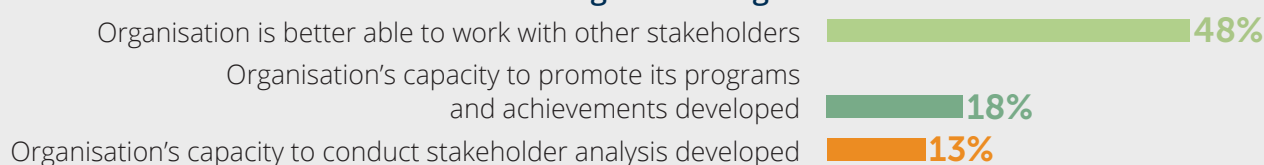
Individuals



The organisation and its stakeholders



Networking and Linkages



A long-term research project started during the year aims to explore partner organisations' different understandings and experiences of organisational capacity strengthening initiatives. Findings from the preliminary stages of the research examined different definitions and aspects of 'capacity'.⁴

It noted that most commonly, academics, and some organisations including the Australian Volunteers Program, categorise capacity at three different levels: capacity at the individual level; capacity at the organisational level; and capacity at the systemic level. Volunteers are asked to report at which of these scales they think they have supported their partner organisation's capacity.

Most volunteers reported supporting capacity at more than one level. Strengthened capacity was most frequently reported at the individual level (88%), followed by the organisational level (82%) and the systemic level (62%). Specific outcomes within these three levels are shown in the graph on page 22.

The following quotes illustrate from partner organisations' perspectives what capacity strengthening looks like and achieves at these three different levels.

Strengthening skills of individuals

"The volunteer provided relevant technical support related to best climate-resilient mainstreaming approaches through mentoring and coaching role to the three provincial coordinators. The provincial coordinator's technical capacity in climate-resilient mainstreaming was greatly enhanced and improved through the coaching and mentoring processes."

~Global Green Growth Initiative, Papua New Guinea

"[The volunteer] has acted as a mentor to the CEO and CFO, providing leadership advice and guidance across areas - he has created a trusted space where we have been able to share challenges to change and systems management we are facing and jointly brainstormed on solutions. This was not anticipated and speaks to the meaningful relationship that he has fostered with the organization."

~The Graca Machel Trust, South Africa

Strengthening the organisation, its beneficiaries and stakeholders

"With the support and advice of the volunteer, we have been able to take initiatives to revise and improve the visual guideline of the organization. We have been able use new softwares and tools to strengthen the organization communication and branding activities. Our staff members have been able to improve their technical knowledge on above tools and web designing. We have been able to design and launched the marketing website of the Strengthening Rural Entrepreneurship project to market the environment friendly reed products."

~South Asia Partnership, Sri Lanka

"The volunteer arrived just before COVID-19 community transmission hit Vanuatu and had a major impact in preparing VCH for the eventual event. Her leadership in the COVID-19 management at VCH was crucial in our efforts to control the impact on the pandemic on Hospital staff and operations. She was able to reorganize the Emergency Department and introduce new structural changes that have improved patient flow through the department and improve efficiencies. She was exceptional in achieving this objective."

~Vila Central Hospital [VCH], Vanuatu

Strengthening systems and networks

"The volunteer acted as the bridge between EWB/CRDT and our Australian corporate partner who took the lead on the Koh Tnout Water Treatment Plant project. This has allowed both parties to have a deeper understanding of how each party operates and how to best communicate in order to get the most out of each other and hence a better overall outcome for the project."

~Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT), Cambodia

"Through [the volunteer's] tireless efforts with building rapport, we have built relationships with the PNG Cancer Foundation, engaging them in our Community Health Outreach Program to do presentations to educate our people regarding cancer. Her networking ability has allowed us to come into contact with other like-minded individuals and organizations that would help the Motu Koita people and MKA help improve our ways of life."

~Motu Koita Assembly (MKA), Papua New Guinea

Strengthening capacity at multiple levels can help ensure the sustainability of assignment outcomes. 74% of volunteers think it likely or very likely that the organisation they've worked with will be able to sustain the initiatives.

4. Researching partner organisation capacity strengthening: Emerging findings from Phase 1, February 2023, Institute for Sustainable Futures and UTS Business School

Partner organisations' satisfaction with the different elements of the program remain high. Of partners who provided feedback during the year, 88% were satisfied with their assignment, compared with 86% the previous year. 89% of partners were satisfied with the volunteer and 92% with the program's in-country management, down from a high of 97% the previous year.

In their qualitative feedback, partners most often mentioned good assignment progress and good relationships with the volunteer and program staff as reasons for high satisfaction ratings.

The positive attitude of the volunteer and the skills and experience they brought to the partner, and the support from the program, were also frequently commented on. Where partners provided more critical feedback it most often related to ineffective communication from the volunteer or the program, insufficient assignment duration or an assignment not progressing as planned.

All partners said they would welcome another volunteer in future, with over half already having something in the pipeline. 98% of partners would recommend the program to other similar organisations, with 2% not sure.

Impact Fund

On top of volunteer assignments, the Australian Volunteers Program provides additional support to partner organisations. The Impact Fund continued to be a valuable part of the program, offering grants of up to AUD \$10,000 to help strengthen the capacity of partner organisations and support the progress of their development objectives in the key priority areas of climate action and gender equality.

Two grant rounds were conducted in the reporting period. The first round, completed in December 2022, focused on climate action projects, with 23 grants awarded across nine countries to a total of AUD \$223,956. The second round, completed in June 2023, focused on gender equality projects, with 10 grants awarded across 10 countries to a total of AUD \$93,680.

In 2022-23, a total of 33 Impact Fund grants were awarded to partner organisations across 11 countries, with a total value of AUD \$317,636.

Partner organisation satisfaction (n169)

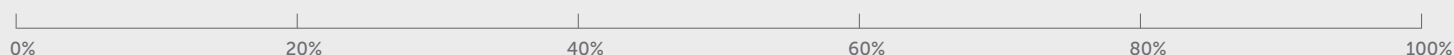
Overall satisfaction with assignment



Satisfaction with volunteer



Satisfaction with program's in-country management



1 - very dissatisfied 2 - dissatisfied 3 - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4 - satisfied 5 - very satisfied

During the year, external consultants were engaged to review two previous rounds of the Impact Fund to evaluate the outcomes achieved by grant recipients, and lessons learned by partner organisations through engagement with the grants program.⁵

The review found that Impact Fund grants:

- Were often used by partner organisations to expand their existing work, enhance organisational or program effectiveness, or develop new programs and or projects.
- Helped partner organisations enhance their program delivery, grant writing and reporting skills.
- Often focused on the capacity development of local communities.
- Were awarded through a process that was flexible, fast, straightforward, user-friendly, and not too onerous.

The review proposed various recommendations including facilitating targeted forums to enable shared learning around grants and increasing accessibility through alternative language options for recipients. These will be actioned to improve the grants program to enhance outcomes and improve accessibility for partner organisations.

94 Impact Fund grant projects were completed and acquitted during 2022-23, with many recipients reporting very positive project outcomes.

For example, with the support of Impact Fund grants:

- Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan published two issues of Jurnal Perempuan (Women’s Journal), including Indonesian Feminist Knowledge: Reflection, Action, and Praxis, and Feminism and Climate Justice. These editions supported gender equality through the publication of scientific writings on feminist knowledge, queer struggles, women with disability, and environmental and climate issues. Published for free in Bahasa Indonesian and English, the journal is accessible to civil society, academics, government, and the public, and helps promote the feminist discourse.

- Kick4Life conducted the Girls United project, through which they engaged three hundred girls and young women across a 12-session curriculum in Maseru, Lesotho. The sessions covered sexual and reproductive health education, and life-skills development. All three hundred participants demonstrated improved knowledge and skills. Mixed-gender soccer tournaments were hosted as part of the project, and all three hundred boys and young men who participated demonstrated reduced discrimination across at least one indicator. The clear value and effectiveness of soccer to deliver key messages around gender equality and respecting and empowering women and girls was evident.
- Wan Smolbag Theatre took their Rainbow Disability Theatre to the remote island of Epi, Vanuatu, to perform their shows around health and wellbeing. The shows were followed by practical and interactive workshops on achieving healthier lifestyles. The shows and workshops were very well received by communities on Epi and showed positive outcomes towards gender equality and breaking down barriers and perceptions of people living with a disability.

Small grants awarded by country, 2022-23

Cambodia	4
Fiji	1
Indonesia	5
Mongolia	5
Nepal	3
Palau	1
Solomon Islands	1
Sri Lanka	2
Tanzania	5
Timor-Leste	4
Vietnam	2
Total	33

5. *Impact Fund Evaluation Report*, March 2023, Synergistiq

Intermediate outcome: Partner organisations have a strategic rationale for participation in the program, provide a safe and productive working environment, and contribute to quality assignments

The alignment of the program to partners' own priorities speaks directly to their strategic rationale for participating in the program. Disability inclusion research showed that support provided by the program 'has enabled change that is directly relevant to the partner organisations' strategic goals and objectives.'⁶ Noting the challenging operating context faced by Organisations of People with Disabilities, with very limited funding and ongoing discrimination, the research found that 'the ongoing support and partnership with the Australian Volunteers Program is highly valued by partner organisations.'⁷

A large majority of volunteers, 88%, report that their assignment was a good fit for their partner organisation's priorities. 81% of volunteers reported that their partner contributed to an effective assignment. This proportion was higher for remote assignments than in-country assignments – 86% compared to 75%.

A smaller majority, 70%, reported that they believed their partner had adequate resources to benefit from a volunteer assignment, while 72% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that the level of supervision from their partner organisation was appropriate. In line with a common challenge, a lower proportion of 66% of volunteers reported that their assignment length and partner organisation's expectations were a good fit. Unavoidable delays and ambitious assignment objectives often combine to lead to a desire for longer assignments. This was similar for both remote and in-country assignments.

In-country volunteers are asked if their partner organisation provided a safe working environment but very few volunteers choose to answer the question so reliable data for this reporting period is unavailable. Of the 73 volunteers who had been in-country and answered the question, 94% were satisfied with the program's safety and security management (91% of female volunteers and 93% of male volunteers). Three per cent of remote volunteers reported not having the equipment they needed to work from home.

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

During the year, the program has partnered with 249 partner organisations. Of the 203 partner organisations that had a new assignment start during the year, 28% of them were newly established partnerships, with organisations not previously supported with a volunteer assignment.

Program research has explored the question of the nature of the partnership and how partner organisations are supported.⁸ Of the partner organisations surveyed and interviewed, a majority expressed high satisfaction with the level of engagement and support provided in their partnership with the program, describing it as a partnership that is built on trust, open communication, and that program support responds to their needs. 73% of partner organisations surveyed strongly agreed that their organisation decides the type of assignments and volunteers they need and 97% agreed (52% strongly agree and 45% agree) that the program effectively supports local partners through the partnership.

Of all partner organisations supported during the year, 41% were local or national NGOs and 20% were local or national government entities. The diversity of partner organisations is seen through their alignment to the to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (with partners coded to one or more of the 17 SDGs). Education (Goal 4, 14%) and health and well-being (Goal 3, 14%) are the two Goals with the greatest alignment, but partners work to achieve all 17 of the SDGs.

Partners are also coded to the three Impact Areas set out in the program's Global Program Strategy. Over half, or 57%, of partners supported align to the human rights impact area. 45% align to inclusive economic growth and 25% to climate change, disaster resilience and food security. The program also identifies three focus areas where we aim to provide more targeted support over the next five years, in gender, disability and climate. In this the baseline year for this strategy, 11% of partners had a significant or principal focus on gender equality, 10% on disability inclusion and 10% on climate action.

6. *Australian volunteers' contribution to achieving disability inclusion in partners' programs*, July 2022, CoLAB Consulting and Pacific Disability Forum, page 28

7. *Ibid*, page 29

8. *Partnerships, power and supporting locally led change*, December 2022, CoLAB Consulting

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.

Australian organisations

Over the year, 10% of all assignments (41 assignments) were supported by Australian organisations. There are currently 104 collaborative partners. Ten new partners have signed ROUs with the program over this reporting period covering science, special education, health including reconstructive surgery, women's rights, and climate action. There are currently seven strategic partners including Atlassian, Australian Humanitarian Partnership, Global Green Growth Institute, Crawford Fund, and strategic regional organisations Pacific Community (SPC) and Pacific Islands Forum.

The program's network of Australian partners continued to bring value and fresh ideas, helping the program to innovate in relation to assignment support via volunteer referrals, knowledge transfer and assignment promotion.

A range of Australian organisation engagement offerings have been developed to meet partner organisations' needs. For example, Town Planners Sri Lanka hosted a remote assignment through its partnership with the Planning Institute of Australia.

The assignment supported the development of a partnership plan which identified the priorities for supporting planning systems and local government in Sri Lanka. The partnership plan also maps a series of remote assignments to be undertaken in 2023-24.

The program provided active support to regional organisations by engaging in volunteer assignments, organising conferences, and fostering partnerships. This included supporting assignments with SPC and participating in the 7th Pacific Regional Conference on Disability, which was co-hosted by the Pacific Development Forum (PDF) and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) in partnership with SPC.



Left: **Indonesia** Emas Hitam Indonesia is a grass roots non-governmental organisation that promotes regenerative solutions to poverty and development. Pictured are Ketut Suciani (L), Finance Manager, and Kadek Suardika (R), Founder and Director, in the organisation's organic garden, Bali. Right: **Vietnam** Australian volunteer Anh Pham (L) volunteers at Vietnam National University of Agriculture as a Research and Network Development Mentor. In this photo Anh Pham (L) is undertaking fieldwork with her counterpart Dang Tran Thuc Hien (R) in Hanoi, Vietnam.

This event provided an opportunity to establish relationships with partner organisations and other key stakeholders, and join discussions coordinated by PDF on supporting Organisations of People with Disability and Special Schools in Fiji and other countries in the region.

Through the partnership with the Crawford Fund, work continued with the RAID Network (Researchers in Agriculture for International Development) and the Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA). Six Australian volunteers who will be going to Vietnam for the in-country phase of their hybrid assignments in July 2023.

Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Australia continues to be a steadfast collaborative partner with the program supporting remote and in-country volunteers in Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Samoa, and Vanuatu. EWB supported a total of 13 assignments over the last 12 months, five in-country and eight remote assignments.

The program's long-standing and vital partnership with Australasian Centre for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) identified suitable candidates for eight emergency medical in-country assignments, including emergency and critical care nurses and visiting emergency registrars in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.

Knowledge exchange

The program has continued to support partners through the Flexible Learning Exchange (FLEX), which provides opportunities for shared learning and knowledge exchange between partner organisations, program participants and staff. This is achieved by bringing people together in various formats: events, communities, networking forums, information and resource sharing spaces.

The Global Webinar Series brings together program participants, partner organisations, staff and stakeholders to share, learn and connect. Over the year, the program hosted 17 global webinar events with over 900 participants. Webinars topics included child safeguarding, disability inclusion, gender, partnerships, science and technology, indigenous cultures, sports for development, diversity of volunteers and environment conservation.

Global webinar attendees noted:

"The commitment and enthusiasm of all involved was inspirational!"

"Passion of the presenters – fantastic presentation."

"It was really informative and inspirational."

Communities of practice are an opportunity for partner organisations, past and present program participants and staff to connect in online communities around a thematic area of interest. This unique shared learning environment sees community members engage in discussion forums, share information, tools and resources and collaborate to strengthen capacity and explore best practice. There has been strong engagement in the Education and Learning and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning communities, and Grant Writing and Fundraising, Safeguarding and LGBTQI+ communities are being established.

An online portal is available for partner organisations to access information and resources, including program documents and forms, global webinar and grant information, and a resource library. Partners are encouraged to suggest what they would find useful in the portal.



Left: **Timor-Leste** Dr. Eleanor McMorran volunteered as a HIV Clinical Mentor at Maluk Timor. She is pictured with colleagues (from L – R) Dr. Odilia Maria Fernandes, Joantina H. dos Santos Soares (HIV counsellor), Dr. Bonifacio da Silva de Jesus, Madalena Filipe Goncalves (nurse) and Karolina Surya Embun (nurse).
Right: **Vanuatu** Nurse Lillian Gilla (L), Australian volunteer Jinsook Yoo (centre) and Theatre Nurse Lina Olul (R), at Port Vila Central Hospital in Vanuatu.

Supporting Australia's COVID-19 response

The Australian Volunteers Program has continued to align with and support the outcomes of the Australian Government's Partnerships for Recovery policy. The following two examples illustrate how the program has been supporting in priority areas.

Health systems and preparedness, Timor-Leste

Maluk Timor works to improve the health care system of Timor-Leste, through support to local doctors, nurses and health care workers working closely with Ministry of Health (MoH). The Australian Volunteers Program has continued its long-term support of Maluk Timor with three assignments in 2022-23. Positions supported women's health and social care, Maluk Timor's Tuberculosis program, and strengthened capacity of national staff in the Nursing training program.

The Nurse Mentor volunteer reported being involved in two key projects that aim to enhance the capacity of primary health care staff in Timor-Leste. The COVID-19 project provided triage training and equipment to community health centres in three municipalities. The second project contributed to the development of a framework and curriculum to upskill primary health care staff in Dili, Ermera and Oecusse. These projects have contributed to improving the quality of health care in Timor-Leste.

Infectious disease outbreak response, Vanuatu

The Australian Volunteers Program in Vanuatu is providing significant capacity strengthening support to the Vanuatu Ministry of Health, including in the area of infectious diseases prevention and control. In 2022-23, the program has supported three in-country volunteer assignments focused on infection prevention and control, including an Infection Prevention and Control Nurse, COVID-19 Health Information Systems Support Officer and a Hepatitis B Program Support Officer.

With volunteer support, the Ministry developed Infection Prevention Control Boards (IPC Boards) for the different wards of Vila Central Hospital. The boards provided up to date information to all hospital staff, and contributed to improving hand hygiene in the wards and an improved audit rating for the hospital.

The Ministry has progressed its work in developing and implementing a health information system (HIS) which will provide accurate and regular data on vaccination progress across Vanuatu. While originally developed for COVID-19, it is intended that the HIS capture vaccination events other than COVID-19, such as HPV and Hepatitis-B.

The Ministry is also progressing its implementation of the Vanuatu National Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis, and documenting progress made on the Global Sector Strategy for Viral Hepatitis.

Focus Area 1: Growing strong partnerships

Establishing long-term, respectful and equitable partnerships between individuals, communities and organisations is fundamental to our approach. We value the role volunteers and partner organisations play in fostering people-to-people connections and building diverse and inclusive partnerships. The program is committed to facilitating partnerships that support locally determined priorities and strengthen relationships across our region and globally.

The **comprehensive and vibrant network of partners** across the program is a great asset, with hundreds of in-country partners driving our work and over 100 Australian partners supporting and adding value to the program. The program has different types of partners from government agencies through to community-based organisations and they come from a broad range of sectors. Some have been recently onboarded and others are long-term partnerships. In this reporting period, the program has worked to better understand the nature of the partnerships within its network and how these partnerships can continue to evolve.

Locally led change is the principle upon which the program is based. Partner-led approaches across all sectors and thematic areas determine how the program provides support through partner-initiated volunteer assignments. The program recognises that solutions to development challenges come from within communities and organisations we support, and that partners lead all aspects of the change process.

The program is influenced by the **decolonisation movement** for change which aims to challenge and dismantle colonial legacies that underpin international development systems. This movement shapes our evolving approach to supporting partners in a more power-balanced way and advocating for locally led change.

Shifting the power dynamics in international development so that people within their own context lead and own the change is central to sustainable development. These principles are integrated into our volunteering approach, where partners are empowered to lead and volunteers support partner objectives, through the exchange of knowledge, skills and sharing of culture.

The program is seeking to **better balance power** within the team and across our dispersed locations, learning through a series of consultations and activities focused on localising power and improving practice. This has included an all-staff survey, focus group discussions and a workshop session at the program's global workshop. This work was supported by a Fijian partnership expert who works across DFAT and other donor-funded programs to support power balanced partnerships that enable locally led change.

The **Partnerships, power and supporting locally led change research** was conducted to help us understand how partners perceive the program's partnership approach, to better understand the power dynamics involved, and to consider how the program can best ensure equitable partnerships that support locally-led change. A total of 79 partner organisations from Fiji and Timor-Leste participated in the research. The majority expressed high satisfaction with the level of engagement and support provided through their partnership with the program, describing it as a partnership built on trust, open communication, and that program support responds to their needs.



Indonesia Staff from Indorelawan, a partner organisation working with the Australian Volunteers Program on the National Volunteering Accelerator research project.

The research found that partner organisations view their partnership with the program as centred around volunteer support, and a few spoke about working with the program in a planned and strategic way. Instead, a partner's strongest influence within the partnership is the ability to influence volunteer support; from assignment design, to recruitment, and subsequent volunteer management in their organisation.

In response to research recommendations, the program is developing more strategic approaches to partnership. This includes mechanisms that encourage open feedback from partner organisations and partner organisations' input into decision-making in how the program operates. The program will continue to involve partner organisations in volunteer selection to promote shared power and decision making. Aligned with recommendations, the program will continue to familiarise volunteers about issues of power, race and privilege and document and share learnings that promote locally led development.

In collaboration with the **Partnership Broker Association (PBA)**, the program sought to better understand how to strengthen collaborative practices within the program. PBA interviewed 17 stakeholders including program staff, partners, returned volunteers and DFAT, and facilitated nine focus groups. They identified a resonance across the program on the conceptual understanding of partnership, its principles, its support for locally led development and the recognition that good partnering takes time. We heard that people to people connections and face to face engagement helps solidify partnerships, as well as open, honest and clear communication from the beginning.

One of the significant issues can be a mismatch of expectations between partners, the program and volunteers. Strong local knowledge and robust interpersonal relationships at a country level enhanced the program's capacity to develop and maintain relationships. The program has continued efforts to understand and support the needs and objectives of our partners. This has included new opportunities to support partners through small grants, knowledge exchange, innovation projects, remote volunteering and national volunteering.

Overall, the recommendation to strengthen spaces for dialogue, mutual understanding, equity and co-creation of approaches to partnering aligns with other findings across the program during the year. In response to the findings, the program plans to **enhance partnerships skills in the coming year through the establishment of a learning forum** where staff can share their experiences and lessons learned in their partnership work with the aim to further strengthen the program's partnership engagement across all partners and countries. Key learning areas will include topics such as effective partnering, characteristics of good partnering and how to have robust and honest conversations with partners.

The program continues to build its network of Australian organisations that are active and vibrant contributors to the program. **Australian organisations** are onboarded to support the program in a range of ways, including but not limited to promoting hard to fill assignments; creating a pipeline of referred candidates; mentoring volunteers; and sharing research and knowledge with partner organisations.

The program continues to deepen and evolve its understanding and collaboration with its network of partners. Increasing the depth of partnerships through mutual understanding supports the ongoing aim of more equitable, robust, and sustainable partnerships that deliver outcomes for all stakeholders.

Case Study

Vanuatu Paralympic Committee



Left Frenda Juvinmal (centre) at a Vanuatu Paralympic Committee (VPC) event in Luganville, with Australian volunteer Asha Boehula (L) and VPC trainer Stanley Toa (R).

Top right (L – R) VPC staff Stanley Toa and Peter Dick with Australian volunteers Asha Boehula and Margaret Johnson.

Bottom right Australian volunteers Margaret Johnson and Asha Boehula at a VPC event.

The Vanuatu Paralympic Committee (VPC) is a non-profit organisation focused on providing opportunities for people living with disability to participate in sport. The organisation aims to promote healthier lifestyles, build friendships and peer relationships, and raise community perceptions about the abilities of people with disabilities. VPC has established programs in four different locations across Vanuatu with a focus on athletics, volleyball and table tennis, and runs integrated programs for both para and non-disabled athletes and coaches, drawing on principles of integration and inclusion.

VPC works to strengthen the capacity of partner sports organisations to include people with disabilities, with a focus on championing women and girls. In their role as 'Change Champions', VPC also work to raise awareness on inclusion issues, domestic violence, the fight against non-communicable diseases, and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, VPC also successfully prepared para-athletes for the pre-Commonwealth Games, which took place in the UK in April 2022.

The Australian Volunteers Program has supported VPC to advance its development objectives through three volunteer assignments to date, including the Provincial Outreach and Advocacy - Inclusive Sports Strategies assignment, supported by Australian volunteer Asha Boehula.

Asha's in-country assignment helped VPC make progress in enhancing staff's capacity in inclusive sports programs, with a specific focus on table tennis, seated volleyball, wheelchair tennis, rowing, swimming, hockey and athletics. Asha also supported VPC staff with improving their ability to establish productive relationships with key stakeholders.

7.2 Promoting the value of volunteering

Increasing understanding of the contribution that global volunteering makes to locally led change is core to public diplomacy and communications activities. This was the first year of the program's refreshed program logic, which includes the updated end of program outcome: *Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering.*

The program delivered a range of activities that contribute to increasing the appreciation of volunteering among its key stakeholders. These stakeholders include partners overseas and in Australia; current, potential and past volunteers; DFAT (Australia and overseas); participants of other DFAT people-to-people programs; Australian MPs and Senators; the development sector; and other international volunteering agencies.

During this period, the program delivered a successful International Volunteer Day campaign, including an event at Australian Parliament House, and an online International Women's Day campaign. The contribution of global volunteering was also shared through conference participation, events, increased social media, and targeted newsletters. Volunteers and partners were supported to share their stories through rich storytelling, videos and animation.

Many of these activities also contributed to the program's recruitment marketing objectives, including advertising the new hybrid volunteering modality and continuing to promote in-country and remote volunteering to existing and new audiences.

End of program outcome: Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering

The program continues to strengthen its approach to increasing the appreciation of the value of volunteering amongst key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries. Progress towards this end of program outcome will be measured through a range of indicators, as outlined in the updated MEL Framework, and new qualitative research.

Researching the value of volunteering commenced in this period. The research will be phased over several years with in-depth qualitative research in a small sample of countries the program operates in, including Australia.

The inception phase has been completed with the researchers working with a co-design team to plan the first country study in Vanuatu, which will be undertaken in 2023-24. The co-design team agreed the research approach, identified the interviewee groups, and developed the questions that will be addressed in the study.

Intermediate outcome: The benefit of volunteering is recognised and promoted by partner organisations, Australian organisations, volunteers and DFAT

The program worked with partners, volunteers and DFAT to share stories that demonstrate the value of volunteering, including forming strong mutually respectful relationships, exchanging knowledge and supporting partners to achieve their development goals.

International Volunteer Day

The program delivered another successful International Volunteer Day (IVD) campaign in 2022. The highlight of the campaign was an event at Australian Parliament House, on Monday, 28 November. More than 90 guests, representing the Australian Government, partner governments, partners organisations, DFAT, other people-to-people programs, volunteers and staff attended the event.

Senator The Hon. Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs, spoke at the event and acknowledged the program's enduring contribution to sustainable development. The First Assistant Secretary, DFAT, the Australian Volunteers Program Director and Australian volunteer Dr Eleanor MacMorran also spoke at the event.



Left: **Australia** Senator The Hon. Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs (L) with Australian Volunteer Dr. Eleanor MacMorran (R), at the program's IVD event at Australian Parliament House.
Right: **Australia** Senator The Hon. Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs, speaking at the program's IVD event.

Dr Eleanor MacMorran is an infectious disease physician who has supported Maluk Timor's HIV programming as a HIV Clinical Mentor. She shared her volunteer experience working with the team at Maluk Timor to end HIV stigma in Timor-Leste and upskill the next generation of HIV medical professionals. In their time together, Eleanor and her colleagues at Maluk Timor have successfully created and run a dedicated HIV centre, where they provide stigma free health care and instruct local medical staff in caring for HIV positive patients.

"In the HIV program, we've gone from this group who knew nothing about HIV two years ago. Now they are independently caring for a complicated group of patients in a setting that really needs that service," said Eleanor about her colleagues.

Eleanor also shared why she values volunteering: *"Volunteering isn't only about sharing skills, it's about sharing solidarity."*

IVD events and activities were also delivered in 20 countries. For many countries, it was the first time they celebrated with volunteers in-country. The events were a mix of face-to-face and virtual events, with some events delivered in collaboration with DFAT Posts or other volunteer sending agencies while others engaged specifically with partner organisations and volunteers.

In Nepal, celebrating IVD was combined with a child protection workshop attended by representatives from local government, disabled people's organisations, universities, youth and community organisations, and DFAT.

In Fiji, the program collaborated with other international volunteer agencies. This included an event opened by the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Mr Rovereto Nayacalevu, who reiterated the importance of volunteering and thanked all agencies for their support which has positively impacted Fiji's development.

Alumni Representatives delivered six IVD events, attended by approximately 90 past volunteers, in Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

The program's theme for IVD 2022 was 'Find your purpose' through volunteering. Thinking beyond ourselves is the heart of volunteering. The opportunity to volunteer is a gift to empower people to step into their purpose and discover a rich meaning to their lives, and to work in solidarity together. This theme was explored in the program's IVD video, which was viewed more than 10,000 times on the program's social media channels. The video will continue to be used to attract potential volunteers to the program. The program provided IVD social media content to DFAT Posts, with 15 Posts sharing content relating to IVD.



Australia SVTC's President, Adi Salaseini Kavu, presenting at the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Brisbane.

Conferences

The program supported partner organisations to attend two international conferences in this reporting period. The partners exchanged knowledge and expanded their networks with international audiences.

Fijian partner organisation, Soqosoqo Vakamarama i Taukei Cakaudrove (SVTC), was supported to attend the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR) in Brisbane, in September 2022. SVTC is an Indigenous women's association in the northern Fijian province of Cakaudrove. Based on needs identified by its membership base, SVTC's key focus areas are economic empowerment and revival of traditional knowledge and culture.

SVTC's President, Adi Salaseini Kavu, and Vice-President, Adi Sereana Kunea Lalabalavu, presented on a project that is helping indigenous women and their families and communities become more resilient to the devastating impacts of climate change by strengthening local knowledge and tradition. They also shared a video that included the perspectives and experiences of community members who participated in the training.

The project was supported by an Impact Grant, and SVTC explained that the small grants program provided a new way for SVTC and the program to work together, in addition to volunteer assignments. SVTC's President and Vice President also met with DFAT and connected with Fijian diaspora while in Australia.

The International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCO) conference brought together the global volunteering for development sector in Senegal in October 2022.

The theme was A New Dawn for Volunteering in Development, with discussions focused on work to strengthen the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) following the pandemic and strategies for navigating an uncertain and changing environment.

The program co-presented at the conference with South African partner organisation Refugee Social Service (RSS). RSS's Director and the program's Southern Africa Program Manager joined the panel: *Volunteering by and for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers* to discuss how volunteering supports refugees and asylum-seekers and the importance of refugee- and migrant-led organisations. Participants widely acknowledged the value of partnering with refugee- and migrant-led organisations in the volunteering sector, and concluded there is a need to focus on the agency of refugees and acknowledge them as leaders of volunteer activities rather than beneficiaries.

DFAT's Director, Humanitarian and Development Deployments Section, also presented on the panel *Engaging the public for volunteering in development*, explaining that the Australian Volunteers Program's public engagement has become more targeted and intentional, as demonstrated by approaches taken under the Indigenous Pathways initiative.

In this reporting period, there has been a strong focus on supporting volunteers to participate in conferences, which is an opportunity for them to advocate for the program and for the positive impact of international volunteering as well supporting their professional development. Thirty-five volunteers were supported to participate in conferences, including the Australasian AID Conference, the Crawford Fund Conference, the National Volunteering Conference and the Innovation in Disability Employment conference.

During the reporting period, there were more than 45 media articles relating to the program, with 60% of the media hits in international media. Sixteen volunteers shared their volunteer experience and partner's achievements in the media or through sector communications.

For example, a volunteer with St John Ambulance Papua New Guinea shared her volunteer journey with the St John Ambulance International network. Media covered a parliamentary delegation visit to Fiji, including a visit to program partner SVTC, resulting in an article syndicated in more than 100 metropolitan and regional newspapers in Australia.

Intermediate outcome: Innovation, learning and program achievements are promoted and shared

The program engaged with audiences through a range of in person and online activities to share knowledge and program achievements.

In addition to the international conferences referenced above, the program participated in five conferences in Australia to engage with sectors including international development, volunteering, disability, education and speech pathology.

The program's Indigenous Programs Manager joined a panel of Indigenous development practitioners to share knowledge, experience, insights and practical examples of their work at the Australasian AID Conference in Canberra. Findings from the program's Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers were also presented at the conference by the lead researcher. The program sponsored the conference, which included an exhibitor presence to engage with delegates and potential partners.

In August, the program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager presented at the Australian Evaluation Conference on how evaluation informs program decision making. Participating in sector conferences, including the Australian Council for Educational Leaders, Speech Pathology Australia and the Disability Connections Expo, provides the program opportunities to raise awareness among the sector and connect with potential partners.

The program delivered two hybrid Connections events, which aimed to bring a wide range of stakeholders together to share, learn and connect. Connections events were held in Adelaide (July 2022) and Hobart (October 2022). Audiences heard from keynote speakers and had the chance to network – either in-person and online. Attendance at the Connections events was lower than anticipated and the format and approach has been reviewed. Future stakeholder events will be more targeted to specific stakeholder groups.

The program's Alumni collaborated with the Australia Awards Cambodia team to deliver a successful networking event for Cambodian Australia Awards Scholars and past Australian volunteers. The Alumni will continue to collaborate with Australia Awards in 2022-23 to connect participants of DFAT's people-to-people programs and strengthen cross-cultural connections,

The program has continued to focus on working with partners to share their stories. For example, we published stories about partners working to enhance inclusive education in Bhutan, conserve coral reefs in Fiji and empower indigenous women and youth in Nepal to tackle climate change. These stories are the most viewed stories on the program website.

Following the success of sharing partner stories through animation series in 2021-22, the program continued to tell complex stories through animation. As part of the 16 Days of Activism, the program shared Ibu Meri's story. Ibu Meri is the director of Nurani Perempuan, a women's crisis centre in Padan, West Sumatra, Indonesia.

In this reporting period, the program refreshed its approach to social media, including an increased focus on engagement and showcasing our partners' achievements through rich storytelling. Sharing the volunteers' journey from pre-departure, on assignment through to reflecting on their experience also generated increased engagement across social media.

Overall reach on Facebook and Instagram⁹ almost doubled and total engagement remained strong. The program continued to receive the largest share of voice compared to similar programs and organisations¹⁰. Use of the program's social media handle and hashtag, ausvols, grew by 26%.

9. Facebook reach in July – December 2022 was 340,000, increasing to 577,000 in January – June 2023. Instagram reach in July – December 2022 was 15,000, increasing to 34,000 in January – June 2023.

10. The Australian Volunteers Program achieves 44% of share of voice when compared with Volunteer Service Abroad, New Colombo Plan, Australia Awards and AVI.

The audience on all program social media channels increased during the period. Of note was a 23% increase in Instagram followers and 28% increase in LinkedIn followers.

The program delivered a 10-day digital campaign to acknowledge International Women's Day (IWD). The campaign across all social platforms included partner and volunteer stories, data on inequality and action people could take to support gender equality.

Partners, volunteers and staff also shared what IWD means to them and women who inspire them. The campaign achieved over 27,000 impressions organically, with total engagement over 1,000.

The website was enhanced with a site-wide search function and updated menu which enable visitors to find relevant information and opportunities more efficiently. The Indigenous Pathways, Inclusion and Impact Grant sections of the website were expanded. With the transition of the Child Safe Volunteering (CSV) Hub into the program, content previously housed on the separate CSV Hub website was added to the website's child protection section. Significant work was undertaken to ensure the website remains a stable and robust platform, including migrating to Google Analytics 4 and preparing to re-platform the website in the next reporting period.

Intermediate outcome: Innovative approaches to, and alternative models of volunteering are designed and tested to expand the program's reach and adaptive capability.

The Innovation Hub has continued to explore alternative models and ways to increase localisation, through community-level and national volunteering, and country-based volunteering for development projects. The Hub's work is underpinned by efforts to strengthen innovation capability both within the program and the partner organisations engaged in innovation activities.

During the year, a draft five-year innovation strategy was developed and will be finalised following the release of Australia's International Development Policy. An Innovation Capability Framework to set out the desirable mindsets, skillsets and process know-how for different program teams was also developed.

The strategy and framework will be used to inform future design, planning and delivery of activities in ways that further strengthen the program's adaptive capabilities.

The program is committed to evaluating and sharing learnings from the Innovation Hub's activities. During the year, the innovation microsite was updated to reflect the full portfolio of innovation projects, innovation activities were shared on the program's social media channels, and MEL reporting templates were revised to ensure data recording is consistent. MEL guidance is being developed to support the capture and analysis of data across innovation activities, and provide a tool for measuring the Innovation Hub's impact overall.

Workstreams

Growing Volunteering at the Community Level

continued to explore potential ways the program could support partners in managing locally engaged volunteers in their communities. This work sought to understand partner views on existing volunteer management resources available from other organisations and their preferences and priorities for support. A Volunteer Management Toolkit prototype and workshop series was designed that responded to partners' needs. The toolkit will be tested with partners in 2023-24.

The **Global Volunteering Accelerator** workstream seeks to understand what conditions are needed to accelerate national volunteering and how the program could partner with governments and peak bodies to strengthen national volunteering initiatives. Projects have explored what the volunteering landscape looks like and different possible ways to engage. Lack of volunteering data and information has emerged as a common barrier for accelerating volunteering, so supporting data collection has been an important step in this work.

The **Volunteering for Development** workstream completed experiments for alternative models of volunteering in Kiribati, Laos, Nepal and South Africa. The teams reflected and documented their learning, which will be compiled to show the broader findings on implementing local and alternative models of volunteering, and the considerations for scaling-up alternative models. This work will continue in 2023-24.

Global Volunteering Accelerator

Phase - Project	Activity 2022-23
Discovery - Exploring government interest and national volunteering priorities in the Asia Archipelago region	The program partnered with the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA) and the Secretary of State for Youth and Sport in Timor-Leste to run a series of workshops where volunteering research and global networking were identified as key priorities.
Discovery - Understanding how different funding mechanisms could support civil society efforts to grow volunteering	The program funded a number of initiatives including: volunteering research, the development of a volunteering website, and the co-funding of a significant Mongolian youth project led by Caritas in partnership with the Mongolian Youth Council and Centre for Citizenship Education.
Design - Understanding how to co-design partnerships to support volunteering research and networks	Signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL) to conduct a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) assessment of volunteering in Timor-Leste. Preparatory work to award a grant to Indorelawan, a not-for-profit volunteering hub in Indonesia, to undertake an in-depth study of volunteering in Java and Bali.
Discovery - Understanding the state of volunteering infrastructure in program countries	Engaged external agency to undertake a desktop study on volunteering infrastructure and trends across program countries. Study will be finalised in 2023-24.

Volunteering for Development

Country - Project	Activity 2022-23
Kiribati - Youth Peer Health Volunteers	Co-designed peer education youth volunteering model launched, following a series of workshops with youth and elders, as well as a live prototype. This model is now available to organisations to adopt, with several expressing interest and allocating funding to use it.
Laos - National Youth Volunteering	Worked with Laos volunteering organisation Huam Jai Asasamak (HJA) to explore how volunteering can support young people to develop professional skills. A series of workshops explored the ideas and insights of university students and employers, including a consultation workshop for 20 Laos Australia National Scholarship (LANS) students, an employer workshop with 23 participants from 15 employers and a final co-design workshop for 15 LANS participants on designing possible volunteer assignments.
Nepal - Remote Assignment Support Assistant (Co-Volunteering)	No further activity during 2022-23.
South Africa - Volunteer Your Way into the Marketplace	Six South African youth volunteers undertook assignments, supported by a peer support group of more experienced young professionals. Five volunteers completed their assignments (one left early due to personal reasons). Five of the volunteers found employment directly after their volunteer assignments. A workshop in Johannesburg explored the participant experience, including volunteers, peers, partners organisations and in-country team members.

Case Study

Áhopanilolo Technical Institute, Tonga



Tonga Sosefina Fineanganofa (center with blue top) with graduates from Áhopanilolo Technical Institute at their graduation ceremony.

Áhopanilolo Technical Institute (ATI) is one of the leading vocational schools in Tonga. ATI believes that everyone has a right to an education and aims to improve the lives of low-income Tongans and out-of-school youth.

ATI launched a Tourism and Hospitality Labour Mobility Pathway in collaboration with the Australian Government through the Pacific Labour Facility, Australian Pacific Technical College and the Government of Tonga Ministry of Internal Affairs. The pathway aims to empower ATI to supply high-quality tourism and hospitality workers to meet labour mobility demands under the Australian Pacific Labour Scheme.

One of the key activities in the pathway program is the development and delivery of certified Tourism and Hospitality Employability Training to ensure that ATI graduates have the employability skills required by the Australian industry and Tongan government. ATI graduates who complete a Certificate IV in Commercial Cookery or Hospitality and an Employability Certificate are considered work-ready and automatically qualify for opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Australian volunteer of Tongan heritage, Sosefina Fineanganofa, has completed three remote assignments and an in-country assignment, supporting ATI as an Assessment and Development Mentor.

"Thanks to Australia providing technical aid to Tonga over the years, I was able to obtain key skills and experience in my country of birth, which I am forever grateful for. I now want to give back to the education system in Tonga," says Sosefina.

Working closely with ATI staff, Sosefina strengthened organisational capacity, improved teaching and learning resources, and trained and mentored staff. With Sosefina's support, ATI staff now feel confident in developing, delivering, and mentoring ATI trainers for future programs.

Talking about her volunteer assignment, Sosefina explains, *"I aim to improve educational training, encouraging life-long learning — both academic and vocational. Supporting locally trained workers will not only help to provide quality services in Tonga, by having transferrable skills, values and attitudes, they'll will also be able to gain employment overseas."*

Focus Area 2: Embracing innovation

Evolving good practice and embracing innovation is a key principle of the program. The Innovation Hub provides a dedicated space to investigate, experiment and develop new ideas, while the whole program practices reflective and adaptive management and works to scale successful ideas.

Our approach to innovation focuses on learning and working in new ways across the program and in our partnerships, bringing together expert knowledge and local context with design and facilitation skills. This is generating knowledge on new possibilities and considerations for the program.

Involving a broad range of staff in our innovation work introduces new ways of working across the program. At innovation project reflection workshops, country teams have noted that the new ways of working and experimentation create positive changes in individual capabilities, a greater sense of agency and opportunity to contribute, and deepening engagement with partners.

"This process allows us to question, reflect, question and ask for clarity - it's empowering for country offices. It allows us to bring different voices into the space... in some ways it is a devolution of power. We have the opportunity to participate in different ways in the program."

~In-country team member

In 2022-23, the program's Innovation Hub had a strong focus on locally led volunteering, exploring new ideas and identifying possible alternate roles for the program to support countries and partners in their use of volunteering as a strategic development tool, with the three key workstreams described in Section 7.2.

Through this inquiry, we are exploring the relationships between definitions of volunteering, distinctions between volunteering and work and the potential for new volunteer modalities that include non-Australians.

We are also identifying and testing possible roles the program could have in local or decolonised approaches to volunteering, such as broker, convenor or collaborator. Understanding potential changes or challenges associated with new roles and modalities, such as changing levels of risk and duty of care, are key to this exploration.

The path to scale is more complex with locally led volunteer modalities, making choices about where to work and who to work with very important. Scalability in some of these new ways of working may need to be considered qualitatively as 'growth', rather than the quantitative scaling possible with new modalities such as hybrid volunteering. Growth is about deeper relationships with partners, increased connections between stakeholders and increasing our accountability to those we work with.

Bringing new volunteering modalities to scale

Hybrid volunteering, the third volunteering modality offered by the program, was launched in this reporting period. While there are innovative bespoke models for small numbers of volunteers or partners, such as Indigenous Pathways or specific partnership models, bespoke approaches are not available to all partners or volunteers. Hybrid assignments are available to all partner organisations, and demand for hybrid volunteering appears to be strong at this early stage of implementation of the new modality.



Mongolia *The Australian Volunteers Program and The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) co-deliver a discovery workshop on new volunteering models.*

Hybrid volunteering offers partners access to a greater range of skills and potentially faster access to volunteer inputs because the remote phase of a hybrid assignment can start while mobilisation activities are completed for the in-country phase. The timing and order of remote and in-country phases are determined to suit partners' needs, activities and context. Hybrid volunteering also provides more Australians access to international volunteering and provides value for money as the remote phase is lower cost.

Hybrid volunteering emerged from the Innovation Hub's exploration of online volunteering in 2019. Early exploration showed scepticism from volunteers and partners about working online and a desire to still have the transformative and face-to-face experience of working together in-country. Two prototypes ran in 2019-20, identifying the system and business changes required, the support volunteers and partners would need during remote phases, and testing demand from those who wouldn't normally consider an international volunteer assignment. During the pandemic, systems were upgraded to support hybrid assignments, with a pilot launched in July 2022 and a public launch in April 2023.

The program has gained valuable insights through scaling remote and hybrid volunteering modalities which will inform how we approach scaling new modalities in the future, both at global and local levels.

Considerations for scaling volunteering modalities include:

- Significant time and effort are required to integrate new modalities into business systems. By implementing 'dynamic journeys' into our volunteer management system, future customisations will be easier.
- Striking the right balance between having common requirements across modalities for ease of management and ensuring requirements are proportionate to the modality. For example, ensuring that the deployment time for a remote assignment is proportionate to the length of the assignment.
- Managing the impact of changes on roles within the program, as team members may need different skills and knowledge, or to take on a different balance of duties. For example, local development of new practices, such as how in-country teams connect with remote volunteers, may need more emphasis and support.
- Evolving the program's internal ways of working and responsibilities to ensure that as new modalities are reviewed and enhanced, the integral nature and intention of the new modality is retained. This contrasts with the in-country volunteering modality where there is long-term understanding of the product and the responsibility of each team in relation to delivery.

7.3. Supporting program participants to gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries

During the year, the program supported 388 program participants: 362 individual volunteers and 26 approved accompanying dependents. Evidence from multiple sources show that participants gain personally and professionally from their involvement and develop greater cultural awareness.

End of program outcome: Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers, with research partners at the University Technology Sydney, continues to follow a small cohort of individuals, with the first in-depth interviews before they departed to the latest round in 2023. Findings from those interviews will be available during the next reporting period. The most recent report showed participants developed a deeper understanding of international development, a better understanding of the country they volunteered in, and that the program contributed to them being more globally connected¹¹.

During the current reporting period, a new survey instrument was developed to be used with the program's Alumni network. The survey has been designed to collect evidence of the ongoing personal and professional impacts of a volunteer assignment on the program's past volunteers. The survey builds on previous surveys and the findings of the ongoing Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers, aiming to complement its qualitative research with a broader quantitative data set. Findings will be available in the next reporting period.

In addition to the ongoing Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers, the program conducted an Alumni survey in 2023, the third since 2018. More than 640 responses were received from past volunteers living in all states and territories across Australia and 12% of responses were from alum living overseas.

The 2023 Alumni survey found that 78% of respondents are still in contact with their partner organisation, and that these relationships often last many years. Of volunteers completing their assignment and providing feedback this year, 41% reported that the assignment had helped them improve their cultural awareness, with 40% also reporting an enhanced ability to work in different cultural contexts. Interestingly, there was little difference in this response if the volunteer had been in-country or working remotely. Improved foreign language skills, increased knowledge of global issues and increased knowledge of another country were all in the top ten competencies identified by volunteers.

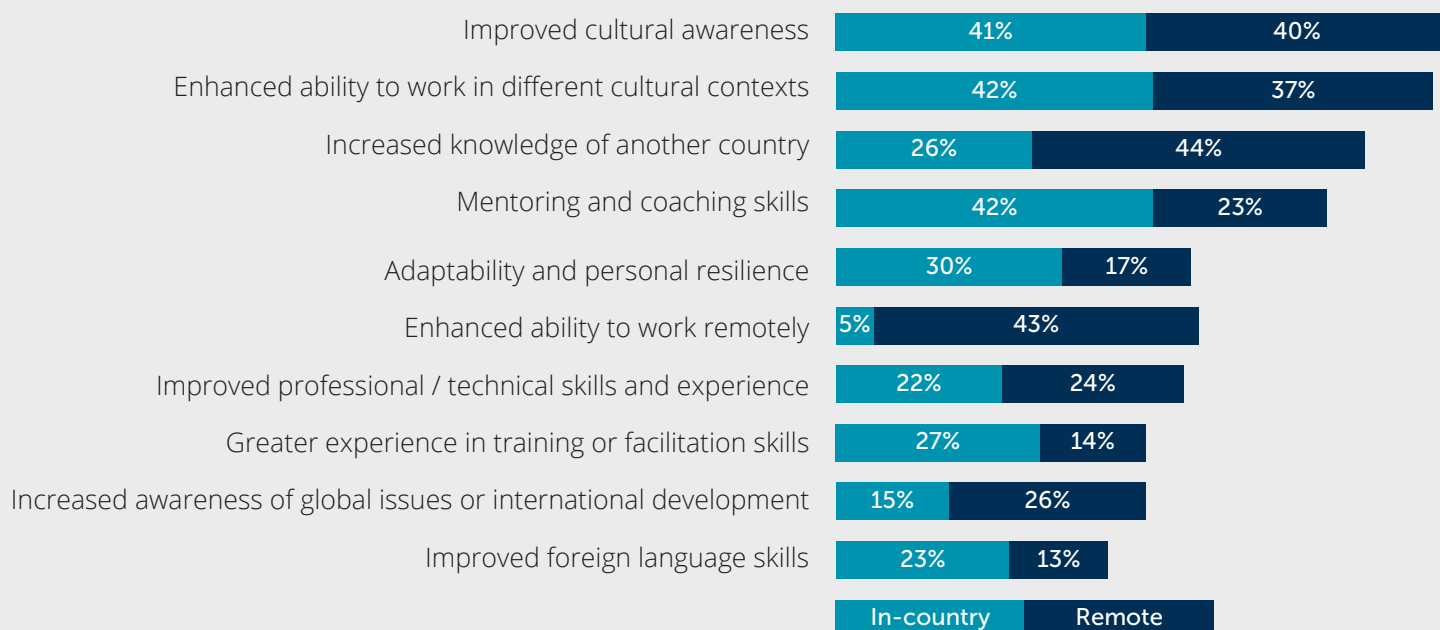
Intermediate outcome: Program participants gain professionally and personally

80% of volunteers who completed an assignment during the year reported that they felt they had grown professionally or personally as a result of their assignment (85% for in country volunteers and 76% for remote volunteers).

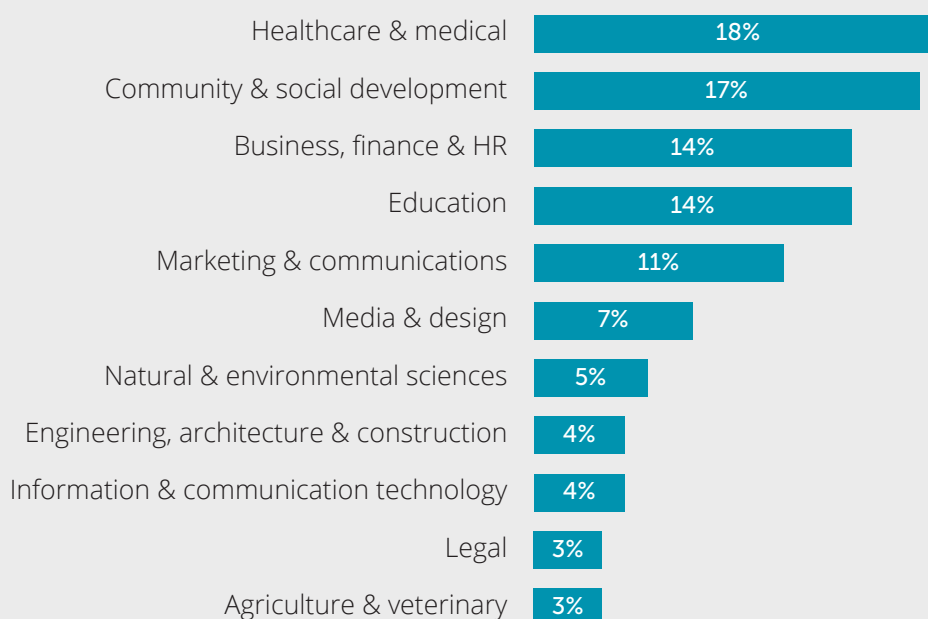
Many of the personal and professional competencies developed by volunteers relate to cultural awareness. Professional skills such as mentoring, training, facilitation and project management were also frequently reported by volunteers. Volunteers also reported gaining skills and experience in a wide range of both technical, job specific areas such as social media use and resource mobilisation, and in 'soft skills' such as resilience and adaptability.

11. *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report*, 2022, Fee, A., Devereux, P., Everingham P., Allum, C., & Perold, H. University of Technology Sydney Business School

Personal and professional competencies developed by volunteers



Most common professions of volunteer assignments



The benefits gained are as diverse as the volunteers and assignments themselves, as a small sample of quotes from volunteers reflecting on what they have learnt illustrate.

"Previous to this assignment I have worked predominantly in the non-governmental sector. This assignment has given me a greater understanding of how the public sector works in the context of health. My experience at the Ministry of Health has given me a better insight into the work and systems involved with developing policy direction, legislation and health policy reforms. I have also increased my knowledge on climate sensitive diseases, and the complexity of identifying the relationship between climate change and health."

~Volunteer, Samoa

"I have never taught online before and using Zoom as a teaching tool was a new experience for me. Although I had attended many online courses using Zoom, I had never experienced being in control of the Zoom space. I was very unsure of where levels of English understanding were initially, and although the teachers were reluctant to speak, let alone be assessed, I found that it wasn't as hard as I had predicted. Initially I gave praise for just joining in, but now I am able to suggest improvements in writing and speaking without teachers being embarrassed or taking offence at being 'corrected'."

~Remote volunteer, Mongolia

"During my assignment, I have gained valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of working in a sports management mentor role in an international development context. I have learned about the importance of adaptability, flexibility, and resilience in dealing with unforeseen circumstances."

I have also honed my skills in strategic planning, commercial sponsorships, program development, budgeting, and marketing strategies. Additionally, I have learned to work effectively in a diverse and multicultural environment, navigating language barriers and cultural nuances."

~Volunteer, Solomon Islands

Intermediate outcome: Volunteers complete their assignment well and learn from their partner organisation

Volunteers are asked to assess their progress towards achieving assignment objectives, independently of their partner organisations' assessment. Three quarters of volunteers (75%) rated their progress as good or excellent, slightly down on 79% the previous year. Scoring from female volunteers was slightly higher at 77% compared to 70% for males. In-country assignments were scored at 78% compared to 72% for remote assignments.

All volunteers who preferred to self-describe their gender identify, all who identified as having a disability, and all volunteers who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander scored their progress as good or excellent. While a positive indicator, the sample sizes for this group of volunteers is too small to draw firm conclusions from.

Progress on achieving assignment objectives - reported by volunteers (n174)

All volunteers



Male



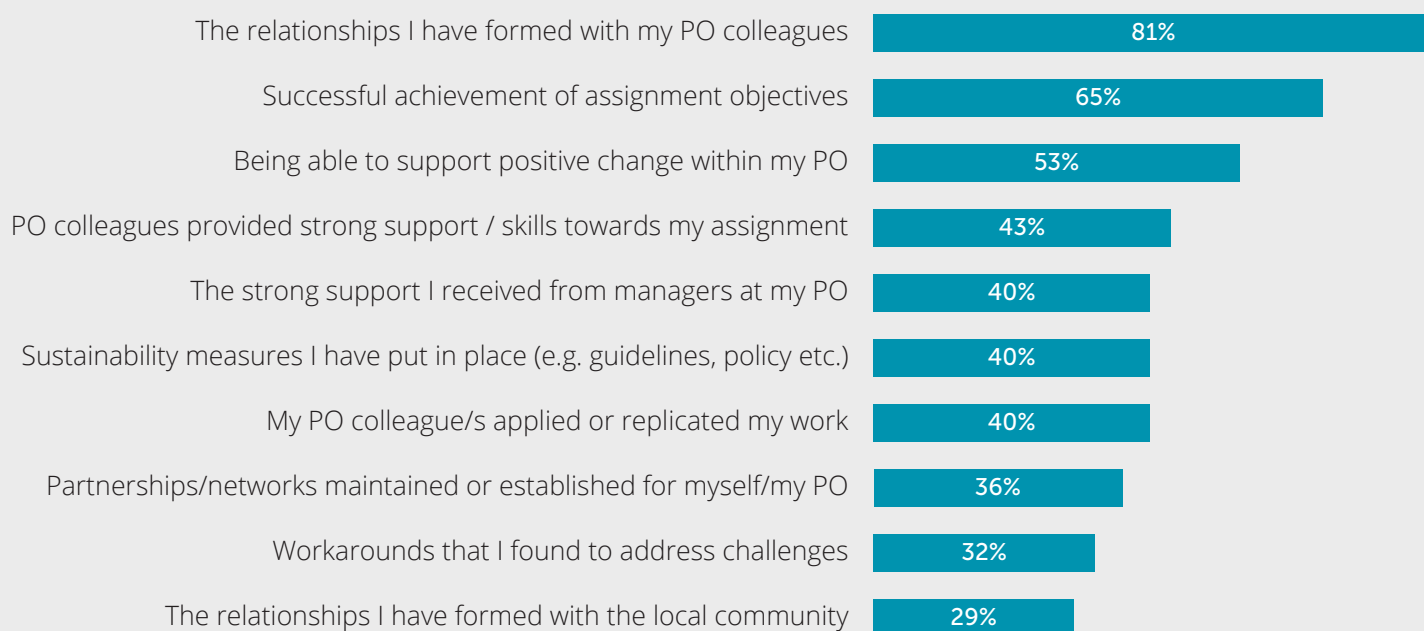
Female



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

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

Most successful or beneficial aspects of assignments reported by volunteers



Duration of assignments

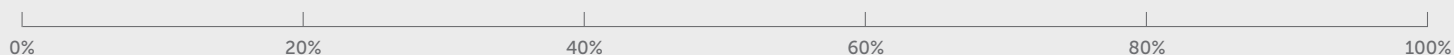
All assignments



Remote



In country



0 - 6 months
 7 - 12 months
 > 12 months

Consistent with previous years, the most frequently reported positive element of a volunteer’s assignment is the relationships formed with colleagues in their partner organisation. Alongside that, and the successful achievement of assignment objectives, there is a wide range of other successful or beneficial elements of volunteers’ assignments.

Not all assignments achieve their objectives or are completed. Where minimal progress was made, volunteers most frequently reported delays due to factors outside the volunteer’s control, and challenges due to limited access to staff and/or decision makers, the latter particularly in the case of remote assignments.

Overall, 10% of assignments ended early – 5% of remote assignments and 15% of in-country assignments. More than half of early ending assignments (55%) were due to volunteer’s health or personal reasons. 20% of early returns (or 2% of all assignments) were due to an assignment not working as expected.

15% of assignments were extended beyond their planned end date. This was particularly the case for remote assignments (19% compared to 12% for in-country assignments), for which the required timeframe often seems to be underestimated.

Most remote assignments (89%) were under six months duration. The maximum duration for remote assignments was previously three months but based on feedback from partners and volunteers this limit was removed, and internal analysis conducted during the year suggests that longer remote assignments are more effective. Most in-country assignments are over seven months.

Overall satisfaction with the program, for all types of assignments, is 87%, which is the same as the previous year. It is higher for women (90%) than men (82%).

Satisfaction with assignments is 76%, and very similar for both remote (74%) and in-country assignments (76%). A higher proportion of women were satisfied with their assignment (80%) compared with men (70%).

Volunteers in the 40 to 59 age groups were somewhat less satisfied with the program overall than those in younger and older age groups. The breakdown of satisfaction rates by other characteristics of volunteers needs to be treated with caution, as in many cases is based on very small sample sizes.

In their feedback, volunteers provide several reasons for their satisfaction. Most relate to achieving their objectives, their relationships with partner organisation staff, the support received from the program or described the ways in which they found the experience rewarding.

Overall program satisfaction

Proportion of volunteers satisfied or very satisfied



Volunteer satisfaction on different elements of program support			
	Proportion of female volunteers satisfied or very satisfied	Proportion of male volunteers satisfied or very satisfied	Proportion of all volunteers satisfied or very satisfied
Recruitment and selection	89%	89%	89%
Training and preparation	80%	83%	81%
Relationship with partner organisation	84%	73%	79%
Safety and security (in-country assignments)	91%	93%	92%
Assignment overall	80%	70%	76%
Support from the program overall	90%	82%	87%

"The information and support provided by [the program] prior to my assignment and during my assignment was excellent. The support provided by the in-country team was exemplary. They went above and beyond to ensure I was provided with suitable accommodation and provided excellent in-country orientation to help me settle in quickly.

During the assignment the in-country team continually kept in touch to ensure the assignment was progressing smoothly and held regular temperature checks. The team also maintained close communication during times when I had health issues.

The in-country team ensured my safety was a priority at all times. When Samoa experienced an earthquake, the in-country team kept constant vigilant contact and ensured that I was provided with a beacon and phone."

~Volunteer, Samoa

"I am grateful for the exceptional support provided by [the in-country team]. Their care and support during my volunteer assignment were greatly appreciated. They went above and beyond to ensure that I had the necessary resources, information, and assistance throughout my assignment. Their professionalism, responsiveness, and dedication to my well-being as a volunteer were evident in their interactions and support. I felt valued and supported by the AVI staff, and their assistance contributed to my positive experience during my assignment."

~Volunteer, Solomon Islands

Volunteer satisfaction (171)

Overall satisfaction with the program



Satisfaction with working relationship with partner organisation



Overall satisfaction with assignment



1 - very dissatisfied 2 - dissatisfied 3 - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4 - satisfied 5 - very satisfied

The most common challenges experienced by volunteers varied in some case by the type of assignment (if in-country or remote), but there were also some common issues: availability of partner organisation counterparts, operational issues with the organisation, internet access and language barriers.

Some of the issues identified are directly within the control of the program and have been addressed to some extent during the year, such as through the allowance review that aimed to address recognised cost of living pressures in many countries. Other challenges such as resourcing and management with partner organisations are broader and multifaceted.

Reasons for dissatisfaction mostly relate to challenges with the assignment, from a lack of ‘buy-in’ or support within the organisations for the assignment’s objectives, communication challenges, and a lack of resources hampering perceived progress.

Volunteers also offer suggestions for ways to improve the program. Practical suggestions around communications and support to volunteers will be reviewed by the program. Some feedback related to the onboarding process of volunteers with suggestions to make this more efficient or reduce duplication, particularly for remote volunteers carrying out multiple back-to-back assignments. Several volunteers made suggestions around peer support and networking which the program continues to work to address through activities such as communities of practice.

Some suggestions related to financial support in part due to cost-of-living pressures in Australia and elsewhere. The allowance review conducted by the program in 2023 aimed to address some financial pressures and the program will continue to monitor changes in the cost of living to ensure allowances are adequate.

Challenges to achieving assignment objectives - proportion of difficulties reported by volunteers on in-country or remote assignments



Several volunteers on remote assignments expressed a desire to volunteer in-country, and the program's new hybrid modality is designed to increase flexibility and streamline assignment management.

Intermediate outcome: The program is inclusive of and accessible to a diverse range of people

Over half of volunteers starting an assignment during the year (56%) were new to the Australian Volunteers Program and going on their first assignment.

0.8% of volunteers identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. 2.2% identified as having a disability, an increase from 1.6% in the previous year. 1.1% of volunteers identify as of diverse SOGIESC.

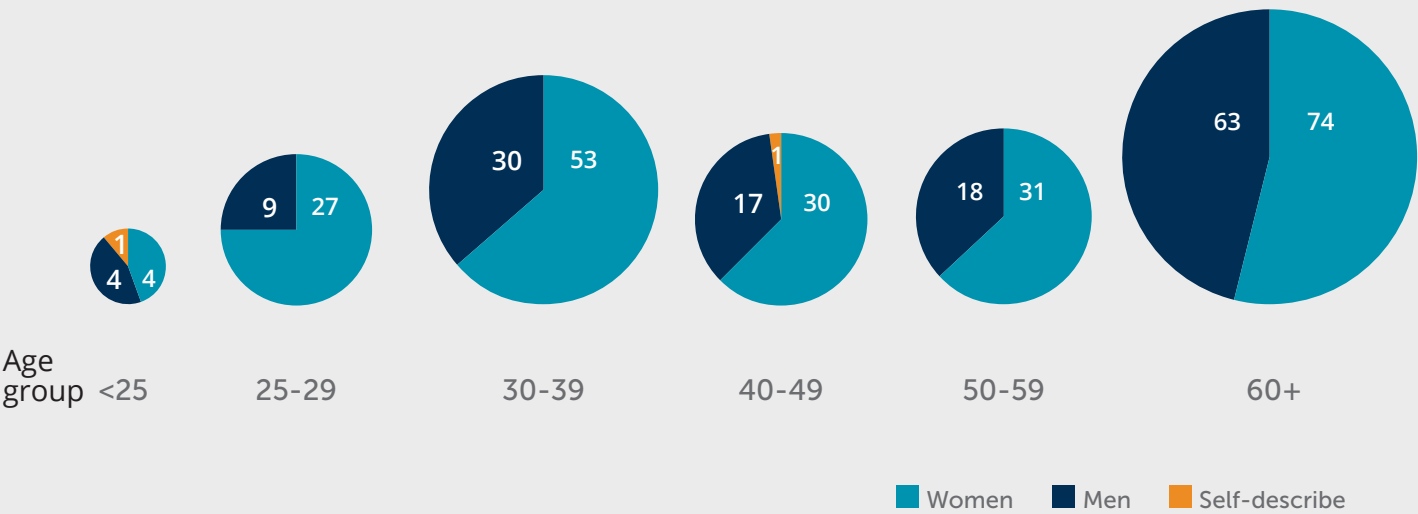
The majority of volunteers (60.4%) were female, 39% were male and 0.6% preferred to self-describe. The age of volunteers ranged from 20 years old to 82 years old. 17% of volunteers speak a language other than English at home.

Most volunteers lived in New South Wales (28%), Victoria (26%) or Queensland (24%). Six per cent were from South Australia, 6% from Western Australia, 5% from the Australian Capital Territory, 3% from Tasmania and 2% from the Northern Territory. This is broadly in line with national statistics (with 32% in New South Wales down to 1% in the Northern Territory).

Internal analysis carried out during the year, based on five-years' of data (from January 2018 to June 2022), provided a larger sample size for more robust analysis of program indicators disaggregated by diversity characteristics and over time. Trend data is complicated by several factors but does not paint a consistent picture of increasing or decreasing diversity. For example, the proportion of volunteers identifying as having a disability is slowly increasing, but the proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander volunteers has decreased (despite a slight increase this year compared to last financial year).

This analysis promoted renewed emphasis across the program on recruiting diverse volunteers and ensuring the program is inclusive of all.

Gender and age of volunteers



Focus Area 3: Enhancing diversity and inclusion

Enhancing diversity and inclusion is a key principle for the program, with particular focus on gender equality, disability inclusion and Indigenous inclusion. We understand that supporting and promoting diversity and inclusion is integral to quality program delivery including good decision making, stronger partnerships and improved equity for all.

The program's end-of-program outcomes require interconnected responses underpinned by diversity and inclusion principles. The program supports targeted efforts in gender equality, disability inclusion and Indigenous inclusion, as well as leading intersectional approaches. The program is committed to being accessible and inclusive to a broad range of volunteers from diverse backgrounds, perspectives and identities. This includes expanding and strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in volunteering and building partnerships through Indigenous Pathways.

Central to effective development and achieving more equitable outcomes, the program supports **gender equality** across women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusion. Resource constraints during the year have limited the number of new partners working on gender equality that the program can support. However, the program supported 40 assignments with partners with a principal focus on gender equality. A new partnership with International Women's Development (IWDA) lays foundations for supporting new women's rights partners.

The program continues to strengthen how it integrates gender across all elements of the program. The program's country Pride Guides provide a useful reference for volunteers, staff and partners and support awareness raising and inclusive approaches. The program also participated in a major LGBTIQ+ festival in Australia to raise awareness about the program.

The program has supported partner organisations with gender equality workshops, and through a dedicated Impact Fund round that prioritised gender equality and women's rights organisations. An example of the convening role played by the program comes from a gender-based violence learning exchange for three organisations in the Southern Africa region.

In eSwatini, KwaKha Indodvza, leads the Gender-Based Violence Charter to encourage individual and institutional commitment to fight gender-based violence. Kick4Life in Lesotho works through sport for development and Refugee Social Services in South Africa supports refugees and asylum seekers in the Kwa-Zulu Nata province. The learning exchange contributed to more than a transfer of technical skills.



Fiji Sereana Kunadua (L), hearing impaired teacher and student at the Lautoka School for Special Education school, interprets using sign language with Veron Vernita (R), classroom teacher.

The organisations also shared knowledge on operational areas key to the survival of civil society organisations working in gender equality; partnerships, due diligence and risk, resource mobilisation, and evidence-based data management.

The program continues to champion **disability inclusion** through strong partnerships with Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) and disability focused volunteer assignments. During the year, 41 assignments have been with partners with a principal focus on disability.

The Fiji team participated in the 7th Pacific Regional Conference on Disability and supported a partner representative from the Special and Inclusive Education department within the Ministry of Education to join the conference and meet with partners working in disability inclusion and special education across schools in Fiji. Through positive engagement and convening of partners at the conference, the program has strengthened the relationship with the Pacific Disability Forum and is exploring opportunities for further partnership with OPDs in Fiji and across the region.

Impact Fund grants have also been used to support OPDs and other partners working in disability inclusion, and have been highly valued by partners such as Disabilitas Kerja in Indonesia. Disabilitas Kerja is a start-up social enterprise which specialises in supporting people living with disability into work to help them make choices in life, contribute to their family and community and be recognised as equal members of society.

With the aim of supporting at least 30 people living with disability into work, Disabilitas Kerja delivered a two-day Disability Job Fair Walk-In Interview event, during which 100 people living with disabilities participated in face-to-face job interviews with eight hiring companies. Disabilitas Kerja provided follow-up monitoring and evaluation of candidates and companies to support employees and employers after the Job Fair.

The proportion of volunteers identifying as having a disability has increased slightly, at 2.2% compared to 1.6% the previous year. We recognise though, the need for more intentional effort in recruiting people with disabilities.

The program has experienced challenges in recruiting volunteers with disabilities, and we are conscious that the proportions of diverse volunteers and volunteers with a disability have not increased. In response, a recruitment inclusion review will be undertaken in 2023-24, applying an intersectional lens to analyse and address barriers for people with a disability, people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous Pathways continues to build strong and equitable partnerships through First Nations ways of working. Pathways prioritises culturally safe and inclusive approaches, equitable engagement between partners, working from a strengths base and operating in a flexible way to maximise participation.

Indigenous Pathways is Indigenous led and guided by an Advisory Panel, comprising members with international development expertise and former Indigenous volunteers. The Advisory Panel provides advice around partnership development, volunteer assignments and ensuring program approaches are culturally safe. The Panel also advises on engagement around the increasing number of First Nations diplomacy opportunities and requests for Pathways representation. For example, the Indigenous Programs Manager joined a panel at the Australasian AID Conference, presenting Pathways approaches alongside fellow members of the newly established Association of First Nations Australians in Development.

The program faces challenges in the journey towards building First Nations participation and establishing new partnerships between Australian Indigenous organisations and partners in the region, including adapting mainstream systems and processes for a new and diverse cohort of participants. For instance, volunteers may not have passports or easy access to documentation required to obtain a passport or health clearance. They are also more likely to experience other forms of disadvantage that are barriers to participation. The program removes barriers through working flexibly, adapting to personal and community contexts, prioritising trust and building strong relationships. This tailored approach to supporting partnerships and volunteers is resource intensive and takes time.

For Pathways, a key measure of success is the strength and mutuality of an emerging partnership, rather than numbers of volunteers. When working with Indigenous organisations, the focus must first be on building personal and trusting connections and adjusting pace to suit all partners.

This is important because Indigenous organisations are likely to be new to international engagement and it takes time to build shared understanding before moving into a more active phase of a partnership.

The program has been developing the foundations of partnership with the **Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)**, with partnership brokering led by Indigenous staff from Australia, Solomon Islands and Fiji. The focus was on meaningful personal and cultural connections between First Nations communities and approaching the engagement in a mutual and open way. There is a shared interest in conservation and climate change and many potential benefits of reciprocal exchange that are being developed.

A Pathways volunteer, Kaurareg woman and Traditional Owner from Waiben (Thursday Island), joined Fiji organisation Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei Cakaudrove (SVTC) to exchange knowledge and skills in jewellery design and production. SVTC is a community organisation run by iTaukei (Indigenous) women of the Cakaudrove Province in Vanua Levu and aims to enhance the status of iTaukei women, as well as preserve and strengthen traditional values, cultural practices and arts throughout their province. The volunteer delivers jewellery making workshops at the Gab Tutui Cultural Centre on Waiben and joined with SVTC to host a series of training workshops for 50 members from rural locations across the islands of Vanua Levu and Taveuni. Economic development for women running small businesses is a key focus for SVTC and the workshops supported participants to learn new skills and many are already making and selling jewellery.

The program has signed an ROU with the **WWF-Australia** and is developing a partnership and assignments with WWF Solomon Islands and the **Australian Indigenous Rangers Network**. Pathways has invested significantly in establishing relationships and identifying areas of shared strength and opportunity in conservation and women's leadership. The program's design approach for the Indigenous Rangers group assignment is iterative and evolving through in-country partnership meetings between WWF and the program and building on mutual interest in knowledge and cultural exchange. Learning from this assignment will inform ways of working and design of the future Pathways partnerships and assignments.

Case Study

Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters



Mongolia Australian volunteers Ramas McRae (L), who is deaf, and Rebecca Ladd (R) supported the Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters as Training Development Officers.

The Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters (MASLI)'s vision is to empower the deaf community in Mongolia by professionalising sign language interpretation. The organisation provides high-quality interpretation services, advocates for improving the legal environment for bilingual education for the deaf community and trains interpreters. It also establishes sign language interpretation as a vocational training program for an inclusive society where deaf individuals have equal access to communication and opportunities.

MASLI sought support to enhance the design, implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive professional training program for sign language interpreters. The organisation also required support in providing the Mongolian government and local NGOs working in deaf education with guidance and resource materials to improve sign language legislation.

During 2022-23, Australian volunteers Ramas McRae (a NAATI Deaf Interpreter and WFD-WASLI Accredited International Sign Interpreter) and Rebecca Ladd volunteered as Training Development Officers, supporting MASLI remotely for five and a half months and via a two-week in-country visit. During their assignments, Ramas and Rebecca provided professional guidance to local educators, conducted vital research, and assisted the local deaf community

and local NGOs in delivering information sessions and advocacy activities. They also connected the organisation with training providers and organisations in Australia and other countries.

MASLI made significant progress in expanding the organisation's knowledge and practice of sign language interpreter training programs on a global scale. Ramas and Rebecca played a vital role in equipping MASLI and its beneficiaries with valuable skills and practical resources, enabling the organisation to enhance the delivery and evaluation of its training program. MASLI has also secured a small grant from the Australian Volunteers Program, which will help empower deaf women in Mongolia.

With Ramas' and Rebecca's support, the organisation pioneered systemic change by introducing a train-the-trainer program designed for deaf individuals aspiring to become sign language interpreter trainers. This innovative model has the potential to be replicated in other countries where the program operates, driving transformative change in education, human and disability rights, and gender equality.

According to MASLI, Ramas' and Rebecca's dedication and contributions have showcased the immense capabilities of deaf individuals to the broader mainstream community and advanced sign language interpretation in Mongolia.

7.4 Program foundations

Program governance

The program's governance framework is well established and effective. The Program Management Group (PMG) is responsible for strategic oversight of the program and is the primary forum for coordination, discussion, and recommendations on program operational matters. The PMG met twice during the year. The program also supported quarterly Contract Management Group meetings, which are chaired by DFAT, and the Risk Management Group meetings, which are chaired by program staff. Regular progress meetings between DFAT Canberra staff and the Program Director and Deputy Program Director continued throughout the year, contributing to the ongoing effective and positive working relationship between DFAT and the program. In addition to these governance arrangements, the Consortium Group continued to play an advisory role. This group is made up of senior representatives from the three consortium group partners: AVI, DT Global and Alinea International.

To support effective program management, the assurance program continued. These internal audits and reviews aim to ensure continuous improvement of AVI's key contractual obligations. In 2022-23, the program developed Audit Guidelines to drive a standardised approach for a more extensive audit schedule, conducted by multiple internal auditors. The Country Office Audit Guidelines Checklist was expanded to include additional criteria to further strengthen processes. Internal audits were conducted in seven country offices by four auditors. A standardised and simple audit spot check was also developed to be used by any senior staff member travelling to another office, to check fundamental practices and procedures. In 2022-23 spot checks were conducted in ten country offices. Recommendations from all internal audits and spot checks are recorded, managed, monitored, evaluated, and closed. Several reviews were also conducted during the year relating to security, staff training, insurance, and partner organisation due diligence.

Annual planning and ongoing implementation

The annual plan is a key operational document for the program. It provides details of proposed activities to be implemented across all aspects of the program.

It outlines the program's strategic approach to implementation, and includes details such as staffing, planned activities with timelines, and proposed deployment of volunteers. It is supported by a fully costed budget.

The annual plan is developed by the program's leadership team and involves extensive consultation across the program and with DFAT. The process commenced in February 2023, and a draft annual plan for DFAT's consideration was submitted to DFAT on 31 May 2023, as per the head contract.

The program procured goods and services as per Commonwealth Procurement Rules and as outlined in the program's Operations Manual. Of note, in 2022-23 the program procured goods and services through nine Indigenous suppliers with a total value of AUD \$83,600. The program continued to support activities relating to public diplomacy; monitoring, evaluation and learning; and partnerships and innovation through the effective delivery of targeted activities. Expenditure for program activity costs was AUD \$3.032 million in 2022-23.

Volunteer services

In 2022-23, the Volunteer Services team supported volunteer recruitment, mobilisation and briefing which led to 417 supported volunteer assignments (and 26 approved accompanying dependants). The team responded to the increase in demand for in-country volunteers, successfully navigating complex travel requirements and supporting apprehensive post-pandemic travellers.

The program successfully launched hybrid volunteering publicly in April 2023. With several assignments underway, the modality is already showing positive engagement and response from key stakeholders.

Additional key achievements this year included:

- Revamped Post-Assignment Workshops were launched, which now include participation of remote and hybrid volunteers, co-facilitation by past volunteers and refreshed content. Two workshops were held this year.
- System enhancements and updated business processes were implemented to increase efficiencies of existing modalities as well as delivering the new modality, hybrid volunteering.
- Complex visa changes were navigated to ensure efficient deployments of volunteers to their assignments.

Risk

The program's risk management is integrated through effective governance, monitoring and reporting, and adaptation to address changes in the risk environment. Key areas of exposure include safeguarding, fraud, cyber security and AVI's enduring duty of care to program participants and staff.

The risk context was variable during the reporting period. The global environment was dominated by the impacts of the pandemic and was subject to essential service disruptions, inflationary and cost of living pressures, combining to contribute to economic and social instability.

Cyber security threats continued to be persistent throughout the year, with AVI's IT team providing comprehensive monitoring and appropriate adaptations to securing the IT systems, including the program's website. The program has been supported by DFAT's Cyber Security Team as well as benefiting from coordination with the Cyber Security Centres.

Safeguarding

Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

The program continued to enhance its ongoing commitment to the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH). Training was delivered in ten countries, featuring at in-country meetings, In Country Orientation Programs, in-country audits and the Global Workshop in Melbourne.

Continuous improvement measures included:

- PSEAH policy revision
- Contractor Code of Conduct updated to refine the detailed requirements for contractors
- Mandatory PSEAH training module for staff and volunteers refreshed

The two PSEAH Coordinators (located in Indonesia and Philippines) continued to progress localised PSEAH activities including facilitating training and local engagement in-country. The desktop legislative mapping study was completed for 19 countries. Recruitment of the Compliance and Assurance Manager with PSEAH expertise in May 2022 has driven the development of a range of tools, templates and resources, including a volume of the Operations Manual specific to PSEAH and covering reporting processes, roles, and responsibilities.

In addition, improvements to SEAH incident and investigation process and documentation have been developed to enhance the strong focus on survivor support, incident response, organisational processes and continuous improvement activities.

Child Protection

This year the program continued to consolidate its commitment to child safeguarding through strong partner engagement, resource development, and support to volunteers and staff. The program's in-country Child Protection Focal Points played a key role in supporting partner organisation compliance and risk mitigation. Resources from the Child Safe Volunteering Hub website were incorporated into the Child Protection webpage of the program website. This year, 60 partner organisations' child protection policies were reviewed and approved as meeting DFAT minimum standards.

Online and in-person workshops were delivered in five countries, providing support to develop and implement program compliant policies and volunteer development opportunities. In Indonesia, the in-country team delivered a webinar with partner organisations that had received Impact Fund grants to support children's rights, including supporting access to health services for children with special needs.

Following a Child Protection Policy workshop delivered in Nepal, the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) Head Office confirmed that CECI Nepal's policy will be implemented across its global program. This is an example of where the program's approach to safeguarding can effectively support a leading international volunteering agency with global acceptance of DFAT's Child Protection Policy principles and practice.

Health, safety, security

A range of events gave rise to political and civil unrest or a heightened security environment over the year. In-country teams effectively managed these events with support from Regional Directors and the Global Risk and Security team.

The program responded to natural disasters including earthquakes, cyclones and tsunami warnings as well as health threats such as mosquito-borne disease and the threat of a Marburg virus outbreak in a program country.

Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa, Lesotho all experienced events that threatened significant political discontinuity. Sri Lanka and South Africa also experienced ongoing essential service disruption. Program activities to support our operations also included addressing risks from increased cost of living and inflationary pressures.

The program undertook contingency planning for elections in Fiji, Timor-Leste and Cambodia.

The program adapted its risk management approaches to support recruitment and mobilisation, including health clearances for a number of short-term deployments and put in place a new health clearance process.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Improvements have been made to the online assignment monitoring and evaluation forms based on stakeholder feedback. The MEL Unit also continued to implement the MEL community of practice online to provide peer support and learning opportunities. Regional MEL Coordinators have visited countries in their regions to support in-country program staff, focusing on strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and learning practices at the local level. Research and evaluation activities are in line with the program's MEL Framework.

The three strategic evaluations aligned with the end-of-program outcomes remain top priorities. Phase one of a participatory action research project on organisational capacity strengthening has been completed, with the action research starting in four countries from August 2023. Research on the 'value of volunteering' has begun in Vanuatu, with a co-design team developing a research approach for 2023. The 'Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers' that started in 2018 continues in the second term of the program, with another round of interviews conducted, and analysis and reporting due next year.

Additional research includes 'partnerships, power, and supporting locally led change' conducted in Fiji and Timor-Leste, aiming to understand partners' perceptions of the program's partnership approach and power dynamics. An evaluation of the program's Impact Fund was also conducted. The program has revised and strengthened processes to follow-up on evaluation recommendations and management actions.

The program remains dedicated to ongoing learning and continuous improvement, evident through its annual reflection cycle. Reflection events were held online in August 2022, allowing program staff to share progress, discuss challenges, and plan actions for the next financial year.

Annual data analysis and reporting contribute to this learning reflection cycle. Additional data analysis was conducted this year, drawing from five years' worth of data to focus on trends. The analysis informed discussions on the revised Global Program Strategy and annual planning.

Environmental safeguarding and carbon offsets

Through the year the Australian Volunteers Program has continued efforts to integrate climate change considerations across strategic, programmatic, and operational activities. Led by an internal working group, guidance for volunteers and online training for staff and volunteers around a climate-risk aware approach to development has been launched, and internal processes and documents reviewed to strengthen climate change messaging. AVI has continued to review its environmental safeguards and decarbonise its programs and operations where possible.

From July 2022 to June 2023, program staff and volunteers flew 2,023,068 kilometres and emitted 476 tonnes of CO₂. Internationally certified carbon credits were purchased from a project in Sri Lanka supporting small-scale renewables, costing AUD \$5,869, to offset these emissions.

Finance

Program expenditure for 2022-23 was AUD \$21.984 million, against the approved annual plan budget of AUD \$20.984 million (at July 2022) and later amended to AUD \$21.984 million in April 2023. This represents a nil variance against the official annual allocation for the program. The additional funds made available in April were welcomed and enabled the program to respond to a higher-than-expected demand for in-country volunteers from partner organisations as well as significant increases in costs around travel.

Human Resources

At 30 June 2022, the program was supported by 136 staff, 82 based overseas and 54 based in Australia. Our overseas cohort includes five expatriates. Our Regional Directors continue to lead our in-country teams from their regional bases in South Africa, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vietnam and Indonesia. Of note, the Regional Director based in Sri Lanka relocated to the program office in South Africa, for safety and security reasons. There were 10 resignations in this reporting period, six overseas based staff and four in Australia. The program's leadership team continued to remain stable.

AVI continued to support learning and development opportunities for its workforce, as identified during the annual performance management process. In 2022-23 there was an overall increase in learning and developing activities including, for example, supporting mental health first aid training for staff.

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
OPDs	Organisations of People with Disability
PO	Partner organisation
PSEAH	Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, and sex characteristics

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