Enhancing public safety:
The case for volunteers in policing and a framework for action

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Introduction

Introduction

The act of volunteering is valuable for both society and individuals - enhancing resources, building skills, improving wellbeing and strengthening social connections[1]. Beyond its altruistic benefits - such as a heightened sense of purpose for volunteers and sparking community spirit - volunteering also delivers significant economic value, contributing to social resilience, future focused skills and long-term sustainability.

Across the Middle East, national visions highlight the importance of volunteerism in building a prosperous, healthy, and cohesive society. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, for example, included a target of one million volunteers annually, underscoring the critical role of volunteering in achieving national development goals.[2] Other GCC nations have also launched various volunteering initiatives at national and local levels to support their strategic pillars, such the UAE's Takatof programme, Qatar's Red Crescent Volunteering Programme, LOYAC in Kuwait and Injaz in Oman and Bahrain, which aim to foster social responsibility and reinforce the spirit of volunteerism.[3]

In the region, volunteering has long formed the basis of social policing and safety. In pre-modern Arab cities, night watchmen (al-ʿassās) would voluntarily patrol neighbourhoods. These men, from the local community, took turns safeguarding their towns, mainly to prevent theft and enforce curfews. Though informal, their role was crucial for maintaining public safety and order. This tradition of voluntary guards was common across many parts of the Islamic world, especially in urban centres like Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus.

The role that volunteers today play in supporting national police forces in crime prevention and community engagement is growing – expanding operational capacities and bolstering police capabilities with specialist and emerging skills as society and the nature of crime evolves at pace. Police services worldwide now rely on auxiliary forces as a cost-effective way to supplement operational policing, with an estimated 30 million hours contributed annually by uniformed volunteers, equivalent to over US$1bn in added policing capacity.[4] This leads to tangible results – in Tokyo, for example, the mobilisation of nearly 5,000 volunteers across one community led to a 63% reduction in crime, and a fivefold increase in citizens' feeling of safety.[5]

While there are police volunteering initiatives on offer across the Middle East, global best-practice case studies create a compelling case for more formally integrating volunteering into national police strategies. Professionalising its management will increase its impact, better harnessing the collective strength, skills and expertise of individuals to support the delivery of strategic objectives, and keep societies resilient in the face of future threats.

Volunteering: A key resource for enhancing delivery

02

US$1.348trn of value from volunteering

Volunteering is an often overlooked yet valuable resource that is playing an increasingly vital role in catalysing strategic delivery, with estimates placing the value of volunteer work worldwide at **US$1.348trn**, or **2.4%.**[6] It has proved to be a key tool for advancing national and international objectives, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where volunteering has been leveraged across the SDGs' five key pillars: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. Recognising this impact, the United Nations has called on governments to formally integrate volunteering into their plans for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Evidence from Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) illustrates the significant contributions volunteers have made to all **17 SDGs, with over 80 countries** now formally reporting on the role and impact of volunteers as part of their VNRs[7]. And when it comes to policing and public safety, volunteer initiatives can be particularly impactful in helping to achieve Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for goals).

Future-forward governments in the GCC are now leveraging volunteering not only to meet global goals, but also as a strategic enabler for their own national transformation agendas. By embedding volunteering into national development plans, they are strengthening social cohesion, fostering civic engagement, and accelerating progress on economic diversification, environmental sustainability, and inclusive growth.

Examples of GCC national strategies supported by volunteerism goals

Country	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar
Strategy	**Vision 2030**[8]	**We the UAE 2031**[9]	**National Vision 2030**[10]
Key volunteerism efforts	• Set a national objective to encourage volunteering as a part of its Vision 2030 to build an ambitious and engaged society. • Aimed to increase the number of volunteers from 11,000 in 2016 to over one million by 2030 – a target that was met six years ahead of schedule.[11]	• Supports the UAE's vision for a cohesive, inclusive and service-orientated society. • Designated 2017 as the Year of Giving to encourage volunteer activities. • Furthered by local initiatives such as the Day for Dubai, originally launched to support UAE Vision 2021 and now expanded.	• Promotion of human, social, economic, and environmental development. • Volunteer programmes play a role in mobilising citizens to contribute to the national vision, reflecting its aim to empower its people and build a cohesive and active civil society.

