

# UNHCR Hails Dedication of JOCVs

INTERVIEW WITH UNHCR JAPAN REPRESENTATIVE

## MICHAEL LINDENBAUER



**T**HE Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 to lead and coordinate international efforts to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems. We asked UNHCR Japan representative Michael Lindenbauer how Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) have contributed to the UNHCR’s mandate around the globe.

**MICHAEL KANERT**

### 50 YEARS OF JAPAN OVERSEAS COOPERATION VOLUNTEERS

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) is a JICA volunteer program that recruits young people between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine who have the desire to utilize their skills, knowledge and experience for the sake of people in developing countries.

In 1965, five young Japanese departed for Laos as volunteers from a nation that had finally recovered from the chaos following World War II. In the five decades since, the number of countries where volunteers have been sent stands at ninety-six, and the total number of volunteers has risen to 46,926 (as of the end of November 2014).

#### TIMELINE:

- 1954** Japanese government starts Official Development Assistance (ODA)
- 1965** Founding of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers/first volunteer group sent abroad (Laos)
- 1966** First volunteer group sent to Africa (Kenya)
- 1968** First volunteer group sent to Central America (El Salvador)
- 1972** First volunteer group sent to Oceania (Western Samoa [now Samoa])
- 1974** Establishment of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)/Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers renamed in Japanese (English unchanged)
- 1978** First volunteer group sent to South America (Paraguay)
- 1990** Number of volunteers sent abroad exceeds 10,000
- 1992** First volunteer group sent to Eastern Europe (Hungary)
- 2000** Number of volunteers sent abroad exceeds 20,000
- 2007** Number of volunteers sent abroad exceeds 30,000
- 2015** Number of volunteers sent abroad exceeds 40,000  
Fiftieth anniversary of JOCV founding

### How have JOCVs contributed to UNHCR programs?

The work of Japanese volunteers has been extremely important to the UNHCR over the years. They are working in many of the areas we try to cover through our interventions, as teachers, in the field of health and as grassroots-level support responding to the day-to-day needs of refugees. One out of the many programmes where JICA and the UNHCR worked very closely together was in Burkina Faso for Malian refugees in 2014. In this operation, six JOCVs organized social activities for refugee women and recreational and educational activities for refugee children in different refugee camps.

JICA also supports those who are interested in working with UN agencies as UN Volunteers (UNVs) after they complete their JOCV term, as part of their career support. Twenty such JICA-sponsored UNVs have so far joined the UNHCR, and played an important role of liaising between JICA and the UNHCR at the field level.

Many of the refugee situations globally are what we call “protracted refugee situations,” where there are second- and third-generation refugees. So to talk about a humanitarian response in such a long-term refugee situation is not really the point, because many of these refugees and the communities hosting them have more developmental needs. As a developmental actor, JICA is a key partner in our

efforts to promote self-sufficiency among refugees and to bring solutions to such protracted situations.

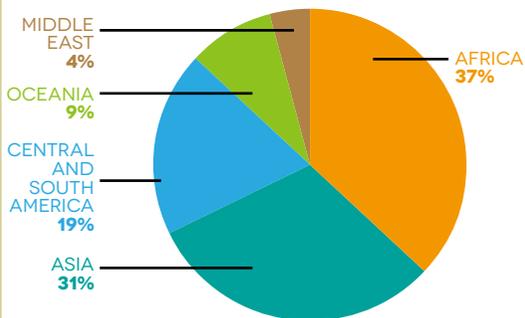
### What would you say distinguishes Japanese volunteers?

They are exceptionally hardworking, extremely committed to their work, and highly motivated. Many of these JOCVs are not people coming in to do this for a year or two and then disappearing and going back into business—they are really motivated to stay within the field of international cooperation. After their JOCV experience, many come to the UNHCR or other humanitarian agencies and stay with us, so to speak, and with the refugees, and maintain their deep personal commitment to the humanitarian cause.

### What would you like to see from the JOCV program in the future?

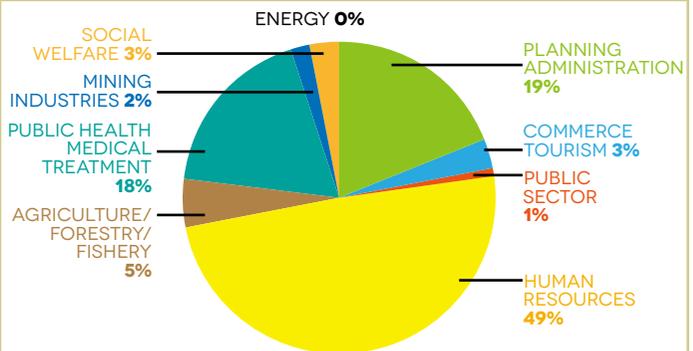
Ideally, I would like to see it expand, and for us—together with JICA—to approach the whole JOCV program and the deployment of JOCVs in a more strategic way. We believe our Japanese colleagues make a huge contribution to our global efforts, and we have a tremendous need for added capabilities and more good and highly committed people in the organization. I very much hope that what is already at a high level can be developed further to increase the cooperation and impact of that program on our ever-more difficult work. **7**

#### JAPAN OVERSEAS COOPERATION VOLUNTEERS DISPATCH PERCENTAGES BY AREA



As of January 1, 2015

#### JAPAN OVERSEAS COOPERATION VOLUNTEERS FIELD ACTIVITY—CURRENT STATUS



As of January 1, 2015

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan