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Aziz Zaguia, local volunteer with the Ministry of Public Health, receiving the Tunisia Volunteer Award 2021 for his contributions to COVID-19 response.

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## Local volunteers in Tunisia recognized for promoting inclusive COVID-19 pandemic response

To mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, the UNV Maghreb Field Unit organized the Tunisia Volunteer Award 2021. This took the form of a national competition aimed at recognizing volunteer commitment in three categories: contribution to COVID-19 response, innovation to inspire new forms of volunteering and contribution to social cohesion. In this story, we highlight how the local volunteers nominated as finalists in the first category promoted an inclusive COVID-19 response in the country.

Just like the rest of the world, the battle against the pandemic is still ongoing in Tunisia. The Coronavirus has been an opportunity to learn more about the potential of volunteering, and what volunteers, who were among the first responders, can do in a health crisis context. They have been yielding impactful results and supporting with different components of pandemic

preparedness and response.

Local volunteers in Tunisia have been committed to ending the COVID-19 outbreak, and have been engaged since the very beginning in several forms of response. The contribution of three local volunteers stood out for their special contributions.

Aziz Zaguia, Amin Sleimi and Aziz Bejaoui, selected as finalists for the COVID-19 response category of the UNV50 Award, were honored in recognition of their efforts, which embody the spirit of volunteering and solidarity.

At the peak of the crisis, Aziz Zaguia (winner of the award) demonstrated leadership in COVID-19 response through his volunteer work with the Municipality of Ksar Hellal and the Ministry of Public Health. Having crossed over 1,500 kilometers in the framework of vaccination campaigns, he was a champion both behind the screen and in the field, solving technical issues related to the vaccination platform EVAX, while facilitating vaccination for over 300,000 citizens on the ground.

Aziz helped in the coordination and facilitation of the overall vaccination process in various forms, from citizen registration to the management of vaccine centres and distribution, with special attention to those left furthest behind. For example, with the aim of broadening the reach of the vaccination campaign, he created a [Facebook group](#) that now has more than 6,000 members, where people can get timely assistance and information on the campaign.

Aziz was conferred the UNV50 Tunisia Volunteer Award 2021 for COVID-19 Response for his continuous efforts in response to the pandemic.

“ The journey of a volunteer never comes to an end.  
This engagement is rooted in us and grows as we  
do. --Aziz Zaguia, Winner of the Tunisia Volunteer  
Award 2021 for COVID-19 Response

As soon as Tunisia had recorded a dozen COVID-19 cases, Amin Sleimi, Tunisian Scouts Volunteer, put on his uniform and joined the efforts of risk

communication and community engagement. He also took part in the disinfection of public spaces to limit the spread of the virus.

In addition to his intervention in crowded areas to ensure the respect of the sanitary protocols, Amin was involved in the distribution of humanitarian aid to the underprivileged and to those affected by the crisis.

Aziz Bejaoui, Tunisian Red Crescent volunteer, equally demonstrated the multi-dimensional volunteer contributions to COVID-19 response. Besides helping to ensure compliance with sanitary measures and distributing donations, he aided and guided citizens reaching out to a toll-free number made available for reporting suspected cases of infection.

As the pandemic weakened the bridges between diverse groups, Amin Sleimi and Aziz Bejaoui demonstrated solidarity with people in isolation. When the stringent lockdowns affected vulnerable families and distanced them from social networks, they helped facilitate access to resources and to aid.

Although the pandemic is still ongoing, it is high time to rethink epidemic prevention and response approaches, by recognizing, measuring and capitalizing on volunteer contributions, and by further involving the on-site heroes in the processes of knowledge generation.

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 **Arab States**

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