



Farah Ismail is a UN Volunteer with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Her work ensures that refugees receive humanitarian aid and basic human services.

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UN Volunteers put people first

On the frontlines of the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan, stands Farah Ismail, a UN Volunteer with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Farah's daily work ensures that refugees receive humanitarian aid and basic human services they urgently need. As a Palestinian Farah knows well what it's like to be a refugee. Both her parents were forced to leave their homes and rely on humanitarian aid for their survival.

"My father and his family were forcefully displaced from Palestine to Jordan in 1948 when the state of Israel was established. My mother and maternal family fled from Palestine to Jordan during the Six Day War in 1967, this has inspired me to pursue a humanitarian career in service of refugees in particular," she says.

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“ There are more than 10,000 UN Volunteers like Farah, who tirelessly support sustainable development by contributing their time and expertise in 160 countries with 59 UN partners. In a nutshell, that’s what UN Volunteers is all about—selfless individuals serving the United Nations around the world. In doing so, they positively contribute to communities by hands-on and grassroots cooperation. At UNV, we facilitate the selection of these talented and dedicated volunteers to help the United Nations system deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

"Volunteerism has given me the opportunity to use my skills to have a positive impact on the lives of others. One of the most satisfying aspects of volunteering is working and learning from refugees who come from different nationalities, ethnicities, religions and backgrounds," Farah says.

UNV was established in 1971, as part of UNDP, and as one of the first common services to the United Nations. The organization has evolved greatly over the past 50 years in terms of the size and mandate. And now, moving into the second half century of its existence, UNV has designed a new [Strategic Framework](#) for the next four years.

The future of UNV is ambitious and builds on the results achieved in recent years. It also underlines why partnerships are vital for making the UN system more diverse and inclusive.

In the coming years we will uphold gender parity at the global level and work on closing the gap on gender at the regional and county levels. In addition, we will increase diversity in nationalities and age groups, and we will ensure disability inclusion rises.

The pandemic, starting its third year now, exposes massive inequalities throughout the world. As business practices change and novel solutions emerge, volunteering is valued more than ever. Serious development challenges have shown us that we need to change the way we live, work, and cooperate. The range of solutions must include choices and creates opportunities for everyone to be involved. Volunteering is a way to provide diversity, innovative thinking, and opportunities.

Farah would like to see more innovative thinking about the ways refugees can contribute to their new societies and not be viewed as a 'crisis'.

"The skills of refugees are significantly underutilized. Refugees bring productivity, enrich cultures, stimulate the economy, and bring skills and knowledge to any society they become a part of," she says.

To tackle this challenge, UNV has made it possible for refugees to be offered an opportunity to volunteer and offered a pathway to professional employment, especially for assignments that require specific skills or insights within the local refugee community.

“ Such initiatives equip and empower refugees economically, reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid, encourage refugee participation. And it benefits UNHCR with local refugee perspectives, and changes how refugees are perceived. -- Farah Ismail, a UN Volunteer with UNHCR

The world is changing faster than we could have imagined and in ways that we could not have envisioned. Now more than ever we require a sense of shared responsibility and a truly global response through volunteerism to help tackle some of the development challenges of our times. We at UNV are up for this challenge, and count on all within the UN and beyond to come join us as partners in our pursuits.

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