



Driven by her motivation to serve the humanitarian mandate of UNHCR, Elsie Aroyan, a displaced person from Syria, serves as a national UN Volunteer in Armenia.

Building a better future for displaced people and communities in Armenia

Today, Armenia hosts around 14,000 displaced persons from Syria. Their access to asylum procedures and services require close monitoring. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with the support of UN Volunteers, is trying to ensure protection and facilitate the local integration of these asylum-seekers.

Elsie Aroyan is serving with UNHCR as a UN Volunteer Community Services Assistant to protect the rights and build a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people in Armenia. As a displaced person herself, Elsie can relate better than anyone to the pain, fears and challenges which these displaced persons and refugees suffer from.

Her journey to becoming a UN Volunteer wasn't an easy one. Elsie worked as an elementary school teacher in her hometown, Aleppo, when war began in Syria. Like millions of other Syrians, Elsie and her husband decided to leave their home and moved to Armenia.

Despite many obstacles complicating her integration, including the language barrier, Elsie was able to smoothly enter the labour market in Armenia by joining UNDP's "Youth Career Trail" initiative. This initiative offered a six-month paid internship programme for 60 graduates, mostly from Syria and Ukraine, to obtain the necessary work experience in areas relevant to their education and gain practical knowledge for future job opportunities.

This experience allowed her to prepare for her career with the United Nations. Driven by her motivation to serve UNHCR's humanitarian mandate as a UN Volunteer, Elsie first became an intern and then a national UN Volunteer.

“ During my challenging path to becoming a UN Volunteer, I learned to achieve my goals even if they seem to be far and hard to be achieved. I learned not to give up, but on the contrary to continue my journey with more persistence. I strongly believe that it is never too late for any new beginning. --Elsie Aroyan, UN Volunteer with UNHCR, Armenia

As Community Services Assistant, Elsie provides face-to-face and telephone phone counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees who come to Armenia from Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine and other countries. She conducts regular monitoring visits and meets with the asylum-seekers to make sure that they know their rights and that their needs are properly addressed by the partners. In her daily work, she also tries to create opportunities through various UNHCR projects.



Elsie Aroyan, a displaced person from Syria, serves as a national UN Volunteer in Armenia. Here she explains asylum procedures during a counselling session. (UNV, 2018)

One of the projects aiming to support integration and improve the living conditions of asylum-seekers and refugees is called Community-based Protection Learning Programme. Elsie contributed to this project by identifying four refugee communities in need of technological support and now works to improve the wellbeing and livelihood of the project beneficiaries and the larger host community, through networking, socialization, awareness raising, employment opportunities, etc. Some 178 persons of concern and 40 locals from the host communities will benefit from this project.


Elsie is also member in the Rental Panel Committee which provides rental subsidy for the most vulnerable displaced families. This project has supported hundreds of vulnerable families in having shelter by providing partial rental subsidy for them since 2014.

Additionally, Elsie represents UNHCR in the Income Generation In-kind Grant Project Committee. This project aims to boost the economic self-reliance of individuals, families and/or small groups of people of concern through providing necessary tools for family business start-ups based on proposals submitted by potential beneficiaries of the project.

“ We are so pleased to have UN Volunteers with us. Volunteers help us spread the spirit of volunteerism in Armenia and ensure that everyone knows that every human being, be s/he a refugee or anyone else, deserves to live a safe life in dignity. This is what UNHCR and UN Volunteers are trying to achieve for refugees. --Never Sargsyan, Head of Programme Unit, UNHCR Armenia

On World Humanitarian Day and every day, UNHCR, Elsie and other UN Volunteers, often refugees and displaced young people themselves, work tirelessly to successfully implement projects for integration of asylum-seekers and refugees in Armenia. They aspire to reach a broader network of various audiences, including government, civil society and media, private sector and academia, to inspire everyone to show solidarity for refugees and lend a helping hand in promoting their rights.

World Humanitarian Day is 19 August. #WHD #WorldHumanitarianDay

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