Syrian and Turkish women participated in the Mardin Meydanbaşı ÇATOM ceramic workshops and events, which also contributed to building social cohesion and solidarity.

UN Volunteers strengthen the integration of Syrian women in Turkey through community volunteering

In Turkey, three UN Volunteers worked together for 22 months with Kirkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doga Derneği, and Mardin Meydanbaşı ÇATOM-Community Participation and Development Association on integrating high quality and well-supported UN Volunteers and volunteerism in their programmes to tackle challenges in social cohesion, assist in volunteer-related capacity building for non-governmental organizations, and empower Syrian women.

The UN Volunteer engagement with the partners focused on delivering results towards Sustainable Development Goal nine, Partnerships for the Goals. They designed short and long-term volunteer-based solutions for better access to services and employment. In the process, they developed and sustained partnerships bringing together Syrian women and host communities with non-governmental organizations, associations and private sector partners.

International UN Volunteer, Tomoko Nishino, fully funded by Japan, was the manager of the
project and organized all actions within the project duration. Additionally, national UN Volunteers supported the project by conducting research, monitoring visits and procurements procedures that were part of some activities of project, and built capacity development workshops for local non-governmental organizations.

“For us, this project was about building grassroots solidarity and developing trusting and respectful relationships between the Syrian and local communities in Turkey. --UN Volunteers Tomoko Nishino (Japan) and Mert Canturk (Turkey)"

The partnership between UNV and Kirkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doga Dernegi revolved around a Kitchen Women's Collective, locally called Mutfak (Turkish) and Matbakh (Arabic). This focused on developing cooking skills and building better social cohesion in Gaziantep, Southeast Anatolia Region, among the women from Syria and local Turkish communities through organizing five cooking workshops and a picnic. In total, fifty-four women benefited from this project. At the community level, the project made a valuable addition to social cohesion between Syrian women and the host community members.

“A lot of our participants have described Mutfak as their 'second home', a place to find happiness and peace in a foreign country. The women were pleased to try different recipes, strengthen relationships, talk and share traditional food, music, songs and games. One participant stated, "I don’t want to be defined as a victim of war. I felt here that I am the same as Turkish women." The project has created a space for coexistence and solidarity. --Partner testimonial from Kirkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doga Dernegi"

The Mardin Meydanbaşi ÇATOM-Community Participation and Development Association together with UNV and other UN Volunteers organized a series of ceramic forming workshops for fifteen women from host communities and among the Syrian community to develop their technical skills. Furthermore, fifty women were provided with education programmes to build better understanding between them.
Some 120 Syrian and Turkish women took part in training offered by Mardin Meydanbaşi ÇATOM and acquired skills and knowledge in Leadership, Economic Development, and Community Development. (UNV, 2017)

Both projects aimed at improving the employability of Syrian women in the South Anatolia region by helping them to gain professional skills to sustain their lives, and also contribute to their family economies. At least 500 community volunteers benefited from heightened awareness about volunteerism, with at least 60 Syrian women receiving support from corporate volunteers in setting up their own businesses or improving their skills.

Three times more women registered than the project had the capacity to admit. Through the project, participants discovered their talent in production that improved their trust in themselves, and the togetherness of the Syrian and Turkish women and their integration were among the positive results. The eagerness of the participant to engage in activities was impressive, and requests for future projects
continue to come in. --Partner testimonial from Mardin Meydanbaşı ÇATOM

Another important outcome of the projects was connecting women from the host and refugee communities, making a valuable contribution to social cohesion between Syrian women and the mainly female host community members. At least 120 Syrian and Turkish women took part in training and acquired skills and knowledge in leadership, economic development and community development.

Throughout these programmes volunteerism as a vehicle for social cohesion was a key outcome, benefiting especially women from Syrian refugee and Turkish host communities. Over 300 women from both host community and refugees were beneficiaries of these projects, which included participants being guided in strategic planning training, including volunteer management, learning about designing solutions for the problems faced by Syrian women and their host communities, as well as the implementation of community projects.

Not only did the local communities benefit, but the corporate volunteering component helped enable the local private sector to better understand the issues faced by Syrian women and take an active role in helping resolve them. These interventions were in support of the United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy 2016-2020 of enabling central/local administrations and civil society to effectively manage migration with a particular focus on vulnerable migrants and people under international protection.

This article was prepared with the kind support of UN Online Volunteer Gabrielle Byko.

Europe and the CIS

- Syria • gender • income-generation • social cohesion • solidarity • refugees • women's leadership • #ResilientCommunities

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth, SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals