HUMAN STORIES

THE DONOR EDITION: GERMANY

Social Service Centre Support to Syrian Refugees

Syrian Social worker Nergis busy at work in Istanbul, Turkey, October 2017 ©UNHCR / Esther Judah

ISTANBUL, Turkey: Nergis is beaming, her smile is electric. Nergis ushers me into her office, through the busy waiting room of women queuing to see her and her colleagues. I met Nergis during the opening hours of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) centre where she works as a social worker and provides sexual health advice to Syrian refugee women, but I'm here to talk to her about her work as a refugee volunteer trainer with UNHCR for the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (MoFSP).

Nergis doesn't have much time for herself. Out of the 9 to 5 office hours at the clinic, she is zipping across town giving lectures at the MoFSP's Social Service Centres as a refugee volunteer trainer. Social Service Centres provide a broad range of social services and protection support from, child protection, Sexual and Gender Based Violence

(SGBV), domestic violence counselling, financial support to help mitigate against child labour and referrals to other government services for Turkish citizens and refugees alike. The Government of Turkey has provided registered refugees in Turkey access to key government services such as those offered in these centres. A priority for UNHCR is to provide support to boost local capacity to be able to best absorb the needs of an extra 3.5 million refugees of all nationalities present in Turkey.

"It took five hours to go and come back" from Beyoğlu where Nergis works to the densely Syrian populated area of Sultanbeyli, where she gave a lecture at the local Social Service Centre. That time the lecture was about access to services, free contraception and how to report cases of domestic violence. The lectures follow a curriculum developed by the MoFSP.

"I listen to 30 stories a day, I am tired, but for many young women I council they see me like their big sister". Nergis is interrupted mid-sentence by a phone call, it's a call from a young Syrian women she has been counselling. Nergis never stops. She is always on call- either at the centre, volunteering, counselling or juggling her own family.

The war in Syria brought Nergis to Turkey like the other 3.2 million Syrian refugees currently registered in the country. "While at first the war didn't come to Aleppo (her home town) and there was a lull where life seemingly went back to normal, eventually it came and in turn we left…

we walked across the border, and after paying the smugglers to get us into Turkey by the time we got here we had no money left… when I first arrived in Istanbul I was broke and scared." Nergis tells me her story is similar to those of the women she now councils.

With years of experience and crucial training from UNHCR as well as her previous experience as a teacher in Syria, Nergis has both the knowledge and expertise to in turn help other Syrian women.

In Istanbul UNHCR has helped the MoFSP train a pool of volunteer refugee trainers to provide specialised counselling and awareness sessions in the Social Service Centres. Across the country UNHCR has provided training to their staff on refugee protection issues and rights, the financial support to hire increased interpreters, phycologists, social workers, councilors as well as material support to equip the centers.

A special thanks goes to Germany that provided UNHCR Turkey with USD 23 million in support of Syrian refugees in 2017. This comes in addition to the resettlement spaces it allocated that provides durable solutions for Syrian refugees.

UNHCR is grateful to all of its donors that contribute financially to helping the Operation build a strong protection environment for refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey.

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LINKS
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