

UN Volunteers Entissar El Mokhtar (third from left) and Sophia El Caidi (fourth from right) taking part in the UN Women launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign in Marrakesh, Morocco.

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Advancing inclusion and participation in the face of gender and other inequalities

Inequality is a paradox in modern society. Yet, it is neither natural nor inevitable. It is entrenched in policies, laws and cultural norms. Facilitating access and enhancing the participation of marginalized peoples and groups is one way to ensure the system is responsive to their needs. Inequality can, therefore, be tackled by each one of us, including volunteers.

The 2019 Human Development Report noted that one of the most persistent forms of inequality is gender inequality. Rooted in social norms and exclusion, girls and women are more likely to have fewer opportunities and stay mired in a cycle of generational poverty.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), more than a quarter of all adults globally are working poor, making less than US \$3.10 per day, and the number of low-paid workers is rising. However, inequality is not just about wealth or income. It can also be seen in life expectancy, or how easily a person can access healthcare, quality education or public services.

Africa has made tremendous economic progress in recent years, with impressive growth and success stories in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Botswana and South Africa. Yet inequalities persist, intersecting and reinforcing each other, perpetuating intergenerational poverty and exclusion.

While a lot has been achieved, a lot remains to be done.

“ Volunteering offers a people-centric approach to peace, humanitarian response and sustainable development. It strengthens trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, empowering change at the grassroots.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme deploys about 8,000 volunteers every year to support UN projects and programmes across the world. Volunteering is an important pathway to tackle our common challenges.

Often, volunteers embody the solution to inequality – participation. Many volunteers are underprivileged themselves and are at the forefront of transforming their societies on issues such as gender rights, disability inclusion and gender-based violence.

A breakthrough partnership between UNV and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has led to a major effort to increase the number of women UN Volunteers in the country. Now serving as UN Youth Volunteers, [30 young women grow professionally and personally while contributing to peace, development and social change.](#)

In Serbia, 65 Roma youth community volunteers have been trained by UNV to [promote inclusion and social justice for vulnerable members of the Roma community.](#) During the COVID-19 pandemic, these volunteers have been actively supporting their communities to deliver emergency aid packages, ensure health assistance, enable access to drinking water and helping people obtain the ID documents required for health insurance or to claim social welfare.

“ Reducing inequality requires sustained investment and focus on marginalized groups such as women, young people, indigenous groups, persons with disabilities and older persons. They must be seen not just as beneficiaries, but also as the agents of

change in their communities.

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Eva Sibanda, a UN Volunteer with UN Women in Uganda, is helping [raise the voices of underprivileged women by documenting their stories](#). Her passion for gender advocacy was ignited when she witnessed sexism on the part of district leaders in positions of power. Eva believes we can only achieve shared prosperity when women and girls actively participate in shaping society.

In Namibia, Pelgrina Ndumba serves as a UN Volunteer Project Officer with UNDP. She is visually impaired and has been [working on the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) project since July 2020 to help promote inclusion.

UN Volunteers with UN Women in Morocco, where the rate of domestic violence was 52 per cent in 2019, are working tirelessly to [document and address the effects of COVID-19 on women](#). While Sacha Belle-Clot has been researching the economic impact of COVID-19 on women, Entissar El Mokhtar is studying how countries worldwide are addressing women's situations during the pandemic.

Sofia El Caidi, another UN Volunteer in Morocco, is helping make resources such as domestic violence phone lines available. Similarly, in Bolivia, UN Volunteer Daniela Riveros with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) helped set up the Familia Segura (Safe Family) call centre, where [over 50 volunteers respond to rising domestic violence cases](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNV and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have recruited 10 UN Community Volunteers to [improve of the health and welfare of women and adolescents and strengthen access to quality basic health services for the most vulnerable](#).

“ Volunteer action adds value to peace and development efforts and the achievement of the SDGs by creating inclusive spaces for engagement and widening participation. Volunteers are essential in our efforts to reduce inequality and enhance participation.

As Nelson Mandela once said, "Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings... Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom."

Together we can.



Global

• IVD2020 • 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence • United Nations Development Programme • United Nations Children's Fund • UN Women • United Nations Population Fund • United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 5: Gender equality](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)