



The importance of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

Through International Volunteer Day (IVD) 2020, we aim to thank volunteers and celebrate their efforts in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and supporting many through the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health has been a critical theme during the pandemic. This article shares voices from around the world on how UNV is supporting efforts to raise awareness of the importance of mental health.

We live in turbulent times and compacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of mental health is not only relevant but crucial.

Mental health is more than the presence or absence of a mental illness. It is a crossroad between emotional, psychological, and physical well-being.

This year, many people have faced serious challenges to their mental health. Along with the health impacts of the disease, COVID-19 has led to, self and social isolation, disconnection from family and friends, quarantine and lockdowns on movement resulting in more people than ever experiencing feelings of helplessness, isolation, grief, anxiety and depression. Demand for health support services has increased exponentially as a result.

“ Over 60 per cent reported disruptions to mental health services for vulnerable people, including children and adolescents (72 per cent), older adults (70 per cent), and women requiring antenatal or postnatal services (61 per cent)” – [World Health Organization survey](#)

To address these challenges and increase the capacity and availability of support, governments, local communities and civic organisations need to increase the resources directed towards addressing psychological suffering, now and after the pandemic has passed. Volunteering has been shown as one way to assist. Volunteering not only reconnects people and supports those who need help, it gives volunteers themselves a sense of meaning which can help counteract low mood and produce positive thinking.

Many people around the world have responded to the pandemic through technology, volunteerism and leaning on each other, to bridge disconnection and improve mental health.

Miroslava Vavrecanova, Head of Human Resources at UNV, is a passionate advocate for breaking down mental health stigma and has seen the power of technology to connect us.

Miroslava spoke of how rather than hosting purely technical webinars, UNV chose to utilize technologies that support high-connection virtual learning, so that people can actively interact and easily share their thoughts and ideas.

“ We are all still human beings. In the face of the unknown, personal connection is what matters. - Miroslava Vavrecanova, Head of UNV Human Resources

Elena Manina, Chief of the Staff Counselling and Welfare Unit of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and a former UN Volunteer, gives advice for volunteers who are under exceptional stress that comes from extreme workloads and risks of becoming infected during the response.

“ Set time aside to breathe, know it is OK to ask for help, set daily routines that include being creative. Stay informed through reliable sources, and remember you are NOT ALONE! -- Elena Manina, Chief of Staff Counselling and Welfare, UNAMA

Marc Liberati, Chairperson of the UNV Staff Association Committee and Policy Specialist in UNV's Volunteer Solutions Section has a heart-warming message and reminder for volunteers.

“ The challenge with mental health is that it is often hidden and you may not know who is struggling. Please take the opportunity to reach out to family, friends, colleagues and even strangers and see how they are. Together, we can strengthen our community safety net and ensure no one is left behind. --Marc Liberati, Chairperson, UNV Staff Association Committee

Shalina Miah, Regional Manager of UNV Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific knows the power of volunteerism. Shalina believes by acting together, we can remove stigma around mental health.

“ First and most importantly, we need to advocate against mental health stigma as people with mental health conditions still often experience severe human rights violation and discrimination. Don't be afraid to speak up and seek assistance whenever you feel unwell or mentally distressed. --Shalina Miah, Manager, UNV Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

By pulling together, unified by our strong sense of solidarity, we can get through this together. We, volunteers and UNV, are committed to creating a world in which everyone, everywhere, has someone to turn to for psychological support.

As the world recovers, we need to continue to advocate for mental health and wellbeing and ensure it is included in universal health coverage.

Join us and express your positivity, solidarity and compassion towards volunteers by using and sharing the blue heart emoji and tagline #TogetherWeCan to encourage volunteers and connect with people worldwide.

 Global

• IVD2020 • TogetherWeCan • COVID-19 • Coronavirus • mental health

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)