IVD 2021 in Europe & the CIS: Innovation, exchange and youth volunteerism

Across Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, people gathered to celebrate International Volunteer Day (IVD) 2021 with vibrant events and advocacy campaigns. From Ukraine and Kosovo* (as per UN SC 1244) to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey, partners, volunteers, academics and celebrities came together to exchange experiences and recognize the contributions of volunteers and power of volunteerism. Here are some highlights of events organized in collaboration with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme.

In Ukraine, events to mark IVD kicked off on 5 December, with a workshop on Innovations for long-term volunteering. The development of volunteerism for youth was the topic of discussion at a major online event held on 7 December, hosted with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and facilitated by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Broadcast on YouTube and Facebook, the event was attended by Ms Maryna Popatenko, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports, Mr Yuriy Didula, co-founder of the education platform Building Ukraine Together!, Ms Anna Bondarenko, Founder and Lead of the Ukrainian Volunteer Service, alongside Mr
Oleksandr Oliynyk, Vice-President of the Association of Philanthropists of Ukraine and many others. UNV Country Coordinator for Ukraine, Yuriy Savko, joined the discussion and shared the opportunities available to the youth of Ukraine via UNV.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNV convened a panel discussion with volunteers who had participated in volunteer exchanges and representatives of host organizations. Guest speakers included Mr Nedim Alibegovic, Youth Council FBiH and Project Manager from the non-governmental organization Zdravo da ste from Banja Luka, Ms Katarina Vuckovic, Chief of the Youth Policy section at the Institute for Youth Development, Ms Ines Bulajic, Project Coordinator with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and Ms Ardanella Ridzalovich, UNV Country Coordinator for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Kosovo*, IVD celebrations began on 30 November, with an advocacy event on the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. Hosted by UNV, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), University of Pristina, Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers and Department of Social Work, the event celebrated volunteers as change agents. On December 6, UNV organized a live IVD advocacy event in partnership with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UNV’s lead partner, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. The Minister, Mr Hajurlla Ceku, praised the efforts of volunteers during the pandemic and presented the Volunteers of the Year awards. Volunteers engaged in COVID-19 response efforts in Kosovo shared their volunteer experiences and encouraged others to volunteer for a more sustainable and inclusive society.
In Albania, UNV commemorated IVD in collaboration with the UN team in Albania and the International Red Cross, which facilitated a blood donation campaign in Tirana. Meanwhile, in Serbia, UNV held a competition for the best Roma volunteer story, and the award winner was announced on the eve of IVD.

In Turkey, UNV organized a live IVD advocacy event in cooperation with the German development agency GIZ and the Turkish National Volunteering committee. This examined the achievements and baseline of 2020 in order to validate what progress has been achieved in 2021.

The first panel was devoted to universities in Turkey, where volunteerism is now a mandatory course. Academics and government authorities reflected on means to strengthen the impact of these classes. Another panel was dedicated to volunteerism for climate and natural disasters, and yet another to inter-generational volunteerism, moderated by renowned Turkish actor and TV show presenter İlker Ayrık. The overall reach of this broadcasted event is estimated at 33,000 people.
Europe and the CIS

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*All references to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244/1999.

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