Building the case for volunteering in policing

03

Police volunteering enhances police intuitions' missions, capabilities, organisational efficiency and the protection of society.

It delivers clear benefits to three primary groups:
- The police force
- The volunteers themselves
- The broader community

Understanding these advantages for each group helps illustrate the vital role that police volunteering plays in enhancing public safety and strengthening societal ties.

Beneficiary	Benefit category	Benefit description	Impact example
Police	**Specialised skills development**	• Bring specialised skills and private sector expertise (e.g. cybersecurity, financial expertise, forensic accounting, art crime investigation), enhancing police capability in niche and challenging areas.[11] • Fill gaps in technical areas where expertise is often costly and difficult to recruit.[12] • Provide in-house training to keep officers updated.[13]	**UK:** Cybersecurity volunteers used expertise in cryptocurrency to solve a multi-million pound theft case, aiding over 100 global victims.[14]
	Cost efficiency and force multiplication	• Reduce the need for extra hires, saving costs. • Flexibility allows scaling support during high-demand periods. • Act as force multipliers.	**France:** Operational reserves in the Gendarmerie and Police Nationale offer a surge capacity of 42,000 trained officers.
Volunteers	**Personal fulfilment and wellbeing**	• Offers a sense of duty and community contribution.[15] • Supports mental and physical health, reducing depression and anxiety.[16]	**Hungry:** The Hungarian Polgárőrség fosters a strong sense of civic duty and community contribution among its 67,000 auxiliary police, enhancing personal fulfilment and wellbeing.

Beneficiary	Benefit category	Benefit description	Impact example
Community	Career growth and pathway	• Volunteering provides a pathway to law enforcement careers.[17] • Builds leadership, communication, and technical skills for broader career opportunities.[18]	🇬🇧 **UK:** A study found that many special constables viewed volunteering as a valuable stepping stone towards joining the regular police force, highlighting its role in career development.[19]
	Public Safety Enhancement	• Enhance safety by being extra eyes and ears. • Presence in the community creates a sense of security. • Helps deter crime through early risk identification and participation in community programmes.	🇸🇪 **Sweden:** A research study shows that uniformed volunteer presence, like police volunteers, creates a sense of safety, particularly in areas perceived as unsafe.[20]
	Community cohesion	• Bridge cultural and language gaps in diverse communities.[21] • Reinforces community bonds and fosters inclusivity.	🇲🇾 **Malaysia:** The Malaysia Police Volunteer Reserve (PVR) promotes community cohesion by bridging cultural and linguistic diversity, fostering unity across Malaysia's varied communities.[22]

Empowering policing through volunteer engagement

04

There are many ways in which volunteers can support their local police forces and help to improve public safety.

Key categories of police volunteers include

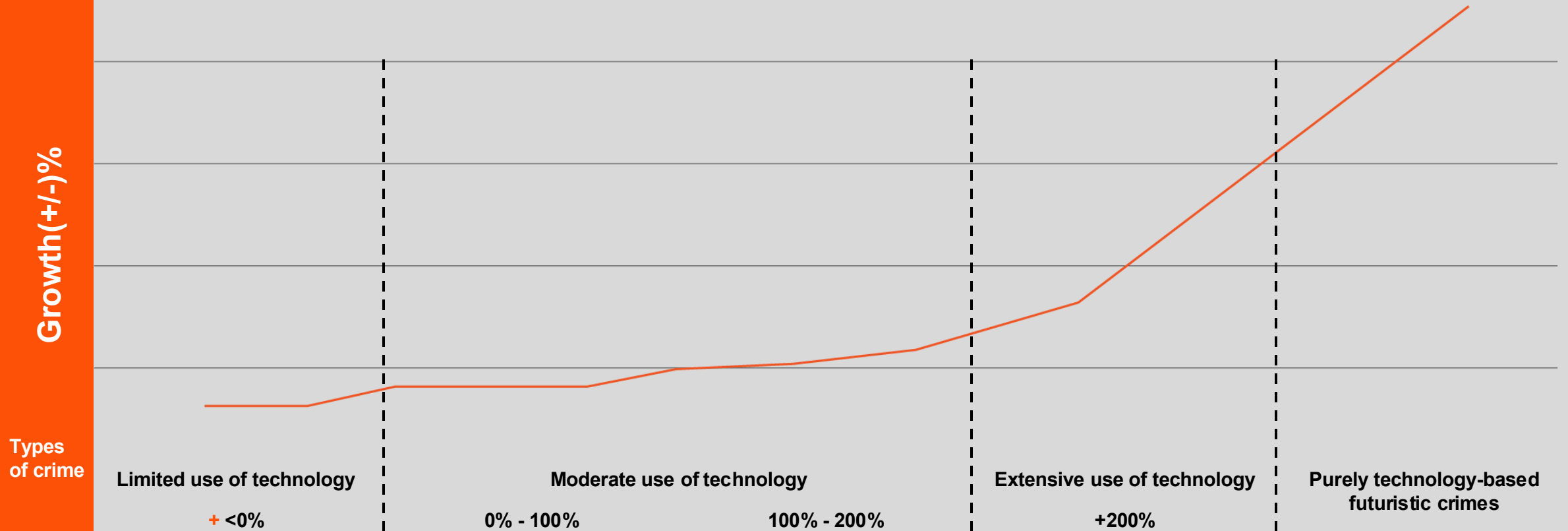| Category	Definition	Global example
Youth volunteers	Young individuals engaging in activities to foster civic responsibility and prepare for police roles.	**Qatar's Officers of Tomorrow:** Youth engage in public safety and military training for future police roles.[23]
Community volunteers	Engage in crime prevention and safety initiatives within communities.	**Japan's Crime Prevention Organisation:** Volunteers in neighbourhood watch groups conduct activities like dog walking and jogging.[24]
Reserve volunteers	Trained volunteers taking on some responsibilities of regular officers with varying authority levels.[25]	**Singapore's Volunteer Special Constabulary (VSC):** Volunteers assist in patrols, roadblocks, and event security with powers similar to full-time officers.[26]
Specialist volunteers	Provide expertise in areas like cybersecurity, forensics, and legal support.	**The Netherlands' Specialist Volunteer Model:** The Netherlands Specialist Volunteer model supports over one hundred highly skilled individuals to bring their expertise from their professional lives outside of policing to support law enforcement.[27]
Support volunteers	Offer guidance and practical assistance to crime and victims.	**Canada's Abbotsford Police Victim Services:** Volunteers provide emotional support and crisis response to victims[28].
Administrative volunteers	Perform behind-the-scenes tasks to improve police organisation efficiency.	**UK's Police Support Volunteers:** Volunteers assist with a wide range of tasks, including station management, administrative work, vehicle maintenance, event management, communication, role-playing for officer training, and translation services.[29]

Specialist skills
case study

05

**The impact of technology is changing the nature of crime.**[30]

While traditional crimes like homicide, burglary, and assault are showing mixed trends as of 2025, the increase in digitised assets – such as cryptocurrency - have given rise to different criminal skillsets and strategies, with crime rapidly escalating in these new areas.[31]

Growth rates of crime types, 2014-20

Growth(+/-)%

Types of crime

Limited use of technology

+ <0%

Moderate use of technology

0% - 100%　　**100% - 200%**

Extensive use of technology

+200%

Purely technology-based futuristic crimes

$13.82trn by 2028

Unlawful activities that are purely dependent on technology will reshape the future crime landscape.[32] Global cybercrime costs, for example, are expected to rise from **$9.22trn in 2024 to $13.82trn by 2028.** To tackle these evolving and escalating forms of crime, police services are engaging volunteers with specialist skills to increase capacity and build capability.
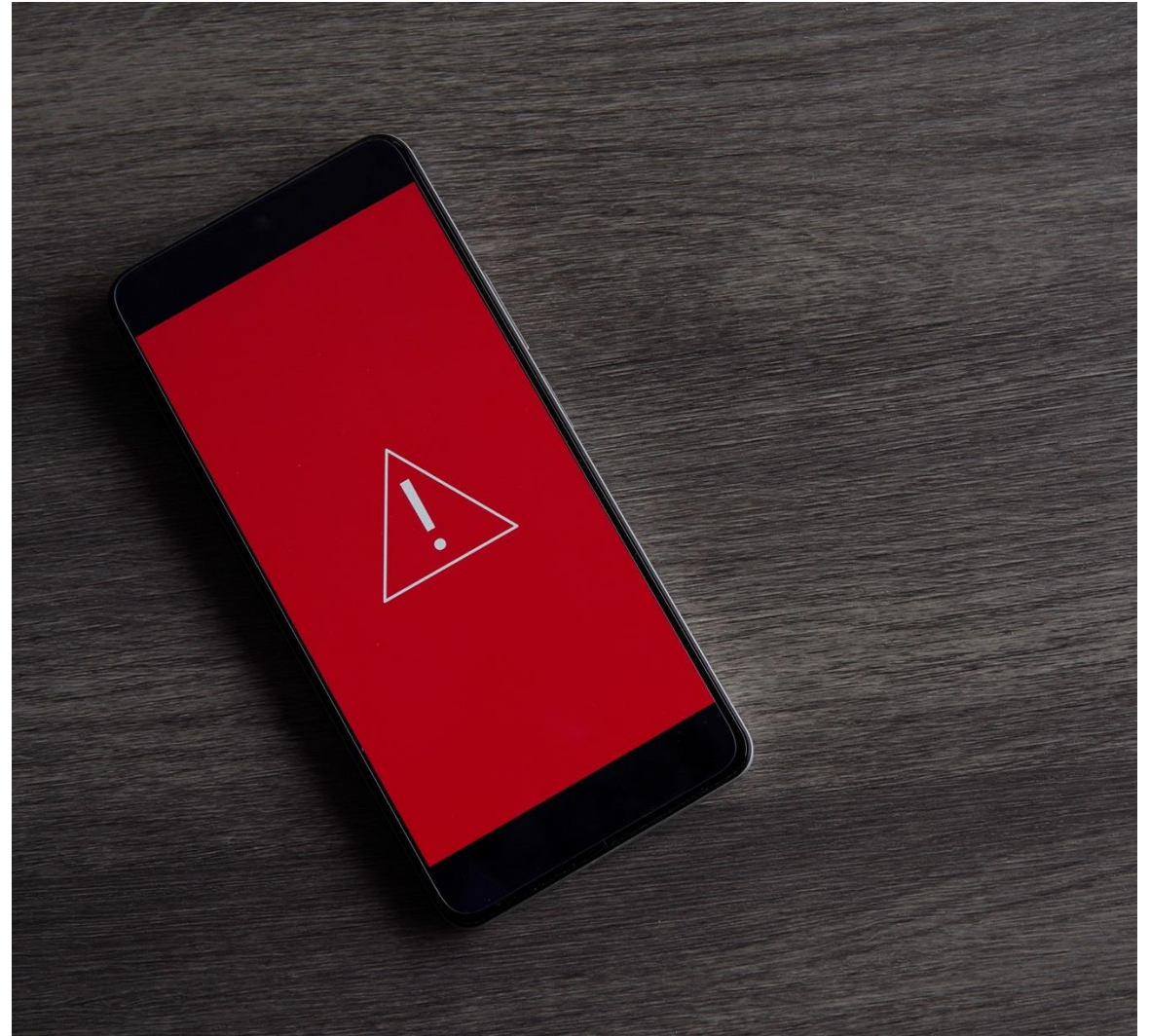
Skills gaps and capability needs

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime have identified five key focus areas police forces must assess for skills gaps:[33]

1	2	3	4	5
Digital evidence: Skills for processing and presenting digital evidence	**Virtual assets:** Expertise in tracking and managing digital currencies	**Cyber investigations:** Investigative skills required for digital crime intervention	**Digital forensics:** Capabilities to collect and analyse device data	**Prevention and public awareness:** Knowledge for educating the public on cyber safety

However, many police agencies struggle to recruit and retain digitally skilled officers - a global study found that around 75% of law enforcers cited a growing technology skills gap in policing, and 52% did not believe that police officers in their department had the right skills to investigate digital crimes.[34]

Utilising skilled volunteers through a structured programme provides an innovative solution to address these challenges, bridging critical skill gaps and enhancing law enforcement's ability to tackle complex cybercrimes effectively.

