![UN VOLUNTEERS]

An older man showing the house he had built for his children that was largely destroyed due to active hostilities in Zhovanka village, Donetska Oblast, Ukraine.
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UN Volunteers deployed to OCHA Ukraine: "A deployment that made us a family"

The Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has significant experience responding to large-scale disasters. In mid-February 2022, two UN Volunteers were among four ROLAC personnel deployed to Ukraine to support the OCHA country office with international rapid response capacity, amid rising tensions. Read more on the UNV emergency response to the war in Ukraine.

Since 2007, more than 95 UN Volunteers have been engaged with OCHA in Latin America and the Caribbean and 30 in Europe and Central Asia. In Ukraine, OCHA successfully used UN Volunteers to scale up its humanitarian response to COVID-19 in the face of escalating needs.

Carol Sanchez (Colombia), Humanitarian Affairs Officer, and Anthony Prassoulis (Canada), Reporting Officer, have been serving with OCHA as international UN Volunteers for the past two and three years, respectively. Deployment to Ukraine required them to quickly understand and adapt to a new context. And they did their best. Even during his long flight to Kyiv, Anthony tirelessly flipped through documents to help wrap his head around the

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humanitarian context in the country.

Upon arrival in Ukraine, Anthony and Carol started off with familiar tasks. Together with other colleagues deployed from ROLAC, they supported OCHA's operations in coordination, including multi-purpose cash assistance, information management and reporting.

> I have always wanted to work on the ground, close to affected people. OCHA and UNV provided the opportunity to put my knowledge and skills to the test and help those who need it most. -- Anthony Prassoulis, UN Volunteer Reporting Officer with OCHA in Latin America and the Caribbean, deployed to Ukraine as part of the rapid response team

When the war started, the scope and scale of assigned tasks expanded considerably and most of the time, they had to deliver while on the move, re-locating or hurrying into basements when air raid sirens rang out.

"We relocated from Kyiv to safer locations in the western part of the country. During our time in Ukraine, we became almost like a family, not only within the ROLAC team, but also with national staff and other colleagues on surge," Anthony shared.

While in Ukraine, Carol was part of OCHA's Coordination Unit, supporting inter-cluster coordination and providing technical guidance and key information to inform effective decision-making. In doing so, Carol had to constantly be up to date on the most pressing needs, gaps and constraints faced by the humanitarian response in Ukraine.

"Carol played an invaluable role in the humanitarian response, convening humanitarian partners and ensuring that they were up-to-date on the latest developments," says Gemma Connel, Head of the Regional Office for Southern and Eastern Africa, who was also deployed as part of the surge to respond to the war in Ukraine.

"She directly supported the General Coordination Meeting and facilitated dedicated meetings with NGO partners," Gemma continues. "Carol also worked with the humanitarian clusters and supported them as they navigated the development and revision of the Flash Appeal to galvanize resources for the response."

> One of Carol's most remarkable traits was her ability to rapidly form strong relationships, both with our partners and OCHA's own staff.

> " She became an integral and trusted member of the OCHA coordination team in a very short time, and was particularly appreciated by our Ukrainian colleagues, who were grateful for her calm, dedicated and focused support during an extremely turbulent and challenging time. --Gemma Connell, Head of Regional Office for Southern & Eastern Africa on surge for the Ukraine response

For Carol, deployment to Ukraine was great learning experience.

> " As a professional, the many challenges coordination brought will serve as lessons learned for future emergencies. As an individual, I learned that even in moments of high stress and exhaustion, I must give my best to support my colleagues and ultimately, people in need. --Carol Sanchez, UN Volunteer Humanitarian Affairs Officer with OCHA in Latin America and the Caribbean, deployed to Ukraine as part of the rapid response team

"I am grateful for the opportunity to show how UN Volunteers are committed to playing a key role in response efforts even in the most difficult situations," Carol said.

As the crisis unfolded, providing humanitarian updates as quickly as possible was of the utmost importance, especially in the first days and weeks of the response. Reporting demands grew, and Anthony's prior experience and expertise in humanitarian reporting in emergencies proved invaluable.

> " Anthony quickly became a great asset to the team. He joined us just before the war broke out and was able to perform at the highest level amid rapidly deteriorating security conditions and extreme pressure. His experience with ROLAC put him in a position to provide valuable advice on how to improve OCHA's public and internal products in Ukraine. Moreover, his excellent writing skills and understanding of our mandate have been highly valued within OCHA, both at the country and global levels. --Lizaveta Zhuk, Head of the Public Information and Reporting Unit at OCHA Ukraine

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One of Anthony's tasks was to produce the situation report, daily at the start, then three times a week, highlighting the most urgent humanitarian needs as well as response activities, gaps and constraints. As a means to demonstrating the contribution of UN volunteers to the response, Anthony suggested including a section showcasing the efforts of UNVs and support UN partners to rapidly engage qualified volunteers in emergency response efforts in Ukraine and its neighbours.

> **❝** I wanted to make sure that UN partners were aware of what UN Volunteers offer. I knew there were potential UN Volunteers out there who meaningfully contribute to this response. Adding this information to the situation report provided greater visibility and helped UN partners connect with UN Volunteers. It's beneficial for everyone: both for volunteers in search of experience and agencies looking to bolster capacities. It's a win-win. --Anthony Prassoulis

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