

Partners

Story

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UN Volunteers with UNHCR supporting vulnerable children and abuse survivors in Cairo

Egypt hosts refugees and asylum seekers from more than 50 nationalities, primarily Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Sub-Saharan Africa. Difficult socio-economic conditions impact the lives of these vulnerable communities. Farah Nasef (Egypt) serves as a UN Volunteer Child Protection Assistant. Cristina Palacios (Spain) is a UN Volunteer Associate Protection Officer for Sexual and Gender-based Violence. Together with other UN Volunteers, they help UNHCR support the refugee communities.



Farah Nasef is a national UN Volunteer Protection Assistant working in child protection with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Cairo, Egypt. Farah is supporting children and people of concern with protection issues at a UNHCR reception centre in 6th of October City in Cairo. #

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(UNV, 2018)

There are more than 240,000 refugees and asylum seekers currently registered with UNHCR Egypt. Many are women and children.

The [United Nations High Commission for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) provides registration, refugee status determination, and protection assistance to refugees and asylum seekers from 58 nationalities, in coordination with national and international NGOs.

In her role as UN Volunteer Child Protection Assistant, Farah's focus is ensuring protection for vulnerable refugee children, the majority of whom are unaccompanied—having arrived in-country without parents or legal caregivers. Other vulnerable children include those facing abuse, violence, exploitation or neglect.

With a long history of volunteering with refugees and a Master's Degree in International Relations from the University of Manchester, Farah draws on this expertise to provide a range of services – including counseling, and assessing risks and protection needs in the best interest of the child.

"We liaise with partners and local leaders to identify members of the community who may be able to help, and then monitor the process," Farah explains. "I regularly facilitate community meetings and trainings, to get people's help in identifying and referring cases."

The work is challenging. "Cairo is an over-populated urban setting," Farah explains, "which means overseeing unaccompanied refugee children is extremely difficult. But sometimes we are able to reunite them with their families."

One of my favourite memories was interviewing a 14-year-old boy, and discovering he had a brother living

here he was unaware of. We reunited them, and both were overwhelmed and tearful; it was such a wonderful moment. They have been living together ever since. --Farah Nassef, UN Volunteer Child Protection Assistant with UNHCR, Cairo



Cristina Palacios serves as a UN Volunteer Associate Protection Officer with UNHCR in Egypt. She supports refugees and asylum seekers who have been impacted by sexual and gender-based violence. (UNV, 2018)

UN Volunteer Associate Protection Officer Cristina Palacios works to support refugees and asylum seekers who have been impacted by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) including survivors from Syria, Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Like Farah, Cristina draws on her expertise in the aid and development sector prior to her UNV posting, which saw her support several refugee projects across Europe and the Middle East. This experience is supplemented by an undergraduate degree in Middle Eastern Studies, and post-graduate qualifications in International Cooperation and NGO Management, Humanitarian Protection and Assistance, and Gender in Development.

At its core, Cristina's role involves a broad range of services provided by the UNHCR to sexual abuse survivors, and those at risk of sexual violence. She is also the focal point for different refugee communities to address SGBV issues or concerns, coordinating with other international organizations in the field.

Every day I hear heart-breaking stories. Though hard, it motivates me to keep working, as does the rewarding experience of working with resilient and amazing people. I believe in this programme, and the impact that volunteers can have. --Cristina Palacios, UN Volunteer Associate Protection Officer for Sexual and Gender Based Violence with UNHCR, Cairo

Her daily tasks range from managing capacity building for UNHCR and partner staff, to monitoring and evaluating SGBV projects, to supporting specific prevention and response activities – such as psychosocial or legal support,

housing relocation and reproductive health.

"In addition to refugees, we work directly with the Egyptian local community and government, working to create a more protective environment for everyone," Cristina concludes.

This article was drafted with the kind support of [UN Online Volunteer Will Seal](#).

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