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Minjoo Lee, former UN Youth Volunteer with UNDP



UN Youth Volunteer Minjoo Lee (left) with fellow volunteers at International Volunteer Day celebrations in 2019, welcoming participants to the exhibit and event.

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Empowering young people to pursue peace and prosperity: perspectives of a former UN Volunteer

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) has been operating in Kosovo* (as per UN SC 1244) since the end of the conflict in 1999. Its Employment and Sustainable Development programme seeks to generate economic opportunities and enhance social inclusion for Kosovo's most vulnerable groups, including youth. Minjoo Lee served with UNDP as a UN Youth Volunteer in Local Economic Development, fully funded by the Republic of Korea. We asked him about his experiences in Kosovo.

What motivated you to become a UN Volunteer?

Led by a strong and innate desire to contribute to making a better world, I have dreamed of working for the UN since I was a child. The UN Volunteers programme provided me with a great opportunity to be a part of the organization and fulfill that dream.

Before becoming a volunteer, I worked as a young professional at the Korea International Cooperation Agency in Peru, supporting development projects and volunteers. Before getting into this field, I had served as a Korean military officer and worked briefly as English teacher in public school. I have a bachelor's degree in Business Administration.

What did your day-to-day work at UNDP involve?

UNDP's Employment and Sustainable Development Programme designs projects and interventions to promote economic opportunities, access to services and participation for all people. It pays special attention to vulnerable individuals and groups who are faced with multiple human insecurity challenges.

In coordinating between senior management and project staff, I supported UNDP by drafting, reviewing and evaluating programme documents and project proposals. I also planned events and workshops, and took part in researching for development interventions.

“ The accomplishment I am most proud of is the support I provided – through an innovative, knowledge-sharing methodology – for the internal roll out of the five-year strategic document of UNDP Kosovo, which laid out the future direction of the organization.

During my assignment I also had the unique opportunity of supporting UN Socio-Economic Response Plan to COVID-19 in Kosovo.

What role do you feel young people can play in building and sustaining peace around the world?

I believe that young people can and must play a leading role in innovation and dialogues for peace around the world. In the digital age, youth have indeed the tools to voice their opinions and talk freely like no other times in history. They therefore represent a force for good with new ideas and open discussion to help build a prosperous and bright future for all.

How does your work impact the local community?

The programme work undertaken by UNDP Kosovo positively impacts the local community at every stage of the project management cycle. I was mostly engaged in the project design phase which ensured that all activities aligned with community needs.

Which were the major challenges you faced during the pandemic and how did you overcome them?

The pandemic forced most of us to work remotely, and the lockdown measures implemented at the beginning of the pandemic prevented me from engaging with people in-person.

The biggest challenge for me was being isolated in Kosovo without my family. However, thanks to the possibility of talking with friends and family members on the phone and through regularly exercising, I addressed the feeling of loneliness to cope with the situation.

“ Being a UN Youth Volunteer was a remarkable opportunity for me to join the United Nations. As a UN Youth Volunteer, I experienced being part of a positive force for a greater good.

Have you had any special experiences with community members or other volunteers that stand out in your memory?

My most memorable experience is from the 2019 International Volunteer Day, convened together with volunteers from the Youth for Kosovo project.

We invited all UN volunteers and partners to mark the advocacy event with different activities and a lot of fun, showing appreciation for their work and establishing networks amongst them. It was really heartening to meet in-person and witness the passion of so many volunteers contributing to peace and development in their various fields in Kosovo.

What advice would you offer to other young people considering volunteering with UNV?

Think deeply about why you want to become a UN Volunteer and what you want to achieve in the assignment that you are applying to. Know that the UN is a dynamic place, and that you will have exposure to many opportunities when you are a volunteer. So be prepared to explore, seize the possibilities and make contributions to the world you want to be part of.

**References to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).*



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