UK Cyber Digital Specials and Volunteers Programme

01: **Scale:** Over 150 skilled professionals.

02: **Focus areas:** Cryptocurrency investigations, cybersecurity, digital evidence analysis, and innovation.

03: **Key contributions:** Volunteers provide technical expertise in ethical hacking, AI-powered tools, and mobile device tracking to support investigations and victim recovery.

Netherlands Specialist Volunteer Police Programme

01: **Scale**: Over 100 specialist volunteers.

02: **Focus areas:** Cybercrime, geospatial analysis, forensic biology, and financial investigations.

03: **Key contributions:** Volunteers are strategically allocated through a national app, and the programme partners with corporate organisations to actively recruit high-demand skills, ensuring precision in addressing police needs.

The REAP framework

06

Regional police services should place volunteering at the heart of their strategy. Drawing on global best practices and academic research, PwC Middle East is advocating a four-pillar approach – consisting of **rationale**, **experience**, **arrangement** and **performance** - to assess, activate and measure the impact of integrating skilled volunteer efforts into police strategy.

The REAP framework offers a structured approach to developing and managing effective volunteer programmes. It enables police organisations to align volunteer contributions with strategic objectives, optimise the impact of volunteerism and enhance overall organisational performance. By leveraging this framework, police services can unlock the full potential of volunteer initiatives, strengthen public safety and support the broader transformation of our region.

Each element of the REAP framework is illustrated with a case study displaying how police organisations worldwide effectively engage volunteers, leverage their skills to strengthen capabilities, and build community trust. These examples provide real-world insights into achieving measurable impact through optimised volunteer programmes.

Framework element	Core focus	Key actions	Case studies
Rationale	**Align strategy with safety goals and community trust.**	Develop strategy to link volunteer contributions to public safety and organisational objectives.	**Dubai Police Volunteers Policy:** Comprehensive guidance on volunteer arrangements that clearly aligns volunteering to the Dubai police strategy.
		Establish clear policies and compliance standards.	**NYPD Auxiliary Police:** Legislative framework defines roles, training, and conduct standards, ensuring compliance and support for public safety goal.
Experience	**Shape a positive volunteer journey and role clarity.[35]**	Create structured volunteer journeys with clear roles.[36]	**Netherlands Politie:** Multi-stage recruitment process ensures alignment with police values and role suitability.
		Define clear roles and recognise contributions for retention and motivation.[37]	**Singapore COP:** Defined roles and structured recognition foster community trust and volunteer retention.
Arrangement	**Facilitate structured volunteer management and support.**	Track and develop skills for meaningful contributions.[38]	**CDSV, UK:** Central platform matches volunteers to roles aligned with specialised skills, supporting professional growth.
		Implement integrated management systems for coordination.	**Duty Sheet, UK:** A centralised system facilitates scheduling, tracking, and volunteer management across police forces, offering role matching.
Performance	**Measure impact and refine for improvement** (Recommended Model Data Set is attached in annex A)	Use metrics to assess impact and optimise strategies.	**UK:** ROI Calculator and balanced scorecards measure volunteer impact across police forces.
		Conduct regular evaluations for ongoing improvement.	**Singapore:** Toolkit 2.0 provides KPIs and surveys to align volunteer roles with agency goals.

Case study:
We are all Police

07

Uniting a diverse city through community policing in Abu Dhabi

We are all Police

Launched by the Abu Dhabi Police in 2016, the We are all Police initiative aims to strengthen community engagement between residents and law enforcement, effectively fostering a sense of individual responsibility for collective safety.

This pioneering programme encourages residents of one of the world's most diverse cities to actively participate in maintaining safety and security across the emirate.

Rationale:
Align strategy with safety goals and community trust.

- Aligns with the vision of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan who emphasised the importance of community responsibility, volunteerism, and social cohesion.
- Reflects the UAE's goal to make the country one of the safest and happiest in the world, with law enforcement and citizens working together as partners.
- Builds community resilience to keep at the forefront of emerging and future crime.

Experience:
Shape a positive volunteer journey and role clarity.

- First aid support: Assisting in emergencies and offering medical help when needed.
- Traffic control and safety: Helping manage traffic during major events or emergencies, and directing people in case of accidents.
- Community policing: Engaging with local residents to maintain order and resolve minor disputes.
- Event support: Volunteering at community events such as the Sheikh Zayed Festival, ensuring the safety and smooth running of large gatherings.
- Public awareness campaigns: Helping spread awareness about safety measures and crime prevention.

Arrangement:
Facilitate structured volunteer management and support.

- Volunteers undergo training covering areas such as community policing, emergency response, digital literacy, and safety protocols.
- The programmes ensures volunteers understand how to handle various public safety issues, including assisting in crisis situations and supporting law enforcement.
- An app helps volunteers stay updated and on events, receive alerts about training opportunities and track their contributions.

Performance:
Measure impact and refine for improvement.

- **13,788** residents registered
- **Over 70 nationalities**
- **6,283** incidents reported by the community
- **33,519 hours** of service in 2024[39]

The role of employers in volunteer engagement

Employers can play a significant role in enabling volunteer engagement. Beyond corporate social responsibility, employer-supported volunteering is emerging as a way to develop workforce skills while making a tangible contribution to community safety. Many organisations are increasingly embedding volunteering schemes - not just as an act of social good, but as a strategic investment in both their employees and the broader mission of public safety.

The following breakdown illustrates different levels of employer engagement in volunteering, showing how organisations can progressively integrate volunteering into their work culture and long-term objectives.

Levels of employer support in volunteering

Level	Employer-supported volunteering	Employer-engaged volunteering	Corporate volunteer partnerships
Employer Role	Facilitates volunteer participation	Actively supports and enables volunteering	Embeds volunteering into long-term strategy
Key characteristics	• Provides paid leave and flexibility for employees to volunteer. • Some employers promote the scheme internally. • May allow short-notice callouts for urgent volunteer needs. • Limited involvement beyond granting time off.	• Employers fund, equip, or provide resources to support volunteering efforts. • Employees engage in structured group projects backed by the employer. • Volunteering is integrated into employee development and rewards programmes. • Employers help design and execute volunteer projects rather than just permitting participation.	• Moves beyond ad-hoc volunteering to a long-term, strategic partnership. • Employers and partners form an ongoing alliance for community impact. • Employees volunteer at scale, with joint leadership between the employer and partner organisations. • Volunteering is deeply embedded into corporate culture and social responsibility goals.

Building momentum

08

Formally integrating volunteers in policing strategy has many benefits.

As well providing extra eyes and ears to help with monitoring and reporting crime on the ground, they can boost manpower and act as force multipliers across a range of tasks, expand police capacity and capability, and help to supplement more specialist and emerging skills.

In addition to enhancing public safety, police volunteering deepens community connections, provides an enriched sense of personal purpose and fulfilment, and can play a key role helping governments achieve their national visions.

Next steps:

Promote national alignment:

National volunteering strategies and/or programmes should actively encourage police services to more formally integrate volunteers into their operations as a contribution to national targets.

Establish a strategic volunteering framework:

Police services should develop a volunteering strategy that clearly outlines how volunteers can support national strategic objectives and sets out arrangements for managing them.

Launch specialist volunteer schemes:

Police services should create specialist volunteering schemes that identify opportunities to supplement under-resourced technical skills with highly specialised volunteers, potentially in partnership with employers.

Strengthen data and impact measurements:

Police services should begin capturing data that enables them to clearly demonstrate the quality of their volunteer arrangements, the impact of volunteers on national and organisational objectives, and to support international comparison and exchange of best practices.

The future of crime will be shaped by rapid technological advancements and emerging societal challenges. Threats such as cybercrime, environmental crimes, biotechnology misuse, and AI-related criminal activity are expected to rise in prominence. [40]

Establishing a strong volunteer framework now will enhance policing resilience in the region, enabling law enforcement agencies to quickly and flexibly draw on specialist skills as new forms of crime emerge.

