Health prevention for migrants

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) of Bosnia and Herzegovina has a variety of important and successful projects related to border management, migration, and human trafficking. In early February 2013, I was warmly welcomed as a new intern with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in the Migration Health Programme. This great opportunity brings a new perspective to my previous migration experience.

One of the IOM Sarajevo programmes organized focus group discussions in cities like Sarajevo, Biha, Gradi’ka, Benja Luka or Tuzla, and these were my first great experiences as a new UN Volunteer Intern. The discussions were not only a chance to explore parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina but also an opportunity to meet IOM staff working in the field.

The focus group discussions were part of a project related to HIV/AIDS (Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria), and included potential migrants such as students, truck drivers and labour migrants who might be at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and HIV.

The main objective of these focus group discussions was to learn what people know about
sexually transmitted diseases and to find out where they get their information from. Based on their inputs, information materials will be produced for migrants.

Especially for me as a UN Volunteer Intern, participating in the discussions provided an opportunity to better understand the whole process involved in organizing groups: recruiting participants, carrying out assessments and producing results.

The other integral part of the programme at IOM is the Swedish Medical Programme. The main aim of the programme is to build the local capacity of medical staff and institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

One of the daily activities of IOM staff under this programme is to assist migrants at the medical centre. Usually, it is a long process involving the necessary medical examinations, HIV and syphilis tests. IOM staff also help participants complete visa applications. My task is to prepare documents and medical sheets and then later send them to the respective embassies.

Being part of IOM as a UN Volunteer Intern is very inspiring and every day brings new experiences and connections. To me, volunteerism is the best way of giving and receiving. Being part of the volunteer community brings new opportunities and builds strong spirit. I cannot imagine a better start for my life and career.

Bio: Marketa Stodolova was born in the Czech Republic. She started volunteering during her studies of Humanitarian and Social Work at Palacky University. She has volunteer experiences with Shekel - Community Service for People with Special Needs in Jerusalem, Israel where she worked for one year; Caritas Athens - Refugee programme in Greece; among others. She recently interrupted her Master’s degree in International Humanitarian Assistance and Social Work to become a UN Volunteer Intern with IOM Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina.