

## UNHCR – KASA PROJECT

### “Refugee Integration through Education and Self-Reliance Opportunities”

#### Newsletter – issue 2

September-December 2019

#### “Join-the-Community” project engaging refugees in the community life

Building cross-cultural dialogue is one of the main principles of the UNHCR - KASA activities aimed at refugees’ inclusion in the society. Hence, a group of fifteen volunteers continued their work at the Reception Centre and Integration House hosting asylum-seekers and refugees during September-December 2019:

- Creativity Clubs: aimed at teaching handicrafts, preparing decorations, working with clay and improving culinary skills;
- Cultural Club: focused on traditional Armenian music and dances;
- Skills Development Club: time management and communication trainings, soft skills, sessions on communal living raising awareness on discipline and hygiene rules.

In addition to the above, a number of food-oriented gatherings were organised to emphasize the importance of breaking bread together in community building; raising respect towards each other and promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence with the co-residents.



“When the project ended and we bid farewell to the beneficiaries, one of the asylum seekers hugged me and called me her daughter and that was one of the most powerful moments in my experience as a volunteer.”

“Join-the-Community” volunteer

Refugees and asylum seekers joined the volunteers for culinary creation at the “Sweet Evening” event on 23 November, and towards the end of the year organised Christmas celebration with games, dances and pizza making in teams which took place at the ‘Loft’ youth café.

On 19 December, after 'Komitas week', a group of refugees and asylum-seekers took part in an excursion to the Komitas Museum-Institute where they learnt about the life and oeuvre of the world-famous composer and ethnomusicologist. This was preceded by Komitas-themed cultural clubs including dancing and singing. The group also visited Martiros Saryan's House-Museum. The collection of Saryan's paintings exhibited at the institution turned out to include paintings influenced by Saryan's travels to Iran, Egypt and Turkey which reminded some refugees of their native land and culture, and brought some memories of the past. The director of the museum, who had offered entry tickets and organised a guided tour for the group in an in-kind manner, and her staff ensured a genuine atmosphere and a warm approach towards refugees during the entire event.

December was marked with the study visit to the Gyumri municipality. The YC met with the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Hayk Sultanyan, and the Youth Palace Foundation in Gyumri. The participants exchanged their experiences, good practices and lessons learnt, and brainstormed on community-based projects they wished to jointly implement in Gyumri.

On 15 September, the participants of the Creativity club



about their countries' culture and traditions, as well as their new life in Armenia, their integration constraints, social and development needs.

Armenian language classes on two levels of proficiency were attended by some 24 asylum-seekers both at the Reception Centre and at KASA's Espaces youth training centre. The courses served beneficial for them, they also socialised and met new peers with whom they practised some colloquial Armenian, socialised and befriended.

participated in the Harvest Festival organised by Green Lane in cooperation with UNHCR and other partners. The event which took place in the English Park in Yerevan, served extremely useful for refugees as they had the opportunity to display and sell their handicrafts, meet new people and make some money. The event also helped raise the awareness of the local community about refugees and asylum-seekers, talk to them and learn



### Youth Coalition's activities in full swing

Youth Coalition, the team of enthusiastic refugee and local youth continued their innovative projects and activities benefitting themselves, their peers and their communities. Parallel to awareness-raising and capacity building combined by team gatherings and discussions on future activities, the group continued study visits to various agencies and assumed community-based activities. A historic event: Youth Coalition's visit to the National Assembly took place on 18 October 2019. The event was hosted by parliamentarians representing the Standing

"I was happy to see the children of the neighbourhood actively participate in the environmental project. They willingly joined the cleaning and tree-planting activities and were eager to learn more about the importance of protecting the environment and Planet Earth."

Varti Sulahyan (Youth Coalition member)

between the Youth Coalition and the National Assembly will continue to ensure further discussions, guidance and joint effort in realisation of projects benefitting the refugee and local youth.

In November, after consultations with and advice by the Yerevan Municipality, the Youth Coalition had an introductory meeting with the Mayor of Shengavit to discuss their initiative of "Climate Action Campaign" project designed to clean the area, plant trees and create street art. As a result, YC members took actions on raising awareness of the local community of the Charbakh neighbourhood of Yerevan on the importance of caring about the local environment to prevent global warming and pollution.



local community worked together to realise the campaign's goals.

On 22-27 December, a study visit of a youth group from Georgia: refugees, IDPs and humanitarian status holders, and local young people from World Vision, took place in Armenia. The visit was initiated by UNHCR Armenia in the frame of the 'Youth Reunion - a cross border youth empowerment' pilot project. The study visit was of particular importance to Youth Coalition and 'Join-the-Community' project volunteers in Armenia and 'I'mpowering' project participants in Georgia in terms of exchange of knowledge and experience. Establishment of a regional platform of communication and action, and amplification of youth activities at country and regional levels were also included in the agenda. At the end of the study visit, the youth agreed on future cooperation

Committees on Human Rights and European Integration. The young people, including the volunteers of the 'Join-the-Community' project, as well as colleagues from KASA, other UNHCR partner NGOs, representatives of state agencies and local authorities, had the opportunity to learn about the mandate and history of the National Assembly, meet with parliamentarians at work and hold a panel discussion. After the Youth Coalition's presentation where they voiced their constraints, the participants brainstormed on some priority issues affecting successful integration of the refugee youth, largely in the sphere of education, employment and professional development. As mutually agreed after the event, the collaboration





and concrete steps: organisation of joint awareness-raising campaigns, community-based activities and public events.

Moreover, on 30 November, UNHCR joined by Youth Coalition, 'Join-the-Community' project volunteers, and a group of displaced Syrian entrepreneurs participated in Christmas Charity Bazaar organised by the "Welcome to Armenia" Diplomatic Association of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Minister took an active part in the event; during his tour around the craft-sale, he talked to UNHCR and persons of concern, praised their handicraft and entrepreneurial skills. He also engaged in the youth's SDG quiz and games promoting cultural diversity expressing his solidarity with refugees in Armenia and worldwide.

## Kick-off of the Civic Orientation Courses



The Integration Unit of the Migration Service (MS) and KASA Foundation started a new collaboration for introduction of Civic Orientation Training (COT) for recognised refugees and implementation of the training curricula. The goal of the COT was to promote smooth and effective integration for the recognized refugees in Armenia through provision of the necessary information, practical knowledge and exposure to the public life by way of acquaintance with Armenia's socio-economic, civic and cultural environment and opportunities.

In November, the participants were offered a series of awareness-raising sessions, workshops and study visits during which they were provided practical information on refugee rights in the sphere of health care, education, employment, bank system, and other public services. The tailored lecture on professional opportunities delivered by the State Employment Agency served useful for refugees, as well as the thorough introduction of the projects implemented by partners benefitting refugees.

The feedback received by the participants after the four-day course was that they were much interested in and benefitted from the practical information they received, particularly on the financial system, education and career opportunities, as well as healthcare.

In the frame of the COT cultural orientation programme, the group of refugees also benefitted from a day trip to the Kotayk region, visited the Garni temple and the Geghard monastery, learnt about the Armenian history and customs. They also had the opportunity to observe pottery production and handicraft, as well as a group of local women weaving carpets and making traditional dolls.



## Professional growth promotion through "Self-

## **employment skills development” and “Photoshop” courses**

Entering the local job market is not very easy for a foreigner, particularly for a refugee or an asylum-seeker who does not master the local language, has insufficient professional skills and is not familiar with the business environment. Thus, besides introducing to the refugees their labour rights and opportunities in Armenia, they were offered two additional courses by KASA aimed to enhance refugees’ professional skills and gain confidence necessary when searching for or assuming a new job.



During October-November 2019, “Photoshop” and “Self-employment skills development” courses were conducted for the beneficiaries, twenty participants in each course. The professional background of the participants included start-up founders, businessmen, designers, social media marketing specialists, florists, university students and others.

The “Self-employment skills development” course was offered at beginners’ and intermediate levels which provided digital

branding, social media management, advertisement and promotion, and content marketing, while the “Photoshop” course participants learnt how to colour B&W pictures, retouch and mask photos, use filters, text and pen tools. The feedback received from the participants was very positive. They were greatly satisfied with the knowledge they received, motivated for and ready to assume a new career in the field. It is worth mentioning that the beginner and intermediate levels of the Photoshop course were taught by the organisation’s former beneficiaries from Syria which served as a motivating factor from the perspective of the participants.

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