



Selected UN Community Volunteers from the Roma community during training organized by UNDP and UNHCR in Belgrade, Serbia.

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Strengthening the social inclusion of young Roma through UN Community Volunteer opportunities

The UN Community Volunteer category was implemented for the first time in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Serbia. Through it, UNDP and UNHCR developed skills and enhanced the employability of 45 young Roma, including internally displaced persons, by offering them UN Community Volunteer assignments. These young Roma were deployed in local institutions, which were supported to formulate, implement and monitor Roma inclusion policies at the local level.

Roma belong to the largest ethnic minority in Serbia and are still among the most deprived communities, often facing discrimination, social exclusion and unequal access to employment, education, housing and health services. The 2017 Regional Survey on socio-economic position of vulnerable Roma in the Western Balkans, commissioned by UNDP, showed that the biggest challenges for social inclusion of Roma in Serbia are their high unemployment and inactivity rates. While the education aspect has improved for Roma, it is not resulting in their employment.

With this evidence available, UNDP started searching for options to contribute to improved employment and expanding economic opportunities of young educated Roma. Given that there is a very low percentage of Roma working in governmental institutions, this was yet another factor taken into account. The UNV UN Community Volunteer Modality proved to be appropriate for young Roma, and a possible flagship for expanding economic opportunities in the sub-region.

Through the pilot UN Community Volunteer modality, UNV, UNDP and UNHCR were able to engage 45 young Roma women and men in local governments and other governmental or non-governmental institutions at the local level and to improve their social inclusion.

Initial employment was for 6 months (May-October 2018). Afterwards, 19 out of 30 contracts were extended till the end of 2018. In early 2019, 15 out of 19 contracts were further extended until the end of April 2019. Due to the success of this project cycle, UNDP and UNHCR announced a new call for applications for the new group of 15 UN Volunteers contracted in May 2019 for 6 months.

Five training modules were prepared, and trainings organized for all 45 selected young Roma men and women. The trainings focused on human rights, discrimination, statelessness; legally invisible people, stateless persons, IDPs and returnees; vulnerable group rights; and the functioning of the local mechanisms for social inclusion.

In addition to capacity building and networking, a Summer Camp for young Roma men and women was organized, covering questions of identity and offering advocacy trainings.

Results achieved

The 45 selected young Roma increased their knowledge and acquired capacities for working in local institutions, thereby empowering the participation of young Roma in the society and their inclusion in the institutions. The participants learned about their ability to influence changes at the local level.

They were deployed in 33 municipalities across Serbia to work in different institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture and Information, Provincial government, local self-government units, health centres, and centres for social work. Having them work as accountants, legal advisers, social workers, nurses, administrative workers and human resource advisers etc. was also beneficial for the Roma community in those municipalities, since

volunteers assisted them in solving their issues.

The project invested efforts in negotiating with local stakeholders to maintain these young Roma and Roma IDPs employed beyond the completion of their engagement as UN Volunteers. So far, out of 45 Roma engaged through the project, continued employment has been secured for 9 people.

The intervention, particularly the tailor-made UN Community Volunteer modality for placement of young Roma in local institutions, has raised significant interest among international organizations (WHO, UNECE, REF, RCC), as well as national and local institutions, but also among young Roma.

Challenges and how they were addressed

The main challenge that occurred during this intervention is related to the advocating for the establishment of permanent positions for representatives of Roma community in the local institutions, as there is still an employment ban in the public sector at present (adopted by the Government).



<https://www.unv.org/Our-stories/engagement-employment-improving-social-inclusion-young-Roma-Serbia>

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