Ready to bring the UN's best experience to Kazakhstan

The hopes and dreams of today’s youth are poles apart from those of their parents. Born in an era of globalization, the millennials and Gen Zers think and act differently – for them, there is no such thing as borders. One of these young people is Dina Akylbekova (Kazakhstan), who serves as a UN Volunteer with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Turkey.

Dina is one of seven people selected for international volunteering in the framework of an agreement between the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and Kazakhstan. Knowledgeable young expert that she is, Dina is quickly adjusting to the UN environment and gaining sound experience in the field of international politics. Born and raised in Kazakhstan, the now 26-year-old volunteer serves at the UNDP office in Istanbul.

As one of the handpicked UN volunteers, now Dina is helping to further Turkey’s
advancement. In the framework of the “Year of the Volunteer”, the Kazakh government is fully sponsoring a one-year UN Volunteer experience for seven volunteers. This opportunity is of great importance to the development and professional growth of Kazakh youth.

National UN Volunteers Dina Akylbekova, Nikita Shabayev and Assel Bissenali in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. ©UNV, 2017

Having first studied in Sweden, Dina received her Master’s Degree in Public Policy from Dutch and British universities. After returning home, she was involved in the work of the UN and similar international organizations. Truly, it is no coincidence that she was selected as one of the very few international volunteers from Kazakhstan.

“ Already back at university, I knew I wanted to serve with an international organization such as the UN. After I finished my studies
in Sweden in 2015, I came back home and started looking for positions. I have spent two years serving with the UN and other international organizations. Then, I decided to go to Europe to pursue further my academic career. --Dina Akylbekova, UN Volunteer

Her accomplishment is a testament not only to her knowledge and professional expertise, but also to her personal qualities. Serving for one of the world’s most prestigious organizations is no mean feat. One must be quite exceptional to get an opportunity to work abroad for the UN programme that stands for solidarity and compassion for others. The fact that she belongs to a handful selected from among hundreds of applicants clearly shows that Dina has a proven track record of good deeds. Ever since she was young, Dina has shown her enthusiasm and compassion. Back at school, she would always be there to help with extracurricular activities. And it was always her hand first in the air to volunteer for an English translation.

Dina’s interest and passion in volunteerism were continued in her actual work; she recalled her first experience as a full-fledged volunteer.

I worked for several months at the media centre of the 7th Asian Winter Games, assisting foreign journalists. Whether they needed help with interviewing athletes, interacting with locals, or traveling in the country, I was there to lend a hand. --Dina Akylbekova, UN Volunteer

The Asian Winter Games were one of the very first large-scale international events that took place in Kazakhstan – one could say that these games laid the foundation for the development of volunteerism in Central Asia. Dina’s acquaintance with the UN Volunteers programme occurred during the capital’s other large-scale events, EXPO 2017. At the time, she was serving in communications at the UNDP. Considering her ample experience in the field, Dina could be named one of the trailblazers of the volunteer movement in the country.

Indeed, she is both a witness and a contributor to Kazakhstan’s first steps of joining this international movement. Inquisitive and thirsty for knowledge ever since childhood, now Dina is representing her home country in a leading international organization.
During the conversation, Dina also talked about the role of volunteering and its development in the country.

"I believe that volunteering can significantly help to resolve long-standing social issues. That’s why nowadays many organizations try to engage volunteers in their projects. And here, I would like to mention the government’s great support to the growing movement of volunteers in Kazakhstan. Adoption of the law on volunteerism, the announcement of the “Year of the Volunteer”, as well as the support shown to the UN Volunteers programme have greatly contributed to Kazakhstan’s burgeoning volunteerism. --Dina Akylbekova, UN
In Istanbul, Dina oversees the implementation of innovative digital solutions in international organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises of developing countries, and non-governmental organizations. She posited the digital transformation project as a key opportunity for Kazakh professionals.

I am very happy to be one of the first international volunteers from Kazakhstan, but I also feel immense responsibility. This programme is a great opportunity for Kazakh professionals to try themselves in a global work environment and garner crucial international experience. --Dina Akylbekova, UN Volunteer
As a UN Volunteer, Dina Akylbekova will have a year to hone her knowledge and skills, all the while learning more about the UN's work on regional and international levels. In this regard, Dina underlined the organization’s focus on creating an environment for the growth and development of volunteers. Since August, Dina has managed to complete five different online courses on digitalization through various learning platforms, such as Coursera, LinkedIn Learning and Rosetta Stone. Apart from that, she is also learning Turkish.

Dina said she would like to apply the gained knowledge and experience in digitalization to the benefit of her home country.

"After I complete this programme, I would like to continue working on digitalization within the UN. Because I believe in the untapped potential of digital technologies to further sustainable development. For a young professional like myself, this experience is invaluable in identifying potential career paths. I think the knowledge and skills that I acquire here will be in demand back home. I am ready to bring the UN's best experience to Kazakhstan. --Dina Akylbekova, UN Volunteer"

Recently the national front-office of volunteers “Birgemiz” has invited Dina to discuss with her the nitty-gritty of volunteering. Her experience will undoubtedly be of interest to the readers. We hope that Dina’s achievements will be an inspiration to those interested in volunteering.
International UN Volunteer Dina Akylbekova in Istanbul, Turkey, during live stream session with the national Kazakhstan front-office of volunteers “Birgemiz”. ©UNV, 2020

The article is published as a translation of Dina Akylbekova’s interview with Egemen Qazaqstan newspaper, egemen.kz.

- IICPSD • Digital Transformation • Kazakhstan

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals