



Mirsade Salihu (right) teaches a literacy and numeracy class for girls at The Ideas Partnership's Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje centre. As Salihu describes it, her passion for education and learning never left, but she was abruptly forced to halt her studies during the region's conflict of the 1990s. "I woke up when I started my education again," she says. And her excitement to jump back into learning seems to translate into her teaching, for which she clearly has a natural aptitude. (Sarah Murphy, 2014)

Making changes through education

Inside the classroom, ten young teenage girls sit among four rows of old wooden tables. Pens in hand and eyes on the blackboard, the girls are oblivious to the laughter and community chatter emanating from the street outside. Their teacher is Mirsade Salihu. A 36-year-old mother of three and active member of her local community, Salihu is one of the volunteers that is part of a project supported by UNV and implemented by The Ideas Partnership to empower Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian communities in Kosovo.

It's a rare sunny day here in the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian (RAE) quarter of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje; a welcome respite from a long spell of chilly, overcast winter weather.

It's also the perfect day to skip school. Or, if you're not enrolled in school – as is the case for nearly 15 per cent of the school-aged children in this impoverished neighbourhood – it's the perfect day to skip your two-hour literacy and numeracy class at the local The Ideas Partnership (TIP) centre.

But here inside this sunlit classroom, ten young teenage girls sit among four rows of old wooden tables. Pens in hand and eyes on the blackboard, the girls are oblivious to the laughter and community chatter emanating from the street outside.

Their teacher is Mirsade Salihu. A 36-year-old mother of three and active member of her local RAE community, Salihu is one of only four women among the 20-member "Community Changemakers" group that comprises one aspect of a three-part project supported by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. It is being implemented by TIP in the Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje and Obiliq/Obilić municipalities of Kosovo*.

The Community Changemakers part of the project targets a carefully selected group of individuals from these marginalized communities for special training in community advocacy, project design and entrepreneurial skills, and broad empowerment capacities for themselves and their communities.

Salihu seems effortlessly comfortable in front of her classroom of transfixed young students. As she patiently reviews the fundamentals of simple addition, Salihu variously calls upon her students to join her at the blackboard, weaving interaction into the instruction process while carefully maintaining her students' focus as though she's been a teacher all her life.

But in fact, Salihu has been teaching for barely two months, and moreover is herself in the process of completing her own high school education.

Salihu's high school education was cut short in the 1990s when conflict and barriers in access to education prevented her from completing her formal studies in law. But last year, she jumped back into formal studies via TIP's bursary scheme, and by January she had initiated her literacy and numeracy classes for girls – which she devised herself and for which she personally recruited students – as well as joined the UNV-supported project's Community Changemakers group.

"These classes really hit the target of what is very much needed here, since all these girls are really interested and really wanted to learn," says Samir Statovci, manager of TIP's UNV-supported project. "Mirsade was chosen to join the Changemakers group due to her noticeable passion and ability to advocate for her community," continues Statovci. "She is determined to help enable those in her community to gain the basic skills required to empower them in the world beyond their marginalized neighbourhood."

“In the future, these women will be young mothers, and they will be able to assist their children with schooling,” says Statovci. “And this will help in our overall cause to lower illiteracy rates in the community.”

This is a success story from a United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) component within a UN Joint project in Kosovo funded by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security and implemented by The Ideas Partnership.

***All references to Kosovo on this story are made in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)**

• Kosovo • RAE • Roma • Ashkali • Egyptian • The Ideas Partnership • education

Sustainable Development Goal: