



Jelena Maric Lukovic (left) is a national UN Volunteer serving with UNDP in Serbia. She works with refugees and migrants on projects that prevent floods in local communities. (UNDP Serbia, 2016)

## Creating opportunities for more resilient communities in Serbia

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My name is Jelena Maric Lukovic. I serve as national UN Volunteer Resilient Programming Assistant with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Republic of Serbia.

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During the last 25 years, Serbia has witnessed massive forced migration and many natural disasters. The 1990s conflict in the Balkans left thousands of refugees in Serbia. In addition to that, massive intercontinental migration has resulted in the displacement of a million people in the country. Major floods have also contributed to the country's internal challenges.

Safeguarding local development and enhancing social cohesion, tolerance and mutual understanding are all part of the mandate that I am delivering on. My previous experience of working with migration issues has helped me in my present volunteer assignment. I am better equipped to address developmental aspects of migration.

It is important to create national and local level policies, and community based projects that link migration and development.

UNDP Serbia underlines the value of UN Volunteers:

“ The UN Volunteers in Serbia promote trust, solidarity, reciprocity among citizens and positive social change within the country’s progress towards European Union membership and support defined by the current UN Development Assistance Framework. At the moment we have UN Volunteers deployed in relieving the ongoing refugee and migration crisis, and assisting municipalities to cope with the pressure caused by migration.

UNDP recognizes the importance of bridging cultural, social and religious-based differences among refugee and migrant communities. And for this purpose, along with the UNDP Resilient Development team, I organized various events where I gathered local volunteers and people from the refugee and migrant communities to implement activities for the benefit of the entire community.

For International Volunteer Day 2016, we gathered UNDP employees, local Red Cross volunteers as well as migrants residing in the municipality of Šid to plant 2,000 hybrid poplar seedlings in the seriously flood-affected Jamena village. This helped people whose homes were destroyed by the floods and those who left their home due to war, famine and insecurity by creating a natural flood prevention and soil erosion mechanism, but more importantly, by bringing the two communities together.

Leaving aside all their differences they had one common goal – to prevent future natural disasters and create more resilient communities, more cohesive societies.


Words of a migrant volunteer resonate loud and clear to this day, “It is the best day of my life ever since I arrived in Serbia. I am a part of something meaningful, I am part of a team to do something good”.

This inspiring experience has motivated me to organize another initiative – joint waste collection for a more efficient waste management in the municipality of Preševo. It is truly rewarding to be able to give back to society – to create long-term development opportunities and to help local communities.

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I am UN Volunteer, Jelena Maric Lukovic and I support resilient communities.

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities](#)