

How Can Volunteers Help Develop the Far East?

KEY CONCLUSIONS

Volunteering in Russia is becoming a part of people's lives

"According to sociological survey, the number of volunteers has doubled since January. 11% of people identify themselves as volunteers. Various programmes are being launched, even governors do volunteer, we see them cleaning up the rivers. The topic of volunteering becomes a natural part of life," Artem Metelev, Chairman of the Council, Association of Volunteer Centres; Member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation.

"We asked which areas need volunteers most. In the first place, of course, comes the support of socially vulnerable groups of the population (46%), second – environmental protection (23%), third – helping people in difficult life situations (22%), then comes healthy lifestyle (19%), and last one in the top five is the development of urban environment (18%). <...> 19%, or about 22 million people across the country, say they are ready to participate in a variety of volunteer initiatives. Another 49% say they are ready to consider it. The potential is enormous," Valery Fedorov, Director General, Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (VCIOM).

The development of the volunteer movement in Russia is supported by the state

"25 regions of our country will receive support of up to 15 million roubles for the development of volunteer centres, programmes, kind ideas, events and initiatives in those regions. <...> In each federal district a volunteer centre will be created, so there will be 8 of them in the country. They will be 8 separate non-profit organizations that will receive serious state support of up to 50 million roubles, and they will become infrastructure centres," Yekaterina Dragunova, Deputy Head, Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (Rosmolodezh).

PROBLEMS

Insufficient information support

"We often do something very good, very kind and needed, but nobody knows about it," Yekaterina Dragunova, Deputy Head, Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (Rosmolodezh).

"Since 2014, the number of incoming foreign volunteers has fallen 3–4 times. This has to do with the information policy. It is not enough to speak within Russian borders, it is necessary to spread the information abroad.

Why doesn't Russia Today run a segment about volunteering in Russia?" Ilya Popov, Founder, GoodSurfing Global Project.

Legislative barriers for attracting foreign volunteers to Russia

"You cannot invite a volunteer and give them a volunteer visa. No such visa exists in Russia. We have an all-humanitarian visa, but it does not say a word about volunteerism as the purpose of travel. All organizations that engage in attracting foreign volunteers say that we have signed an agreement with the European Union on voluntary exchange. The European Union follows the agreement, but Russia does not. A Russian volunteer can enter the EU free of charge, without paying a consular fee. But it's impossible to invite a German person to Russia without them paying," Ilya Popov, Founder, GoodSurfing Global Project.

SOLUTIONS

Extensive coverage of volunteer movement plans and accomplishments

"It is not enough just to create [projects], we need to tell about them. We lack regional branding. In the central part of Russia, cities and villages have already begun to brand themselves. It is not as popular in the Far East. Media-volunteers can help spread the information," Ilya Popov, Founder, GoodSurfing Global Project.

"Information support is crucial for such events, because they attract volunteers, they satisfy their need for recognition. If I were to participate in some event that no one knows about, even if we produce some social effect, but no one will know, it greatly reduces the interest for such event," Ekaterina Rybakova, Co-Founder, Rybakov Foundation.

Attraction of foreign volunteers to exchange experience

"Experienced foreign volunteers can bring their expertise to Russia. <...> special kind of volunteers who after [visiting] Russia become the ambassadors of our ideas, the truth about Russia. They will be followed by tourists, as practice often shows," Ilya Popov, Founder, GoodSurfing Global Project.