To ensure lasting effectiveness, public safety must be a shared responsibility between the police and the citizens they serve. Volunteers will play a crucial role in bridging technical gaps, enhancing agility, and strengthening greater community ownership of public safety.
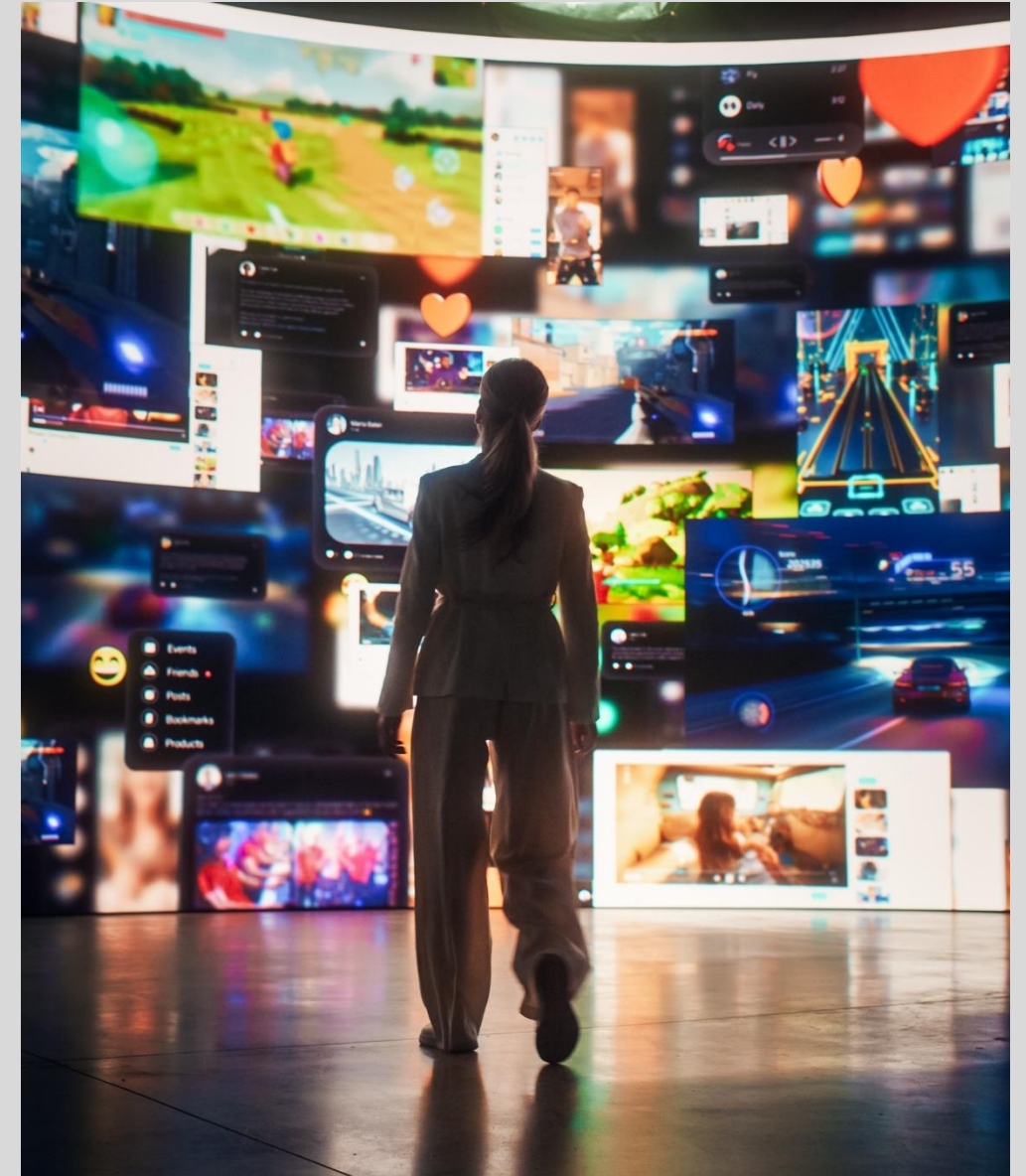
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