



Participants in the Regional Consultation on the Plan of Action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda in the ESCWA region

## Exploring the way towards reimagining volunteerism in the Western Asia region

The Regional Consultation on the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region took place on 10 April 2019, in the context of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development in Beirut, Lebanon.

The Consultation provided a space for Plan of Action stakeholders from the ESCWA region to identify opportunities to support volunteers to accelerate SDG progress and maximize the potential of volunteering to tackle the region's most pressing issues.

Frederico Neto, Director of the Social Development Division at the ESCWA, and Jason Pronyk, Regional Manager of the UNV in the Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, delivered opening remarks and invited participants to discuss some of the key challenges already highlighted in the Regional Synthesis Report for the ESCWA region. These include enhancing the measurement of scale and scope of volunteering in

the region, addressing the obstacles faced by female volunteers and linking youth volunteering with enhanced youth employability.

“ A step change is necessary to genuinely integrate volunteerism into the 2030 Agenda, so it can be a force for change, said Jason Pronyk, UNV Regional Manager for Arab States, Europe and CIS

The Regional Consultation was moderated by Ziad Abdel Samad, the Executive Director of Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), and chaired by Mahmoud Ataya, the Director General of Policy and Reform Unit at the Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine. Ataya shared his country's experience in measuring volunteerism and explained how the concept has evolved within the Palestinian society over the years.



Sheikha Hissa Al-Thani, League of Arab States Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs © (Imad Maalouf, UNV 2019)

Sheikha Hissa Al-Thani, League of Arab States Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs, focused on the value of self-driven initiatives and role of local volunteers in addressing development and humanitarian needs of their communities.

“ Throughout my work as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on Disability and as a Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs, I have met many youth volunteers. I was amazed by how most of them were engaged through self-driven initiatives in response to the crises that affected children, women and the elderly in our region in the past years, said Sheikha Hissa Al-Thani, League of Arab States Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs



Meryem Agadi, in charge of Cooperation and Partnerships at the General Secretariat of Ministry of Youth and Sports in Morocco © (Imad Maalouf, UNV 2019)

Meryem Agadi, in charge of Cooperation and Partnerships at the General Secretariat of Ministry of Youth and Sports in Morocco, talked about volunteering infrastructure in her country and shared the experience of the MoYS in supporting youth volunteering, pointing out that it is seen as a means of enhancing youth employability.



Nader Keyrouz, Regional Labour Statistician, ILO Regional Office for Arab States © (Imad Maalouf, UNV 2019)

Nader Keyrouz, Regional Labour Statistician at the International Labour Organization Regional Office for Arab States, highlighted the importance of measuring volunteerism, while explaining the challenges statisticians face when measuring informal volunteering. He added that ILO is performing some cognitive testing in the region to develop measurement tools that are more inclusive and adaptive to regional specificities.

Emma Morley, Chief of Volunteer Advisory Services at the UNV programme, shared findings from a regional synthesis report that drew on information submitted by ESCWA Member States on the scale, scope and impact of volunteerism across the region. Based on evidence from the report, Morely provided some recommendations on the need to provide more evidence around volunteering in the region, namely around local and informal forms of volunteering and its holistic benefits. Other recommendations highlighted the need of an enabling and more inclusive environment and the potential

of volunteering in empowering marginalized groups and as part of post-conflict peace building frameworks.

[The outcome of the discussions](#) will feed into further dialogues on the Plan of Action and inform a global synthesis report for a Global Technical Meeting to be held at the 2020 High Level Political Forum and co-chaired by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the UNV programme.



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