



Aleksandra Andjelic serves as a UN Volunteer Youth Engagement Officer with UNICEF in Serbia.

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## Building youth skills is a universal way to build the community and yourself

The blend of education in International Cooperation and Development, and Journalism drove Aleksandra Andjelic (Serbia) to volunteer for social action. She started as an intern at the New Delhi office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Then, Alexandra worked as a part of the corporate communications team at a prominent Eastern European firm, after which she chose to become a UN Volunteer.

Alexandra seized the opportunity to serve as a national UN Volunteer Youth Engagement Officer with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Serbia. The assignment sparked her will to contribute to UNICEF's mission, especially as a young person herself. Now, as she finishes her assignment, Aleksandra describes her experience as crosscutting and most enriching.

As a member of the Adolescent and Youth Development Programme, Aleksandra and her team coordinated projects and partnerships for youth to build their skills and lead inclusive, safe and healthy lifestyles.

“ On the one hand, I mapped and engaged with civil society organizations and the private sector — our key partners for youth development. On the other, I enjoyed engaging youth, not just as programme beneficiaries, but as active members of society.

Aleksandra reached out to vulnerable young people to mobilize them for UNICEF activities. Her assignment also included working on youth focus group discussions, consultations through the U-Report platform, engagement through the national volunteering platform, and involving young people and UNICEF Youth Advisory Board in the dialogue with stakeholders. The views of young people were integrated in planning and strategic processes, while their reflections about COVID-19 fed into the Preventing a Lockdown Generation report.

“ Youth energy and insights are the key driving force in our work. They have an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of society, and we must ensure that their needs and recommendations are heard.

Under UNICEF's global flagship initiatives UPSHIFT and Generation Unlimited, in-community and virtual bootcamps and mentorship programmes were conducted with thirty youth teams reaching 18,000 peers and leading the development of their neighbourhoods for a cleaner environment, mental help support and better access to youth-tailored information and services. "We enabled young people's initiatives through skill-building programmes, where youth engage their communities. I love seeing their ideas roll out and develop into an actual eco-camp or a community youth information service," Aleksandra shares.

Together with partners, Aleksandra also works to ensure digital literacy and entrepreneurship programmes are accessible to diverse groups of adolescents and youth within formal and non-formal education opportunities.

She undertook monitoring visits and shared information with stakeholders to ensure overall quality programme implementation. For instance, through the UNICEF Learning for the 21st Century programme, more than 1,500 youth across 20 municipalities learned about critical thinking and the basics of robot programming: 62.6 percent of participants were from underprivileged groups and 61 percent of all participants were girls.

"In cooperation with partners, I shared insights to address the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, by aligning all projects to the new circumstances. Some were digitized to ensure

continuity, while others were amplified with digital tools and formats such as video galleries, podcasts and a web platform with youth media content," Aleksandra points out, adding, "It fills my heart to hear that partners have expanded the scope of their work to the most marginalized youth with our support, and how rewarding it is for them."

In 2019, the UNICEF Country Office conducted a situation analysis, mapped out needs and priorities for children and youth, and then shaped the Youth Programme Strategy for the current programme cycle of 2021-2025.

Adolescent girls and boys shall become more and more aware of the Sustainable Development Goals, methodologies and tools, and their own driving force, both at a young age and in the future.

"What I value the most is being exposed to diverse stakeholders and the opportunity to enhance my communication, strategic thinking and project management skills," Alexandra shares.

“ For me, volunteering is a universal way to build both your community and yourself.



• COVID-19 • Coronavirus • International Youth Day • youth skill-building activism

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 3: Good health and well-being** **SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals**