2,000 impressions, or, why I promote my UN Volunteer experience

Year 2019. One day, in the middle of my active search for opportunities to serve the Sustainable Development Agenda, I see a national UN Volunteer Communications Officer opening with the UN Development Programme in Azerbaijan. I read the description, thinking “this is about me!” and applied immediately... and so my journey began. It’s been more than a year now since that day, and I can proudly say that I am where I am supposed to be.

Year 2020. After this one-year life-changing journey, I got my certificate and shared it on my LinkedIn profile, tagging the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. With that another exciting journey began: people from all over the world started liking, sharing and
asking me to talk through my experience with them. From Africa to Asia, more than 2,000 people felt inspired by two simple sentences I wrote when sharing my UN Volunteer Certificate of Service. They sent me questions, asking me to explain the steps I had taken to get the assignment and to share my own vision of the process. Enjoy the ride (or read?).

How do I apply? The answer is simple: go to vmam.unv.org. Provide basic info about yourself, register your profile and start filling it out with further details about your studies, internships and work. Share everything a hiring agency needs to know about you and your background. Then you check the special calls page, where all vacancies are listed. There are several categories for volunteers such as University, Youth, Specialist or Expert -- in national or international assignments (I was a national Volunteer). There is an "Apply" button which you can click to "officially run" for a chosen position, but please be 100 per cent sure that you are "the one". Your drive and inspiration are key factors for success when you become a volunteer.

What does the hiring process look like? I was ready to do everything for the process go smoothly and be accepted for my dream assignment. So, first, you apply. Then if you make it to the shortlist of the candidates, a test assignment is sent to you to check your capabilities (this part may differ from agency to agency). If successful in the test, you may be invited to a panel interview. The awesome news is that on the UN website, they have the competency-based interview questions to help you prepare.

What skills do they require from me as a UN Volunteer? There is no specific answer to this, I would say. Different positions have different requirements. From your side just be sure that you are "the one" for the position. Read the description of assignment carefully. Work on yourself and be prepared.

Does my little experience with volunteering affect my UNV application? Before my UN Volunteer assignment, I did a little volunteering, but not officially. It is important to understand the added value of volunteerism and be inspired by the rewards volunteering brings, like the opportunity to learn, meet new people, have new experiences and help others.

How can I volunteer in my country? On the page https://www.unv.org/special-calls you can
filter the calls by countries and see if there are any assignments in your country at the moment.

Can I apply to be a volunteer in another country? Of course, you can! You need to apply for international UN Volunteer assignments.

What is the age limit? For Expert Volunteers there is a minimum age of 35 years, for National Specialists - 22, and for International Specialists - 25; for UN Youth Volunteers the age range is between 18 and 29 years.

Is the assignment paid? You receive a volunteer living allowance. In addition to that, you get medical insurance and learning support.

How can I apply for online volunteering? Good one! There is a separate website for it: onlinevolunteering.org. Check it out for possibilities that you can contribute to. Online volunteering allows organizations and volunteers to team up to address sustainable development challenges – anywhere in the world, from any device. Online volunteering is fast, easy and – most of all – effective.

Dilara Umudova with her former colleague Arzu Jafarli, Communications and External Relations Analyst. ©UN, 2019

People were asking me "Dilara, please, share what UNV promises you?". So I listed several of the most important advantages that the UN Volunteers programme will bring to your life and career when you join it. I hope this list will inspire everyone who is still considering
whether volunteering is worth doing.

- **An international community.** I think that was the most exciting part when I was applying for this assignment.

- **Immense experience.** Looking back at that only one-year experience and my achievements, I saw how much I’ve grown in such a short period of time... and my CV could barely accommodate the real growth I experienced.

- **Stress resilience and fast decision making.** There were times when I would complete work assignments and afterwards wonder how I managed. There were times when I was not sure, but did it anyway to learn from my mistakes, if I had taken the wrong decision. You just learn to be more flexible than ever.

- **Mentors for life.** Every person you meet in the UN has a purpose of serving for justice and peace in their country, region and in the world. An intern or a senior employee, each of them knows exactly what they want to achieve and will gladly support you.

- **New goals and ambitious perspectives.** During my one-year assignment, my most important achievements were related to the women's empowerment and gender projects. So, I was into this issue more than ever. As a result, when I got an offer from a project working to end violence against women and girls in Azerbaijan, I immediately said yes, and here I am working with the amazing team at UNDP Azerbaijan team to achieve this goal.

Dilara (third from left) and her colleagues on United Nations Day. ©UN, 2019
• Volunteering • national UN Volunteer • capacity building

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals