



Dr Matshidiso Moeti (centre, addressing the group), WHO Regional Director for Africa, visiting community rapid diagnostic testing site in Brazzaville, Congo.

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Rising for an equal and healthy future in Africa through volunteerism

The Africa Women Health Champions initiative is a partnership of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, shares her reflections as we approach the two-year anniversary of the initiative.

In 2020, WHO and UNV joined forces with the aim of recruiting 100 women to improve people's health and well-being on the continent, while also promoting gender equality in Africa.

Thanks to this initiative, 77 UN Volunteer Health Champions are actively participating in the work of the World Health Organization (WHO). I am particularly appreciative of their actions during the COVID-19 response and other emergencies in the Africa Region. With diverse skill sets and competencies, they are also helping us sustain gains made in terms of our health priorities.

“ It is a personal wish to support the next generation of women leaders in Africa, particularly in the field of public health, and I am delighted today that this dream is becoming a reality through the African Women Health Champions initiative. --Dr Matshidiso Rebecca Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa

Violet Mathenge, Surveillance and Emergency Risk Management Officer, is just one example. Her work has helped [strengthen the Botswana health sector's data infrastructure and capacities](#). Information generated through her work has been useful in informing response activities, such as guiding targeted case management and vaccination, particularly in the context of COVID-19 response.

Esther Njinembo, deployed as a Technical Health Officer at the Regional Office in Brazzaville, is [supporting 47 countries on the African continent to establish policies on the prevention of risk factors for noncommunicable diseases](#). She provides critical data and statistics for awareness-raising, and supports the development of health promotion materials.

Melvis Kimbi, Communication Officer, is deeply involved in the [strategic management of WHO Madagascar's social media and online presence](#). She oversees communications to position the organization as a lead partner in health responses in that country.

The presence of UN Volunteers within and alongside our technical teams has provided support in many areas, including family health, nutrition, disease prevention and control, as well as communications, general management and administration.

“ What the UN Volunteers all have in common, and what we looked for in their recruitment, is their passion for making a difference for the people they serve. Such motivation is crucial when working in the public health field. --Dr Matshidiso Rebecca Moeti

Through the Africa Women Health Champions initiative, UN Volunteers have demonstrated that the achievement of gender equality is possible; women represent 67 per cent of the all the UN Volunteers deployed to WHO in the Africa region in 2021. This comes at an opportune time for WHO as an organization, as we have pledged to achieve gender parity, and rejuvenate and increase geographical representation among WHO personnel. This inspirational programme is a source of great pride for me personally, and for the organization.

Today, WHO Africa's total UN Volunteer contingent stands at 174, up from only 60 in 2019. Our objective is to increase this number to reach 200 UN Volunteers by the end of 2022. The Regional Office and 23 WHO Country Offices are all hosting Health Champions, with plans to expand the project to 14 additional countries in the coming weeks.



Read more about the [Africa Women's Health Champions](#) of WHO and UNV and see current [openings here](#). Check out our partner page: [UNV partnering with WHO](#)

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