

BLUE BERET

Spring 2022



UNFICYP continues
to combat COVID-19

UNFICYP marks
International Women's Day

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Editor's note

Dear readers, with the arrival of spring in Cyprus we have the pleasure to launch the latest edition of the Blue Beret magazine covering the highlights of the Mission during the first quarter of 2022. In January, UNFICYP's mandate was renewed for a further six months, underlining the importance of our continued efforts to prevent tensions, maintain calm across the buffer zone and work to build trust between the communities across the island.

In this edition, we cover SRSG, Colin Stewart's meetings with key stakeholders, including his meetings with the leaders in early February. We also focus on on-going efforts being taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Encouragingly, UNFICYP's efforts to engage with civil society groups from both sides of the island continue to grow from strength to strength with virtual and in person activities, events and meetings being organised despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. We are also pleased to share a recent visit from Professor Bettany Hughes, who is filming an episode of the series "Treasures of the World" for the UK's Channel 4. Professor Hughes visited the buffer zone together with our Chief

of Staff, Colonel John Hamson and some of our peacekeepers in March.

We also celebrated World Wildlife Day in early March by highlighting efforts we are taking to prevent hunting, bird trapping and other illegal activities that threaten the natural ecosystem across the buffer zone.

You will also find several stories on some of the initiatives led by our Civil Affairs colleagues, including some motivated young people who are taking part in the Young Leaders in Action programme and young students who are coming together with innovative entrepreneurship ideas.

In this edition, we also include coverage of our most recent medal parades and the work our peacekeepers are doing inside the buffer zone. Finally, you will also find some examples of the great work being done by our colleagues, the highlights of our International Women's Day events, featuring the women's walk and talk to mark the day together with civil society representatives. In the next few pages, read about how UNFICYP continues to combat COVID-19, and much more.

Enjoy reading!

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Spring 2022

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SRSR meetings

On 1 February, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in #Cyprus, Colin Stewart, met with both leaders of the Turkish Cypriot community, Ersin Tatar, and the Greek Cypriot community, Nicos Anastasiades. It was his first meeting with the leaders in 2022.



On 15 February, Colin Stewart, welcomed the Austrian Federal Minister of Defence, Klaudia Tanner, and her delegation to the UN Protected Area.



On 11 March, UNFICYP Head of Mission and SRSR Colin Stewart, welcomed the Ambassador of Italy, Federica Ferrari Bravo, to the UN Protected Area.



On 1 March, Colin Stewart, welcomed the Australian High Commissioner, Fiona McKergow, to the UN Protected Area.

UNFICYP marks International Women's Day

UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde and UNPOL Senior Police Advisor, Assistant Police Commissioner Satu Koivu, invited women in peacekeeping from across the Mission to the United Nations Protected Area on the date, to meet and share experiences and good practices from their respective countries and previous deployments and how do they believe are effective ways of serving for peace in Cyprus.



SRSO Stewart and Force Commander join women's walk and talk

To mark international women's day, the Centre of Visual Arts and Research (CVAR) and the Turkish Cypriot University Women Association, organized a women's walk and talk with Cypriot women from across the island on 12 March. UNFICYP's Head of Mission, Colin Stewart, together with the Mission's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, and representatives from the diplomatic community joined the event and discussed how the United Nations in Cyprus has been working towards gender equality and women's participation and the essential role of civil society. Stewart reinforced the need to engage women meaningfully in the Cyprus peace process, highlighting the recent development of an action plan on ways to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in an eventual settlement process in Cyprus.



UNFICYP marks World Wildlife Day and tackles illegal bird trapping in the buffer zone



Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean and lies on one of the main bird migration routes across the area. In the United Nations buffer zone alone, there are around 200 bird species out of the over 400 known to exist on the island. Many of them are endangered by bird traps set illegally by hunters.

Mark Wall has served as a detective police officer in Ireland for almost 30 years. Since 2021, he has been deployed with UNPOL to Pyla, where he is responsible for coordinating the daily patrols of 9 patrol officers. For him, “effective patrolling means being aware of all potential illegal activity and coordinating a response.”

In addition to partnering with local authorities, like the Game and Fauna Services, to seize and destroy illegal hunting equipment inside the buffer zone, UNPOL has also had support from CABS, the Committee Against Bird Slaughtering, which is helping enforce the law for the protection of birds and works to detect and spot illegal hunting and trapping activities.

Andrea Rutigliano, who has been working with CABS since 1996, oversees the antipoaching operations in Cyprus, Italy, Spain, and France. On the island, they count with 4 staff and few volunteers who are mostly foreigners. For her, “We are glad to have the contact and support of UNFICYP. We believe that joint operations between UNFICYP, the Cyprus police and CABS would bring great results in the buffer zone.”

The buffer zone extends for approximately 180 kilometres across the island. In some parts of old Nicosia, it is only a few meters wide, while in other areas it can reach a few kilometres between both communities. The area has remained a haven for flora and fauna, thriving on the near absence of hunters and most other human interference.

However, over the last months, UNPOL have spotted illegal trapping devices in remote areas. Once this happens, a detailed search of the location is carried out and depending on the circumstances, Game

and Fauna Services or CABS staff are escorted to the scene and assist in seizing the equipment.

UNFICYP pays careful attention to preservation of the natural environment, and to the prevention of unlawful activity in the buffer zone. However, despite Mission efforts and active patrols, Mark details that in some instances, “illegal bird traps were found placed near large trees or on small grove of trees such as olives in distant areas ways from patrol tracks.”

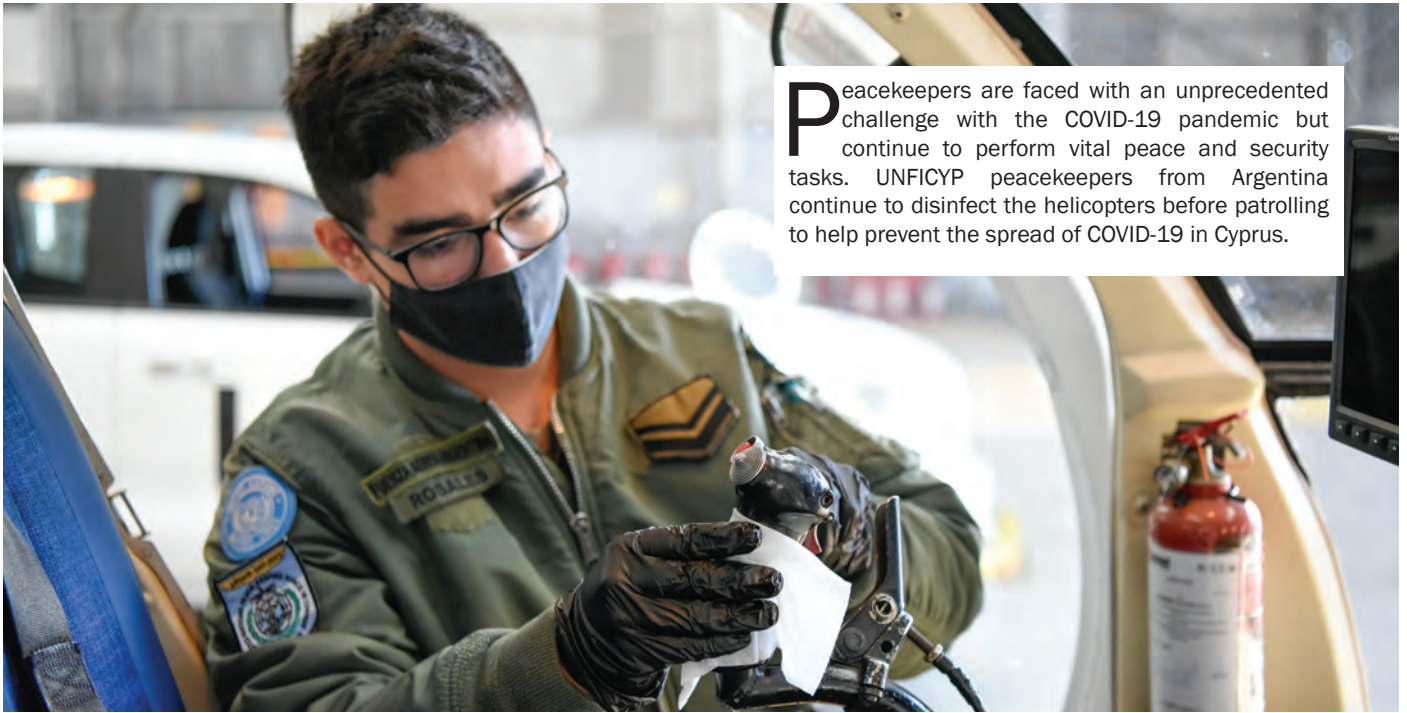
Andrea explains that “small migrating birds are a sought-after delicacy”. According to her, although CABS does not remove traps on their own, they inform authorities on the spot. With CABS support, in 2021, “we removed around 2,300 lime sticks, 140 nets and 130 electronic decoys used for both hunting and trapping,” she recalls.

