



Elif Görkem Arslantürk, a national UN Volunteer serving with WHO as an interpreter/translator.

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## Partnering with WHO in Turkey to address COVID-19 challenges

In Turkey, the World Health Organization (WHO), provides expert support through its programmes to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. UN Volunteers serving with WHO in the field of communications and public information are important team members. Their achievements are an important testimony to the partnership between the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme and WHO, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.

UN Volunteers are supporting a WHO project for Health Security in Turkey, which aims to improve services and the capacity of laboratories, and another for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Mental Disabilities. These projects have changed dramatically due to the outbreak.



“ At the WHO office, we are fortunate to have a high calibre cohort of UN Volunteers as an integral part of our operations in Turkey. Their diligence and commitment to programmatic priorities, coupled with their impressive profiles, have surely advanced our work in areas of health security and mental health. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, we all have worked as a united surge team to support community-based risk communication interventions, including the translation of much-needed technical guidelines from WHO for wider stakeholder distribution. --Dr Irshad Ali Shaikh, Health Security Lead and interim head of WHO's office in Turkey

Tunc Ozceber is engaged with WHO Turkey as a national UN Volunteer Communications Associate, under the UN Expert Volunteer modality. He supports both projects, and has experience a surge in workload and redirecting of his efforts to immediate coverage and translation of official statements. He also supports partner organizations and institutions in remaining aligned and informed through data collection and reporting.

“ I ensure communications and visibility requirements are met for both projects, and have produced the social media strategy of the QualityRights platform and videos for mental health promotion. I also contributed to developing the social media accounts of WHO, which have proven exceptionally important in the time of COVID-19. --Tunc Ozceber, UN Volunteer Communications Associate with WHO, Turkey

Supporting the most vulnerable groups since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mental Health Programme prepared brochures, pamphlets and posters on how to protect one's mental health during the pandemic for children and elderly.

Another stream that was not stopped by the virus is collecting feedback from Community Mental Health Centres (CMHCs) and health care professionals, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. It was important to understand the different experiences, challenges and opinions for the trainings to be perpetuated online. It was also crucial to establish dialogue between the CMHCs and health care professionals to exchange concerns and conduct risk assessments.

All this work requires translation of notes, brochures, calls and conversations. This is where Çağrı Özbek, a national UN Volunteer serving as an Interpreter/Translator for the

past year, supports WHO. During the pandemic, the Mental Health Programme and Ministry of Health worked on a psychosocial support hotline for persons in need of mental support and counselling. Çağrı translated materials for the support hotline, and, during COVID-19, has served as an interpreter of the official live and online meetings on COVID-19 between the CMHCs, Ministry of Health and WHO.



Çağrı Özbek, a national UN Volunteer serving with WHO as an interpreter/translator. ©WHO, 2020

“ From 13 May onwards, WHO and the Ministry of Health conducted regular meetings with health care institutions for persons with mental disabilities to make sure that the project for their social inclusion of was developing in accordance with the national plan. I am glad I could play a helpful role to support inter-institutional dialogue on the national COVID-19 response. --Çağrı Özbek, UN Volunteer Interpreter/Translator, WHO

Another UN Volunteer Translator and Interpreter, Elif Görkem Arslantürk, also contributes to the everyday work of WHO and its counterparts with relevant and trustworthy information. Her main role is within the Health Security in Turkey project, translating written documents and providing both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation between relevant counterparts, in training sessions, and in high-level meetings.

“ The Health Security Project in Turkey aims to improve national capacities for detection, identification, management and communication of all acute public health threats. The collaboration between WHO, Ministry of Health and relevant parties demands constant and accurate information flow. I do my best to ensure both the written and spoken conversation is direct and correct. --Elif Görkem Arslantürk, UN Volunteer Interpreter/Translator, WHO

Elif also provides support during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since the first COVID-19 cases were reported in Turkey, she has translated key documents developed by Turkish counterparts and the WHO country and regional office, and interpreted at meetings and press briefings.

For Tugce Eruydas, serving with WHO as a national UN Volunteer Specialist in project management, this is her first assignment within the UN system. Having started right before the outbreak, Tugce is now providing support for WHO's country office, as the workload has increased under quarantine during COVID-19.

The main part of her routine is to support and coordinate the [Refugee Health Programme](#) in the country, bringing together stakeholders and partners – now virtually – to develop programme plans and risk management solutions.

“ In Turkey we have the third largest registered Syrian refugee population in the world and keeping track of each project takes a lot of effort and responsibility. Now, together with partners, our team is considering designing virtual platforms for a healthcare project for Syrian refugees in the country. --Tugce Eruydas, national UN Volunteer, WHO

Tugce considers her assignment with WHO the best way to improve knowledge, both of the healthcare sector and project management. "Though COVID-19 changed our plans, we still

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have great inspirational achievements and results. Recently, we are collecting human stories for partners, and constantly get in touch with those who benefited from WHO initiatives," she shares.

One of such examples is Syrian Dr. Sameer – who was awarded by the Turkish government for his work in the refugee and migrant health centre in Bursa and providing primary health services to Syrian patients, after accomplishing WHO's adaptation programme for Syrian doctors and nurses, Improved access to health services for Syrian refugees in Turkey.

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