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Showvik Das Tamal, UN Volunteer Associate External Relations Officer with UNHCR Albania.
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Helping vulnerable groups across the Western Balkans

Meet young and driven UN Volunteers helping vulnerable groups across the Western Balkans. They may have different reasons to devote their skills to social improvement, but do they also have different assignments? What they do have in common is a deep understanding of vulnerabilities and a desire to be helpful to the UN.

“ Most UN Volunteers in Balkan countries are highly skilled individuals, eager to apply and transfer their previous experience in a new context. They are motivated more by the tasks at hand and the opportunity to contribute projects of value. --Rimma Sabayeva, UNV Regional Manager for Europe and CIS

Rachid Ouaich (Morocco) joined the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Montenegro in 2019 as a UN Volunteer Interpreter. He also worked in data management and reporting, and became the first communication focal point for many asylum seekers. Before that, Rachid volunteered for the Red Cross, assisting migrants with French-English-Arabic translation during health or psychological check-ups.

“ When an asylum seeker applies for status through a non-governmental organization, he or she needs to understand the full procedure, all rights and obligations very clearly. --Rachid Ouaich

As UN Volunteer, Rachid made sure each asylum seeker had fair access to the application procedure. He also reported on cases of mistreatment of migrants and refugees.

“ I see migrants and refugees as people rather than numbers or statistics. I am proud that as a UN Volunteer with UNHCR, I could hear their stories and achievements, and was part of their paths. It is never a choice to be a refugee. It can happen to each one of us. --Rachid Ouaich

One of the most touching stories Rachid recalls is a mother he helped reunite with her two children in their teens. Such successes keep him going. Children, singles, elderly – since 2014, UNHCR received 39,352 total asylum applications in [the Western Balkans](#)

“ The work of Rachid has been instrumental to guarantee regular access to the asylum procedure by asylum seekers speaking Arabic, French, Berber or English. In the context of the registration of applications for asylum, Rachid has also been assisting staff with regard to persons speaking other languages, in particular Farsi. He has demonstrated empathy and highly developed social skills in dealing with asylum seekers and refugees and their needs and questions. --Kristina von Petersdorff, Protection Officer with UNHCR

Showvik Das Tamal (Bangladesh) joined UNHCR in Albania in 2021 as a UN Volunteer Associate External Relations Officer. She was driven by her desire to help partnership

building and resource mobilization for refugees.



Office work in process, ©UNHCR, 2020

“ I worked with the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh for the last seven years and wanted to contribute to other UNHCR operations with the experience and knowledge I acquired from one of the largest refugee responses in the world. --Showvik Das Tamal.

Showvik believes that more and more young people should engage themselves to build a positive and humane narrative for the refugees and asylum seekers, as more than one per cent of the global population is forcibly displaced today.

“ At UNHCR, our job is to create a world where our job is no longer required. Here in Albania, we are working jointly with the government

“ to reform policy structures to make them more inclusive of refugees and vulnerable people at large. None of us is safe until everyone of us is safe. Inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers within the national COVID-19 vaccination programme is one such example. -- Showvik Das Tamal.

Aleksandra Andjelic, national UN Volunteer Youth Engagement Officer with UNICEF Serbia works with diverse youth groups. Her educational background, blending an MA in International Cooperation and Development and BA in Journalism, drove her to pair communication with social action.

With her UNICEF Serbia team, Aleksandra reached out to mobilize vulnerable young people, including those on the move,. Her assignment also brought working on youth focus group discussions, consultations through the U-Report platform, engagement through the national volunteering platform, involving youth and the UNICEF Youth Advisory Board into the dialogue with stakeholders.



Aleksandra Andjelic [presenting platforms for youth engagement](#). ©UNV, 2019

“ We enable young people’s initiatives through skill building programmes, where youth engage their communities. I love seeing them grow as their ideas roll out, be it an eco-camp or a community youth info service. --Aleksandra Andjelic

Aleksandra participated in piloting programmes that provide youth with opportunities for joint problem solving and teamwork. Under UNICEF’s global flagship initiatives UPSHIFT and Generation Unlimited, in-community and virtual boot camps and mentorship were offered, with thirty youth teams reaching 18,000 peers and leading the development of their neighbourhoods for a cleaner environment, mental health support and better access to youth-tailored information and services.

These programmes represent a unique tool to bring youth together in new and mixed teams, to create space for their innovation and activism, such as [Just Human team](#)’s youth-led initiative to boost intercultural understanding between migrants and the local community in Sid. By working with mentors, the team learned the basics of project implementation: how to identify needs and the target audience, how to detect root causes and monitor the impact of their activities. They have spread awareness about the key needs of diverse groups, but also brought them together by organizing a sports tournament and handicrafts fair, thus paving the way for more interaction, spending more time together and bridging communities.

“ What I value the most is being exposed to diverse stakeholders and the opportunity to enhance my communication, strategic thinking and project management skills. For me, volunteering is a universal way to build both your community and yourself. --Aleksandra Andjelic



• Western Balkans • refugees • asylum seekers

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