On 23 February, UNFICYP peacekeepers from UNPOL in sector 4, together with the Game and Fauna Services, held a symbolic ceremony in Kofinou village to destroy all illegal bird trapping equipment seized by the Mission’s military and police in the buffer zone over the last months.

UNFICYP keeps a permanent watch over the buffer zone with patrols in vehicles, on foot, on bicycles and by helicopter. For Mark, “patrolling the buffer zone makes you realise how fragile the ecosystem in Cyprus is. The buffer zone has many beautiful but endangered plants and animals. Anything we can do to help support their survival gives us great satisfaction.”

On many occasions, he witnessed birds being rescued from their traps and recollects the experience: “we have actively assisted in freeing protected wild birds. It’s a great feeling knowing you are making a positive contribution to the protection of wildlife in Cyprus.” UNFICYP reminds that such activities inside the buffer zone are strictly forbidden and the use of weapons, dogs or equipment in this context poses a security risk and all illegal equipment that endangers wildlife seized inside the area will be removed.

UNFICYP continues to combat COVID-19



Peacekeepers are faced with an unprecedented challenge with the COVID-19 pandemic but continue to perform vital peace and security tasks. UNFICYP peacekeepers from Argentina continue to disinfect the helicopters before patrolling to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Cyprus.

Slovak peacekeepers run for a good cause

In February, 72 of our Slovak peacekeepers from sector 4 took part in the “Let’s Run Slovakia” world challenge event to support selected charity organizations of their choice. Our peacekeepers ran a total of 1721 kilometres in Cyprus in 3 days. As a result, the Slovak contingent team on the island, led by Lieutenant Colonel Roman Ivor, took 3rd place in the overall ranking. In the individual category, SFC. Maroš Vitko, who ran 100 kilometres, making it to 2nd place out of a total of 730 participants. With his results, he motivated other competitors in overcoming their own challenges. All participants supported a cause not only with personal performances, but also with voluntary financial contributions. We are proud of them!



Peacekeepers awarded UN peace medals

On 18 January, UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, awarded medals to 8 peacekeepers from Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Brazil, who are based in sector 1, for their service for peace in Cyprus. Sector 1 covers a distance of approximately 90 kilometres from Kokkina village on the western coast of the island to the village of Mammari, west of Nicosia.



On 21 January, UNFICYP's Force Commander Major General Ingrid Gjerde awarded medals to 25 peacekeepers from Argentina, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia and United Kingdom, deployed at the Mission's Force Protection Unit for their service for peace in Cyprus. The Force Protection Unit's main tenet is to prevent, through proactive policing and security measures, and to preserve the operational effectiveness of the force and safeguard its personnel.



On 16 February, Colin Stewart, welcomed the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle and his delegation to the buffer zone for a brief on the UN's peacebuilding efforts on the island. Sir Lindsay also awarded medals to British peacekeepers serving for peace.



On 22 February, UNFICYP's Commanding Officer in Sector 4, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Plavka, awarded medals to 24 peacekeepers from Slovakia for their service for peace in Cyprus. The responsibility of the unit is to patrol and monitor military activity over 65 kilometres along the United Nations buffer zone, beginning at the east end of Kaimakli village and ending at the village of Dherinia on the east coast of the island.



On 10 March, UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, awarded UN medals to peacekeepers from Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Ghana, Hungary, India, Norway, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and United Kingdom in the United Nations Protected Area.



On 22 March, UNFICYP Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, accompanied by Sector 4 Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Róbert Plávka, and the Ambassador of Slovak Republic, Ján Škoda, awarded medals to 112 peacekeepers from Slovakia for their service for peace in Cyprus.



SRSB Stewart and Force Commander meet with Sector 4 peacekeepers

On 7 February, top United Nations official in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, accompanied by UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, visited peacekeepers in sector 4 and Pyla for a briefing on the current situation in the area. Since 2018, UNFICYP's sector 4 is the responsibility of the Slovak contingent. They patrol and monitor military activity over 65 kilometres along the United Nations buffer zone, beginning at the east end of Kaimakli village and ending at the village of Dherinia on the east coast of the island.



