UN Volunteers amplify young voices in their pursuit of a future for all

The Arab States region is considered among the youngest in the world, with half its population under the age of 25. Thus, advancing youth empowerment and inclusion is one key area of activity for UN Volunteers serving with UN partners in the region. This article showcases the diverse ways in which UN Volunteers contribute to creating a future for all ages, while amplifying the voices of young people in various fields.

UN Volunteer Saleh Nasser, serves as an Adolescent and Youth Associate with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Jordan. He supports skills development programmes that place youth with community and business leaders who represent role models. Such programmes help to foster connections across generations through the transfer of knowledge, while equipping youth with tools for success in their future career paths.
Saleh’s UN Volunteer assignment was made possible with generous support from the Government of Sweden, as part of a broader commitment to disability inclusion and national capacity building.

Saleh is part of an inclusion committee and youth advisory council that help UNICEF operationalize its disability inclusion strategies and ensure activities are accessible. Admirably, Saleh counts his service as a way of life.

“As a person living with disability, I bring perspective. I decided to join the team to inspire youth with disabilities to believe in themselves, pursue their dreams and prove people with disabilities in the workplace are capable. --Saleh Nasser, UN Volunteer Adolescent and Youth Associate with UNICEF, Jordan

In the State of Palestine, UN Volunteers Amal Ashour and Rewa Barghouty, both serving with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), contributed to the establishment of the first Youth Advisory Panel.

This is a group of 18 young Palestinian leaders and aims to ensure that Palestinian youth interests and views are meaningfully taken into consideration by key decision-makers and relevant stakeholders, both at the national and international levels. Beyond representing youth and giving them a voice, this coordinated effort by multiple UN agencies creates a space for young people to engage in cross-generational dialogues.

“My role is to encourage youth to be the initiators of opportunities, to make their voices heard, while creating the space for open intergenerational dialogues and bridging the gap. --Rewa Barghouty, UN Volunteer Youth Specialist with UNFPA, State of Palestine
For Amal, who is YAP’s coordinator in Gaza Strip, promoting inclusion is another key component of the work she does, “by ensuring fair participation of youth regardless of their gender or disability,” she explains.

In Egypt, UN Volunteer Mohamed Elfawy is inspiring community change via similar dialogues. As a Y-Peer Field Coordinator, also with UNFPA, Mohamed leads a peer network that conducts health activities designed by and for youth, to exchange ideas about family planning.

In addition, he organizes training for non-governmental organizations and other volunteers, to replicate best practices from the Y-Peer awareness campaigns and activities which have reached over 200,000 youth. These activities have included interactive sessions with community elders to increase public support for the health education, reproductive rights and behavior change youth need to plan and support a family.

Intergenerational dialogues are promoted via a different tool in Sudan, where UN Volunteer Azhar Abdalla is utilizing sports as a means of enhancing community ties.

In her role as a Project Officer on Integrated Community and Stabilization with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Azhar is promoting sports as a means of effecting several layers of change. These range from enhancing inclusion of women and girls, to fostering ties between different generations and reducing tensions between host and refugee communities.

Over the past year, I was fortunate to take a leading part within UNDP’s new Sports for Peace section. The world of sport is a world that has successfully brought different communities together. --Azhar Abdalla, UN Volunteer Project Officer with UNDP, Sudan

Across the various contexts these UN Volunteers serve in, and whatever diverse tools they utilize, they not only demonstrate their commitment to advancing youth empowerment and inclusion, but also prove the power of volunteering in bringing people together and creating a future for all ages.
Arab States

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