



Markéta Pavlíková speaking to participants at the Youth and Women Forum "Together for the Future" in December 2016. (UNV, 2016)

Engaging with internally displaced people through volunteering

Markéta Pavlíková, a UN Youth Volunteer in Youth Participation in Governance and Peacebuilding has been deployed in Ukraine since February 2016. Her assignment is funded by the Czech Republic.

My assignment as a UN Youth Volunteer in Youth Participation in Governance and Peacebuilding with the United Nations Development Programme is based in Ukraine. For the first six months, I was working in Kiev on business conferences and entrepreneurship promotion through targeted motivation campaigns – something that didn't really perk my interest. It was like being in a world full of abbreviations, stacks of files and papers.

I missed working in the field and in challenging situations. I was not cut out for desk work. Even though Kiev being the capital was multicultural – nevertheless, it was like any other capital city.

After a few conversations with my supervisors, the relocation to the Eastern part of the country was arranged. People around me thought it was strange for me to opt for Donbas, which had been engulfed by armed conflict.

Everything changed, so suddenly and so much. When I entered the campus surrounded by barbed wire, I saw a yard full of armoured vehicles and an office where helmets and bullet proof vests were scattered on the floor. It was a surreal feeling, almost as if I had had an adrenalin rush, and from that point onwards my entire outlook towards my volunteer assignment changed.

“ This experience is teaching me to go beyond my line of duty. It has made me resilient.

I started mapping the existing youth NGOs in the region. I got a chance to speak with the local people, the internally displaced people and the activists. I listened to their stories full of challenges but also their eagerness to overcome them.

I co-organized the first forum for youth and women NGOs in the region and International Tolerance Day where we had more than 400 people attend the event.

As a UN Youth Volunteer I am able to engage with the local community. They have started accepting me. This achievement of making my place among them and being one of them gives me the energy to do more and without any fear.

My UN Youth Volunteer assignment has been full of challenges and even tears but I believe the easiest way is never the best one. This experience is teaching me to go beyond my line of duty. It has made me resilient. The people of Donbas and their strength to fight with adversity is becoming my strength.

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