Young Cypriots lead efforts to tackle community challenges together

In the first week of February, UNFICYP, together with the British High Commission and the British Council, kick started the 'Young Leaders in Action' initiative, which is bringing together 35 enthusiastic and committed young men and women from all communities and parts of Cyprus to discuss how collective social actions can help their communities.

Over the intense 2 full-day workshops, young Cypriots came together virtually to discuss how they can join forces to identify and tackle some of the issues and challenges they experience in their daily lives.

The group of participants formed intercommunal teams and identified issues ranging from lack of trust between communities, environmental problems, and women's inclusion to reducing the gap between academic research and public awareness and began to consider ways in which they can address these issues together through small collective actions.

The series of workshops took place in February and the participants started crafting their initiatives and start to work on turning their discussions into small projects. Find out more about some of the projects over the next pages.

"Incredible things can be achieved when we look at diversity as a strength"

Phoebe Coles is a 25-year-old Cypriot who strongly believes that "incredible things can be achieved when we look at diversity as a strength and work all together for a sustainable, equal, safe, and peaceful world."

A recent MSc graduate in Defence, Development, and Diplomacy at Durham University, Phoebe is also the founder and director of a voluntary humanitarian group called 'Vicinus', which organizes education initiatives, fundraising projects, and advocacy campaigns related to human rights and humanitarian topics in Cyprus. Their work particularly focuses on women, youth, refugee and migrant rights and empowerment.

In January, with a mindset of true peacebuilder, Phoebe joined the "Young Leaders in Action" and was impressed with the programme's objectives, which aim at strengthening engagement and meaningful participation of women and youth on the island. She said: "I gained a sense of community and belonging to an incredible network of talented young people from diverse backgrounds and an enriched understanding from different perspectives and opinions related to youth action and empowerment".

"I was touched by the experiences, stories, and ambitions shared by the participants and it warmed my heart connecting with humans beyond borders. My hope for Cyprus and for our future increased."

Phoebe, together with Yassine Chagh, Ledün Caymaz, and Penelope Demetroulopoulou, started the 'Bubble Out-Share Your Story'. They joined forces to provide a safe space for people who have experienced mistreatment in Cyprus to share their story and to receive support from their peers and professionals. It also aims to raise awareness to the mistreatment of marginalized groups on the island.

"The Bubble Out concept was inspired by the idea that as humans, we often tend to stay in our own groups or 'bubbles' and many of us do not step out and immerse ourselves in diverse multi-communal spaces," Phoebe explains and highlights that "our project gives a voice to the voiceless, empowering women, youth, and other marginalized groups with solidarity and support regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race and disability".

When asked about the programme and its impact on the youth in



Cyprus, Phoebe says: "It provides young leaders with the necessary tools to confidently establish their own youth-led initiative. The multicommunal collaboration aspect of the programme enriches young people's horizons and empowers youth to come together to make Cyprus a better place for future generations".

Phoebe concludes her participation with high hopes: "I was touched by the experiences, stories, and ambitions shared by the participants and it warmed my heart connecting with humans beyond borders. My hope for Cyprus and for our future increased."

The Young Leaders in Action is organized by UNFICYP, in partnership with the British Council and the British High Commissioner in Cyprus and focus on equipping participants on peace and security, peacebuilding, social action, leadership, negotiation, and mediation processes, in addition to providing groups tools and strategies needed to develop their own intercommunal projects and small grants for implementation.



Young Cypriots take stock on environmental challenges on the island

As part of the Young Leaders in Action initiative, a group of six young Cypriots from both communities in Cyprus came up with “Green Mahalla”, a project to tackle environmental degradation and increase communication between both communities, with actions that includes clean-ups in selected areas on the north and south of the island.

Christina Kakoulli, Joya Lahoud, Hanife Serin, Stelios Antoniou, Polymnia Glykeriou and Sofia Polydorou recently launched the project’ social media pages to present “before and after” photos of the clean-ups, shed light on environmental problems and spread awareness in an attempt “to make people rethink their behaviour towards the environment,” Sofia explains.

Sofia describes how the group came up with the idea: “We all agreed that the separation of our island prohibits us from seeing the bigger picture of common environmental problems. We recognised the need to initiate intercommunal environmental activities to prevent conflict and build peaceful relations between our communities.”

For Hanife, the Young Leaders in Action “provided us the opportunity to get to know new friends from all over the island who are willing to contribute to peacebuilding and doing something beneficial. It is very exciting to be with other enthusiastic people keen to create a better and more peaceful Cyprus.”

“to meet people from other communities and backgrounds of this little island that I call home was something really special.”

more peaceful Cyprus.”

The Young Leaders in Action focuses on equipping participants with tools and strategies needed to support them to develop their own intercommunal social action projects and with small grants to kick-off the implementation of their ideas.

For Christina, “to meet people from other communities and backgrounds of this little island that I call home was something really special. I’ve lived here all my life and never had the chance to reach out to others. This gave me the perfect opportunity because we also have common values and interests. It’s also uplifting to meet others who also want to empower groups that have received discrimination, tackle inequality and promote environmentalism.”

The programme aims to strengthen women and young people’s input to discussions on peace and security, with a focus on peacebuilding, social action, leadership, negotiation, and mediation processes.

Stelios Antoniou, one of the Green Mahalla members, believes that “the youth is an essential aspect of society that isn’t taken as seriously as it should, and our community should heed their opinions and demands because the youth shape the future.”

Through a series of workshops at the beginning of the programme, the participants had the opportunity to learn about issues related to the inclusion of women and youth on the island and develop their own ideas to act upon what they consider to be relevant topics to address how to increase their participation.

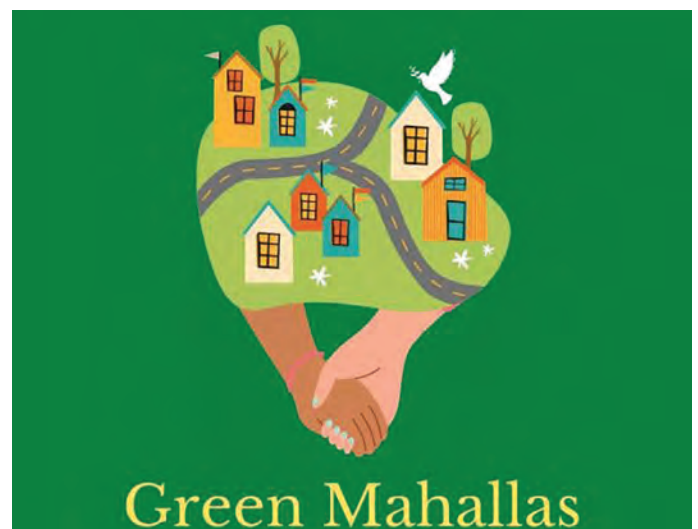
For Polymnia Glykeriou, who is part of the group and joined UNFICYP’s first Youth Champions for Environment and Peace, “the sessions have been inspiring and joyful. The whole programme gives me hope that our communities can coexist in harmony. I am looking forward to starting our project and contributing to our society.”

“If I can describe the programme in one word, I would pick ‘fantastic’”

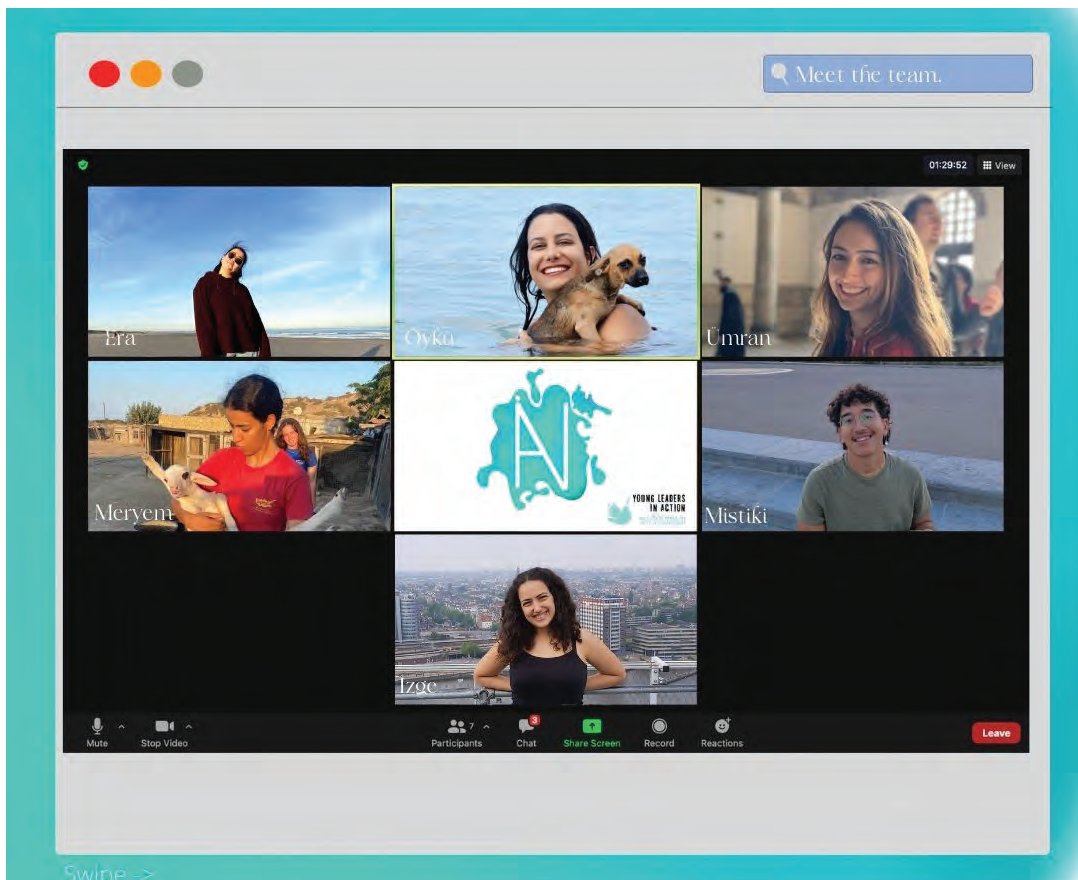
Joya Lahoud, who was also part of the Youth Champions programme concludes: “If I can describe the programme in one word, I would pick ‘fantastic’.

It taught me a lot about how leadership, cooperation, hope, ambition, solidarity and friendships can and are shaping a better island. It inspired me to be hopeful about a better future together regardless our differences and current circumstances and motivated me to work harder to achieve this dream peacefully alongside other inspiring young Cypriots.”

The Young Leaders in Action started in January and is being organized by UNFICYP, in partnership with the British Council and the British High Commissioner in Cyprus. The initiative will run until April.



“An inclusive society with empowered women and youth is on the way”



All in Cyprus is a new intercommunal advocacy group established during the Young Leaders in Action initiative, which provided a space for young Cypriots from both communities of the island to brainstorm different ideas and put in practice initiatives to help increase participation of women and youth in peace activism on the island.

Like all groups, “All in Cyprus” is young and diverse: Ümran Avni and Meryem Ozkan work for NGOs on the island, Öykü Tural works as a general practitioner, İzge Shanlitourk is a PhD student and Era Georgiade and Mustafa Mistiki Araz are studying abroad.

All in Cyprus started after its members noticed that “there are many active social initiatives in Cyprus, however, there is a lack of awareness about these initiatives and understanding the meaning of activism. We aim to create one uniting hub to bring together the activists and events amongst local communities and diaspora, making activism in Cyprus stronger and easier to access,” Era explains.

The Young Leaders in Action seeks to strengthen women and young people’s contribution to discussions on peace and security, with a focus on peacebuilding, social action, leadership, negotiation, and mediation processes.

For Meryem, “when people living on the different sides tried to define the problems in Nicosia and how to improve them, it was shocking to see how similar, yet how different, our lifestyles are and how much being able to verbalise problems help build bridges and lead to forming beautiful relationships.”

When asked about joining like-minded people, Ümran explains: “to work with a vibrant group of young people passionate about meeting each other and collaborating together to make Cyprus a better place made us all feel very fortunate and grateful.”

The Young Leaders in Action proposes to equip young Cypriots with the tools necessary to support young people to develop their own intercommunal projects and with small grants to begin the implementation of their ideas.

For İzge, “It was amazing to get to know people who hold similar perspectives and I have been impressed by the funding offered, which presents a possibility of not only learning, but actually pursuing activities in real life.”

Through several workshops since early January, these young people had the opportunity to understand issues related to the inclusion of women and youth on the island and develop their own suggestions to act upon what they consider to be relevant topics to increase their participation.

For Öykü, “this programme shows us that we are not alone in our purpose, by bringing together young people who look at the future with hope, who have an enormous amount of energy and motivation to change the world for the better.”

Mistiki, one of the group members, concludes with a message: “these sessions showed me how when Cypriots want something, they make it happen. Therefore, a more inclusive society with more representation of marginalised groups and empowered women and youth is on the way, get ready!”

