

# DIVERSITY MOSAIC

 | **77**  
*inspirations*









**DIVERSITY** | **77**  
**MOSAIC** | *inspirations*

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Ten years ago, there were seven UN Volunteers with disabilities in the entire United Nations system.

This year, 177 UN Volunteers with disabilities are helping the United Nations to promote peace, development and human rights worldwide.

From achieving inclusive education to assisting migrants,  
from empowering women to fighting disinformation,  
here and now, volunteers with disabilities are making difference in people's lives.

UNV presents to you these trailblazers and, through them, a story of profound change.

Has disability inclusion become the new normal in the United Nations?

Not yet. But it is no longer a mere aspiration.



Toily Kurbanov  
United Nations Volunteers



**LEADING** |  
**FROM THE HEART**

## LILIANE AKADATA

Liliane Akadata (28) is a UN Volunteer Disability Inclusion and Monitoring and Evaluation Assistant with UNDP in Rwanda. She is helping persons with disabilities become full participants in the workforce by crafting inclusive policies that promote their long-term employment success. Liliane contributed to a thorough update of the legal disability protection frameworks in the country. Liliane has a physical disability. She encourages everyone to embrace challenges, become lifelong learners and volunteer to help others.

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The first year of Liliane's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“My life motto is, ‘Turn obstacles into opportunities’. To my mind, this mantra is deeply intertwined with disability. It encapsulates the extraordinary capacity of individuals with disabilities to transform challenges into stepping stones for growth and accomplishment.”***





## CHRISTIAN DIESTRA

Christian Diestra (32) serves with UNHCR in Peru as a UN Volunteer Programme Assistant. He supports project and partnership agreements, oversees budgets and monitors financial reports. Despite Christian's physical disability, he regularly visits social projects with partners, which was not possible in previous workplaces.

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The first year of Christian's assignment was fully funded by Sida.

***“Being a UN Volunteer has given me a lot of hope that I will be able to find workplaces where my disability is not an impediment to my being active in monitoring social projects.”***



## **MARINELA MARQUEZ NUÑEZ**

Marinela Marquez Nuñez (59) was an Online Volunteer serving from her home in the Philippines. She was part of a UNV research and mapping project that examined digital volunteering trends in the Asia-Pacific region. Marinela previously served as a UN Volunteer in South Sudan. In 2020, two years after her on-site assignment ended, she was injured in her home, resulting in a physical disability.

*“UNV understands us. The United Nations may look like an enormous entity, but it is a kind giant, because it promotes inclusion and equality. The United Nations is not to be feared; it is ourselves – our mind, our insecurities – that cripple us. So here I am now, not very physically fit, but my mind and heart are able. I am happy that UNV considers us.”*

## **LANA EL-SKAFI**

Lana El-Skafi (25) is a UN Volunteer Research Assistant with UNESCWA in Lebanon. She promotes gender equality, addressing population dynamics and ensuring inclusivity in development processes. Her work helps identify knowledge gaps and sheds light on pressing issues affecting vulnerable populations. Lana has cerebral palsy, which she says has given her a resilient and compassionate outlook and an appreciation for the beauty of life in all of its myriad forms.



***“My motto is, ‘make the impossible possible’. As a volunteer, I am committed to empowering individuals with disabilities, breaking down barriers and building a more inclusive society.”***





## **JASSIM MUSTAFA ABDULREDHA AHMED YUSUF**

In Bahrain, Jassim Mustafa Abdulredha Ahmed Yusuf (37) is a UN Volunteer Communications Specialist. He is based in Manama with the United Nations Information Centre, UNDGC. As part of his assignment, Jassim prepares the local news brief. He also regularly uploads content to the website to spread awareness of United Nations activities and disseminate news. Jassim has Friedreich's ataxia, an inherited degenerative disease that affects the spinal cord and nerves.

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The first year of Jassim's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“A statement that resonates with me is: ‘Everyone has a disability; the question is what you are going to do about it.’ I recommend volunteering with the United Nations. Always give back. It helps you build your potential.”***

## **BARTHOLOMEW MAIDA**

In Malawi, Bartholomew Maida (35) serves as a UN Volunteer Finance Officer with UNDP. He supports the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit by streamlining financial planning. In the process, he is determined to prove that being a paraplegic does not hinder him from collaborating effectively. During the rainy season, when moving between buildings in a wheelchair was challenging, he switched to online platforms to collaborate with colleagues.



***“My motto is, ‘if you can conceive it, you can achieve it’. I believe that I have emerged as a role model within the disability space, proving that determination and dedication can overcome barriers. As of now, I am proudly serving as a UN Volunteer, an opportunity that continues to enrich my professional journey while enabling me to contribute to positive change at both local and global levels.”***



## ANTONIO PALMA LÓPEZ

Antonio Palma López (27) is a UN Volunteer Communications Assistant with UNRCO in Guatemala. He fights for the rights of persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups, emphasizing access to education. Antonio first felt the sting of exclusion as a young child, when he was turned away from his first day of school after administrators realized he was blind. That memory spurs Antonio – who today is a multi-instrumentalist studying for a college degree – to spotlight the talents of persons with disabilities.



*“I was diagnosed with retinoblastoma as an infant and completely lost my sight at the age of four. I have had to deal with my condition my entire life. When I first started, I was surprised when my supervisor said that they were going to learn from me. That moment made me see how far I had come. Today, as a UN Volunteer, I can say that I have found the way to reach my full potential.”*



## ASRAA ALGHALI

Asraa Alghali (28) is the first woman with a disability to serve as a national UN Volunteer in Libya. She is an Education Sector Coordinator with UNICEF. Children with disabilities often face barriers to education that other children do not. The armed conflict and socioeconomic instability in Libya add extra educational challenges for them. That is where Asraa comes in, helping to knock down barriers.

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The first year of Asraa's assignment was fully funded by BMZ, Government of Germany.

***"One of my key achievements is that I defied my situation. I didn't stay home, blame it on disability and not fulfil my duties as a citizen. People with disabilities shouldn't imprison themselves. They should have an impact on life regardless of their situation. A disability lies in the mind, not in eyes, arms or ears. If the mind is free, the person is not disabled."***



## **ANXO PÉREZ RODRÍGUEZ**

From Spain, Anxo Pérez Rodríguez (32) supported the UNV office in Panama as an Online Volunteer. Despite his bilateral hearing loss, which stemmed from having jaundice at birth, he transcribed audio recordings to text. The testimonials of UN Volunteers he prepared are being woven into communications products that highlight the positive impact volunteers have on the communities they serve.

*“Volunteering online has helped me feel useful, test my abilities, become an agent of change, and act according to my ideological values (solidarity, altruism, empathy and human rights). By meeting people outside of my typical social environment through my assignment, I have acquired basic social values that allow me to relate to a larger community. We have both nurtured our points of view in a more positive and satisfying way. We have gained greater emotional intelligence.”*

## **JOAQUINA ARMANDO RODRIGUÊS**

Joaquina Armando Rodriguês (32) is a UN Volunteer Project Associate with UNESCO in Mozambique. She ensures that persons with disabilities have meaningful work and can fully participate in society. Joaquina has albinism and works in support of the National Action Plan on Albinism.



*“In a very rural and remote area of Zambezia Province, we came across children and youth with albinism who were discriminated against to the point that they couldn’t even go to school or play with other kids. They were seen as monsters or cursed people. We had an extensive dialogue about albinism with community, religious and education leaders, who then included albinism and human rights topics in their daily class plans. Months later, most of the children had been enrolled in school. The behaviour change in the community was noticed in a positive way, meaning the work we did had a positive impact on the people with whom we engaged.”*





## GUILLAUME PYOT

In Senegal, Guillaume Pyot (30) was a UN Volunteer Human Rights Specialist with OHCHR from 2020 to 2022. He engaged in protecting and promoting the economic, social and cultural rights of women, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups. One priority for him was the right to work, as he felt this was the key to achieving a more inclusive future. Guillaume is from France and has diabetes.

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The first year of Guillaume's assignment was fully funded by the Government of France.



***“When you come across people with disabilities, rather than pretending there is no difference, acknowledge that we are all different. This little change can help everyone bring their own experiences and expertise to the table. Some people with disabilities choose not to get involved, as they often have the impression that they are not being heard. To them I say, please don’t give up. Share your voice. Your participation will help people change the future in the right direction.”***

## DAMBA MANA N'DJOH NIKABOU

Damba Mana N'djoh Nikabou (35) was a UN Volunteer Communications and Advocacy Associate for Disability Inclusion with UNRCO in Togo from 2022 to 2023. She was the focal point for disability inclusion and helped weave disability considerations into agency programmes and projects. Damba promoted the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, highlighting the ways in which United Nations agencies support persons with disabilities. She also used social media platforms to generate interest in disability and access issues. Her own experiences as a person with hearing loss inspired her work.

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Damba's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***"Volunteering is a wonderful opportunity to work with a team that respects and values my disability. When I interact with persons with disabilities in the context of my work, they naturally feel more confident and willing to open up to me. They feel understood by another person who experiences situations similar to their own every day."***



## JONATHAN ANDRIAMBALOHERY

Jonathan Andriambalohery (30) is a UN Volunteer Communications and Social Media Assistant with UNV in Madagascar. By managing social media and creating different communications materials, he captures the contributions of fellow volunteers, highlighting their impact on partners and communities. Jonathan has a physical disability and brings people together to advance inclusion.

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The first year of Jonathan's assignment was fully funded by BMZ, Government of Germany.



*“My journey into volunteering was sparked by a life-changing experience. When I fell sick in my hometown village, volunteers came to my family’s aid, making me realize the profound impact of their selfless actions. Today, I volunteer with the same spirit, aiming to help others and inspire those around me to join in the cause.”*



## **KRISTINE RODA ALINGOD**

Kristine Roda Alingod (45) was a UN Volunteer Programme Officer (Children with Disabilities) with UNICEF in the Philippines from 2022-2023. She helped the Child Protection team develop more inclusive programmes that better responded to the needs of children with disabilities. As a person with an invisible disability, Kristine brought a unique perspective to the work of UNICEF, in addition to her skills and experience.

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Kristine's assignment was fully funded by Sida.

***“Volunteering provides pathways to a life that otherwise would be closed to some groups. In my case, it gave me a door to a world of high-level developmental work within a powerful and historic organization. Volunteering provided a pathway, not despite my disability, but because I have a disability. I am very hopeful. Today’s technology, such as immersive readers and the text-to-speech capabilities available in everyday phones, enables people with disabilities to volunteer.”***



## MAZEN BADAWI

Mazen Badawi (39) is a UN Volunteer Research and Analysis Assistant with IOM in Lebanon. He assists the Data and Research Unit in collecting and analysing data about migrants in Lebanon. Mazen's reports on migrant movements help partners meet the needs of migrants more effectively.

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Mazen's assignment is fully funded by Sida.

*“One of my favourite quotes is: ‘Disability is not a brave struggle or courage in the face of adversity. Disability is an art. It’s an ingenious way to live’. These words, by writer and actor Neil Marcus, resonate with me deeply. My role model and source of inspiration is Stephen Hawking. His advocacy for disability rights and commitment to inclusive communities motivated me to strive for positive change and challenge societal perceptions.”*







## MARIANA ȚÎBULAC-CIOBANU

When Mariana Țîbulac-Ciobanu (41) joined UNFPA in Moldova in late 2021, she brought along her podcast, “Overcoming Prejudices”. As a Communications Officer until the end of 2022, Mariana broadened this podcast to include issues around reproductive health, bodily autonomy and gender-based violence. Mariana has locomotor problems resulting from cerebral infantile paralysis.

Since concluding her assignment, Mariana has been a national consultant with UN Women and UNHCR in Moldova.

*“Unfortunately, people in our country have quite a few prejudices and stereotypes towards people with disabilities. Through my podcast, I am able to dismantle these. The first prejudice is that ‘disabled’ people should be isolated. Another is that they live only by the mercy of the state and are good for nothing. That’s not true. In our country, there are people with disabilities who are very active, have potential and talent. They have shown us that they can achieve things and, sometimes, even overcome their condition.”*

## **YURII CHERNUKHA**

In Ukraine, Yuri Chernukha (33) served as a UN Volunteer Operations Assistant in the Procurement Unit of UNDP from 2019 to 2021. He performed administrative and procurement tasks, such as creating and processing tenders and hiring individual contractors. He also trained colleagues to carry out these processes.

Displaced by the war in Ukraine, Yuri currently resides in Germany.



***“I am happy that I was able to help United Nations agencies work towards the Sustainable Development Goals and contribute to the UNV Strategic Framework. It is also meaningful to see volunteerism as a driving force for sustainable development and a better future.”***



## **CHENJERAI LOUIS BANDAWE**

Chenjerai Louis Bandawe (47) of Zimbabwe initially was a UN Volunteer Disability Inclusion Coordination Officer with UNAIDS from 2021 to 2022. At UNAIDS, he engaged adolescent girls, youth and women, including persons with disabilities, to monitor the state of HIV and tuberculosis prevention. He also helped with COVID-19 pandemic response. Chenjerai then moved, in the same capacity, to UNRCO. He helps conceptualize, develop and manage empowerment initiatives for women and girls with disabilities to advocate for their rights. Chenjerai has a physical disability.

***“I believe my time at UNAIDS and UNRCO was well spent. Without this experience, I might have missed out. As a person with a disability, working with individuals you’ve never met before can be daunting at times. My volunteering experience taught me empathy, compassion, teamwork and the importance of good communication. Engaging in community service brought out qualities in me that I never knew existed. I gave my expertise to the disability fraternity and broader community, but, in all honesty, I feel they gave me even more in return. This experience helped me cherish my ability to impact others – and that is why volunteering once is never enough.”***

## SUVD BOLD

In Mongolia, Suvd Bold (32) is a UN Volunteer Humanitarian Affairs Officer with UNRCO. She organizes monthly humanitarian country team meetings to share information with partners and prepare for potential disasters. She also helps build the capacity of the personnel of government, international organizations and other counterparts. Suvd has a visual disability.

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The first year of Suvd's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“Volunteering makes me happy, because I am contributing to society and to the development of Mongolia. Through volunteering with the United Nations, I have lived my dream. I have proven to myself and to the people around me that disability is not a barrier to achievement. I encourage other persons with disabilities to seize any opportunity you come across.”***

НЭГДСЭН  
ҮНДЭСТНИЙ  
БАЙГУУЛЛАГА  
МОНГОЛ УЛС

UNITED  
NATIONS  
MONGOLIA



НЭГДСЭН  
ҮНДЭСТНИЙ  
БАЙГУУЛЛАГА  
МОНГОЛ УЛС

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МОНГОЛ УЛС

**PEOPLE  
CENTERED  
GOVERNANCE**

**RULE  
OF  
LAW  
AND  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS**





## TESTIMONIAL FROM SWEDEN

### FOSTERING INCLUSION THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

*Sweden, through Sida, has been an active partner to UNV since 2007. We have engaged with UNV in a pilot initiative to support the UNDP-UNV Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities. Initially, this effort focused on Swedish nationals, but was later extended to include professionals with disabilities from partner countries. All in all, we funded 82 such professionals, including 79 nationals of partner countries..*

*Through our catalytic support of this initiative with UNV, we wanted to increase disability inclusion and also provide equal opportunities for national UN Volunteers with disabilities to serve in the United Nations. By promoting the inclusion of professionals with disabilities and national volunteers from partner countries in its work, UNV has become a role model for the United Nations system in terms of inclusion and diversity. This is in line with Sida's principles and commitment to diversity, helping to foster a more inclusive United Nations system through volunteerism.*

*We acknowledge and recognize the valuable work and results UNV has led and achieved through our partnership. A great number of national and international UN Volunteers with disabilities have been deployed across the world over the past few years, significantly contributing to a better world for sustainable development. We look forward to achieving further results together with UNV to make disability inclusion and equality in volunteerism part of the United Nations mission in humanitarian aid, development and peace.*

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**Alan Atkisson**, Head of Department for Partnership and Innovation and Deputy Director General of Sida, Sweden







**RETHINKING** |  
**INCLUSION**

## **TATIANA VASCONCELOS DA CRUZ**

Tatiana Vasconcelos Da Cruz (42) is a UN Volunteer Disability Inclusion Specialist for UNRCO in Uruguay. She has a visual impairment due to congenital glaucoma. With her service dog, Fito, at her side, Tatiana ensures that the perspectives of persons with disabilities are considered when developing communications materials and adopting labour practices. She is pleased that persons with disabilities are gaining more visibility and acceptance in the workforce.



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The first year of Tatiana's assignment was fully funded by Sida.

***“We persons with disabilities work twice as hard – and get half the recognition – because the focus is always on what is lacking. When looking for a job, it is sometimes difficult to be seen as a professional with the same potential as any other candidate. Now, we are seeing a shift in how we communicate; the changes are small, but notable. The other day, reviewing the accessibility of the annual report, I noted that it was very visual and incorporated photos of people with disabilities from an image bank I compiled during my assignment. Seeing this approach to normalcy gives me satisfaction. It ensures that people with disabilities are perceived as an equal segment of the population.”***





## ELVIS LUNDBERG

In Nepal, Elvis Lundberg (39) raised awareness of mental health issues, drawing from his personal experience with depression. Hailing from Sweden, Elvis was a UN Volunteer Programme Officer for Disability Inclusive Development with UNDP from 2020 to 2022.

Elvis worked as a Consultant Programme Manager for a large Swedish international non-governmental organization after his UN Volunteer assignment came to an end.

***“A piece of advice I gave myself was to never be afraid of anything life offered me. Another was that it was okay not to be okay. We all have issues, and many of us have invisible disabilities. But that does not mean that we cannot give ourselves time to recuperate and, if needed, seek help from others. Throughout my assignment, I had a strong support network of colleagues and friends who were there for me.”***



## **TUQA FAISAL ALSAYID MAJALI**

Tuqa Faisal Alsayid Majali (31) serves as a UN Volunteer Governance and Peacebuilding Support Officer with the UNDP Regional Hub in Jordan. She researches the unique and specific impacts that climate change and conflict may have on persons with disabilities and offers advice on how to make UNDP projects more inclusive. Tuqa says her passion for volunteering energizes her to overcome the challenges she faces due to her visual disability.

***“My UN Volunteer experience made me feel that I was in the right place. It enhanced my confidence and sense of self-fulfilment. Also, it allowed me to demonstrate my capabilities and unleash my creativity.”***

## I MADE WIKANDANA

UN Volunteer I Made Wikandana (26) is a Disability Inclusion Officer with UNICEF in Indonesia. He approaches disability inclusion efforts with the conviction that “nothing about us without us” should permeate every step of the process. I Made strives to advance disability inclusion in the activities and programmes that UNICEF offers throughout the country. He is particularly passionate about ensuring that children and young people – particularly those with disabilities – have the chance to speak freely about issues of concern. I Made is visually impaired.



***“My biggest motivation as a UN Volunteer is to contribute to my community. I wholeheartedly believe that by meaningfully engaging with children, adolescents and young people with disabilities, I open spaces for them to advocate for the issues affecting them. No one knows the rights, needs and interests of persons with disabilities better than someone with a disability themselves.”***



## **ARLET DEL ROSARIO FERRER SOSA**

Online Volunteer Arlet del Rosario Ferrer Sosa (55), originally from Venezuela, is now living in Panama, where she supported UNV with outreach to potential volunteers. She helped develop a database for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that outlined their human resource needs and is expediting the recruitment of volunteer talent. Arlet was born with a musculoskeletal disability.



***“I have always been focused on helping people. That’s why I chose medicine as a professional career – because it motivates me to contribute and improve the lifestyles of individuals. As a volunteer, I can share my knowledge and experience. Volunteering online was groundbreaking for me.”***



## ABRAHAM V. KANNEH

From 2017 to 2022, Abraham V. Kanneh (39) was a UN Volunteer Programme Field Officer with UNRCO in Liberia. Through the Spotlight Initiative, he strengthened women's groups and civil society organizations. Additionally, as Regional Coordinator for the Youth and Elections Project, Abraham helped young people understand how democratic processes work and encouraged them to get involved with the peaceful conduct of the 2017 general elections.

Following his volunteer assignment, Abraham moved on to work at the National Union of Organizations of the Disabled in Liberia.



*“My personal experience with a physical disability has fuelled my desire to create a positive impact in the lives of others facing similar challenges. I have encountered various barriers, making me acutely aware of the importance of inclusivity, equality and empowerment for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. I believe in the transformative potential of volunteering and the power of collective action. Volunteering has allowed me to break free from societal stereotypes and demonstrate my capabilities.”*



## MADINA KARSAKPAYEVA

Madina Karsakpayeva (36) is a UN Volunteer Disability Inclusion Specialist in Kazakhstan, serving with UNDP. She improves the accessibility of United Nations buildings and conducts inclusion workshops for staff. She also assisted the organization of an online conference on inclusive employment. Madina has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair.

In the photo on the left, Madina is greeting United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed during her visit to Kazakhstan in 2022.



***“It’s been more than 10 years since I started my unique and inspiring journey as a volunteer. I used to be a shy person. Now I am creating an inclusive workplace for persons with disabilities seeking more opportunities. The UNV experience has been enriching for me to grow both professionally and personally. I strongly believe that inclusion is all about freedom: to work, collaborate and contribute to the development of an inclusive society.”***



## **ANA GÓMEZ ESCOBAR**

Ana Gómez Escobar (36) of Spain was a UN Volunteer for nearly three years, beginning in 2016. A Monitoring and Evaluation and Coordination Officer, she served with UNRCO in Angola. Ana developed a report on refugee issues that was presented to the Government of Angola and strove to further human rights. She has a physical disability.

Ana now works as a strategic planning consultant for UNICEF.

*“Workwise, my experience in the United Nations in Angola was one of the most interesting ones I have had. I had the opportunity to assume tasks that would have been very difficult to engage in if I had not been a UN Volunteer. If you feel that there is no space for you in the United Nations system, ask questions, network. You can create the space.”*



## **VANNDASLOUT**

Vannda Slout (34) is a UN Volunteer Technical Project Officer with UNDP in Cambodia. He offers technical support on disability inclusion projects, works with partner organizations to create inclusion programmes, develops case studies and helps organize workshops. Vannda has physical, visual and hearing disabilities.

*“The key challenge for persons with disabilities is access to education. Many persons with disabilities have difficulty accessing education – especially those living in rural areas. There, schools are often far from students’ homes and difficult to access for those who use wheelchairs. The schools do not offer instruction in Braille for those who are blind and do not offer instruction in sign language for those who are deaf. Persons with disabilities have the right to an inclusive education, so they can fully engage in society and live with dignity. “*

## OSAMA NAWAHDA

Osama Nawahda (26) serves as a UN Volunteer Humanitarian Field Support Assistant with UNOCHA in the State of Palestine. Through regular field visits, he collects and verifies information on the humanitarian situation of the most vulnerable communities across the occupied Palestinian territories. Osama's muscles have started to become less responsive due to his progressive physical disability, but he is determined to overcome hurdles.



*“I was tasked to assess humanitarian needs for vulnerable communities. Despite the different obstacles on the way to the site, I insisted on reaching every house and location and meeting with all of the affected residents. The people I met were surprised that even though I have this type of disability, I still go on field visits. At that moment, I felt like a winner, I felt like I had fulfilled one of my purposes in this assignment: I had defeated stairs, rocks on the road, mountains and hills. No matter what your disability or situation is, with determination you can achieve your goals.”*



## **ALFRED PHIRI**

Online Volunteer Alfred Phiri (32) supported the United Kingdom office of the World Changing Centre in preparing a book about autism and ethnicity. From Zambia, he collaborated with a colleague to proofread, edit and write the book. Alfred, who has a physical disability, also prepared and translated a user guide and marketing materials related to the book.



*“Online volunteering has provided me with an opportunity to develop new skills and refine existing ones. Through virtual volunteering, I have managed to make a difference in the lives of others. I am inspired by tennis player Martina Navratilova, who said, ‘Disability is a matter of perception. If you can do just one thing well, you are needed by someone’.”*



## LAYE SÉKOU CAMARA

Laye Sékou Camara (35) was a UN Volunteer Programme Assistant with UNV in Guinea from 2019 to 2022. He supported the recruitment, management and monitoring of national and international volunteers serving there. He contributed to preventing election violence in the Guinean capital of Conakry and bolstered the COVID-19 response. A birth injury damaged the nerve in his left forearm, resulting in atrophy, which makes gripping or performing tasks requiring coordination between arms difficult.

Following his volunteer assignment, Laye joined WHO as an Administrative Assistant.



*“The work done by the United Nations is essential in addressing some of the complex challenges facing our planet today, such as social and health crises, extreme poverty and climate change. Being a UN Volunteer allowed me to learn about various cultures and socioeconomic realities, while broadening my intellectual horizons. It also gave me a unique opportunity to discuss different issues and connect with people from all over the world who share a common vision – that of a more just and peaceful future.”*

## TAYYABA ARSHI

Tayyaba Arshi (36) is a UN Volunteer Social Inclusion Officer with UNDP in Pakistan. She conducts research on inclusive social protection systems and develops strategies to enhance community support and raise awareness of the rights, needs and challenges faced by persons with disabilities, especially women. Tayyaba has a physical disability and describes herself as a “woman on wheels”.



*“Having the first-hand experience of living with a disability has enabled me to empathize with the challenges faced by others. It has allowed me to understand their needs, concerns and aspirations on a deeper level, enhancing my ability to provide relevant support and guidance... Overcoming the challenges associated with disability has honed my problem-solving skills and fostered a creative mindset.”*





## HUDOYKUL HAFIZOV

Hudoykul Hafizov (52) is a UN Volunteer Disability Inclusion Adviser with UNDP in Uzbekistan and is a staunch advocate for disability inclusion. He has physical, psychosocial and visual disabilities and promotes disability inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Hudoykul suggests improvements to communication materials and websites to enhance accessibility for people with diverse abilities.. He also raises awareness of disability rights and the ways in which volunteerism can make the United Nations more inclusive and accessible.

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The first year of Hudoykul's assignment was fully funded by Sida.

***“One of my most memorable experiences as a UN Volunteer was when I was asked about the reasonable accommodations I needed to fully participate as a member of the UNDP team in Uzbekistan. It was the first time in my career that I was asked this question! Being given the opportunity to communicate my specific needs for accommodation fostered in me a sense of empowerment and belonging. It highlighted the dedication of the United Nations to recognizing and addressing the unique requirements of its volunteers, and it made me feel valued.”***



***“I am dedicated to human rights monitoring in my country. As a volunteer, I have trained investigators on verifying cases of illegal detentions and mapping human rights violations. As a result, at least 100 civil society organizations and investigators are equipped to monitor human rights violations.”***

## **DJIMET NANGTOUR**

Djimet Nangtour (39) was a UN Volunteer deployed to OHCHR in Chad from 2022 to 2023 and is visually impaired. As a Legal Adviser and Human Rights Specialist, he analysed national laws and regulations and provided advice to identify abuse and/or violations of human rights, including among persons with disabilities.

Since concluding his UNV assignment, Djimet has continued volunteering in another capacity. He has been providing regular presentations to UNICEF and UNOCHA on how to care for persons with disabilities, with a special focus on refugees in Chad.

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Djimet’s assignment was fully funded by BMZ, Government of Germany.



## **AWA MAIGA TRAORE**

Awa Maiga Traore (26) supports UNDP in Mali as a UN Volunteer Community Facilitator. She is the liaison between people with disabilities and UNDP and promotes the socioeconomic and political rights of persons with disabilities. She also participates in activities that raise awareness around disability and inclusion issues – including in COVID-19 response and local development. Awa has a physical disability.



*"I encourage persons with disabilities who are interested in volunteering to apply. The United Nations system offers volunteers an exciting and inclusive workplace where diversity in culture, gender, sexual orientation, beliefs and other characteristics is embraced and valued. At the same time, the United Nations provides reasonable accommodations for all types of disabilities."*



## **NIRVANA GABRIELA CALLEJAS GUTIERREZ**

Nirvana Gabriela Callejas Gutierrez (34) is a UN Volunteer Communications Specialist with UN Women in Bolivia. She supports awareness campaigns, for example, for Women’s Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. Nirvana, who has a hearing disability, describes fighting for equality and women’s rights as one of the most memorable features of her assignment.

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The first year of Nirvana’s assignment was fully funded by BMZ, Government of Germany.

*“I am proud to be helping increase awareness and understanding of the needs and challenges of persons with hearing impairments and disabilities. I also promote gender equality and demonstrate through my contribution that women with disabilities can deliver a lot.”*



## **PARKHAT YUSSUPJANOV**

Parkhat Yussupjanov (40) is a UN Volunteer Partnerships Assistant with UNICEF in Kazakhstan. He assists with resource mobilization and developing fundraising strategies. Parkhat has a visual disability and helps UNICEF to be more inclusive by providing different types of training sessions.

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Parkhat's assignment is fully funded by BMZ, Government of Germany.



*“I am committed to increased inclusion and equality. In 2022, I participated in a high-level intergovernmental meeting in Indonesia, when the Jakarta Declaration on the establishment of the new Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities was announced. In 2023, I also supported the preparation of the operational guide for this declaration.”*



## NICHAKARN KAVEEVORAYAN

In Thailand, Nichakarn Kaveevorayan (31) is a UN Volunteer serving as a Disability Inclusion focal point with UNDP. She implements projects to empower persons with disabilities, advocate for their rights to employment and raise awareness on physical and digital accessibility issues. In addition, she helped formulate the Disability Inclusive Development Strategy, aligning it with UNDP's five-year country programme. When she was a student, Nichakarn encountered attitudinal barriers and struggled with inaccessible learning materials due to her visual disability. These experiences led her to work in the field of disability inclusion.

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The first year of Nichakarn's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“Being a UN Volunteer has been a good opportunity for me to expand my knowledge of national and international legislation and good practices in inclusive development. It has also helped me understand the issues of diverse groups of persons with disabilities.”***

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## TESTIMONIAL FROM THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT TRUE INCLUSION REQUIRES COMMITMENT

*The United Nations has been making significant progress towards promoting and upholding the rights of persons with disabilities in political, social, economic and cultural life. In 2019, the Secretary-General launched the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). This defines how we in the United Nations attract, recruit, retain and promote persons with disabilities in the workforce. It also sets down our responsibilities to build staff capacities, develop communications and raise awareness on disability inclusion in the workplace.*

*True inclusion goes beyond hiring persons with disabilities. Rather, it is about ensuring that they feel valued and have an equal opportunity to succeed, learn and advance in their careers. In recent years, UNV has gathered solid experience in including talented young persons with disabilities in the United Nations system as volunteers. These UN Volunteers contribute significantly to our collective results and to our inclusion efforts.*

*One successful example comes from my team: In 2019, we welcomed Vibhu Sharma to the Human Resources Policy Section. In anticipation of her assignment, the team received training on aptly including persons with disabilities, including dos and don'ts, understanding boundaries and offering help. Vibhu contributed to developing policy and monitoring employment, accessibility and reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. Her resilience and resourcefulness, also during the COVID-19 pandemic, were a source of inspiration for many of us.*

*Now, it's your turn.*

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**Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations Secretariat



**NAVIGATING** |  
**CHALLENGES**





## NAMCHOK PETAEN

Namchok Petsaen (35) is a UN Volunteer Communications Assistant with the UNV Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Thailand and the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub. He previously served as a UN Volunteer Data Analysis Officer with UNDP in Armenia. Currently, Namchok develops multimedia content to tell the stories of UN Volunteers, highlight the results they deliver and support talent outreach to persons with disabilities. Namchok has also contributed to inclusive, community-based tourism and the Bangkok Accessibility Journey, organized by the UNDP Accelerator Lab to raise awareness of accessibility issues. He tested first-hand the challenges that persons with disabilities face while commuting on public transport. On a personal level, Namchok designed his own motorbike, equipped for him to drive as a wheelchair user.



***“My motorbike provided me with a sense of freedom, empowerment and equal opportunity to contribute to my assignment. I believe that by creating an inclusive environment that is accessible and supportive, we can empower persons with disabilities to fully participate in the workforce and contribute their unique talents and skills to enhance our societal well-being. In this way, we can ensure that we uphold the principle of leaving no one behind.”***

## **DORICE AHMED MKIVA**

In Tanzania, Dorice Ahmed Mkiva (29) is a UN Volunteer Knowledge Management Officer with UNICEF. Dorice teaches staff knowledge management techniques and communications strategies. She promotes a culture that values the importance of sharing knowledge and skills. Aside from overcoming her own mobility challenges, Dorice is leading by example in creating a more accessible workspace.



***“I am inspired by Nick Vujicic, an Australian who has no limbs, who said, ‘I manage my life; my disability won't hinder me.’ He is living proof that limitations don't define us. My advice to fellow youth with disabilities is to not be fearful or hold back. Come to the front line and apply for the positions that the United Nations system is advertising. The United Nations values inclusivity and, therefore, we have a place here to grow professionally and excel.”***

## AHMED HAMDY ABDELAAL

Ahmed Hamdy Abdelaal (30) was a UN Volunteer Programme Associate with UNDP Egypt. During his two-year assignment, from 2020 to 2022, he was engaged in tracking programme results, researching how goals and policies were being implemented and integrated, and supporting new partnerships with the private and public sectors. He also assisted in creating concept and briefing notes and in producing major reports. Ahmed is blind.

After concluding his assignment, Ahmed moved on to the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development, one of the largest philanthropic organizations in Egypt.



***“Believe in yourself. Believe in your capabilities. Believe in your aspirations and ambitions. In many cases, there are many obstacles that individuals with disabilities have to face on their own that many other people are not aware of. However, this shouldn’t be discouraging; it should inspire you to prove yourself and your capabilities. UNV provides reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities depending on their needs, as in my case, so be aware of your needs, know your rights and be confident that you will be supported to the greatest extent possible.*”**

***My dream has always been to create a positive impact on people’s lives. I aspire to be a successful role model for any person with disability to be an effective protagonist of global change – and to have a successful career path.”***



## **ESTHER KAPENGA MULAMBA**

Esther Kapenga Mulamba (31) started as a UN Youth Volunteer, then continued as a UN Volunteer Specialist in Governance and Women's Rights with UN Women in Egypt. She provides technical support for women's political participation, gender justice and disability inclusion. She also has administrative and logistical responsibilities, such as processing recruitment, payments and procurement services. Esther is from Switzerland and is passionate about the gender aspect of inclusion.

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The first year of Esther's assignment was fully funded by Switzerland.



***"Persons with disabilities are often marginalized. Women with disabilities experience even greater discrimination. For me, as a woman with a disability, advocating for gender equality and disability inclusion at UN Women has truly been rewarding."***

## ADAM SACKO

Online Volunteer Adam Sacko (28) of Côte d'Ivoire was a communicator relaying messages for UNFPA in Guinea. She tapped social networks to aid an information campaign for the National Youth Council of Guinea. Adam has osteoarthritis, a degenerative disease affecting knee cartilage. A student of sociology, she was proud to help facilitate this important civic event.



*“The last five years have been marked by high tensions between the government, civil society and the opposition, which has stalled the process of political dialogue. Participating in the Youth Council gives young people the opportunity to build their knowledge and skills in leadership, education, citizenship and conflict prevention and management. It is a bold step towards true democracy, a democracy where young people also have their say and where their concerns are taken into account.”*

*“My assignment has been beneficial, also to me. I now have a higher level of self-esteem. I have had the chance to prove myself and my assignment has certainly broadened my employment opportunities. Even if I haven’t yet found a job that suits me best, my determination and passion will take me far.”*



## MOSES CHUBILI

Moses Chubili (33) of Zambia was a UN Volunteer Coordination and Partnerships Officer (Disability Inclusion) with UNRCO from 2018 to 2022. Moses is deaf and used sign language interpretation services and closed captioning processes while performing his duties. As a volunteer, he provided technical guidance on using sign language and Braille to communicate with those who have hearing or visual impairments. He also collaborated with a team on legal pathways to justice for persons with albinism and supported the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy in the country.

***“My disability gave me an opportunity to shape my workplace to make it accessible in ways that allow deaf persons to work as effectively as everyone else. Since becoming a UN Volunteer, I have developed this motto: ‘Work hard, be perseverant, learn more, embrace teamwork and be passionate as a volunteer!’”***

## FABIÁN ALEJANDRO RUIZ SILVA



*“I believe the most important contribution I make through my assignment comes from working with vulnerable people, analysing their economic situation and level of poverty, so the United Nations solutions we offer are tailored and more efficient.”*

In Ecuador, Fabián Alejandro Ruiz Silva (36) was a UN Volunteer Population and Development Specialist with UNFPA from 2021 to 2022. He then moved on to UNRCO, where he was a UN Volunteer Diversity and Inclusion Specialist until mid-2023. He was motivated to become a volunteer because the United Nations welcomes the participation of those who are the most vulnerable. Fabián’s professional training as an economist and personal experience with a disability gave him a deep understanding of the challenges others with disabilities face.

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The first two years of Fabián’s assignment were fully funded by Sida.





## ANH NGUYEN THI YEN

Anh Nguyen Thi Yen (31) serves as a UN Volunteer Education Officer for Digital Inclusion with UNICEF in Viet Nam. Through her assignment, she contributes to digital innovation for children with disabilities. Yen Anh has a visual disability and strives to ensure the availability of accurate data and information on inclusive education for children. She also seeks to identify and adapt digital materials for children that are provided for free and emphasize inclusivity.

*“Inclusive education has always been a personal passion of mine, as I deeply empathize with the challenges and obstacles faced by individuals with disabilities, particularly children, in accessing education.”*

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The first year of Yen Anh’s assignment was fully funded by Sida.

## ANDI SELVI FANDISYA

Online Volunteer Andi Selvi Fandisya (27) of Indonesia supports UNRCO with social media messaging. She directs potential volunteer candidates to the information they need when considering whether to volunteer with the United Nations. Andi has a physical disability. By day, she works as a teacher. In her free time, Andi is a content creator who offers encouragement to all.

*“The reason I volunteered online for the United Nations was that I was interested in becoming a special advocate for people with disabilities. Because I have a disability myself, I want to give positive energy and inspiration to friends with disabilities.”*





## **JOSÍAS OSBELI VÁSQUEZ BAMACA**

Josías Osbeli Vásquez Bamaca (29) was a UN Volunteer Human Rights Associate and Accessibility Specialist with OHCHR in Guatemala from 2022 to 2023. He has a visual disability and contributed as an expert in digital accessibility and accessible web development.

Josías is now working as a Specialist in Accessibility with Innovating Work on Rights, Development and Sustainability (IWORDS), a consulting firm. He is also running two projects – an inclusive academy and an inclusive job platform.

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Josías' assignment was fully funded by Sida.

***“There are guidelines that determine how digital content – video, audio recording or text – should be constructed to be accessible for persons with disabilities, whether their disabilities are visual, auditory, physical or intellectual. In my assignment as a UN Volunteer, I helped OHCHR in the implementation of these guidelines in reports, documents, audiovisual materials and virtual events organized by the office.”***



## ANES KUJOVIĆ

Anes Kujović (21) is the first person with Down syndrome to become a UN Community Volunteer. He joined UNDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans and is gaining skills through training and practice. Anes is also benefiting from a mentor, who provides guidance and monitors his progress and well-being at work. Anes' contagious smile and cheerful spirit bring joy every day in the Municipality, where he is surrounded by a team that believes in his abilities.



***"I have great work colleagues. We work, but we also know how to joke and laugh sometimes. My tasks are to enter data into tables, distribute documents to the departments for signatures and attend meetings with the mayor. We welcome guests together, and sometimes I also attend sessions of the Municipal Council."***

## KADIATU MANSARAY

Kadiatu Mansaray (30) is a UN Volunteer in Partnerships and Knowledge Management with UNRCO in Sierra Leone. She compiles research on potential partners, drafts materials to use when working with government officials and reviews reports to donors. Kadiatu has a physical disability. She is the Disability Focal Point and has represented her United Nations country team in disability inclusion training.

