

# UNHCR TURKEY

## HUMAN STORIES

Support from the People of Japan improves adolescent refugees' lives through life skills sessions



*Selma attending her Life Skills Session with her caseworker Rua from AAR Japan, July 2019 ©UNHCR/Davina Pirro*

Mardin, Turkey- When I arrive to meet Selma at the location in Mardin, I thank her for her time and for missing her guitar lesson to meet with me. She confidently replies “Don’t worry, the teacher gave me permission to come here”, relieved, I continue with the many questions I have.

Selma is a cheerful 14-year-old, but she tells people she is 15, “so they take me seriously”. Originally from Al-Hasakah in Syria, she and her family fled Syria 6 years ago and now live in Kızıltepe in the province of Mardin.

Selma is a girl of many talents: she plays the guitar, she sings, she dances and she is extremely committed to all of these activities. Her greatest passion is for the classical guitar. While she has been playing for a few years, she now attends classes three times a week in Kızıltepe. Not only does she enjoy playing but she also enjoys the lessons: “I like my teacher because in the class we’re all the same, it’s a mixed group of Syrian and Turkish kids”. She loves playing guitar so much, she uploads videos of her playing on social media platforms. “I have more than 6,000 followers” she informs me gleefully.

With Selma’s cheerful and confident attitude, it is difficult to believe that in her first days in Turkey she did not have much faith in herself, that she was shy and was often feeling sad and tired. But this was all before a fortunate encounter, here in Turkey, changed the way she approaches her life. Selma was already aware of Association for Aid and Relief, Japan (AAR Japan) because her mother had come into contact with them through their outreach activities and community centre in Kızıltepe. One day, Selma went to the community centre along with her mother and there she learnt about the “life skills sessions” gatherings AAR Japan holds for teenagers. In the sessions they discuss topics that are crucial to every adolescent’s life: self-esteem, hopes for the future, setting goals and stress management. By attending these sessions, Selma was better equipped to react to moments of discomfort, sadness, and tiredness.

AAR Japan has provided Selma with a list of self-care activities that helps her focus on positive coping mechanisms when she is having negative thoughts. She confides to me that she keeps the list on her table at home, and every time she feels down she recalls the discussions from the

sessions and goes through the list to pick out a different activity. Sometimes, with her parents’ permission, she may go out, otherwise she writes songs and uploads the videos on social media.

Self-care is only one part of what Selma is taking from the life skills session discussions with AAR Japan. In these sessions the teenagers are given the opportunity to discuss issues that directly affect them or their community and now Selma is committed to sharing her thoughts with others and help them share their experiences as well. She wants to pass on the knowledge to her friends and initiate discussions on social media about the topics she feels strongly about.

With the support of AAR Japan and these sessions, Selma is happier, more confident and socially engaged, “I want to be famous” she says, and no doubt about it, this girl is going places.

Selma and her family are part of the over 3.6 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey. Since 2014, Turkey has been hosting the largest number of refugees in the world, and today it hosts more than four million refugees and asylum-seekers of different nationalities. Protection outreach teams like AAR Japan’s, play a key role in identifying individuals with specific needs, and helping them access the care they need.

This work is possible thanks to the generous contribution of the People of Japan that supports the work of UNHCR Turkey and in particular AAR Japan’s work in Mardin. This key financial support has allowed UNHCR and its partners to help refugees like Selma and her family access a range of protection activities and the Turkish authorities to provide these services.

## CONTACTS

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