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Holly Langham (United Kingdom) serves as a UN Volunteer Associate External Relations Officer with UNHCR in Albania supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the COVID-19 context.

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Assessing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees and asylum-seekers in Albania

Holly Langham (United Kingdom) serves as a UN Volunteer with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Albania. She is actively contributing to a rapid socio-economic assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and asylum seekers. Working towards the effective integration of refugees and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable has always been a deep-rooted interest.

Holly finds working on refugee and asylum matters very engaging, especially as the country has long-term ambitions to join the EU and align its legal frameworks and systems accordingly.

“ Holly originally joined UNHCR in Albania as an EU-funded volunteer

“ in August 2019. We were then happy to welcome her back to the team as a UN Volunteer Associate External Relations Officer, in May 2020. The fact that she already knows the context and her colleagues well has meant that she has really been able to hit the ground running in this new role.-- Pablo Zapata, UNHCR Representative

Due to the pandemic, Holly had to dive in to work rapidly and support her team. Immediately after starting her assignment, she was already reporting on the impact of the pandemic on persons of concern, including a socio-economic assessment of the impact on refugees and asylum-seekers.

“ The socio-economic assessment confirmed the worrying negative impact that lockdown measures are having on jobs and reliable household incomes of people of concern. Now we're using this as a basis for national response plans and social protection schemes going forward, in collaboration with the government. --Holly Langham, UN Volunteer Associate External Relations Officer

Regionally, UNHCR is focused on providing effective protection and solutions to asylum-seekers fleeing conflict or persecution -- especially those with the intention to remain in the region and those with specific protection needs.

Holly's role is to coordinate agency relations with external partners, including potential donors and embassies. She drafts regular reports, briefings and other documents to contribute to operations and partnership building.

“ I contribute to build partnerships among bilateral partners in support of refugee and asylum-seeker rights in the country, to ensure their effective inclusion and integration in society and that no-one is left behind. --Holly Langham

The Western Balkans have traditionally been seen as a region of transit for many of those arriving in mixed movements of migrants and asylum-seekers. However, in recent years, UNHCR has been engaging closely with national governments to enhance asylum systems

and opportunities for effective integration, so that the region offers durable solutions in the context of EU accession.

Thus, UNHCR in Albania monitors border trends, promotes coordination among relevant stakeholders, improves identification and referrals of asylum seekers with specific needs in the context of mixed migration flows and works towards increasing integration prospects of refugees. It also supports the government to improve the asylum system and eliminate statelessness.

UNHCR partners provide Albanian language courses, vocational training and support to access the labour market. In addition, UNHCR is working with the Ministry of Interior to promote the naturalization of refugees who fulfill the criteria.

The team is now balancing ongoing COVID-19 emergency response with other longer-term activities to support refugees and asylum-seekers in Albania.

“ This is a great assignment, with lots of different priorities. Though certain aspects have been challenging (e.g. learning how to cope with teleworking at the height of the pandemic), I am fully motivated to leverage a balanced response for people on the move, as a part of the UNHCR team. --Holly Langham

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