Across the world, UN Volunteers step forward to leave no one behind

As the Coronavirus pandemic rages across the world, marginalized and disadvantaged people have become even more vulnerable. Emergencies like COVID-19 present unique challenges, hence vulnerable populations are more likely to experience increased hardship, due to lack of access to effective information, surveillance, early-warning systems and health services.

As the pandemic continued to spread, UN Volunteers across the world stepped forward. They ensured marginalized and disadvantaged communities, including people with disabilities, indigenous communities, refugees and people on the move are included in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

With a disproportionate impact on human mobility, migrants and mobile populations are
among the most vulnerable to COVID-19. In Lao PDR, UN Volunteer Suhyun Park is serving with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Suhyun is working to improve the prevention, detection and response to the spread of disease at the points of entry bordering Lao PDR and neighboring countries. These activities help ensure the safety of travelers, migrants and frontline border officials and contribute to IOM’s commitment to facilitate orderly, safe and regular migration and mobility.

"As a UN Volunteer, I'm proud to have been able to provide communications support under the mission’s COVID-19 project. At the points of entry, I am helping to monitor facilities and provide personal protective equipment and information, education and communication materials for border officials and migrants. --Suhyun Park, UN Volunteer with IOM in Lao PDR"

"In the process, we are raising awareness on personal hygiene practices, reaching thousands of beneficiaries. Other efforts include providing frontline officials training on standard operating procedures to enhance their COVID-19 response capacities as well as developing IEC materials for the safety of incoming and outgoing passengers," Suhyun says.

In Tajikistan, UN Volunteer Ruhafoz Nekushoeva serves with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Dushanbe to support refugees and asylum seekers during the COVID-19 crisis. She was engaged UNHCR’s dedicated information campaign for COVID-19 prevention, including facilitating the printing and dissemination of information materials through partner organizations, in locations where refugees and asylum seekers reside.

Posters depicting hygiene measures, restrictions on gatherings and travel and guides on maintaining social distancing were produced, initially in English and Russian. Later, through the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, they were later translated into Dari, the native language of a large group of refugees and asylum seekers.

In Guatemala, UN Volunteer with UN Women Ingrid Sierra, an indigenous woman from the Poqomchi’ linguistic community, with a Q’eqchi identity, is leading her community's response efforts to the pandemic, demonstrating the immense power of solidarity and compassion in the face of crisis. Unable to conduct field visits at the outbreak of COVID-19, Ingrid continued reaching women through different means – such as making phone calls to maintain contact and gathering information about how COVID-19 is affecting women’s lives, their decision-making authority and their access to services and basic needs.

UN Volunteers serving with UNICEF in the Middle East and North Africa have been
supporting the Blue Dot programme that aims to build resilience among children in the region. At the same time, they have been engaged in the UNICEF’s efforts to mitigate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable children in Jordan. Others serving with UNHCR have been helping refugees brace themselves for COVID-19 in Sudan and compiling data on livelihoods and access to healthcare in Djibouti.

In Liberia, 50 UN Community Volunteers reached out to cross-border communities to educate them on COVID-19 prevention measures. As part of the mission to ensure no one is left behind, they reached out to 100 disabled people from Lofa and Foya County, assessed their needs and shared with UN partners for support. They donated skills training materials, such as fabric for sewing and thread for weaving, as a form of empowerment.

“UN Community Volunteers created awareness among us on COVID-19. They made us feel that we are included. We are very happy and grateful. --Nancy Andrew, President of the Association for Disabled Women of Foya County

In Zimbabwe, UN Volunteer Gift Govere has been supporting a multi-stakeholder project for women and girls with disabilities and has adapted his tasks to ensure a disability and gender-inclusive response during COVID-19.

UN Volunteer Dao Thu Huong, serving with UNDP in Viet Nam, as a Disability Rights Officer, reiterated the importance of fighting against stigma due to the pandemic. Both, Gift and Dao are UN Volunteers deployed under the Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities, jointly implemented by UNDP and UNV.

Through each action, UN Volunteers have helped strengthen societies by reimagining the future of human mobility to ensure that it is inclusive, safe and respects all human rights. As we move into the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer actions will be vital in countering post-crisis marginalization and exclusion and promoting dialogue between authorities and vulnerable populations.

Through volunteering, we can ensure no one is left behind.
Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being, SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals