Andrei Lahunou (center) works in Kramatorsk, Eastern Ukraine as a UN Volunteer with UNDP (2017).

Ukraine : réapprendre à vivre ensemble

In the city of Kramatorsk in Eastern Ukraine, reminders of the hostilities following the EuroMaidan protest movement are still widely present. Andrei Lahunou, a UN Volunteer working on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution with UNDP, is helping reconcile the lives of people impacted by conflict.

Eastern Ukraine is an area of protracted armed conflict, which refers to conflicts that are marked by longevity, complexity and a high impact on local populations. Kramatorsk, located in the Donbas region, was one of the first cities over which the Ukrainian government lost control during the conflict’s onset in 2014. In this former rebel stronghold, projectile holes and damaged buildings can still be found everywhere.

As a UN Volunteer with UNDP’s Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme, Andrei is responsible for organizing events, workshops and courses
promoting peace and fostering social cohesion. Working across sectors and communities, the volunteer collaborates with internally displaced persons (IDPs), people from non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine, civil servants, activists and ex-combatants, as well as people who have become mediators in their communities.

Andrei (on the right) and the UNDP’s Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme in Kramatorsk (UNV, 2017).

For example, Andrei organized four Bellum aut Pax Seminars in partnership with local NGOs, activists and experts with the aim of creating dialogue, exchange knowledge and build capacity. He also organized various ‘Insider Mediation’ workshops, as well as a special event for the International Day of Peace which attracted 200 participants, including young people.
“Peace or social cohesion is not something tangible you can touch. We plant seeds, some of which - hopefully - will prosper.”

To transpose these efforts into public space, Andrei also took part in the creation of the community garden “StudParkovka”. Located close to four universities, two of which were displaced by hostilities, this garden is designed for leisure and social events. The main objective is to foster a sense of community, trust and healing in the area.
Andrei and other volunteers working on the community garden “StudParkovka” in Eastern Ukraine (UNV, 2017).

The real actors of the peace efforts are to be seen on the ground according to Andrei. “The people who stay, return and commit to face recovery and development challenges are the real heroes.”

“The most inspiring stories and the bravest initiatives are those carried out by Internally Displaced Persons – a group of people that UNDP and other UN agencies actively support,” he says.
Amongst the many lessons learned in the field, Andrei was particularly inspired by the resilience of the people striving to promote peaceful change around him.

“We should not victimize people affected by armed conflict. In many cases, they are examples of bravery, heroism and human strength.”

“I have learned that there are many professionals, doing day-by-day activities, invisible from the outside, but helping the UN and the population we work with to move forward.”, he concludes.

This story is published as part of the campaign for International Volunteer Day 2017: Volunteers Act First. Here. Everywhere.

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions