

## UN Volunteers in UN Peace Keeping Missions

### Context

The collaboration between UNV and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) started in Cambodia in the 1990s, when UN Volunteers were deployed to serve as civilian staff for the national electoral process at the United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC, February 1992-September 1993). Following this first collaboration, in which more than 400 volunteers from over 60 different countries were involved in the UN Mission work<sup>1</sup>, UNV became an essential support to UN Missions worldwide. In 2003, UNV and DPKO/DFS formalised their collaboration through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the purpose of defining the operational framework, basic rights, status and obligations for both organisations. Furthermore, the MOU established a model of Exchange of Letters (EOL) to set the basis for particular collaborations in the different UN Missions in order to reflect specific contexts of operations. The MOU was reviewed several times in 2007 and it was amended for the first time in 2008 along with the UNV recruitment rules, and for a second time in 2009 with reference to DSA payments for in-mission travel.

A joint evaluation of the collaboration between UNV and DPKO/DFS was carried out in 2011 to provide a response to the UNGA resolution 60/266 in which the Secretary General requested a strengthening of the coordination between DPKO/DFS and UNV for the use of UN Volunteers and the evaluation of their contribution to peacekeeping operations. The evaluation concluded that the partnership had been very successful in meeting DPKO/DFS objectives in a number of countries and emphasised the rapid engagement of highly skilled and motivated volunteers. According to this evaluation, the partnership also made progress in the promotion of volunteerism and the development of national capacities, although this remained a work in progress, particularly in achieving outcome-level results in communities. The evaluation identified challenges related to mission planning, stakeholder communication, and reporting on results. It also recommended to update the MOU between UNV and DPKO/DFS, and to strengthen their partnership. Until today, although UNV and DPKO/DFS recognise the need to reformulate the MOU, this has not happened yet.



### Key words

UNV, DPKO, DFS, DPA, UN Peace Keeping Missions, flexibility, rapid deployment, motivation, cost-effectiveness, high professionalism, strengthen national capacities, South-South Cooperation.

### Overview

The work provided by UN Volunteers in UN Missions contributes to Outcome 1 of the UNV Strategic Framework 2014-2017 in which UNV assists UN entities in delivering their results by integrating high quality and well supported UN Volunteers and volunteerism in their programmes. DPKO/DPA is one of the most important clients for UNV, as they mobilise the

<sup>1</sup> <http://collections.infocollections.org/ukedu/en/d/Jh0466e/4.html>

largest numbers of volunteers: 37% of all UN Volunteers were deployed in Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Missions during 2014-2017.<sup>2</sup>

Depending on the number of UN Volunteers in a particular UN Mission, and the complexity and size of the operation, a UNV Field Unit (FU) is integrated within the Mission staffing and budget. The UNV FU is responsible for the mobilisation and management of UN Volunteer assignments, strategic advice to mission management to optimise the use of UN Volunteer modalities in achieving the Mission mandate, and advocacy around the role of volunteers and volunteerism in the country.<sup>3</sup> The UNV FU in a UN Mission usually consists of a UNV Programme Manager (PM) at P3/P4 level, international UN Volunteers (Support Officers) and national staff at G4/G5 level. All the UNV FU personnel are integrated within the mission staffing table. In case there is no UNV FU in the Mission, the volunteer management and support to the UN Volunteers is provided by the Office of the Head of Administration of the Mission.<sup>4</sup>

Today, UN Volunteers serve in five Special Political Missions (SPMs/DPA) and eleven Peacekeeping Missions (DPKO). The UNMISS (South Sudan), MONUSCO (DR Congo), and MINUSCA (Central African Republic) Missions are the ones that have mobilised the majority of the UN Volunteers. However, the number of UN Volunteers in UN Missions has declined 8.4% overall since 2014 (from 2,346 volunteers mobilised in 2014 to 2,148 in 2016<sup>5</sup>) due to the downsizing or closure of Missions and also due to revised structures of new UN operations which focus more on national capacity development and lighter footprints in the country of operation. This is also in part due to the changed approach to UN-supported elections: some countries have passed from territory-wide observation to capacity development of National Elections Commissions, which requires less manpower.

Most of the UN Volunteers that serve in UN Missions are international. Although the mobilisation of national UN Volunteers has increased since 2014, it still represents a small percentage. In 2014, 0.4% of the total volunteers mobilised in the Missions were nationals, while in 2017 this percentage has increased to 6%.<sup>6</sup> One of the major reasons for international UNV deployment with UN Missions is a lack of capacity at local level, which can be a hindrance to achieving the mandate of the Mission. In addition to providing the required substantive, administrative and technical support to the Mission, the UN Volunteers play a crucial role in developing local civilian capacities. With the emphasis on UN Missions to develop national capacities, they are now looking at mobilising national UN Volunteers and pairing them with international volunteers that have a dedicated focus on national capacity development. An advantage of this is that national UN Volunteers can often connect better with the local communities. Examples of Missions with increased numbers of national UN Volunteers are MINUSCA, with 55 national UN Volunteers included in the 2016/2017 budget for the Mission Support Division (MSD), and other UN Peacekeeping Missions that have incorporated national UN Volunteers are UNAMID<sup>7</sup>, MONUSCO and UNMIL.

Further to this, 86% of the UN Volunteers working in the UN Missions are from the global South, which indicates that most of the internationals that work as UN Volunteers in UN Peacekeeping Missions are facilitating South-South cooperation. Although UNV has increased the percentage of female UN Volunteer candidates proposed to UN entities during the last years, the

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<sup>2</sup> UNV Volunteers' statistics 2014-2017

<sup>3</sup> UNV, Review of Enhanced Field Presence (EFP) for Field Units and Assessment of Proposed Field Unit Contraction/Augmentation

<sup>4</sup> MOU DPKO/DFS

<sup>5</sup> UNV Volunteers' statistics 2014-2017

<sup>6</sup> UNV Volunteers' statistics 2014-2017

<sup>7</sup> In Darfur, the government is not allowing the hiring of more internationals so the UNAMID Mission has started to include national UN Volunteers.

percentage of females in UN Missions has remained steady from 2014-2017 and represents 31% of all volunteers deployed in Missions.<sup>8</sup> In most of these Missions, it is challenging to mobilise women because some technical professions are still predominantly occupied by men, for example, in the areas of engineering and aviation. At the same time, the majority of assignments are located in non-family duty stations, which can constitute a challenge to the efforts to recruit women.

### **Performance**

The technical capacity and motivation of UN Volunteers as well as the speed of deployment and their cost effectiveness are considered to be the most important reasons for recruitment of UN Volunteers in the UN Missions. The inclusion of UN Volunteers has helped to bring new knowledge to support specific activities and tasks, and the UN Volunteers are valued for coming with a fresh mind and bringing in new ideas to the Missions.

Overall, UN Volunteers are recognised by DPKO/DFS as being a resource for the Missions that enable them to build national and local capacities, engage with civil society and grassroots organisations, and to provide community-based action. UN Volunteers also have the advantage of being perceived as politically and socially neutral actors and thus non-threatening to stakeholders. National and international volunteers have complementary roles in the Missions. While national UN Volunteers are often more accepted in their communities and contribute to sustainability, internationals are in a better position to safeguard neutrality and uphold principles of impartiality.

Although UNV's flexibility in the recruitment and deployment process is being considered as a benefit, UN Missions perceive that UNV has become more bureaucratic over the past years. According to UNV personnel and Missions, some years ago the recruitment, deployment and reassignment processes were much easier and quicker. Furthermore, due to the revised conditions of service, volunteers can only serve for four years whereas before they could serve for eight years. While the maximum assignment period was shortened to protect UN Volunteers, this has limited the UN Mission's ability to retain them.

Another challenge is related to the participation of UNV in the volunteer forecasting for the Missions. While UN Missions usually adequately anticipate the number of volunteers, and staffing tables are considered a good mechanism for calculating accurate forecasts of the numbers of UN Volunteers to be selected and mobilised, UNV does not participate in the decision-making process and therefore cannot receive real time information on possible forecasts. As a result, UNV has identified the need to participate in the forecast of assignments for business predictability and has requested DPKO/DFS to include UNV Programme Managers at the Missions during budget formulation and the drafting of staffing tables.

Volunteers are deployed to work in diverse areas, and often they are considered to be the front-runners of the Missions. Regarding UN Volunteers' experience, when the UN Missions have a UNV FU, UN Volunteers are usually better informed and supported. In Missions without a UNV FU, in some cases UN Volunteers are sent to the field without basic induction training, or without clarity of their work assignment. These issues need to be addressed by the Mission, and UNV's HQ in Bonn normally has quite a limited capacity to ensure that these aspects are covered.

UN Volunteers that have served in UN Missions constitute a pool of highly qualified professionals that are able to serve in similar contexts after the end of the assignments. However, according to the break-in-service rule about the eligibility of UN Volunteers for mission appointments and outlined in the administrative instruction ST/AI/2016/1 on recruitment<sup>9</sup>, the UN Volunteers, in case of resignation or recruitment in the same Mission, are required to take a break of six months before joining the Mission appointment. This can lead to a missed

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<sup>9</sup> The document can be downloaded at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/viewm\\_doc.asp?symbol=ST/AI/2016/1](http://www.un.org/ga/search/viewm_doc.asp?symbol=ST/AI/2016/1)

opportunity for the UN system, as former UN Volunteers look for other job opportunities during the ending period of their assignments. Therefore, UNV has proposed and agreed with DPKO/DFS to revise this rule, but the process is not finalised yet.

Programme Managers that have been allocated in Missions directly report to the Director or Chief of the Mission Support (DMS/CMS) who manages the personnel or human resources section of the Mission. They do not directly report to the Resident Coordinator who leads the UNCT, which limits UNV's positioning as a programmatic and implementing partner. However, with the programmatic approach introduced by UNV's Strategic Framework 2014-2017, UNV personnel at UN Missions have initiated new projects in coordination with governments and other UN agencies. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, the UNV Programme Manager of the Mission and the Programme Officer of UNV's FU have taken advantage of UNV's presence in the country and in June 2017 launched a project to develop a national volunteer scheme co-shared with UNDP, the Ministry of Youth and other government institutions. This initiative has contributed to positioning UNV as a programmatic partner in the country, to building national capacity and transferring knowledge whilst also serving as an opportunity to maintain UNV's presence in the country once the Mission finishes.

### **Lessons Learned & Upscaling**

UNV's support provided to the UN Missions shows that flexible mechanisms, rapid deployment, as well as the motivation, cost-effectiveness and high professionalism of UN Volunteers are the most important aspects to be maintained in order to keep or increase the numbers of UN Volunteers mobilised in the UN Missions.

The increasing interest of recruiting national volunteers for the Missions also demonstrates that nationals constitute an added value in Peacebuilding Missions where it is necessary to strengthen national capacities, facilitate knowledge and skills transfer, and where it is also necessary to bring local community members closer to the Mission.

Considering the declining numbers of UN Volunteers in the Missions, it is crucial for UNV to improve its business, which requires reducing bureaucracy, improving its response to UN Missions' needs and ensuring adequate support to the UN Volunteers in their induction and training processes. Additionally, UNV needs to play a more active role in the volunteer forecast for the UN Missions in order to adequately plan numbers.

The experience of the partnership with DPKO/DFS also demonstrates that MOUs need to be frequently adapted according to new circumstances and changes produced by external factors that might limit the achievement of results.

Finally, UNV's programmatic approach constitutes an opportunity to position UNV as a programmatic partner in countries where UN Missions are established and UN Volunteers are deployed. It also contributes to maintaining UNV's presence in countries where UN Missions are closing or the numbers of volunteers mobilised are decreasing.