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NEWSLETTER

United Nations Development Programme

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Young Volunteers Shaping the Future - Be the change you want to see!

Young people today are looking for opportunities to actively contribute to the development of their countries. While the form and magnitude of challenges in the Arab States vary, young people all over the region share the perception that limited opportunities are available for them. Many of them are turning to creating their own opportunities instead, for example through volunteerism.

On 5 December 2021, the world celebrated International Volunteer Day to promote volunteering for the change we want to see in years to come. On 16 December, UNDP's Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) and the Youth Development Delegates in the Arab Region recognized the efforts of six young YLPers volunteering to bring peace, social justice, climate action, and skills development to their peers by organizing the "Volunteer for the Future" webinar, which gathered more than 150 youth online and reached 2.8k through Facebook live.

Volunteering connects youth to their communities

One of the biggest concerns discussed through the webinar was finding volunteering opportunities that young people are interested in and can benefit from. Young people expressed that while there are opportunities available, they do not necessarily meet their skills, capabilities, or ambitions. Adel Azouni, a Tunisian YLP Alumnus and a volunteer for more than ten years noted that sometimes young people need to create the opportunities themselves:

"Look at your community and look for what could benefit from your efforts. I realize it is hard to find solutions to some issues, but on the other hand, there are challenges that you can solve, even if partially. When you start working on something, others will follow".

Why volunteer?

Volunteerism can not only bring personal benefits to young people, but also give opportunities to use their skills for the greater development of their communities.

"Volunteering for me was about finding motivation. It helped me tackle personal challenges and made me a stronger person", answered Maroua Ameziane, sustainable development and youth empowerment expert from Morocco and the winner of UN SDG Action Campaign Award in the "Mobilize" category.

"I was going through a difficult phase of my life when I started volunteering. Helping others helped me overcome those hardships. The feeling of fulfilment and content I've felt at the end of each volunteering day was a great source for motivation for my other work, and a great reason behind my successes that came after", Maroua explains.

Rewa Barghouthi, United Nations Volunteer working with UNICEF in Jerusalem as a Youth Specialist, highlighted that beyond personal development, volunteering can bring benefits to the

people and communities around you.
"I've started volunteering when I was a university student but volunteering did not end with graduation. I've volunteered my efforts even in the workplace, where I ran initiatives or managed campaigns advocating for gender equality and against gender harassment. I now work on setting a volunteering mechanism in the State of Palestine, to empower and benefit young people".

Volunteering needs a network

While individual efforts are always crucial, volunteering needs a growing network of changemakers working towards the same goal.
Baraah Batainah, the Youth Development Delegate at UNDP Jordan is the founder of "Pass the Mic", an online podcast that hosts different speakers every week to discuss their ideas, projects and initiatives.
"My initiative aims to celebrate the accomplishments of young people, by highlighting their efforts and connecting young changemakers to coordinate efforts and support each other", Baraah explains.

Volunteering and the 2030 Agenda

Volunteering can provide a possibility for youth to engage in the development of their communities and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Their action locally, nationally and globally both builds their capacities and increases the ownership of local communities in the process towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
Through volunteering opportunities, whether self-created or linked to formal organizations such as the UN Volunteers, young people can become active models for personal and societal change and development.
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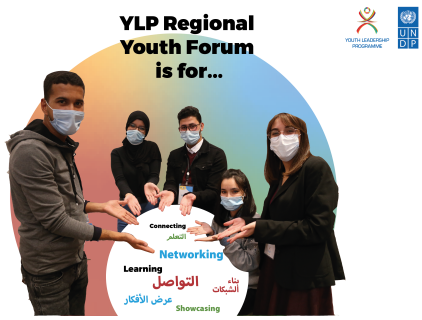
You can watch the live recording of the webinar here.
Youth Leadership Programme *is part of UNDP's regional youth project aiming to support youth from the Arab region to unleash their potential and become social innovators, leaders, and a force for development in their communities.*
Youth Development Delegates in the Arab Region *is a joint initiative between UNDP and the Arab Youth Center, through which 11 youth from the region are deployed in UNDP country offices to contribute to sustainable development and youth empowerment. The "Volunteer for the Future" webinar is the third in the series in which the Delegates lead discussions on timely topics related to youth and development in the Arab region. The webinar was led by Sara Qaddoura, Youth Delegate at UNDP Palestine.*

5 Things to Learn About Being a Changemaker

Every year, young people from all over the Arab region gather in the Youth Leadership Programme's (YLP) Regional Youth Forum to share experiences, network and learn from other changemakers.
This November, the 7th YLP Regional Youth Forum, gathered almost 300 participants from 14 countries in the Arab region, including representatives of 84 youth-serving organizations around the theme "Creating Change from Inside Out".



What does being a changemaker mean, then? Here are five things that we learned during the Regional Youth Forum.

1: Everyone can be a changemaker

There are as many ways of being a changemaker as there are people. Often, being a changemaker means being a leader. During the Forum, Iraqi youth defined a leader or a changemaker to be a *"person who can spread positive change, accept others and different ideas, and can inspire other people and guide them. "*

Regardless of one's background, specialization or experience, everyone can develop their skills and bring about positive change in the field of their interest. Therefore, YLP wants to unleash the potential of youth to be changemakers and serve a key role in the development of the region.

2: Change starts from within

During his opening speech, Khaled Abdel Shafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub for the Arab States, emphasized the importance of starting with ourselves if we want to impact our communities. *"We must lead by example",* he said.

Creating change from within can mean many things: holding oneself accountable, considering ethics, building one's capacities, and becoming part of a changemakers' community. Indeed, the Forum's theme, "Creating Change from Inside Out", highlighted young changemakers' journey from within themselves out to their communities.

For example, Aya Shawky, who graduated from Amazon Web Services re/start program, encouraged youth to keep learning and to apply their learning from a field to another creatively.

3: Take care of your mental health

If the Covid-19 pandemic has taught the world something, it is the importance of mental health and well-being. Therefore, in 2021, YLP7 put a special emphasis on the well-being of youth.

UNDP Regional Youth Project Manager, Linda Haddad highlighted that prioritizing mental health and well-being is essential for young changemakers to create change and continue doing their important work. Emotional intelligence, often defined as an ability to understand, manage, and handle the emotions of oneself and others, can play a crucial role in developing skills to handle adversity and take care of one's mental health.

4: FAIL = First Attempt In Learning

For highly motivated changemakers who want to make a difference, the possibility of failure can seem overwhelming. To address this, the Forum discussed the topic of resilience, and brought in YLP alumni to share their journeys of implementing their ideas and projects.

How could we redefine failure?, asked Asmae El Hajji, YLP4 alumna, PhD candidate, facilitator and trainer from Moor Initiative, a platform that brings together trainers and learners. She encouraged participants to cultivate resilience and the mindset to move forward from obstacles rather than give up.

Similarly, Falasteen Awadallah, YLP6 alumna from Jordan, noted that *"if you did not succeed in implementing your idea or your project, know that you are on the right path to success and learning, and it should motivate you in the future."*

5: We are all in this together

Being part of a community is vital in supporting one another and making each others' paths easier. Connecting and bringing in experts and youth both from the Arab region and globally serves an important purpose: to know that many challenges are shared. We are all in this together.

A key part of YLP, especially the Regional Youth Forum, is to learn from each other's experiences, share successes and challenges, and start turning ideas into reality.

Brian Nyagol, an alumnus of UNDP Youth Connekt Africa and CEO of Startup Suite from Kenya, shared his experience in developing his idea and encouraged youth to actively seek out communities of support: *"If you become part of existing support systems, you will benefit greatly*

from the support to take your idea to the next level."
Coming together around the passion for making a difference and helping their communities, experts and youth alike are equal members of the YLP community. The community comes together across countries, cultures and languages around one mission: to unleash the potential of youth to be key players in the development of their communities, countries and the region.
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You can learn more about YLP here, and follow YLP on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.