



Dima Al-Khatib, UNDP Resident Representative in Moldova (left) at the inauguration of a centre for the protection of women suffering from gender-based violence in Gagauzia, supported by UNDP.

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UN Volunteers: agile, hardworking, grounded

Whether we speak of the COVID-19 pandemic, frozen conflicts, or any other type of crisis, we need competent human capacity. Effective deployment of such expertise to shoulder our efforts and services, as well as our country offices, exists in the UN system – in the form of the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme.

“ We shall, as one UN organization, keep promoting the principle of volunteerism and integrating it into our thinking and daily aspirations. Whether we are UN Volunteers or UN staff of any agency, we are practicing and promoting volunteerism in what we do and what we work for.

Whether it is about new ideas, initiatives, contributions, coaching others,

spending additional working hours or operating in hardship conditions – you name it – we volunteer without noticing, because it is part of our value system.

This topic is dear to my heart, as I used to be a UN Volunteer myself during the early stages of my career. That extraordinary experience has marked me throughout my career.

I volunteered in my home country, Lebanon, where I worked together with a multi-disciplinary UNV team, as part of a UNDP development project to support the return of the internally displaced to Mount Lebanon.

My experience was extremely enriching and a source of pride, as it gave me the opportunity to know my own country better, take an active role in addressing a national development challenge and be able to have meaningful contributions to mitigate its implications. It was an extremely humbling experience with hands-on interaction with vulnerable people and dealing with sensitive issues.

Reflecting back on my experience as a UN Volunteer and the solutions, value-added and opportunities that UNV brings, I draw several key lessons.

- Volunteering with the UN is an extraordinary and innovative way of engagement and inclusion, especially for young professionals. It is a good initiation for newcomers to the system by engaging them in development work.
- Volunteering gives people the opportunity to make good use of their talent and cultivates in them a longer term commitment to UN values. When you are UN Volunteer, you are driven by the cause and you are on a mission to achieve impactful results beyond your personal career progression.
- UNV not only puts diversified expertise at the service of the hosting organization, it provides an agile and fast mechanism for deploying a competent, highly motivated, hardworking workforce on the ground. In the Europe and Central Asia region there are many opportunities and emerging needs where such agile and effective recruitment is needed.



Dima Al-Khatib (right), UNDP Resident Representative in Moldova, at an event to donate smoke detectors to vulnerable families from Sarata Galbena village, thanks to a partnership of the Government of Austria and UNDP. ©UNDP, 2020. [Read more on how a [safe house saves lives](#)]

To exemplify this, in Moldova, we are fortunate to have people like [Elin Elisabet Langemar](#), a highly motivated UN Volunteer Environment and Climate Change Officer. Elin works with the Environment and Energy Team, bringing new ideas and approaches to address environment priorities in the country. This is surely an area of growth for UN Volunteers across Eastern European countries as they plan and expand their Green Transformation agenda, in alignment with EU directives.

Another successful example where UNDP has been promoting volunteerism in Moldova is in local development work with communities, notably in the areas of conflict divide. This is another area of growth for UN Volunteers, given the existing frozen conflicts in the region and the need for sustained development support to affected communities, in support of social cohesion and improvement of livelihoods.

There are many other opportunities for consideration by UN agencies to engage UN Volunteers such as work on youth and women's empowerment. We have several success stories of talented UN

Volunteers contributing significantly to COVID-19, for example, [boosting skills to support women and girls](#) with UN Women and [enhancing health and wellbeing for Moldovan youth](#) with UNICEF. All that comes along with supporting private sector-related initiatives, digitalization and innovation.

“ On a final note, we all need the agility and the expertise that UN Volunteers offer, especially during this critical period where we are pooling our efforts to support the implementation of the UN Socio-Economic Response and Recovery plan, as the country emerges from the pandemic. UN Volunteers can surely be part of this endeavour and bring expertise across all the five pillars of this plan.



• COVID-19 • Coronavirus • Resident Representative

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