Youth innovators help build inclusive futures with ESCWA

Since November 2020, the number of UN Volunteers serving with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has reached 51, offering their expertise in 12 different areas of specialization. These volunteers include youth, specialists and experts, with experience varying between 2-15 years. In this piece, UN Youth Volunteers serving with ESCWA highlight how they contribute to knowledge-sharing platforms, drive
innovation and inform inclusive COVID-19 response strategies.

Nathalie Nuwayhed is one of 15 national UN Youth Volunteers serving with ESCWA. She is deployed as a Team Assistant with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in Beirut. The department is tasked with the security of UN premises, staff, and activities, and has been undertaking activities to increase the representation of women in its workforce. Nathalie’s has been engaging in outreach for new recruitments, resulting in a seven per cent increase of women in the department.

Serving with ESCWA as Research Assistants, national UN Youth Volunteers Hiba Choucair and Sarah Jaroush are supporting a programme designed to foster dialogue between Syrian youth from different backgrounds, with an eye towards reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Hiba maintains the programme’s webpage, developing reports, conducting research and disseminating information about the impact of the Syrian conflict on socio-economic conditions and livelihoods within the COVID-19 pandemic context.

“I am excited about this programme, which develops training for Syrian youth. We build on youth participation in consultative dialogue, to ensure they are encouraged to contribute to shaping the future of the country. --Hiba Choucair, UN Volunteer Research Assistant with ESCWA

Sarah develops reports focused on decentralization, prevention of violent extremism and community resilience. The consultative dialogue is eye-opening to her, because it is the process where inclusion transforms from theory to practice.

“We make sure youth voices from local communities in Syria are amplified. From engagement and outreach to policy recommendations, we maintain an inclusive platform that, foremost, represents Syrian youth. --Sarah Jaroush, UN Volunteer Research Assistant with ESCWA

Sarah is also a member of Young ESCWA, a division of the broader Young United Nations committee of youth staff members, who develop and incubate new ideas for youth engagement, outreach and other efforts. Their commitment to the people of Lebanon is especially heartwarming.
Last August, for example, Haitham Tibni represented Young ESCWA in UN4Beirut, to assist people affected by the Port of Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020.

In this initiative, Haitham joined his Young ESCWA colleagues on the ground, cleaning debris, launching fundraising campaigns, collecting aid and distributing it alongside local associations. Experiences like these were inspiring and motivated Haitham to stay on with ESCWA, where he had been an intern, and take on a new role as UN Volunteer Programme Management Assistant starting January this year.

Haitham is now helping to draft and disseminate ESCWA’s new data, innovation and digital strategies and promoting data analysis and artificial intelligence across different work streams and divisions. These strategies will support connections between early career professionals and senior leaders and inform stocktaking, lessons learned and change management activities.

“We are looking at strategies in practice, going beyond numbers and performance indicators to help people when they need it most. I witnessed firsthand what a strategy provides in real life. I know I’m a part of change and this is everything to me. --Haitham Tibni, UN Volunteer Programme Management Assistant with ESCWA

These innovators are leaders, elevating the voice of youth and helping to make ESCWA’s engagement in innovation, peacebuilding, and disaster recovery more inclusive.

- ESCWA - youth volunteers - innovation for development - Syria

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 5: Gender equality SDG 10: Reduced inequalities SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals