



Chihiro Saito (left) is an international UN Volunteer from Japan serving with UNHCR in Serbia. Chihiro visits Reception and Transit Centers to meet refugees and asylum seekers. (UNV, 2017)

Helping refugees and asylum seekers get basic social services in Serbia

As part of my assignment, I visit Reception and Transit Centers where most refugees and asylum seekers are housed. I am responsible for ensuring asylum seekers' basic social service needs are met and human rights respected.

"I am Chihiro Saito – international UN Volunteer from Japan serving with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Serbia. I work as Associate Field Officer in a team that responds to the refugee and migrant situation in the country. As part of my assignment, I visit Reception and Transit Centers where most refugees and asylum seekers are housed. I am responsible for ensuring asylum seekers' basic social service needs are met and human rights respected. I have attained so much knowledge and experience working with asylum seekers and refugees.

“ At times, we cannot do much but simply listen to people's fears and concerns – nevertheless I feel

“ proud that I’m able to help. A brief interaction can positively impact someone’s life.”

I am always amazed when I see children in such difficult circumstances smile. Their optimism is heart-warming. I still think of a little girl who was living in a make-shift tent in the transit zone between Serbia and Hungary. She had nothing to do to pass her time. She would come and talk to me, hold my hand, walk with me as I visited each of the tents. She would take my sunglasses and my clipboard, and pretend to be me, taking notes and interviewing her friends. One day, she told me, “Go to Hungary tomorrow”. She meant that it was time she and her family could leave the transit zone and go to Hungary. Her innocence, her strength and her hope inspires me to date. I was very sad because I knew that I will not be seeing her again but at the same time so happy that our work as UN Volunteers no matter how

small makes a difference to so many affected by war.”



UNHCR Serbia works under the mandate of safeguarding the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee. In her volunteer assignment, UN Volunteer Chihiro Saito works with refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria and many more countries. Some are fleeing war and violence, others are fleeing persecution in their home countries on basis of race, religion, social or political opinion.

In 2016, 913 UN Volunteers served with UNHCR, out of which 21 UN Volunteers served in the Republic of Serbia.



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Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 10: Reduced inequalities**

