

UNHCR TURKEY

HUMAN STORIES

Social cohesion activities and language courses bring together refugees and host community members to build stronger relationships and boost social interaction



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Samsun, Turkey – On a wintery day in the Black Sea region of Turkey we meet 15-year-old Zahra*.

Zahra is a very hardworking refugee student who lives in Samsun with her family. She is fluent in Turkish and participates in the Community Support Project 'Dream Garden', implemented by

the Provincial Directorate of National Education with the support of Samsun Metropolitan Municipality, other municipalities in the district, the Provincial Directorate of Youth and Sports and UNHCR.

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*

Originally from Mosul in Iraq, Zahra fled with her family to Turkey in 2017. Even though her studies were interrupted for two years, upon arriving in Turkey, Zahra was able to re-register at the local school in Samsun and has been able to continue her education from where she left off. According to the vice-principal at her school, **Zahra is now one of the top students at the school:** “She gets some of the highest grades throughout the whole school and the region itself, she also maintains a great relationship with her peers in school.”

Soon after arriving in Turkey, Zahra’s main aim was to learn the language. **“My priority was to learn Turkish, so I started to learn online by myself to be able to communicate with my friends in school,”** says Zahra. While Zahra took up Turkish very easily, her family required additional help to get a grasp of the language. The family members heard about the UNHCR-supported language courses programme called ‘Do not stay stranger’. With the support of one of UNHCR’s partners, Zahra’s family members were able to attend language courses in a local Public Education Center in Samsun. Zahra feels that being able to speak Turkish is crucial for both her and her family, as not only does it help them interact with members from the local community, **but it also helps them establish long-lasting bonds and friendships.** One of the activities of the the Dream Garden project, brings together refugee

and host community students between the ages of 11 and 17. These meetings provide an opportunity for students to meet, talk and interact in different settings sometimes alone and sometimes in the presence of their parents. “In one of the activities, **I made a presentation to my peers, teachers and parents about my life before Turkey, about who I am and what I dream of,**” says Zahra. Thanks to the activities, she feels that she and her friends are better able to connect with each other, whether they are refugees or not.

For her, through these social activities her confidence has grown a lot and that this has had a positive impact on her success at school and she hopes to continue developing the friendships with her peers as much as her studies allow her to. Zahra concludes by saying **“having access to education can be one of the greatest ways to help you thrive, especially when your peers are sympathetic and supportive towards you.** Thanks to this project, I have more self-confidence and I hope to have a bright and successful future”.

Thanks to the generous support of the United States of America, refugees like Zahra as well as the host community members can better interact and learn from one another. Additionally, with the Turkish language courses and social cohesion activities, UNHCR can work to bring the communities closer together to build stronger and lasting relationships.

CONTACTS

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