



# LEARNING DOCUMENTATION

**The ESSN Storytelling Project Guide**

Zainab Chamoun



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the European Union



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Into the Story

## Summary

In this learning documentation, we offer a glimpse into the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Storytelling Project, a creative collaboration between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Türk Kızılay/Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), funded by the European Union. The project supported eight Syrian refugees living in Türkiye to tell their stories about the realities and issues that matter to them. Through developing their skills in storytelling and content creation and providing them with the needed resources, the refugee storytellers were able to tell their stories in their own words, on their own platforms.

This documentation explores the project's journey, with its successes, challenges, and stories, through a mix of semi-structured interviews, diary entries, and desk-review, all while keeping the spotlight on the invaluable voices of our storytellers. The interdisciplinary methodology included 20 interviews with IFRC and Türk Kızılay staff, stakeholder organizations, trainers and mentors, and participants. It also included a 5-day diary-writing exercise. Throughout the guide, you will come across insightful quotes and personal diary entries that capture the essence of the storytelling initiative.

The storytellers shared that the project played a major role in developing not only their skills but also their characters. It became an integral part of their identity, encouraging them to express themselves. Acknowledging the learning nature of this pilot project, challenges were encountered on the way and mainly related to external factors like the earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several recommendations emerged from this enriching experience, highlighting the value of face-to-face engagement and hands-on training. Sustainable networking was highlighted, along with leveraging storytellers' voices as an extension of the organizations' mission in the society. The documentation also traced valuable takeaways and lessons, emphasizing that working with refugee communities necessitates an extra layer of care for their unique needs and priorities. Also, it is crucial to work with experienced actors who carry humanitarian values and hold a genuine belief in the need for such initiatives.

The project successfully met expectations, especially when it comes to the development of the storytellers in terms of skills and character. The collaboration between IFRC, Türk Kızılay, stakeholder organizations, donors, and participants thrived through sincere and regular communication, fostering a successful partnership throughout the project's duration.

This learning documentation serves as a guide for humanitarian actors interested in similar storytelling initiatives. It also highlights the contextual nature of the outlined best practices and recommendations, acknowledging the potential need for adaptation in different contexts.

So, get ready to dive in, enjoy the read, and join us on this journey of learning with some truly amazing storytellers!

**Note:** there are embedded links in the underlined text of the guide. To access them while using the printed version, simply scan the following QR code or visit [www.linktr.ee/essnstorytellingproject](http://www.linktr.ee/essnstorytellingproject). You will find them in the order of appearance.



# Meet Our Storytellers



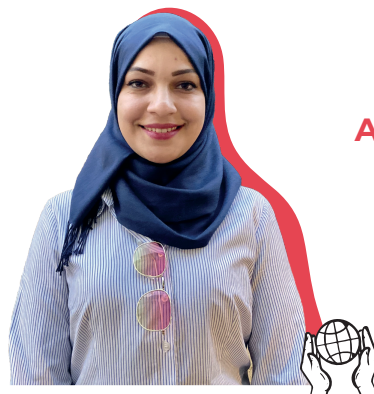
**ABDURREZAK ATTAR**  
THE PHOTOGRAPHER



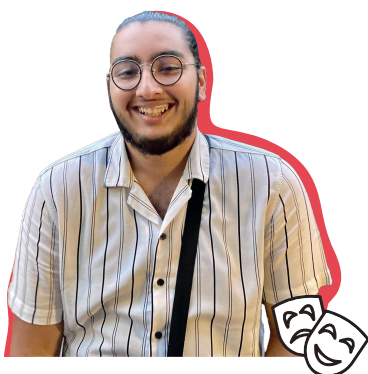
**AHMED DAHO**  
The FOODIE TRAVELLER



**ALAA HOURANI**  
THE CHEF



**ASMAA ALSAWAF**  
THE ADVOCATE



**FAROUK AKBIK**  
THE COMEDIAN



**LUAI HAMADE**  
THE ADVENTURE  
STORYTELLER



**MALAK HAMAMI**  
THE ARTIST



**NUREDIN BAKER**  
THE HISTORY BUFF





## Chapter 1

It Started with  
Eight Refugees,  
Eight Stories



September 2021, Gaziantep – Our story started in Gaziantep. At the heart of the city, eight Syrian refugees convened in one shared space for a week. In a creative and loving environment, they worked hand in hand with skilled experts to develop their skills in photography, videography, and storytelling techniques. Venturing into the local community and streets, they interacted with the people of the city, creating content about its people, themselves, and everything that transpired in between.

Gaziantep transformed these gifted storytellers into friends over the course of seven days and nights, and since then, they are excited to share their stories and realities with the world.

Each storyteller brought something unique to the table, but together the chef, the painter, the advocate, the adventure storyteller, the foodie traveller, the comedian, and the history buff made something truly special and genuine. Their stories are a reflection of their own individuality, and expand on the stories of everyone in Türkiye.

## About the ESSN Storytelling Project

In a world full of stories, each person has their own special tale to tell, and it's important for us to listen.

Brought to life through the [Emergency Social Safety Net \(ESSN\)](#), the ESSN Storytelling Project focused on empowering Syrian refugees in Türkiye to share their authentic stories—ones that reflected what mattered most to them. The goal of the project was to provide a platform for vulnerable communities to share their experiences, and as it progressed, it became a heartwarming reflection of their faces and voices.

The [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies \(IFRC\)](#) and [Türk Kızılay \(TRC\)](#), with the support of the European Union, collaborated with eight incredible Syrian refugees who were enthusiastic in using different channels to share their stories with the world. This one-of-a-kind project gave these gifted storytellers the skills, knowledge, and resources they needed to tell their stories in a sustained and engaging manner.

This learning documentation captures learnings and best practices from the ESSN Storytelling Project. It offers a roadmap for humanitarian and communication practitioners who are seeking to integrate creative and storytelling elements into their large-scale humanitarian initiatives, particularly in refugee and displaced communities. It highlights the project's impact on storytellers in terms of skills, character, and their life in general. It closely examines bumps on the road and areas for improvement.



I want to put a spotlight on the social issues that can impact or even destroy women's lives. Hopefully, through my storytelling, other women will not feel alone and can help prevent others from being harmed.

Asmaa Alsawaf, the advocate

Together with The Everyday Projects, the project taught the participants the best ways to use photography, videography, and social media. They were introduced to content creation tips and tricks, and the excitement of shooting from the field. The time they spent in training not only helped the storytellers improve their skills, but it also gave them chances to try out new ways of expressing themselves.

At a later stage, each storyteller was matched with a leading professional in the field—a mentor dedicated to guiding them on their content creation journey. These mentors were very important in helping the storytellers improve their skills, clear up their communication goals, and make their social media and storytelling tactics compelling. The mentorship part not only helped the project succeed, but it also built ties that will last long after the project was over.

My passion for photography, content creation, and traveling motivated me to join the storytelling project. It is an exciting opportunity to delve deeper into the art of storytelling, camera tricks, and video editing. I love wandering around and exploring new cities and hidden gems. I have a collection of personal and professional videos that highlight my different journeys and stories on the way. But what drives me to produce content is my deep interest in problems that are important to me, especially standing up for refugees. I am dedicated to be a voice for their stories, showing off their amazing skills, and bringing attention to the events that have shaped their lives.