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Kadiatu's assignment is fully funded by Sida.



***“As a woman with a disability and from the African continent, I feel we are faced with a lot of challenges and barriers that limit our participation. There are environmental barriers, negative mindsets and policies and laws that are not inclusive. These keep hitting me hard, inspiring me to push, head on, for the change I want to see.”***



*“My experience with UNDP was wonderful for my personal and professional development. I found the level of disability awareness within the organization very high, which made me feel supported – especially when the team moved floors to accommodate my mobility. For me, inclusiveness means that everyone can be accepted, and everyone has their own opportunity to become a change-maker and have a real impact. I encourage anyone to apply and become a change-maker too!”*

## **MARTA NYKOLAYEVA**

UN Volunteer Marta Nykolayeva (34) served as a Media and Outreach Assistant with UNDP in Ukraine from 2018 to 2022. Children with disabilities have increasingly been seeking access to Ukrainian schools, which Marta strongly supports. In 1996, Marta was one of six children with disabilities accepted to study in regular classrooms in Lviv. Hers was the first school in Ukraine to take this step, according to an interview she gave while studying for a master’s degree in inclusive education at the University of Glasgow. As a volunteer, Marta trained teachers on how to integrate children with disabilities into their classroom communities. She hopes cultivating inclusive environments for children sparks a broader effort to include people with disabilities throughout Ukrainian society.





## LATHIIF HARVIDIANTO HAIRUL

In Indonesia, Lathiif Harvidianto Hairul (26) serves as a UN Volunteer Junior Project Clerk with UNDP. He supports operations and administrative work, processes payments and supports travel and visa applications, as well as logistics and asset management. Lathiif has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair.



*“When I joined the UNV programme, I wanted to take on a new challenge, hone my skills and gain more professional exposure. I also desired to prove that I can play a role in addressing development challenges, despite my physical disability.”*

## ANITA SHABANI

Anita Shabani (27) is a UN Volunteer Programme Assistant with FAO in Kosovo (as per United Nations Security Council resolution 1244). She was part of a project to strengthen sustainable forest management to improve rural livelihoods and address climate change. Since early 2023, Anita has been involved in the FAO flood response and early recovery plan in Kosovo. Anita has a physical disability, and her priorities included promoting inclusion and gender mainstreaming.



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The first year of Anita's assignment was fully funded by BMZ, Government of Germany.

***“Gender inequality intersects with other forms of exclusion. Many women and girls continue to be deprived of rights, resources and voice. During my assignment, I supported gender-responsive strategies to achieve transformative agrifood systems and women’s empowerment. Despite my disability, my gender or my background, I know that I am a strong asset to help the world.”***

## **PEDRO MANUEL CASTRO RIVERA**

UN Youth Volunteer Pedro Manuel Castro Rivera (27) serves with UNHCR in Mexico as an Analyst in the Nationality Department and has a hearing disability. He supports refugees during the naturalization process, starting with their initial application and continuing until the successful conclusion of the process.



*“I like the final stage of the process, when the Letter of Naturalization is issued – the happy reactions, hopes of a new life being fulfilled and the positive ambition of recipients that they can now contribute formally to the development of the Mexico we are all dreaming of.”*

## VIRGINIE BLANCHE WEND-KUNI ZOUBERE

In Burkina Faso, Virginie Blanche Wend-Kuni Zoubere (33) is a UN Volunteer Assistant Communication Specialist with UNDP and has a physical disability. She helps to increase the visibility of UNDP on the web and in social media. She also conducts training sessions on disability inclusion, thus helping staff and youth become advocates for volunteerism and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. She guides them on how to produce and adapt editorial content, photos and videos for the organization's digital platforms.

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The first year of Virginie's assignment was fully funded by Sida.

***“I believe that UNDP provides great support to young people in the field of entrepreneurship, gender and inclusion of persons with disabilities. This is the positive feedback I received from beneficiaries at community level. I feel honoured to be a UN Volunteer in the communications team.”***





## **SIBLYA KARINA SANTANA GOMES**

Siblya Karina Santana Gomes (29) was a UN Volunteer Project Assistant with UNFPA in Brazil from 2021 to 2023. She created the Inclusive Nós programme to train youth with disabilities and teach them to advocate for their rights. Siblya has visual and physical disabilities.

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The first year of Siblya's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“A young leader with a disability is rare. Through personal experience, I realized that many young persons with disabilities are disempowered due to guardianship, over-protection and lack of autonomy. This initiative addresses this gap so we can ensure that nothing is decided without us, the very people who understand our needs best.”***



## **ENaida ALISPAHIĆ**

Enaida Alispahić (21) is a UN Community Volunteer with UNDP, serving with the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans. Enaida supports the Local Development Management Service of the Municipality of Novo Sarajevo. She performs administrative tasks – such as preparing, scanning and archiving documents – and is supported by another UN Volunteer, who is her mentor. Enaida, who has always loved completing school and housework, has Down syndrome. Non-governmental organizations estimate that only three or four of the approximately 1,000 people in Bosnia and Herzegovina who have Down syndrome are employed.

***“It’s great for me here. I can do all kinds of things – write, type – and I feel really good. I come in the morning with my mom. I do everything, and I have friends to work with. When I don’t know something, I ask how to do it.”***

## NAHASHON NJUGUNA

Nahashon Njuguna (30) is a UN Volunteer Social Protection Officer with UNICEF in Kenya. Nahashon, who has a bachelor's degree in special needs education, is inspired by the idea that providing educational opportunities to vulnerable children offers them a path out of poverty. Through his assignment, he supports a government programme that offers school transport to children with disabilities, along with financial support for educational expenses and disability-related costs.

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The first year of Nahashon's assignment was fully funded by Sida, Sweden.



***“I am visually impaired and understand the vulnerability of persons with disabilities. I also understand the stigma and discrimination that comes with it. Through my volunteer service, girls and boys have access to free, equitable and quality basic education and get the support they need. That is the core of education for all.”***







## TESTIMONIAL FROM GERMANY

# AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

*I value the strong partnership with UNV, which is at the forefront of bringing talented and diverse people – representing 179 nationalities – into the United Nations system. Germany is proud to collaborate with UNV to foster a more inclusive and responsive United Nations system, echoing our commitment to diversity, equality and the rights of persons with disabilities.*

*Through the partnership with UNV, Germany has, so far, been able to support 31 assignments for persons with disabilities. This includes, for example, our project “Supporting UNV towards an inclusive United Nations system for persons with disabilities”. The project provided a systematic approach to integration, guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and demonstrates our joint commitment to leave no one behind and the 2030 Agenda.*

*The forthcoming Global Disability Summit 2025 in Berlin, co-hosted by Germany, Jordan and the International Disability Alliance, will showcase our collective dedication to amplify the voices of persons with disabilities on the global stage. I am looking forward to a fruitful collaboration with UNV on this event.*

*I am grateful to UNV for championing disability inclusion and diversity. UNV consistently demonstrates an exemplary commitment to driving inclusivity and points the way to a future where every individual's contribution is valued.*

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**Jochen Flasbarth**, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany





**SCORING** |  
**THE GOALS**

## MOHAMMAD SARHAN

Mohammad Sarhan (55), from the State of Palestine, served as a UN Volunteer in Communications and Technology with UNAMID in Sudan from 2011 to 2015. Alongside his assignment, he supported the Darfuri Disabled Club, which opened its doors to persons with disabilities every afternoon, offering social care, training, rehabilitation and medical equipment.

Mohammad now works as an Administrative and Finance Assistant with ILO in Jordan, supporting the Employment Intensive Investment Programme.



***“I have always been passionate about volunteering. As soon as I arrived in Darfur, I realized that there was so much to do for this community. I needed to start advocating for the cause I have worked on my whole life: persons with disabilities.”***



عالم  
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عاقين  
3 ديسمبر

## UZOAMAKA ANITA ASIEGBU

In Nigeria, Uzoamaka Anita Asiegbu (30) was a UN Volunteer Programme and Inclusion Analyst with UN Women from 2020 to 2022. She led the development of a comprehensive inclusion strategy, addressing the needs of marginalized women and girls, particularly those with disabilities. Uzoamaka notes that, in 2018, WHO estimated that 29 million persons with disabilities lived in Nigeria, and about 50 per cent of them were women and girls. As one with a physical disability, Uzoamaka is especially passionate about advocating for women and girls with disabilities to access inclusive education, enter the workforce and earn a living so that they can live an independent life.

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The first year of Uzoamaka's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“Personally, the UN Volunteer experience exposed me to connections and networks that would have taken longer to build. Professionally, volunteering with UN Women improved my development capacity to work on issues of women with disabilities. This knowledge aided me in my choice to acquire more theoretical knowledge on women’s empowerment, which is why I am currently doing my master’s degree in women and gender studies in Europe.”***



## **THABISO MASENYETSE**

UN Volunteer Thabiso Masenyetse (36) of Lesotho is a Disability Inclusion Officer with UNRCO. Thabiso, who is blind, studied international human rights law, specializing in disability rights. He advises, coordinates and monitors disability mainstreaming efforts by resident agencies. Thabiso led the accessibility assessment of the United Nations premises, programmes and IT systems, which resulted in a five-year improvement plan. He also supported the production of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in Braille and audio formats. Thabiso has provided training for colleagues and persons with disabilities on inclusion and work opportunities.



***“I joined UNRCO as a volunteer fresh out of university. I applied what I learned as a student and gained practical experience dealing with colleagues, responsibilities and challenges. My experience has been an emotional rollercoaster: some colleagues did not understand my ability to undertake my duties, and I worked hard to prove myself as a professional expert in my field. I also had the opportunity to participate in training on disability inclusion strategies and disaster risk management, which have broadened my scope.”***



## RUPMANI CHHETRI

Rupmani Chhetri (37) was a UN Volunteer Communications Assistant with UNDP in Ukraine from 2017 to 2018, where she supported people internally displaced by the war. The first differently abled UN Volunteer from India, Rupmani has a hearing disability. During her assignment, Rupmani conducted sign language courses for local teenagers and adults, as well as for United Nations colleagues in Ukraine, Germany and India. She has taken part in a TV marathon on human rights with OHCHR, the World's Largest Lesson with UNICEF and university lectures with UNHCR. Rupmani has also created videos summarizing the UNDP Human Development Report 2017 and introducing the Sustainable Development Goals in sign language.

Rupmani is the co-founder of SignAble Communications in Bangalore, which provides the services of sign language interpreters to enable participation and inclusion. On the left, Rupmani is addressing United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres during his visit to Ukraine in 2017.



***“Through the war, some people had acquired disabilities or become injured, including around 300 deaf people who had become displaced. They were asking me, as a fellow deaf person, for help. I was not really aware how to help, so I had a lot to learn, especially how to deal with post-traumatic stress disorders. Deaf people wanted to tell me their stories and what they went through. By being able to communicate with me, I was able to give them a message of love and reassurance.”***

## **MAHA ADEL ABDALRAHMAN KHALIL**

Online Volunteer Maha Adel Abdalrahman Khalil (35) was a Media Monitoring Specialist with UN Women in her home country, Egypt. She reviewed public information related to sexual violence against girls and women and women's economic empowerment. Maha notes that online volunteering is a good way to accumulate work experience for persons with disabilities because they are more likely to face difficulty entering the labour market. Maha has a bilateral hearing impairment.



***“You should not feel shame about your disability. You have the right to educate your employers about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to ask your employers for reasonable accommodation. Two-way communication is the best way to discuss your needs; I learned the hard way. Sometimes you have to find non-traditional ways or techniques to meet your work responsibilities.”***

## AMARA KANTE

Amara Kante (24) is a disability rights activist and served as an Online Volunteer with UNFPA in Guinea. He disseminated posters from the National Council of Youth of Guinea and articles among his 5,000 followers on social media. Amara does not let his motor disability limit his achievements. He is an accomplished athlete and serves as captain of the National Para Athlete Taekwondo Team and president of the Council of Para-Athletes. He also volunteers with the Guinean Federation of Disabled People, is the secretary of the Communal Youth Council of Ratoma and a socio-educational worker at Merit International Youth Guinea. Amara won an award in civic leadership at the 21st session of the YALI Regional Leadership Centre West Africa.



***“What motivates me to be an Online Volunteer is to be of service and help people with disabilities. I am committed to being useful in society because in the Republic of Guinea, the rights and duties of people with disabilities are ignored by most citizens. They think having a disability is synonymous with being destitute or even being cursed. Because of this segregation, we are discriminated against and rejected; some never manage to integrate into society. I am in favour of the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.”***

## GIFT GOVERE

Gift Govere (30) was a UN Volunteer Project Officer with UNDP in Zimbabwe from 2019 to 2022. Working for governance and peacebuilding, he helped create programmes that include people with disabilities. Gift has albinism and is on a mission to break barriers for marginalized groups, including by promoting gender equality and advocating for changes in laws.

After concluding his UN Volunteer assignment, Gift joined UNDP in Zimbabwe as a Disability Inclusion Analyst.

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Gift's assignment was funded by BMZ, Government of Germany.



***“Working for UNDP, for me, is about breaking certain stigmas and stereotypes in society that tell me, ‘You can go this far, but you cannot go further than this’. I have had my challenges, and I have listened to other people’s stories. This makes me appreciate the challenges and barriers faced by marginalized groups in society. If I can be included, accepted and contribute meaningfully, why can’t everyone experience the same?”***



## MILANKA NIKOLIC

In Serbia, Milanka Nikolic (32) was a UN Volunteer Human Rights Associate with OHCHR from 2021 to 2022. She focused on implementing the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and protecting the rights of vulnerable groups. Specifically, she conducted media research and prepared social media content.

After completing her assignment, Milanka began pursuing a doctorate in media and communications and is working on her own podcast.

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Milanka's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“My disability had a great impact on my assignment, although I wasn’t aware of that at first. I was focused on trying to do the best I could, as I considered it an honour to work for the United Nations. Part of me was scared that I would not be good enough. Generally, I was experiencing a lot of physical pain, but I rarely reached out for support, as I was worried that it would affect the way my colleagues saw me. I believe that my example helps us to better understand the pressure persons with disabilities are under, as they often feel like they constantly have to overachieve. I just want fellow persons with disabilities to know that all you can do is do your best. What matters is what is best for you, your physical and mental health and your inner balance.”***



## **JASON WILLIAM GBAMBI**

Jason William Gbambi (51) of South Sudan played an important role in connecting local communities with UNMISS and its core values. He was a UN Volunteer Community Outreach Officer from 2018 to 2022. Jason raised awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse by offering training sessions to women, community leaders and partners. Jason has a physical disability.

*“Being a UN Volunteer is a calling. Volunteerism is all about the community, about dealing with problems and succeeding together. If there is any young person who wants to make a difference, who wants to build a better world, then I would hugely recommend becoming a UN Volunteer and serving for peace and development. Being a UN Volunteer with UNMISS has been one of the most meaningful journeys of my life.”*





## CHAVIA ALI

Disabilities advocate Chavia Ali (43) moved from Syria, which has endured more than a decade of civil war, to Sweden, where she helped refugees by translating and assisting them with completing job applications and insurance forms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she became a UN Volunteer Assistant Research Officer, serving remotely with UNDP. Chavia has a physical disability.

Chavia is currently working with UNDP on implementing the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy in the Arab States region.

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Chavia's assignments were fully funded by Sida.



***“Embrace your differences, seek support and make a positive impact through meaningful actions. Design your life to suit your differences because we, as persons with disabilities, have so much to share. Never feel ashamed to ask for support, and don’t try to be superhuman.”***

## PELGRINA SHIMANU NDUMBA

Pelgrina Shimanu Ndumba (36) was a UN Volunteer Project Officer with UNDP in Namibia from 2020 to 2021. She supported the United Nations Partnership Project on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Pelgrina strengthened data systems to inform planning, budget allocation and service delivery, as well as early identification and support of children with disabilities. Her motivation to volunteer stemmed from her personal experience with a visual disability.

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Pelgrina's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“I wanted to be an agent of change to shift mindsets towards persons with disabilities and disability-related matters. I further wanted to prove to the world – through my actions and contributions – that disability does not mean inability.”***



## KADÉLÉ ELVIGE VINCENT BOHOVO

Kadélé Elvige Vincent Bohouo (41) served as a UN Volunteer Partnerships Analyst with UNEP in Côte d'Ivoire from 2021 to 2022. During his assignment, he helped raise money for children in two orphanages, assessed partnership requests and created a partner database across the public, private, media and civil society sectors of West and Central Africa. Kadélé has a motor disability, following the amputation of his left lower leg.

Following his UN Volunteer assignment, Kadélé returned to his previous position as administrative assistant at the Court of Appeal in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire. He graduated from the African-German Leadership Academy, organized by the German Institute of Development and Sustainability, in 2022.

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Kadélé's assignment was fully funded by Sida.

***"There is more joy in giving than receiving. I have a physical disability and had a great volunteering experience that boosted my self-confidence and inspired me to become more active within the community of persons with disabilities in Côte d'Ivoire. I believe that inclusion in the United Nations should follow a dual-track approach: firstly, equip volunteers with disabilities with the skills they need to carry out their roles, and secondly, train United Nations personnel on workplace inclusion."***



## OLGA ALTMAN

Olga Altman (37) served with UNDP as a UN Volunteer Technical Officer in Inclusion, Innovation and the 2030 Agenda in the Dominican Republic from 2019 to 2022. She collaborated on various projects aimed at promoting human rights, inclusion and diversity. One of these projects was the inter-agency project of UNDP, UNICEF and PAHO/WHO, focused on promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education and employment, and enhancing their participation.

After her volunteer assignment, Olga continued to work with UNDP in the Dominican Republic for the rights and inclusion of vulnerable groups.



*“I love my job and feel valued for what I can do. This feeling drives me even more to fight against the prejudices and taboos that persist in society and the unfounded belief that people with disabilities cannot receive an education, work, have a partner or – worse – lead a normal life. Raising awareness, breaking stereotypes and respecting differences will help us promote a culture of peace and respect, and thus achieve a fairer and more inclusive society.”*

## OSAMA SHAMALLAKH

Osama Shamallakh (34) served as a UN Volunteer Network Officer with UNDP in the State of Palestine in 2021. During his assignment, he provided technical and administrative supervision of projects in Gaza. Osama conducted research and provided recommendations for project improvements. Having become an amputee at the age of 15, he reflected on learning to live and work with a physical disability.



***“Every institution should have a disability ambassador who conveys the experience of persons with disabilities to ensure the quality of services provided. Often, physical accessibility is a challenge. I have a deep passion for my original profession, automotive mechanics. Since completing my volunteer assignment, I have become an entrepreneur, designing and developing an elevator that helps persons with disabilities gain access to public and private buildings.”***





## **ALIAKSANDR AUDZEVICH**

Aliaksandr Audzevich (39) was a UN Volunteer Inclusion and Disability Officer with UNDP in Belarus from 2019 to 2020. He supported the adaptation of workplaces to include persons with disabilities.

Following his volunteer experience, Aliaksandr embarked on a tour by hand bike from Georgia to the Canary Islands to raise awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities. He has since opened his own café, called “Inclusive Barista”, and offers a barista training programme for persons with disabilities. Aliaksandr aims to change the way coffee shops hire their personnel and design their cafés.

***“Barriers to inclusion in the workplace take both physical and cultural forms. Through my assignment, I helped educate workplaces on how to make the physical work environment more accessible for persons with disabilities. I also worked to build a culture of understanding and dispel myths. Inclusion is our future!”***

## VIBHU SHARMA

Vibhu Sharma (30) was a UN Volunteer Associate Policy Officer at DGMSPC, United Nations Secretariat, in New York from 2019 to 2021. She contributed to shaping human resource policies, including leave, attendance and flexible working arrangements. Together with the staffing and diversity team, Vibhu developed reasonable accommodation guidance for hiring managers. She helped create a mechanism for people to self-identify their disabilities, in order to facilitate data collection and reporting on the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. Vibhu is from India and has a visual impairment.

Vibhu subsequently served with UNICEF in New York as a UN Volunteer Disability Inclusive Education Officer. She then joined the UNV communications project recognizing volunteers with disabilities, which has resulted in the photo book before you and an accessible web portal.



***“Prepare for a rigorous journey, embrace resilience through challenges and remember that every effort creates a brighter tomorrow. Serving as a UN Volunteer offers persons with disabilities the opportunity to acquire practical work experience and exposure to the United Nations system. While this is valuable for career learning and development, it also opens up pathways that may previously have been inaccessible. Volunteering boosts the participation of persons with disabilities in political, economic, social and cultural life.”***





## **DAO THU HUONG**

Dao Thu Huong (38) served as a UN Volunteer Disability Rights Officer with UNDP in Viet Nam from 2019 to 2022. She led workshops with government and development partners, enhancing participation and amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities in the decision-making process.

Huong is currently a Disability Inclusion Officer with UNDP in Viet Nam.

***“By being there and leading these workshops myself, I demonstrated that just because a person has a disability, it does not mean they are any less capable of delivering high-quality outcomes in a professional environment. I am committed to building the right support systems around people with disabilities and ensuring they are visible and engaged in society. In doing that, we can challenge perceptions and change mindsets about what it means to have a disability.”***

## **ROSA MARÍA DEL CARMEN PIMENTEL CORTEZ**

Rosa María del Carmen Pimentel Cortez (65) was a UN Volunteer Sexual and Reproductive Health Specialist with UNFPA in Peru from 2021 to 2022. She advocated for the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls and appreciated the opportunity to fight specifically for the rights of women with disabilities.

Rosa María continues to advocate against gender-based violence.

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Rosa María's assignment was fully funded by Sida.



***“During my assignment, I contributed to the technical assistance provided by UNFPA to the Ministry of Health in developing technical health regulations. These regulations seek to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence in health facilities that offer sexual and reproductive health services.”***



## **KASUNJITH SATANARACHCHI**

Kasunjith Satanarachchi (33) was a UN Youth Volunteer with UNDP in Sri Lanka from 2018 to 2022. He mapped the disability sector and evaluated the accessibility of the United Nations compound. He also enabled sign language interpretation of the Parliament session in Sri Lanka – the first time this service had ever been offered in South Asia. Kasunjith has cerebral palsy and is described by his teammates as someone who does not give up.

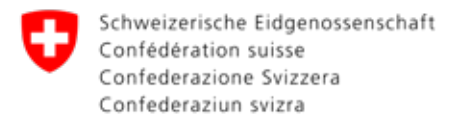
Upon completing his volunteering assignment, Kasunjith joined UNDP in Sri Lanka as a Disability Inclusion Analyst.



***“Attending the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum in New York in 2019 gave me a platform to bring to light the importance of inclusion and accessibility in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. I have always advocated to let the lives of persons with disabilities, like me, be a reflection of the endless abilities each one of us has.”***

**THANKING**  
**OUR PARTNERS** |





## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNAMID	African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNDGC	United Nations Department of Global Communications
UNDMSPC	United Nations Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
UNV	United Nations Volunteers programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WHO	World Health Organization

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## CREDITS

We hope this book was a page-turner for you. We are proud of all of our volunteers and are inspired by their courage, their compassion and their resilience. We hope that pride shines through in every story. Through the images, you met UN Volunteers and Online Volunteers with disabilities who have enriched communities, and shattered stereotypes and misconceptions.

We did not do this alone. We created this photo book in consultation with seven amazing and highly experienced UN Volunteers with disabilities, who helped us steer, guide and explain: Ahmed Hamdy Abdelaal, Hudoykul Hafizov, Josiás Osbeli Vásquez Bamaca, Moses Chubili, Namchok Petsaen, Vibhu Sharma and Virginie Blanche Wend-Kuni Zoubere – we thank you! 💙



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