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Volunteering, the very foundation of development

All around us, we see civic engagement growing – from small community actions to international ones, and from human rights to ecology, we see movements seeking change. People want to contribute to a common good cause and that is why they organize themselves. It is an essential human need to be part of a social network, part of a community and this is the very essence of volunteerism.

We live at a time of disruption, witnessing the effects of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, which threatens to reverse progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The complexity of the issues we need to address on this path demands that we all work together, in much broader partnerships, connecting various areas of expertise to develop integrated development solutions.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes the important role that the private sector, civil society organizations and individuals play – sustainable development concerns all of us, it is everybody's business. Volunteerism is essential for sustainable development, as it enables individuals and organizations to engage, to express themselves and to contribute to positive changes.

“ Through the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, we had 965 volunteers in the Eurasia region in 2018, with 308 international and 662 nationals assisting UNDP in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Together with UNV, we are able to think outside the box and create volunteer solutions to support the most vulnerable groups.

During my assignment in Serbia (2014–2019), we succeeded in connecting UNDP’s experience of working with local public administrations and UNDP’s experience of working with the Roma community, by creating employment opportunities for young Roma volunteers in a public office. Thus we helped 30 young Roma gain access to work experience and become more active in their local community. Their assignments in local social and health offices and in local administrations put them at the centre of their community, empowered them and gave them the opportunity to speak up for their community, while gaining valuable work experience.

In piloting this idea we worked together with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), as the Roma people were a common target group for both our organizations, and with UNV. Our aim was to leverage the volunteering mechanism and find the best solution for deeper engagement of Roma. The pilot worked well and thus became a new scheme on how to create work assignments for Roma youth, on a competitive basis, within their local community.¹

This is how the UN Community Volunteer modality originated and was later applied in other countries in the region and beyond.

My previous experiences working in Kosovo* (as per UN SC 1244) and Kazakhstan (2011-2014 and 2007-2011, respectively) featured great collaboration with UNV teams. This is where I learnt the full potential of United Nations Volunteers.

“ UN Volunteers bring different cultural perspectives, energy and creative ideas, and all of this makes a solid contribution to UNDP’s work. Besides their core assignments, UN Volunteers also engage in various social and community projects and learn from each other.

Another dimension of UNV’s work is advocating for embedding volunteerism in national legislations and regulations. In this area, UNV shares its experience and advice, and promotes the values and principles of volunteering.

Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the continued technological advancement and widening internet access, are putting the spotlight on online volunteering, which became more popular in recent months.

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“ For us at UNDP, UN Volunteers remains a flexible and agile partner, with an ear to the ground, ability to react quickly and capacity to continuously change and evolve.

The project on Roma inclusion developed successfully in Serbia. More information can be found here www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/presscenter/articles/2021/kampanja-informisanja-romske-populacije.html

* All references to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).



• UN Community Volunteers • Roma

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)