Protecting Internally Displaced Persons, including women and girls

Based in Goma, a city in the eastern DRC, Italian international UN Volunteer Serena Ricci is assigned to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as an associate protection officer. Her role is to ensure the protection of refugees, forcibly displaced women, girls, men and boys and people with specific needs.

“Sexual and Gender-Based Violence is an acute problem in the DRC and often considered as taboo. With the support of local partners, one of my roles is to sensitize local communities, traditional leaders, refugees, members of the Congolese army and the police on SGBV related issues and capacitated to work as change agent in their respective communities to achieve the ultimate outcome of prevent SGBV”, Serena said.

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“I am as well supervising a pilot project empowering 100 displaced women via the production and use of briquettes, a low-emission cooking fuel made from dried biodegradable materials for income generating activities such as bakery”, she added. Serena is a strong advocate and integrates a gender perspective into the activities she is conducting. What has been her most memorable moment to date? When she saw traditional leaders stepping up against forced and early marriage within their communities in Shabunda, a remote area in South Kivu.

“The sensitization session we organized made them aware that some practices commonly accepted in their community amounted to some forms of SGBV. They even decided to volunteer and record advocacy messages against early marriage on the radio which was later broadcasted in the region”, Serena said.

Serena is grateful to contribute her time and skills through volunteering for UNHCR and seeing that her assignment has a real impact on the different communities living in the region.