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Training of youth leaders in Sri Lanka to strengthen knowledge of peace and conflict management, as well as values of non-violent communication and respect for diversity. (UNV, 2018)

Harnessing the power of youth through volunteering

UNV promotes youth participation through volunteering, offering opportunities for young people to engage in local and global action, and providing spaces for them to contribute to peace and development as volunteers, while building their skills and professional experience.
Young people are a driving force for peace and development. Their energy and creativity are key in building a better future, and they are often the first to come up with innovative solutions to the world’s most pressing issues.

Yet millions of young women and men are affected by conflict, violence and deprivation, and are unable to fulfil their potential. The world’s youth need safe spaces where they can participate, express their views and exercise their rights.

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In 2017, of the 6,501 UN Volunteers on the ground, 28 percent were under the age of 29 and served with 23 UN entities in 79 countries worldwide. And 63 percent of the 17,893 UN Online Volunteers supporting 2,200 development organizations around the world were also under 29. This youth force contributed to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals by supporting our partners’ mandates and objectives, bringing a fresh outlook on development issues and an innovative approach to finding solutions.

Hyeon-Soo Jeon, for example, is an international UN Youth Volunteer with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kosovo (as per UN Security Council Resolution 1244), where she is tasked with finding innovative solutions and approaches to UNDP’s development processes. And Oskar Tinnerholm, UN Volunteer Conflict Resolution Officer with UNDP in Guatemala, trains young leaders in addressing social conflict and promoting peacebuilding in the country.

In the State of Palestine, a UNESCO project supported by a UN Volunteer has mobilized more than 600 young local volunteers who have contributed to the activities of ten community libraries and helped more than 24,000 vulnerable higher education students – most of them women – find the support they needed to carry out their studies and enhance their skills. And in Sri Lanka, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV developed a joint project to engage young people in peace initiatives, providing a safe space for youth to express themselves and to learn and interact with other young people from different ethnicities and religions.

Volunteering is an essential tool to enhance national capacity and the social inclusion of youth. UNV supports Member States in their efforts to establish national volunteer infrastructure initiatives. In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, a National Volunteer Programme promotes the socio-professional integration of young people, with 471 youth aged between 18 and 35 deployed as national volunteers. Moreover, in 2017 UNV was involved in the creation of laws on volunteerism in Côte d’Ivoire and Madagascar as well as national policies on volunteerism in Kenya and Rwanda.
Through partnerships, UNV offers volunteering and capacity-building opportunities to young people. Since 2013, UNV and the Kwansei Gakuin University (KGU) in Japan have mobilized over 70 university students selected from nine partner universities to serve as UN University Volunteers for five-month assignments with UN entities worldwide.

In West and Central Africa, where 64 percent of the population is under 25 years of age, UNV plans to offer more opportunities for engagement to young people through innovative partnerships with UN agencies and partners. In Senegal, for example, UNV has recently started a partnership with the Institute of Management to provide UN University Volunteer opportunities for students so that they can contribute to sustainable peace and development in Africa.

According to Dr Richard Munang, Africa Regional Climate Change Programme Coordinator with UNEP, and author of the book 'Making Africa work through the Power of Innovative Volunteerism', development and peace need to be driven through innovative forms of volunteerism, particularly among youth. “An ocean is formed little by little by drops of water, and if we bring everyone together we will be able to implement the SDGs and drive transformational change for people and planet.”

Research shows that millions of young people around the world are ready and willing to provide leadership and inspiration in global peace and development, yet they face vulnerabilities and challenges.

As highlighted in the 2018 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report, young people are active in volunteering but often excluded from decision-making. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on the inclusive representation of youth noted that a lack of leadership opportunities, protection and support for young people leave them open to undesirable influences, including antisocial forms of engagement.

By mobilizing thousands of young volunteers to contribute to the work of the United Nations around the world, and by supporting national and local governments to enhance youth involvement through volunteering, UNV provides young people with opportunities to have their voices heard, connect with others in similar situations, and build their skills and experience for the future.

• youth • International Youth Day

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth, SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions