



Loukas Garanis, UN Volunteer
Peacebuilding Programme Assistant with
the International Organization for
Migration (IOM) in Ukraine.

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Volunteering to bolster social cohesion in vulnerable communities of Ukraine

In Ukraine, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been complementing humanitarian interventions with early recovery approaches. With the support of UN Volunteers, the agency has engaged youth, enabling them to become agents of change in their communities by supporting their social actions and decision-making processes.

Collaborating with partners, coordinating with field offices, drafting project proposals, scheduling actions and deadlines – these tasks are the foundational components of a successful project. However, delivering these tasks efficiently also means analyzing the broader context in which the project unfolds to enhance positive and mitigate potential negative effects on the social fabric.

Loukas Garanis, a Swiss national, serves as a UN Volunteer Peacebuilding Programme Assistant in the Emergency and Stabilization Unit of the UN Migration Agency (IOM) in Ukraine. His assignment is fully funded by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, specifically, the State Secretariat/Peace and Human Rights Division (STS/PHRD).

In IOM, Loukas' portfolio is within the Transition and Recovery team. Since the start of the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, IOM has complemented humanitarian interventions with early recovery approaches. This is of utmost importance to seize development opportunities, build resilience, and contribute to a sustainable process of recovery from the crisis.

“ Loukas joined our team at an important moment. Not only is his motivation and work ethic a wonderful addition to the team, but his efforts to enhance our peacebuilding programming is particularly timely as we seek to expand and enhance our work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. --Alissa Lalime, Transition and Recovery Programme Officer with IOM

In 2020, IOM piloted a project called “*Engage, Connect, Empower*”, which strengthened youth to become agents of change in their communities by supporting them in social actions and decision-making processes. The pilot project, funded by the British Embassy, initially reached out to youth aged 15-34 years old from Zakarpattia, Volyn, and Ivano-Frankivsk regions.

As part of the pilot project, 320 youth participated in training on project development, fundraising, participatory democracy, human rights, and environmental protection. The participants formed 16 youth initiative groups (YIG), developing a social initiative project and awareness-raising campaign on environmental protection issues. To implement their project, the YIG then received a small grant to help realize their community activities.

Members of 16 youth initiative groups in western Ukraine learning drones' operation and maintenance to mitigate disaster risks and foster other environmental protection initiatives. ©IOM, 2021.

“ If youth come together through participatory actions,

“ such as workshops, awareness-raising campaigns and thematic trainings, and engage on topics that are of shared interest to them and the greater community, then they can use their energy to build up society-wide resiliency and contribute to the cohesiveness of their communities. --Loukas Garanis, UN Volunteer Peacebuilding Programme Assistant

To expand the impact of the action and build upon the lessons learned, IOM designed the second phase of the project. Loukas had an instrumental role in drafting the project proposal. "The team formulates the logic upon which the proposed activities will be successful in reaching the project's overall goal. This phase requires brainstorming between colleagues in Kyiv and the field offices. Lastly, the team and I start putting these ideas on paper to formalize the project proposal, which we then send to the donor".

The team efforts were successful: the donor recently approved initiating the second phase of programming expanding to three additional oblasts (Mykolaiv, Odesa, and Kherson).

Another important initiative to which Loukas contributes is linked to the understanding of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine. Here, Loukas coordinates meetings with governmental authorities, international organizations, and local non-governmental organizations to discuss their potential interest in collaborating on such issues.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, IOM has completed eight years of programming on redress mechanisms for survivors of CRSV. Loukas is working to arrange a knowledge exchange event between Ukrainian and international actors to exchange best practices and share lessons learned.

Loukas holds a master's degree in Innovation, Human Development, and Sustainability and launched an awareness-raising campaign in Switzerland to facilitate the integration of asylum seekers on the Swiss labour market. With one colleague and the support of the State of Geneva, they created a website to provide employers, authorities, and refugees with up-to-date and clear information on labour rights for asylum seekers. To continue building his expertise in the fields of migration and peacebuilding, Loukas continually attends trainings, webinars, and knowledge exchange events.

“ The goal of volunteering with the UN, and especially with IOM, the UN Migration Agency, is to increase my thematic and practical expertise so that, in turn, I can enhance the peacebuilding prospects in Ukraine. --
Loukas Garanis



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