Young Cypriot students present intercommunal ideas for a sustainable future on the island

On 27 February, the Intercommunal Social Entrepreneurship Competition came to its conclusion with 35 students from all communities of Cyprus in an online selection of their best business ideas. In total, eight teams presented their initiatives to a judging panel who reviewed the concepts and efforts of each project. For the last five weeks, teams, with the support of their mentors, engaged with members of other communities and collaborated on generating business ideas to tackle social problems ranging from environmental issues to employability. Among the participants ideas, were included initiatives such:

- PlastiGoBusters: an application to increase public understanding and shape community perceptions regarding the dangers of plastic usage.
- CY ecotourism: a platform for eco-conscious tourists, eco-friendly hospitality businesses, as well as domestic suppliers in Cyprus, to connect with each other.
- FoodMer: a social enterprise which will process supermarket leftover produce to reduce wasted food and promote a healthy lifestyle.
- C.A.R.E pads: a safe, affordable, reusable, and eco-friendly product for menstruation.
- Cy Greenlane: development of straws made from reeds and restoration / upkeep of Cypriot wetlands.
- The Luxurious: a cosmetic brand that provides organic products to a wide range of audiences hence breaking gender norms in society.

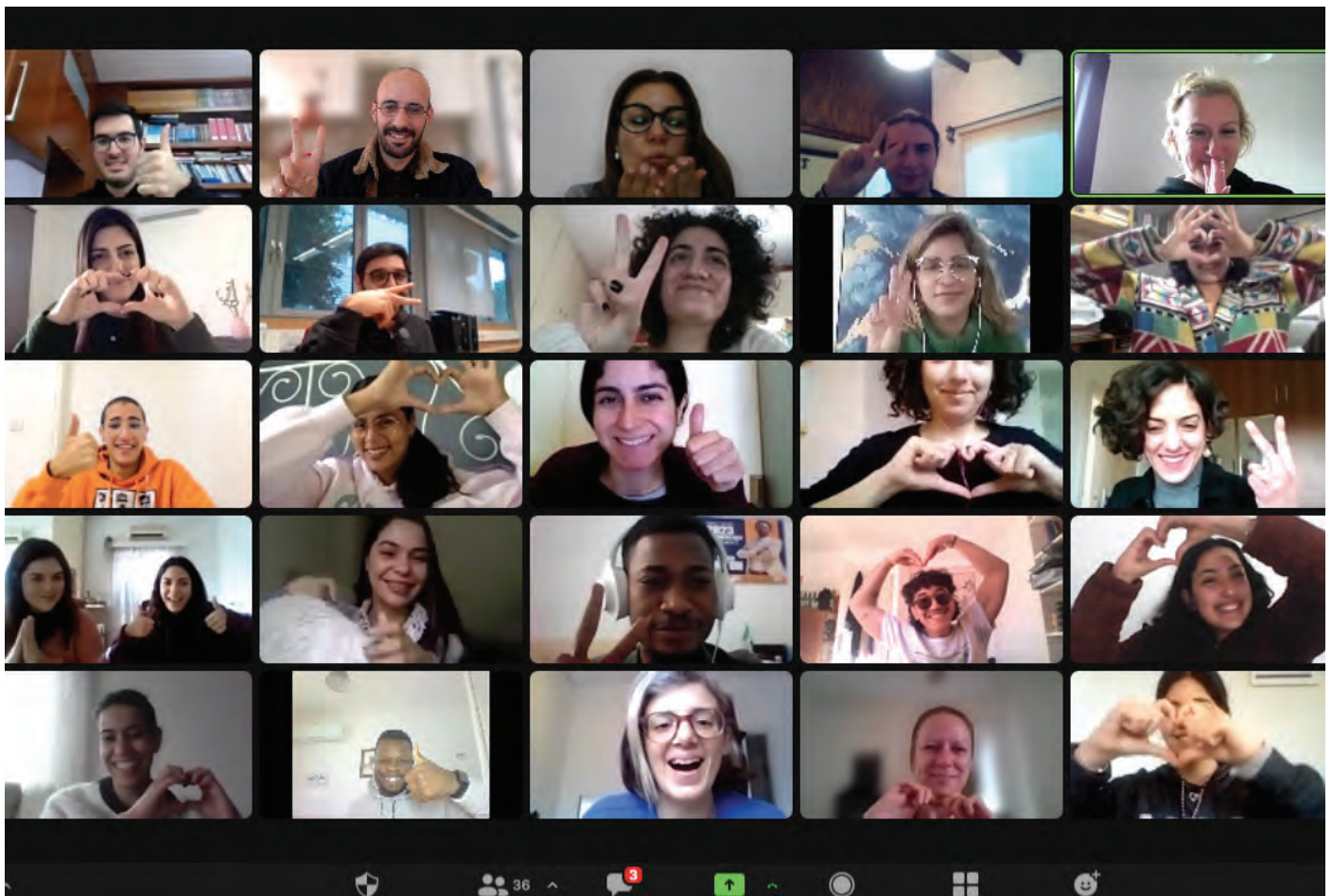
The winning team, 'Joble', developed an app idea to provide opportunities for young job seekers to market themselves by creating their profile, explaining, and uploading their skills while employers would have the opportunity to hire.

Silas Izuchukwu Onuoha, mentor of the winning team, who is a teacher in Cyprus, stated: "this project provided us with the wonderful experience of teamwork, respect for diversity, tolerance, patience, networking and working for a common goal."

The Intercommunal Social Entrepreneurship Competition provided an opportunity for youth in Cyprus to learn and express new ideas related to social entrepreneurship and link them to the UN' Sustainable Development Goals.

For Efthymios Charalambous, one of the mentors: "As a young professional, I had the opportunity to practice my leadership skills, but at the same time to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. Although every competition has a winner, the most important thing was to promote these values to the young generation."

As one of the mentors, Bahire Lütfiöglü also describes the experience: "during this period, I realized that youth are more open to communication, and they are aware and accustomed to new sustainable business models. I was shocked that they already have knowledge on nearly all the UN Global Goals. We need to give them more chances and listen to their voices actively for moderated solutions to real problems."





Peacekeepers plant trees with community in Troulli

On 20 February, UNFICYP peacekeepers from civilian, military and UNPOL components joined hands with the local community in Troulli for a tree planting event in the United Nations buffer zone. Together, they planted pines, cypresses, olives, palm trees and roses.



Joint visit to Dhenia

On 25 February, UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, UNPOL Senior Police Advisor, Assistant Police Commissioner Satu Koivu and the Mission's Chief of Civil Affairs Section, Faylene Woolley, visited Dhenia for a briefing about the current situation in the area and as part of UNFICYP's cross component efforts to engage with the local community and help maintain calm and order in the area.



UNPOL marks ninth anniversary of Slovak peacekeepers in UNFICYP



On 10 March, UNFICYP marked the ninth anniversary of UNPOL contributions from Slovakia deployed with the peacekeeping mission in Cyprus. Speaking at a ceremony held in the United Nations Protected Area, UNFICYP's Senior Police Adviser, Assistant Police Commissioner Satu Koivu from Finland said: "I am proud to say that your strong commitment to the UNPOL work and UNFICYP's mandate in Cyprus has proven invaluable since your first deployment in Cyprus 9 years ago. Slovakian UNPOL officers are highly educated

and extremely competent police officers. All of you show your competence through your daily work across the buffer zone. I thank you for being ready to support and advise your colleagues from other components, working together is vital for the effectiveness of our mission. You can be proud of your service under the flag of the United Nations. Thank you."

In addition, the Contingent Commander of Slovakian UNPOL officers, Alena Kvintova highlighted the important role of the Slovakian police officers in the mission. She said: "I'm very proud to serve with all of you here, dear colleagues. We have represented our country with professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm."

UNPOL has been part of UNFICYP since 1964. It works in collaboration with UNFICYP's Military, and Civil Affairs components to maximize collaboration on all aspects of the Mission's mandate. More specifically, UNPOL contributes to the maintenance and restoration of law and order in the buffer zone and cooperates with UNFICYP's military and the Civil Affairs components concerning civilian activity in the buffer zone and humanitarian matters. The Slovak contingent was first deployed in 2013 with only one female and one male officer, today there are four female and three male Slovak officers serving in the mission.

Patrolling the green line

UNPOL peacekeepers continue patrolling the United Nations buffer zone in Nicosia. UNPOL contributes to the maintenance and restoration of law & order in the buffer zone and cooperates with UNFICYP's military and Civil Affairs components concerning civilian activity in the area.



Give the gift of life, donate blood

On 4 January, UNPOL peacekeepers from Slovakia, Serbia, Romania, Bosnia, and Herzegovina started the new year donating blood in solidarity to those in need. We are proud of them for supporting the communities we serve with vital donations during the pandemic.





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