Volunteering to determine refugees’ status in India

Andrea Marilyn Pragashini Immanuel: “Refugees bring with them their culture, traditions, history and a truckload of experience. They strive through unimaginable hardship, incomprehensible misery and through it all find the strength to smile. They have taught me perseverance, to never give up hope even when everything fails and to strive hard. They have taught me to appreciate life, peace and prosperity. As a Refugee Status Determination Assistant, I work with Afghans, Somalis, Rohingya Muslims, Iraqis, Syrians, Sudanese, Iranians and other nationalities who have sought international protection from the UNHCR office in India.”

“Anyone can be a refugee, and that is a stark reality the world is yet to come to terms with.
Gauri Talwar: “I determine eligibility for refugee status by conducting interviews for asylum seekers in need of international protection and the vulnerable population fleeing persecution. The interviewees are from Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Myanmar. The real impact of my work at UNHCR can be compared to that significant “watershed” in a person’s life – from a mere existence marked by fear of harm, to living an exuberant life of safe refuge. I am glad to use my knowledge for this cause, to protect human dignity and human rights. And especially at a time when the world is confronted by unabated conflict, war and violence.”

Shreya Bose: “Anyone can be a refugee, and that is a stark reality the world is yet to come to terms with. Each time I hear one of the asylum seekers speak these words resonate loud and clear. My volunteer work with refugees has taught me the courage to hear horrific stories and it has also given me an insight into the human psyche. For me, interviewing refugee children is the most difficult part of my assignment. They open your eyes to a world rife with violence and war. Yet their beguiling innocence gives you hope for a better future. Empathy is a big part of my assignment – we, as UN Volunteers through our work want refugees to know that we stand with them.”

UNHCR India has a Refugee Status Determination process that starts with registration of asylum seekers, after which interviews are conducted with each individual to determine their eligibility.

In 2016, 913 UN Volunteers served with UNHCR, out of which 22 UN Volunteers served in India.

Asia and the Pacific

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 10: Reduced inequalities