



Vivien Savoye, former International UN Volunteer, on a field mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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UN Volunteers in Bosnia and Herzegovina: delivering results for people in need of international protection

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, an estimated 9,500 migrants and refugees are in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN Development Assistance Framework 2015-2020. At the time of the COVID-19 outbreak, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) focused on the critical need to maintain essential services, while preventing the spread of COVID-19. The organization reports about new challenges its joint team took on, supported by UN Volunteers.

“ UNHCR has benefitted from a number of international UN Volunteers over the years – they become an essential part of the team, bringing a wealth of fresh perspective and knowledge and positive energy. -- Stephanie Woldenberg, Senior Protection Officer with UNHCR,

Bosnia and Herzegovina.



In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNHCR's work is focused on catering to persons in need of international protection, persons at risk of statelessness and advocating for durable solutions for vulnerable internally displaced persons and returnees, 25 years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. While all international UN Volunteers contribute to the overall work of the organization, the key area of focus is the mixed movement the country has been experiencing since late 2017, and UNHCR's role in supporting those with international protection needs.

Jessica Dietlein (USA), UN Volunteer Associate Reporting Officer with UNHCR, is now active in the development of new projects and supporting the organization's partners in their work to provide services to persons of concern.

One of the regional projects that Jessica participated in developing is a joint project of UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration, which addresses challenges related to COVID-19 within the migrant and refugee response in the Western Balkans, financed under the [EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#). "Together with colleagues from UNHCR, we ensured that this regional project would address the key needs of some of the most vulnerable persons of concern in the country," Jessica says.



Vulnerable persons of concern were already facing unique challenges, which were further exacerbated as a result of COVID-19. Through this project, persons of concern, including unaccompanied and separated children, will have access to protection sensitive accommodation, humanitarian aid and online education. --UN Volunteer Reporting Officer Jessica Dietlein

Jessica is also responsible for interagency reporting on behalf of agencies involved in the response to the migrant and refugee mixed movement situation, as well as donor reporting.

Another UNHCR team player, UN Volunteer Jae Ik Jang, whose assignment is fully funded by the Republic of Korea, joined the team in August 2019 as an Associate Protection Officer. He works directly with asylum seekers and refugees via individual case interventions to ensure that their needs are addressed and followed up by referrals to adequate services.

Jae Ik has provided training and guidance on UNHCR's Data Protection Policy for partners and worked on establishing data protection agreements with each of them. In 2019, Jae Ik

drafted a participatory assessment report on persons granted international protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina after taking part in a joint assessment exercise with partners to support the local integration of refugees.

When the outbreak started, he administered the [UNHCR Help website](#) to provide updated information related to COVID-19 for persons of concern to the organization.

“ We presented state regulations, protective measures and information, in response to the evolving communication needs of persons of concern to UNHCR, and enhanced the level of communication with communities via digital channels during the pandemic. –UN Volunteer Protection Officer Jae Ik Jang



UN Volunteer Jae Ik Jang, whose assignment is fully funded by the Republic of Korea, serves as a UN Volunteer Associate Protection Officer. ©UNHCR, 2019

When meeting asylum seekers in person became less viable due to the temporary closure of the UNHCR Information Centre in accordance with COVID-19 preventive measures, Jae Ik instead provided online counseling via a secure video conferencing tool of UNHCR.

"It was important for us to continue our direct engagement with the people in order to make sure that those with protection needs are not left out during the pandemic," Jae Ik explains.

UNHCR and UNV: a solid partnership through history

Vivien Savoye (France) served from 2016 to 2020 as a UN Volunteer Associate Protection Officer in the Protection Unit, which monitors the human rights situation of persons of concern to UNHCR. For four years he contributed through drafting policy papers, analyses, reporting and planning documents, but also through field activities.

"In July 2018, I organized with partners the relocation of 20 highly-vulnerable families squatting in poor conditions to the first reception centre that opened in the northwest part of the country," Vivien shares. "This was a challenging but rewarding activity." He continues, "On a regular basis, I monitored the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in reception centres and out-of-site locations. We conducted interviews to counsel them on their rights and obligations."

In cooperation with local faculties, Vivien organized five refugee [law clinics](#) to train law students on international refugee protection, internal displacement issues and statelessness. Beyond teaching students in this specific field of law, the project achieved awareness-raising of important issues and created synergies between academic and humanitarian actors. Vivien contributed to training over 50 law students, several of whom were later recruited as interns and staff for international or local organizations working with refugees and asylum-seekers.

When asked about his most demanding experience as a UN Volunteer with UNHCR, Vivien said, "While helping a 15-year-old unaccompanied boy from Afghanistan to reunify with his family, I was challenged to build a trustful but professional relationship with a very vulnerable and distraught child". Speaking of his most difficult emotional challenge, Vivien mentioned the hardship of having to prioritize among vulnerable families when accommodation capacities offered by the authorities were insufficient.

“ At the end of the day, I chose to continue promoting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, as I am now working for the same

“ office as a staff member. Serving as a UN Volunteer at UNHCR opened up a professional path for me which is both fulfilling and challenging. --Viven Savoye



Viven Savoye, former UN Volunteer Protection Officer from France, on a field mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. ©UNHCR, 2019

 <https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/en/resources/publications>



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