Luai Hamade, the adventure storyteller

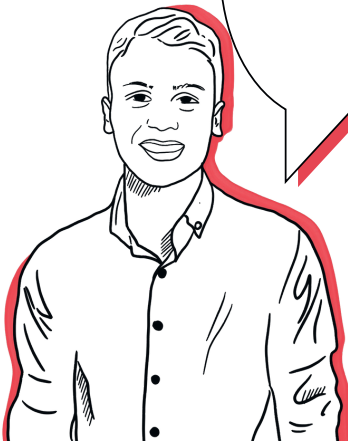



Photo credit: The Everyday Project

## Eight compelling voices emerged from the project

Ahmed, Asmaa, Alaa, Farouk, Abdurrezak, Luai, Nuredin, and Malak.

Each storyteller painted a vivid picture of their life in Türkiye. Following the lives of the storytellers through various critical moments over the year, the project showcased the tangible impact of the ESSN programme. The storytellers became familiar faces, representing not just the recipients of aid but individuals with agency, resilience, and distinctive narratives—a counter-narrative to prevailing stereotypes about refugees in the world. Their stories were inspiring and familiar, and they hit home with audiences in the European Union.

By the end of the project, these passionate storytellers transformed into ambassadors of their own experiences. Through their stories, the project not only enriched the cultural fabric but also contributed to a broader narrative—one that transcended borders, fostering empathy and understanding across different communities.

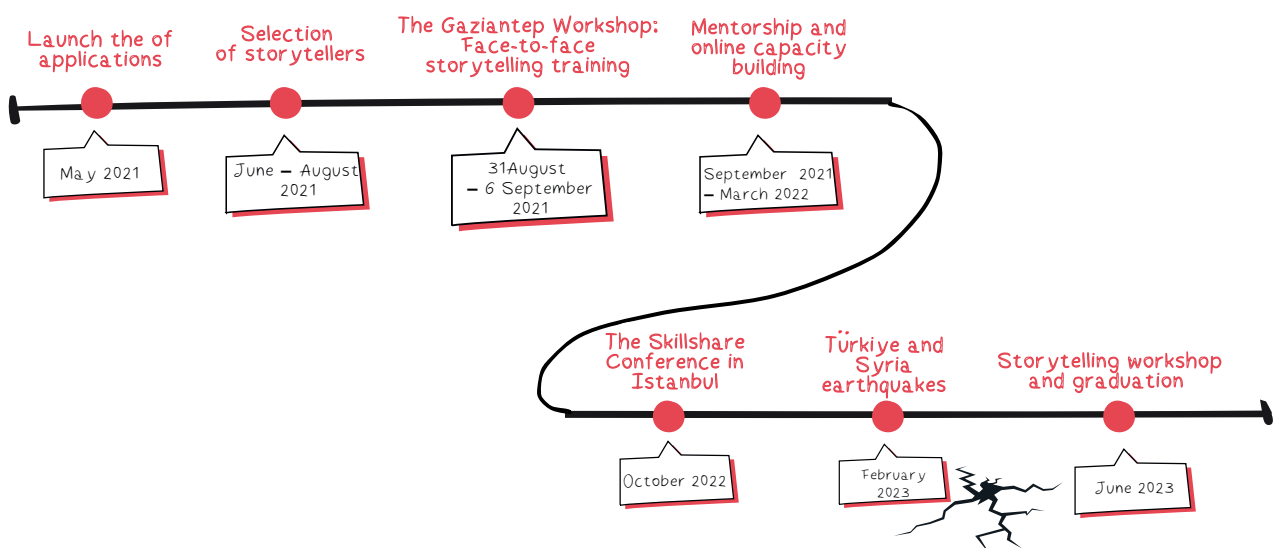


Through my art, I am committed to raise awareness on injustices around the world. I don't like to witness injustice silently. Children in particular hold a very special place in my heart, and their pain touches me deeply. I want my art to be a way for a positive change to happen. I joined the storytelling project to turn my artistic work into stories that bring to light important problems, and achieve a meaningful change in my own way.

Malak Hamami, the artist

## The timeline of the story

The storytelling project is a journey of skill development, mentorship, and powerful storytelling that unfolds in three phases, concluding in a joyful celebration of their content. Here is a timeline of key internal and external events throughout the life of the project.





## Phase #1

### In-person Storytelling Training in Gaziantep (September 2021)

#### Dear Diary

November 2023, Istanbul – I cherish the time we spent together in Gaziantep.

It was the most enjoyable part of the whole thing. What made it even more special to me was that the space reconnected me again with my fellow storyteller Farouk. Farouk and I were friends and we lost touch for about six years. This project brought us back together and revived our friendship.

From Abdurrezak's Diaries

The eight storytellers convened for a rigorous one-week in-person training in the center of Gaziantep. Through practical instruction, the training aimed to transform them into engaging "storytellers" and introduce the fundamentals of photography, videography, social media, and content development.

The workshop covered a variety of topics and basics that every storyteller needs, in addition to giving them a practical experience in the field. Each storyteller was supported with equipment to help them tell their stories better. Since the project's primary emphasis was on social media use and content creation, the provided equipment was sufficient for the storytellers to craft their stories. Introducing more advanced equipment at a beginner level could have had backfired.



Smartphone



Vlogger Kit



Microphone



Laptops



Tripod

The workshop was led by [The Everyday Project](#) and was based on a comprehensive curriculum to give the storytellers the needed theoretical and practical basics for content creation. Teaching was given by [EverydayMiddleEast](#) photographers. The curriculum was developed by expert photographers and journalists, with feedback from the IFRC team. The training covered a variety of topics, including:

Goal setting

Photography

Creating engaging content

Street photography

Radio

Videography

Photojournalism

Best practices in social media

Audio

Fieldwork

During the fieldwork in Gaziantep, I learnt to set my fear aside and simply forget who I am in the streets. I no longer feel shy about taking public photos of myself or other people with the camera. As a content creator, I want to go on this adventure to the end.

Farouk Akbik, the comedian

The first three days of the workshop were lectures. Storytellers collected content and worked on their story outside the workshop room in the following days. At the end of the week, each storyteller created one compelling story that incorporated multimedia elements. Stories covered themes related to family, culture, and belonging.



## Phase #2

### Mentorship and online capacity sharing (Sep 2021 - March 2022)

The storytellers were matched with a mentor in the industry. Middle Eastern writers, photographers, social media gurus, and influencers make up this group of mentors. Every participant's interests and ambitions were taken into consideration while choosing the ideal mentor. Mentors and participants met on a monthly basis.

In addition to regular assignments and tasks set by the mentors, participants attended monthly online classes over a period of six months to help them hone their skills and knowledge.

The storytellers worked closely with their mentors to develop content that improves their message, social media presence, and reach. Their content was used and repackaged for different purposes to be posted on IFRC and Türk Kızılay social media platforms. Also, influencers and mentors were expected to share the content of the eight storytellers regularly.

The storytellers created a brief video of one of their colleagues by the conclusion of this phase.





## Phase #3

### Storytelling Workshop and Graduation Ceremony (June 2023)

Facilitated by Lebanese comedian and filmmaker Wissam Kamal, participants gathered together for one last time in Ankara to receive a hands-on training in content creation before their graduation ceremony. The workshop covered the entire process of creating a story, from planning to shooting to editing. Storytellers supported one another with filming their stories – the last piece of work they created under the umbrella of the project.

Although it was all covered in one day, the importance of this workshop lies in preparing the storytellers to create content from scratch, with minimal resources and a short period of time. It was challenging, but it is a skill that they will need in their journey.



Photo credit: Miriam Atallah/IFRC

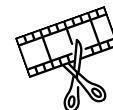
#### Pre-Production

What is a Story?  
How to Brand Yourself?  
Research Writing



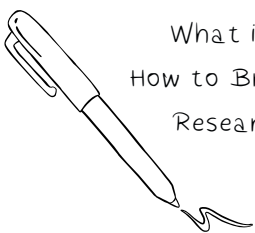
#### Production

How to film with a  
Smartphone?  
Location, Lighting, Sound



#### Post-Production

Editing  
Using the right music



“

*I was eager to deliver this training because I am a storyteller myself, and I understand the challenges it can pose. These refugees face struggles even more difficult than mine, and I aimed through my session to ease their entry into the world of content creation. In just one day, with limited resources and time, my goal was to demonstrate to them that they are capable of creating engaging content. When I witnessed the stories they crafted by the end of the day, I felt so proud and touched. Each participant shared a story that spoke to their talent and interests in less than two hours. I still remember the work of Luai on the city of Ankara. I am truly proud of them.*

WISSAM KAMAL, COMEDIAN AND FILMMAKER



Photo credit: Miriam Atallah/IFRC



The session ended with a watch party that celebrated the brilliant stories created by the storytellers. Representative from the European Union were present to meet and support the storytellers, and honor their outstanding work.

When asked about special moments throughout the project, several participants reflected on the graduation ceremony.



Photo credit: Duygu Nihan Acar/IFRC

## Dear Diary



November 2023, Gaziantep – It was one of the most moving experiences I have ever had, and I hope I never forget it. This took place at the workshop in Gaziantep, where we were all presented with certificates for our work as storytellers and content creators from the IFRC. Trainers back then shed tears of happiness over our rapid progress in content creation, expressing their compassion for us as refugees who needed just a single chance to show our worth to others. This was the first time I had ever seen such an emotional reaction; it was also the first time someone cries because of my success.

From Nuredin's Diaries



## ESSN and the Storytelling Element

### Dear Diary

November 2023, Istanbul – During my stay in Gaziantep, we went late at night to a coffee shop close to the hotel, and we were more than ten people. We talked about our personal lives and the project. The coffee shop was cozy. What made that night special is my reunion with one of my cousins who currently lives in Gaziantep. The last time I saw him was eight years ago, before we fled Syria and found refuge in Türkiye. After eight years apart, we spoke and arranged to meet again. I invited him to the coffee shop, and we sat with the project team. These were some of the most gorgeous nights.

From Luai's Diaries

Before delving into the best practices and challenges extracted from this learning documentation, it's worth highlighting how the storytelling element was incorporated into the ESSN programme in the first place and how it aligns with its values. The ESSN programme, the world's largest cash assistance programme, incorporates storytelling as a tool to help refugees share their stories. Beyond the storytelling project, the programme focused on telling the stories of young refugees through regular digital campaigns, such as the [#PowerToBe](#) campaign.

The storytelling project aligns with the IFRC's values, as it provides an unconditional platform for refugees to share their experiences without having their stories told on their behalf. This change in communication strategy was identified as a need, as individuals typically share stories about how the cash is helping them. In this storytelling project, refugees were trained to tell their stories without pre-determined questions or prompts, focusing on what mattered to them, regardless of the programme.

“

*I joined this project for its storytelling aspect. Being a Syrian refugee myself, I sensed a disparity between what is shared about refugees and their real stories. Upon arriving in London, I conducted interviews with fellow Syrians and displaced individuals. When asked if they would be willing to be interviewed by a newspaper, most of them said no. They felt the published content didn't truly reflect their perspectives.*

ALAA ALSEWID, PREVIOUS COMMUNICATIONS X-MEDIA DELEGATE FOR  
THE IFRC TÜRKIYE DELEGATION

The storytelling component supports the ESSN programme in terms of visibility, sustaining people's dignity, raising social cohesion, and demonstrating accountability to both refugees and the programme's donors.

Programme visibility

Social cohesion

Sustaining dignity and  
freedom of choice

Accountability to  
donors and refugees

## Programme Visibility

This storytelling element was leveraged for the visibility of the ESSN programme. It falls in line with the communications strategy of the organizations involved, which is to communicate less about the aid delivered to people and open a space for refugees to describe the situation and what they need with their own unique voices.

## Sustaining Dignity and Freedom of Choice

The cash assistance programme is unconditional; not only about the cash itself, but also about giving refugees the freedom of choice to decide how to use this money. Similarly, the storytelling project gave the participants a free platform to tell stories that matter to them and supported them with an opportunity to pursue their dreams. Through it, their unique personalities and perspectives were seen on the surface. Storytelling in this matter means hearing the voices from the original voice and sustaining their dignity in the country.

“

*Authenticity is key. While we may aim to represent them genuinely, it's better to let them speak for themselves. Make them the primary voice of their experiences.*

AYSE NUR GENCALP, PREVIOUS AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCER  
FOR THE IFRC TÜRKIYE DELEGATION

## Accountability to Donors

The storytelling element is crucial for the programme's donors, who are in this case the European Union. It's essential to put a face to the people who are supported by these donations. They are not merely numbers; they are humans just like everyone. Tax payers in Europe have to know that their donations are going to similarly notable people.

“

*As a humanitarian organization, our approach is people-centric, focusing on meeting the needs of those we serve and being their voice. Rather than traditional donor communications approach, we have shifted to creating content that allows the individuals we assist to share their own stories. Cash assistance isn't just about covering their experiences; it's about giving them a platform to express themselves. We have moved away from directing the narrative and instead engaged with them on their terms, encouraging them to shape their own stories and identity.*

MIRIAM ATALLAH, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR FOR THE IFRC TÜRKIYE DELEGATION

## Social Cohesion

The ESSN programme focuses on meeting essential needs for individuals with temporary or international protection statuses in Türkiye, promoting decent living conditions and social cohesion. The programme acknowledges that refugees are unique individuals with distinct voices and talents.

The storytelling project was introduced as part of broader efforts to shed light on the diverse experiences and abilities of refugees benefiting from cash assistance. By allowing refugees to share their stories directly, the project contributes to fostering understanding and empathy in the community.

Since the project was implemented on a small scale, it was not possible to measure whether any positive transformation happened on the community level. However, there are small moments, captured by the storytellers themselves, that tell another story from the ground – a story of tolerance and fraternity between Turkish citizens and the Syrian refugees.

Our brothers  
&  
sisters  
from Syria  
are  
in our   
hearts

With a caption that says *“the cheapest Shawarma sandwich from the sweetest man in Türkiye,”* Ahmed shows us in [this video](#) this different side of the story. The Turkish man, who owns a Shawarma kiosk, welcomed Ahmed with love, friendliness, and great interest to know him and have a conversation.

When he knew Ahmed is Syrian, the Turkish man said, “Our brothers and sisters who came from Syria are in our hearts.”

This video was also published by Al Jazeera [here](#).



# IMPACT

The Storytelling Project met the expectation in the right place. As a pilot project, it succeeded to achieve its primary goal: empowering refugee storytellers and put them on the start of the road to start producing stories and content that is engaging.

The project had an intersectional impact on the life of the storytellers and the organization. In terms of skills, character, and overall reach on social media, each participant went through a transformation of his own.

“

*To me, the project exceeded every expectation. My metric was not beautiful cinematography; that was not the objective. The goal was to let them tell their stories in any way they wanted. I'm fascinated by the direction they took, the confidence they built, their progress in the English language, and their motivation to act more – all of it. I saw them in the Skillshare conference in Istanbul and I was inspired by how far they got.*

CORRIE BUTLER, PREVIOUS COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR  
FOR THE IFRC TÜRKİYE DELEGATION

## Skills, tips, and tricks

In terms of skills, the trainings gave them the needed basics in photography, videography, and social media. Tips and tricks were shared with the participants and this helped them to structure their knowledge.

Storytellers implemented everything they learnt from the face-to-face trainings, online sessions, and mentors. A quick comparison between their content at the start and their content now shows a huge improvement on both technical and content level.



Every photograph has a story to tell. Today, I feel quite proud when I see how far I have come in photography. I can now tell stories in a more captivating way because of my gained skills.

Abdurrezak Attar, the photographer

There will always be a room for improvement, but the project indeed put them on the right track and provided them with the knowledge, resources, and connections to pave their way.

Their relationship with mentors helped them to define their goals in a clear, ambitious, yet realistic manner. Just observing the popularity and success of their mentors closely gave them the push to take good care of their social media platforms and pay attention to details. They also came to the understanding that content creation is time-demanding and needs commitment.



Storytellers now know more how to navigate their way through social media. They were put on the right track. By the end of the project, the level of their content shifted to a more engaging, original, and interactive one.

“

*After the Gaziantep workshop, the first stories produced by the storytellers showed impressive progress in style, theme, video, and photo editing. When they first started, their content was less engaging. The content now clearly communicates messages and purpose, demonstrating significant improvement.”*

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM AT THE TURKISH RED CRESCENT

## Character

On another, and more significant level, storytellers experienced a transformation in character and well-being. One of the prominent transformations mentioned both by storytellers and actors who observed their change is a change in their self-confidence. All of them became more confident in front of the camera and on a social level in general. They became more self-confident, disciplined, and passionate about making their stories meaningful.



This project encouraged me and gave me the motivation to make my voice heard. By nature, I am very a shy person and I didn't have the courage to dominate a space. Now, I am more confident when I'm around people. I can communicate my ideas and dreams clearly. I know what I want and I know how to achieve it.

Malak Hammami, the artist

Under the umbrella of the project's goal in making them tell their stories, it provided them with a safe space where they connected with people who come from the same background and are experiencing life as refugees in a new country. They became good friends and they still meet regularly. Also, the project gave them the push to believe in themselves more. They felt seen as unique individuals, rather than just refugees who are receiving aid from humanitarian organizations.



Photo credit: Ayşe Nur Gençalp/IFRC



Photo credit: Ayşe Nur Gençalp/IFRC

Personally, I used to be a really introverted and isolated person, but now I am the complete opposite. I have become a social person with no concerns about appearing on a screen.

Nuredin Bakour, the history buff



## Numbers and fame!



“

*One day, while browsing social media, I came onto a video Luai made and it was on the "for you" page. I watched the entire thing, not because I'm his mentor, but just because the video was brilliant and engaging. This video was featured on the "for you" page, which means that viewers were very interested in it and that it was recommended.*

KASEM HATO, LUAI'S MENTOR

One of the objectives of the project is to increase the popularity and reach of the eight storytellers. There was a significant improvement in this area, as most participants reported feeling more confident about their ability to create content.

A significant number of the storytellers increased their use of social media, and some even received nominations from websites like YouTube. This transformation differs from one storyteller to another, based on how much time and effort they put into it. A quick look at their reach:

## LIKE

1

Plural + Youth video festival used Malak's painting about migration. She was also identified to participate in an art exhibition in Istanbul after sharing content about her paintings, marking World Refugee Day, and Syrian media outlets have interviewed her (Enab Baladi, Halab Al Yawm).

2

Nuredin's YouTube channel now has 5.3k subscribers. Some of his photography work were shared by popular and verified accounts.



3

Asmaa's Instagram following grew by about %60. She create multiple videos on social issues.

## FOLLOW

4

Alaa was contacted by an Arabic media publication that repeatedly published her recipes after seeing her content. One of her TikTok videos became viral and gained 1.5 million views.



One of my proudest moments was when my video, making cookies, went viral on TikTok, getting 1.5 million views. It makes me so happy to see my content hitting home with people and encouraging them to bake delicious cookies like the ones I made!

Alaa Hourani, the chef



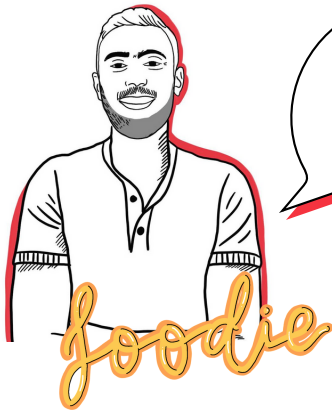
## Success Story

From a dedicated daily worker in construction to a full-time inspiring content creator and coffee shop owner. This is how far Ahmed got in a short period of time after a long journey of migration, adaptation, and perseverance.



Photo credit: Corrie Butler/IFRC

Throughout the duration of the storytelling project, Ahmed gained so much following on social media. His cultural content, visiting different restaurants and coffee shops in Türkiye and exchanging interesting conversations with people he met on the way, resonated widely with Turkish and Syrian audiences. Eventually, Ahmed was able to quit his full-time job as a daily worker and dedicate his time for content creation. During that time, Ahmed's sole source of income was Facebook.



The proudest moment of my life is when I left my job at the construction. I left with a relieved heart that I know I have now another career that aligns with my passion and identity, doesn't exhaust me emotionally and physically, and provides a much better source of income and stability.

Ahmed Daho, the foodie traveller

With time, Ahmed was able to open his own coffee shop selling crepe, waffles, and other sweet treats!

Ahmed had the potential to be a star from the get-go. He is where he is today by diligent effort and hard-work. With no doubts, the Storytelling Project gave him the extra push and motivation to have greater faith in himself and abilities. With improved storytelling techniques, a supportive network, and a motivating environment, Ahmed achieved a life-changing transformation.

Right after the project ended, Ahmed was invited to deliver training sessions on content creation and social media management to the Syrian Women Association in Türkiye. Also, Ahmed today creates content that features and promotes other coffee shops and restaurants, and thus supports other small businesses in Türkiye.

From one refugee to the wider community, Ahmed was able to pass on the technical knowledge and skills he gained from the project, demonstrating the long-term and far-reaching benefits of the Storytelling Project.



Photo credit: Corrie Butler/IFRC



## Chapter 2

# Lessons We Carry



## Best Practices, Limitation, and Rooms for Improvement

This section celebrates the successes of the Storytelling Project as well as its shortcomings. As we walked down this path of learning and overcame multiple challenges, we gained vital lessons and insights for improvement from each limitation we came across.

Best practices that worked in the Turkish setting are outlined below. However, it is essential to remember that these practices may not be applicable everywhere and that future iterations of the project will need to be altered to fit local contexts, needs, and priorities.

### ● Face-to-face workshops: Between Gaziantep and Ankara



The time we spent in face-to-face trainings reminds me of the proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Our trainers and hands-on fieldwork adventure have given us the skills we need to create content independently, and fearlessly. They taught us how to fish.

Farouk Akbik, the comedian

The workshop in Gaziantep marks the beginning of the project and is remembered fondly by everyone involved, particularly the participants. It's emphasis on collaborative in-person learning was important in developing their skills, boosting their sense of self-worth, and sparking a passion for content creation.



Photo credit: The Everyday Project

## Choice of trainers and guest speakers

The trainers chosen by The Everyday Project had a significant effect on the participants because they were engaging, approachable, and had something in common with the students. As a result of the trainers' contagious enthusiasm, the participants formed a lasting bond with them and often refer back to those times as "the best days of the entire project."



The trainers were loving and friendly. It didn't feel like they were our teachers and us, their students. They were quite giving in their assistance, and we became friends. They offered us a sense of confidence to take the lead in the field and simply hold the cameras and shoot.

Malak Hamami, the artist

Having influencer guest speakers from the Middle East and sharing their journeys as content creators was a huge plus. The storytellers connected with the speakers on a personal and relatable level, which elevated the training's overall effectiveness.

In Ankara, the decision to bring a mentor who was a comedian, an influencer and a storyteller at once was a thoughtful choice. The trainer skillfully connected with the diverse characters and talents within the group, providing something valuable and relevant for each one of them.

## Choice of content

The workshops, in Gaziantep and Ankara, included lectures that integrated theoretical and applied methods. As already mentioned, a wide range of storytelling and content creation topics were covered. Additionally, the workshops provided hands-on experience in the field. They will never forget the time they spent with the people and on the streets of Gaziantep, and the footage they captured is outstanding.



Photo credit: Ayşe Nur Gençalp/IFRC

In Ankara, the storytellers faced the challenge of creating content from scratch. This task motivated the atmosphere with competition and excitement, and remarkably, they successfully created content by the end of the day.

## A space for friendship and self-discovery

Having everyone – storytellers, trainers, and IFRC staff – in one place for an extended period was an added value by itself. Creativity was boosted and friendships emerged. Together, they shared learning, meals, and joy. Together, they took a look at the cities of Gaziantep and Ankara. The bedrock for the project's overall success was the seven days and nights they spent together in Gaziantep. It is a time they will always cherish. They were able to connect with others who understood their sentiments and journey. For a moment, they were no longer living in isolation but rather blending in society. It was an opportunity for them to disconnect from their everyday lives and discover their passion and capabilities.



The gathering of a group of creative people, coupled with those with extensive experiences, in one space, formed an exceptionally creative team capable of achieving great things.

Luai Hamade, the adventure storyteller

### Limitations

- ❖ Face-to-face trainings happened only twice over the course of two years. The number of in-person interactions and opportunities for hands-on practice was limited compared to the timeline of the project.
- ❖ Although the trainings in Gaziantep were somehow balanced in the material, there was a lot of sit-in in the days before the fieldwork. Also, the material inclined to be more traditional and journalistic.
- ❖ Some of the trainers did not have a previous experience in dealing with vulnerable groups. It was unintentional, but multiple examples shared were from privileged backgrounds that the storytellers would not find relatable.

### Improvement

- ❖ Conduct face-to-face gatherings more often. In the case of this project, at least have one extra long training in between the opening and closing workshops.
- ❖ Bring trainers from backgrounds close to the refugees or with an extensive experience in working with vulnerable groups. Discuss sensitivities with them before the start of the training.
- ❖ Tailor the training material for non-traditional and fast content creation, including for Meta and TikTok.
- ❖ Consider extending the duration of the closing workshop too. While it can still involve fast-paced activities, allowing a few more days would ensure that everyone gets the full benefit.
- ❖ Explore the possibility of conducting sessions in creative venues or outdoors rather than dry hotel halls to boost creativity.

## ● Engagement between different actors: Everyone believed in the project

### → Locally-rooted staff

One of the secret ingredients of the overall success of the project is relying on locally-rooted staff, who can clearly be relevant to the group we are working with, which are the refugees. The lead focal point was Syrian and could establish this connection with the refugees during and outside the training program. This brings in the importance of bringing relevant individuals who can influence and gain the trust of vulnerable groups.

“

*The best part of the project was spending time with them outside the training hours. We became really good friends, to date. Through our conversations, I could relate to their stories, struggles, and enthusiasm. I told them, one day I was in your place. The first training I attended was magical and it brought me to where I am today. We had a strong link and I felt how much they needed this space, because one day I needed it too.*

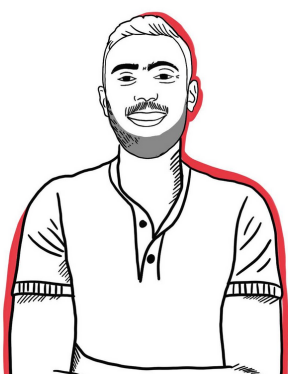
ALAA ALSEWID, PREVIOUS COMMUNICATIONS X-MEDIA DELEGATE FOR THE IFRC  
TÜRKIYE DELEGATION

### → Dedication to tasks and values

On an operational level, it is impressive to see how roles were assigned to different actors. Each stakeholder focused on tasks in which they excel. For example, one of the best practices of this project is the recruitment process. Türk Kızılay played a major role in that due to their ownership of a huge database of refugees in Türkiye. For them, it was a very sensitive process to evaluate and support in the selection. A fair, equitable, and impartial approach was adopted and the recruitment process was handled by a committee of representatives from IFRC and Türk Kızılay. Each application was reviewed multiple times.

Also, the right person was in the right place, and as one of the staff said in an interview “the project was delegated to the right team.” Staff members expressed genuine dedication to the cause of the project and were supporting each other with flexibility, despite some uncontrolled challenges.

Staff members also engaged on a deeper level with participants and were empathetic to their experiences and stories. This created a safe space for participants to just be and express their concerns and themselves.



Throughout this journey, I have learnt to believe in ourselves in order to achieve our dreams. Patience is key; creating content takes time, consistency, and perseverance. I hope we will carry these lessons forward in our storytelling journey.

Ahmed Daho, the foodie traveller



## ● The selection process: value of diversity and inclusion

One of the great things about the group is how diverse the storytellers, mentors, and trainers are. Even though it was hard to choose who would be involved, the project was made better by bringing together Syrian refugees in Türkiye with different backgrounds, hobbies, and stories. The mentors and trainers, who were from different countries, gave the participants a cross-cultural experience that broadened their views and helped them build their networks and personalities.

### Limitations

- There were no storytellers from the host community. Their presence can make social harmony and integration more valuable.
- The call for applications excluded refugees who benefitted the ESSN programme in previous years.
- Some of the selected participants were not content creators and do not use their social media platforms. This hindered their ability to start swiftly and continue after the project ended.

### Improvement

- Consider opening the call for storytellers from the host community too. For example, in this case, young Turkish and Syrian storytellers sharing a stage together can promote social cohesion, raise awareness of Syrian refugees, and shift the Turkish community's attitude and perception towards them.
- Open the call for individuals who benefited previously from the ESSN programme. This helps as a direct long-term manifestation of, in this case, the ESSN impact on refugees.
- Select participants who have a proven interest in and dedication to using their platform for storytelling.

## ● The art of shared learning

Not a single interview done for this study does not explicitly tell how mentors and staff benefited from the participants' experience, and not only the other way around. The uniqueness of this project is that it does not adopt a top-down approach. Instead, it puts all involved actors on a shared learning journey where the benefits are mutual, whether on skills level or emotional level. Multiple mentors could not help but be inspired by the storytellers' perseverance and strength.

“

*I am a refugee myself and I lived through war and migration. I genuinely felt empowered by how these young people, despite the loss and pain of adapting to a new country, are fighting their way through.*

BISHER NAJJAR, NUREDIN'S MENTOR

“

*I'm fascinated by how they are seeking the integration within the community despite the many challenges. It is hard, but their perseverance makes it sound easy. We shift between countries for jobs and we find it hard, how come that these young people, who fled war, are having this loyalty to the country that embraced them. They want to show that they are active citizens in the country, not only refugees.*

RABAB HASSAN, MALAK'S MENTOR

## ● The social media takeover

Throughout the programme, the IFRC opened its social media platforms for the storytellers to take over and walk the IFRC audiences through their life in Türkiye. This was one of the most impactful elements in the project and it reflected the trust that was built between the team and the storytellers.

Two storytellers, Asmaa and Ahmed, took over the IFRC Instagram account and walked us through their days. The content of IFRC was relevant to their lives and led by them.

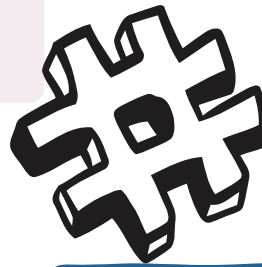
FOLLOW



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*These storytellers added perspectives that we did not think about. Sometimes, working in the field, we find ourselves limited and inside the box of communications guidelines. These storytellers were outside the box and they influenced our content in so many ways.*

MIRIAM ATALLAH, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR FOR THE IFRC  
TÜRKİYE DELEGATION



## Limitations

- Not all storytellers took part in the social media takeover process.
- The lack of highlighting this takeover on IFRC platforms.



## Improvement

- The takeover could have been effective if all storytellers took part in it. Some storytellers wondered why they were not included in the takeover process. Although this goes back to changing priorities and some external challenges, storytellers need to be briefed about this.
- It's hard to track these takeover stories. A highlight on IFRC social media accounts should include these stories for people to be aware of it. Also, this should be communicated about more on the IFRC social media channels.



## ● The mentorship phase: The journey together

The project blended two different worlds together, the Syrian storytellers with the experienced influencers.

This was a huge benefit in a variety of ways. On one hand, it increased the exposure of the storytellers as mentors were sharing their content on their social media channels. On the other hand, it gave a special feeling for refugees to be working with influencers whom they used to follow on social media and look up to. The monthly sessions between the mentor and the mentee were filled with advises, tips and tricks, and constructive feedback.

### Limitations

- Not all mentors and mentees had the chance to meet in person.
- Some mentors had hectic schedules and live in a different timezones. It was challenging to find a common time for the monthly catch-up.
- Mentors' social media posts about the storytellers and their work did not provide the a continued exposure and reach.
- Lack of communication and coordination between the IFRC and mentors during the mentorship phase.
- Some storytellers did not feel that the mentor is aligned with their interests and needs.
- Storytellers are hard-working individuals with tough working hours. It was challenging for them to find the time to have monthly meetings and create content regularly.



### Improvement

- If all of the mentors and storytellers had met in person for at least one time, the mentoring phase might have had a greater influence. Together, they will have more time to bond throughout their stay in Türkiye and establish a routine and style of work that suits them both. Another improvement would be to engage with locally based mentors, in this case Türkiye-based mentors. However, in the project's case, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures limited in-person meetings.
- Creating a chance for mentors and mentees to work on content and stories together. Publishing a collaborative story on the influencers' platform gives more more exposure to the storytellers and make the mentorship phase more fun, engaging, and beneficial to both mentors and mentees.
- Give the storytellers the flexibility to choose their own mentors, or check with them before matching. While the majority expressed satisfaction with their matched mentors, a small percentage felt their mentors were irrelevant to the needs and area of interest.

- When choosing mentors, strike a balance between amateur, mid-career, and professional influencers. This balanced approach can involve people who are “less busy” and fosters a closer bond between the mentor and the storyteller.
- Schedule monthly check-ins between the leading organization and mentors to follow up on the progress of storytellers.
- Provide a monetary compensation for the time that participants spend during the training and content creation time.



Photo credit: Ayşe Nur Gençalp/IFRC

## ● The door is always open

Throughout the life of the project, and afterwards, participants always had a way to voice their concerns, questions, and feedback to the people in charge. Through the WhatsApp group and regular surveys, their insights were always included in the planning phase for the next steps. When the IFRC team were planning for the 2023 communications plans, the storytellers were consulted too. To day, participants connect with the IFRC staff on the WhatsApp group. On individual level, many opportunities are shared with the participants through the IFRC staff. Also, participants still connect with their trainers and ask for advise when needed.

### Limitations

- Lack of explanation on why some feedback from the participants was not always considered.
- There was a silent period after the mentorship ended. Participants felt that the project is falling apart and lost the motivation to continue with content creation.

### Improvement

- Although it can be challenging to address all feedback provided by storytellers, an explanation needs to be given for clarity.



## In the Shadows: Challenges

While some of the mentioned limitations might be negotiable, other challenges inherent to the project imposed inevitable constraints. Recognizing these challenges can inspire precautionary measures and alternative approaches during the project planning phase.

### ● Content restrictions

This project aimed to provide refugees with an unrestricted platform to share their stories independently. However, amid Türkiye's multifaceted period, including elections and rising tensions between host and refugee communities, the impartial nature of IFRC and Türk Kızılay required content to avoid sensitive and political views. While this safeguarded refugees in the country, it also potentially limited their freedom of speech.

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*We must handle sensitivities and carefully consider every public communication risk and word used publicly. Fortunately, our exceptional storytellers minimized risks from the start. Participants showed amazing awareness and understanding, building a friendship that overcame such barriers. We set boundaries and managed risks together through sincere and direct communication.*

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM AT THE TURKISH RED CRESCENT

### ● The tragic 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria



Following the February 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, the IFRC communications team swiftly focused on the impacted areas. Given the broad suffering of both refugees and Turkish citizens, publishing stories from unaffected regions appeared insensitive. The earthquakes changed priorities, and some of our storytellers were in the impacted zones. Thus, project momentum slowed down in the second year and less publicity was given to content created by the storytellers.

However, Ahmed, one of the storytellers, refused to be passive in the face of this challenge. From the heart of Hatay, he used his platform to raise awareness on the earthquakes and its aftermath. His message spread on social media and was shared by the IFRC on their social media channels.

### ● Logistical constraints

Refugees in Türkiye face significant logistical and mobility issues. Traveling between cities without a permit is impossible, while obtaining one is complicated and time-consuming. From the start, the project eliminated many face-to-face engagement opportunities to avoid this issue and its impact on refugees. Travel restrictions and COVID-19 forced the project staff and participants to rely on online involvement, despite the transformative power of hands-on interaction and face-to-face engagement.

## ● Budget constraints

Due to budget constraints, the project was unable to fully satisfy the needs of refugee storytellers. These young talents come from the most vulnerable groups in society, and they do not have the luxury of taking unpaid leaves from their jobs and dedicate more time to content creation. Also, they have long working hours, which makes it exhausting for them to clear their minds and pursue creative projects on the side. The inability of IFRC to provide some compensation for the time and efforts they spent on content creation has hindered their capacity to fully leverage this opportunity.

## ● Internal and organization instability

After completing the mentorship phase, the IFRC encountered internal difficulties that slowed project progress and risked the promised Season 2. Due to high staff turnover, the project's progress slowed down while dispersing the original goal across varying perspectives. The departure of key individuals led to a reshaping of the project's concept, causing confusion for both the team members and storytellers who regularly met new faces.

There's no question that the inherent challenges and the effects of the pandemic slowed things down overall. The job took longer than we thought it would, which kept us from making the most of our time and resources. Despite this, many people agree that for a test run, the project went off without considerable problems. This learning documentation will help make future replication efforts more successful.

## Flash Takeaways

This section outlines the important takeaways shared by all actors involved from the time they spent working on this project.

- **Embracing flexibility and adaptability** as guiding principles and navigating unpredictable conditions. It is important to acknowledge the ever-changing nature of conditions beyond our control. Working on this project allowed actors to practice an adaptive mindset that fed into project resilience.
- Adopting a **human-centric approach and meeting project participants where they are**. Dragging them into predefined structures contradicts humanitarian principles. The best project experience is tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of individuals.
- **Allowing time** for organic project shaping and progress. It's important to recognize that certain aspects of the project cannot be rushed.
- Investing in **trust and relationship-building** is a priority. When it is done properly before the project begins, it helps create a foundation of trust between participants and different partners.
- What made the flow of this project unique was mobilizing **values-aligned individuals**. All team members were on the same page, which fostered a sense of collective purpose. This created a cohesive, harmonious, and authentic working environment.
- **Perseverance, perseverance**. It is a fundamental lesson that this project has taught everyone involved. Whether the storytellers or project implementers, they both embraced perseverance as a shared value, acknowledging the resilience born by navigating challenges and uncertainties.
- As this was a communications project, changing objectives to meet new needs resulted in data inconsistencies and differing views on the primary goal. **Regularly revisiting the plan and aligning goals among team members** is crucial for a clearer understanding of impact against desired objectives.

## Chapter 3

# Into the Next Stage

## How does the ESSN Storytelling Project stand out?

A brief exploration of past and current refugee humanitarian initiatives shows that storytelling emerges as a common and integral component. Stories are powerful tools employed by humanitarian actors on international and grass-roots levels to elicit empathy, shed light on the experiences of refugees and vulnerable communities, and facilitate community engagement. Within some scopes, they are used as therapeutic tools for community healing.

Several [UN organizations](#) are integrating storytelling components into their humanitarian initiatives. However, most stories are pre-defined and centered around the organization's mission and the positive impact of the assistance it provides. As a [critical article by Refugee Hosts](#) argues, these stories are framed within pre-defined narratives and themes. Although they started to deviate away from portraying refugees as passive victims, the study proves that the stories follow a universal pattern that does not necessarily translate into a real positive impact on their lives.

While these stories undoubtedly have power in raising the voices of vulnerable communities, stirring empathy from international audiences, attracting donations, and ultimately achieving positive change, they do not build a sustainable independent path for the people featured themselves, and this is what makes the ESSN Storytelling Project stand out.

Our project took a distinctive approach that can hit multiple boxes at once. Our emphasis was on capacity-building in digital storytelling, in addition to community engagement, raising awareness, and attracting audiences. Rather than merely collecting personal stories, the project empowers participants with tools, resources, and mentorship to create their own platforms, allowing for the free flow of narratives without any predefined objectives.

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*A fundamental principle has guided our project from its inception: we intended to help and encourage refugees to share their stories without making any claims of ownership over their content. With our storytellers, we did not even need to highlight any key messages or principles related to our organization and the ESSN programme – they have done that beautifully without being asked. Through building friendships and showcasing their talents and life in Türkiye, they embodied our key principles. Through their stories, you can actually see that they are living these key messages without being guided to do so.*

MIRIAM ATALLAH, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR FOR THE IFRC  
TÜRKIYE DELEGATION

The goal of our objective goes beyond attracting attention or donations or highlighting the positive impact of the ESSN programme; it's about providing skills, resources, and genuine opportunities for refugees to pursue their dreams and resist, addressing fundamental human needs that go beyond immediate challenges—it looks at identity building and strengthening, making dreams come true, and facilitating a healthy integration within the Turkish society. While it's important to leverage such opportunities to display the positive impact of our organization, it should never be the primary objective.

By taking this distinctive approach, the project not only informs policy through lived experiences, but also opens doors for storytellers to start careers as independent content creators. We did not represent our storytellers as communicators on our behalf or recipients of the ESSN programme; they represented themselves through their talents and what actually matters to them. Our eight storytellers were not the subjects of the stories; they were the creators.





We have come across some storytelling projects that incorporate digital capacity-building components; however, the end aim is different from ours. For example, the World Food Programme (WFP) Storytellers Project, which also worked on developing digital storytelling skills for communities in crisis, states that these displaced and vulnerable individuals can later become communicators on WFP's behalf in society. While this opens a lot of opportunities for refugees, it limits the scope of their expressions to the mission of the organization. IFRC can definitely benefit from the presence of these storytellers on the ground to spread the movement's communications messages, but it did not limit them to that. They have control over how they want to use the skills and resources we provided, yet we welcome them as storytellers for the movement too.

This approach not only positions our project as a catalyst for human-centric change, but also presents an opportunity for collaboration and mutual benefit with other existing storytelling initiatives. By fostering connections with diverse storytelling projects, we can learn from their strategies and share insights from our unique approach. Also, it is crucial to extend our perspective beyond traditional humanitarian organizations and acknowledge the value of grass-root initiatives that actively work on refugee stories. These platforms serve as an opportunity for refugee storytellers to publish their work, contributing to a wider community of refugee creators and fostering a supportive environment where storytellers can connect, learn, and amplify their voices collectively.



## Casting the Net: How to Get Donors On Board

One of the key elements for the success of any initiative or non-traditional activity within a broader humanitarian initiatives is sustainable funding and genuine interest from donor organizations. The storytelling project was able to get donors on board due to several factors, including transparent communication, relevant impact stories, and network engagement.

From the moment the activity was pitched to the donor, it was tailored to address the **visibility element of the ESSN programme** in a non-conventional manner. This one-of-a-kind communication activity raised the interest of the donor because it had potential and high-standard humanitarian values. Rather than being framed as money providers, this way of communication stresses on the capacity sharing and human elements.

**Transparent communication** was held regularly between the team and the European Union. Updates on progress, challenges, any additions or changes were shared first hand with donors seeking feedback and insights. Donors, although not the direct implementing actor on the ground, were included in the planning and implementation phases. This built trust between the donors and IFRC.

Stories created by refugees were shared with the donor and disseminated through their channels. When this content appeals to European audiences and showcases the mission that donor is investing in, it keeps donations coming as well as it keeps the interest in doing good. Donors, and the European audience in this case, could connect emotionally to the project.

On another level, donors felt connected to the project because they were included in **network engagement processes**. This allows a space for human connection between the donor organization and participants. This connection and closeness allowed a space for heart-to-heart conversations that kept the donor interested in investing in these people. In the graduation event, the donors were invited and celebrated the space with participants - this is one of the most powerful moments. This space can foster a sense of commitment of the supporters towards participants.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are framed for actors who want to replicate the Storytelling Project or add a storytelling component to their own humanitarian efforts. As a result of the suggestions, project efforts should be more long-lasting, consistent, and impactful, with a better use of time and resources.

## National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

### Communication and coordination:

- ➡ Enhance communication and coordination with IFRC or the leading organization for smoother collaboration and project implementation.
- ➡ Lean in more in the implementation phase and be strongly present on the ground.
- ➡ Improve the communication with participants by dedicating a delegate from your national society, in this case Türk Kızılay, fluent in the language of refugees, fostering closer connection with them.

### Content creation and travel facilitation:

- ➡ While acknowledging the complexities surrounding the issuance of travel permits, given its intricate ties to state and legal affairs beyond the influence of national societies, it is crucial to strengthen partnerships with governmental entities. This will facilitate the process of obtaining travel permits for refugees interested in becoming content creators.
- ➡ Recognize the importance of sustainable travel in their storytelling journey and facilitate permits for travel between cities for projects beyond the project timeline.

### Recruitment and program reach:

- ➡ Ensure a diverse talent pool by opening doors for applicants from different groups in the society. For example, in the project's case, this could be an opportunity for participants who initially benefited from the ESSN programme but are not part of it anymore, showcasing the broader impact on their lives.
- ➡ Also, open doors for participants who are from the host community to foster better integration and social cohesion.
- ➡ Broaden the project's reach and inclusion by extending partnerships with local organizations and actors.
- ➡ Engage the national societies in finding influencers and/or partnerships with big companies in the country for the storytellers.

### Storytelling and network building:

- ➡ Expand the impact of the storytelling training by including volunteers from national societies, enabling broader access to content creation and ensuring project sustainability.
- ➡ Build a sustainable network with storytellers and include them in relevant events to foster ongoing engagement and collaboration.



## International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Other Implementing Organizations

### Project planning and human resources:

- ➡ Define project goals clearly before implementation, ensuring improved clarity in the planning phase.
- ➡ Establish a clear timeline for project activities with a focus on risk mitigation; ensure a well-defined plan to navigate potential challenges.
- ➡ Develop Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) data from the beginning, even for communication-focused projects, to maintain project continuity and alignment. This can include a simple theory of change and a logframe with defined outcomes and outputs.
- ➡ Ensure stable human resources and staff leadership by bringing on permanent staff or consultants committed for the entire project duration.

### Participant engagement and fair compensation:

- ➡ Consider the unique needs of vulnerable groups in content creation projects and ensure fair compensation for participants' time and effort.
- ➡ Establish clear and consistent communication channels with participants, providing feedback on plan changes while ensuring they understand the reasons.

### Content production and visibility:

- ➡ Address challenges related to utilizing participant content for institutional purposes and consider adapting content for platforms such as Meta and TikTok for a wider reach.
- ➡ Emphasize the importance of content production and visibility for project success; encourage participants to showcase their work on various platforms.

### Project transition and long-term impact:

- ➡ Conclude project activities earlier to allow for promotion on social media platforms and hand over the project with a clear transition plan.
- ➡ Allocate more resources to the career path, recognizing it as a priority for participants, and consider extending support beyond the project's scope for a more significant long-term impact.
- ➡ Invest in a networking component to enhance project sustainability and facilitate opportunities for participants to build connections beyond the project.
- ➡ Capitalize on the willingness of the storytellers' becoming mentors to people from their communities by producing content about this and documenting it, and finding more opportunities for them to become mentors themselves.

### **For the training phase:**

- ➡ Include more face-to-face trainings with hands-on opportunities for storytellers, including the idea of a creative bootcamp for an immersive and longer experience.
- ➡ Implement online sessions thoughtfully and engage participants with hands-on activities afterwards. These online sessions need to be adapted to participants' availability.
- ➡ Immerse the participants in the content creation world through organizing visits to production companies and offering internship opportunities after the project ends.
- ➡ Invest more in trainer-of-trainers initiatives for the storytellers to multiply the impact.
- ➡ Provide incentives such as prizes and competitions to keep participants motivated.
- ➡ In addition to technical skills development, complement the project with interpersonal training components like public speaking.
- ➡ Open doors for tailored training opportunities for the storytellers based on their needs. For example, an artist storyteller would benefit from a training on digital painting (e.g. Adobe Animate and Illustrator).
- ➡ Continue to invest in the participants you already selected so they can reach their maximum capacity.

### **For the mentorship phase:**

- ➡ Enhance mentor commitment by involving both mid-career and junior mentors.
- ➡ Prioritize alignment between mentors and mentees by checking in with participants before assigning a mentor, ensuring relevance to their needs and field.
- ➡ Deliver a three-hour training session to mentors, ensuring awareness of their role and commitment.
- ➡ Support face-to-face meetings between mentors and mentees.
- ➡ Promote an interactive and fun mentorship phase by encouraging joint content creation between mentors and mentees, ensuring broader content reach.

## **Donor Organizations**

- ➡ Invest more in being in a direct contact with the participants through regular engagement opportunities. This could be through having regular meetings with them or attending project activities (e.g. events, trainings, etc). This gives project participants the opportunity to get to know the people behind the organization that is supporting them.
- ➡ Strengthen participant trust and engagement by dedicating someone from the donor organization to represent and connect with participants. This puts a human face to the institution and supports the trust element.
- ➡ Enhance the impact of humanitarian projects by focusing on quality rather than numbers. Donors need to dedicate more unconditional and flexible spending for communications and human-centric components.



## Chapter 4

# The Story Unfolds

## Where Are Our Storytellers Now?

### Dear Diary



November 2023, Istanbul – After the training in Gaziantep, people started to notice us more in stories on social media. When I returned to home, my family, friends, and colleagues were all curious about the project and our activities. Suddenly, I found myself being sought after for advice on content creation. They wanted tips on writing, photoshooting, and lighting. People started recognizing me as an experienced content creator, someone eligible to offer valuable advice.

From Farouk's Diaries

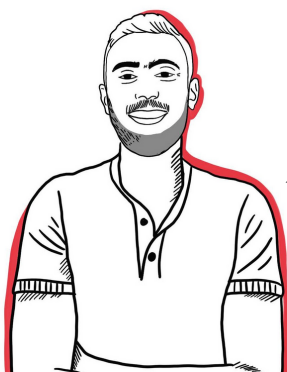
The project may have officially ended, but its spirit lives within the hearts of all who took part in it. The connections formed between participants, trainers, and staff members continue to thrive. The echoes of the stories they created - and continue to create - persist. Participants are in daily contact with each other and they remain present on the social media feeds of staff and trainers. They engage with each other, through likes and quick comments. Most staff members share a genuine sense of joy when they witness their transformation and come across their content. These simple interactions show that the project's influence extends far beyond its initial timeline. They also still hold so much memories from the time they spent with participants.

“

*I definitely remember eating a lot of Baklava with Ahmed while shooting his foodie content. It was always nice and fun to be around them. I dearly remember my time with Malak, too. I recall supporting her during filming, and I was truly mesmerized by her incredible talent in painting. I expressed my admiration for her artwork, and she could see it in my eyes, particularly for one specific piece. During the Skillshare event, Malak gave me that very painting as a heartfelt gift. I still have it. I genuinely hope that Malak's exceptional talent and warm character will be widely recognized and appreciated.*

AYSE NUR GENÇALP, PREVIOUS AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCER FOR THE IFRC TÜRKİYE DELEGATION

On another level, the project has become part of the eight storytellers' diverse identities, shaping how they see themselves in society. It shed light on hidden layers of the refugee state, making a modest yet impactful contribution to altering stereotypical and negative perceptions.



Today, I am more than just a refugee. I am a refugee with so many stories to tell, some who can integrate into society, build businesses, and positively influence the community.

Ahmed Daho, the foodie traveller

Some participants have carried on their creative journey, while others had to take a step back, grappling with the challenges life threw their way. When working with vulnerable groups, it's crucial to acknowledge the challenging backgrounds they come from. Our participants understand they have more to offer, yet they take pride in where they stand now, trusting that the right time and conditions will unveil more opportunities.

Asmaa continues her advocacy for women's rights, Alaa crafts delightful recipes, and Malak continues to paint. Luai remains an explorer, wandering into new places. Abdurrezak captures stories and art through his photographs, and Nuredin delves into history. Farouk continues to spread joy, and Ahmed is absolutely smashing it with his refreshing cocktails and fruity desserts, and inspiring content creation.

Nevertheless, life unfolds with its bumps on the road, and these individuals confront unprecedented challenges daily. From hustling to secure their daily income to supporting their families, they sometimes forget to tend to themselves and their passions. Yet, they're allowing themselves the time to rediscover and nurture what they love.



# THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

## **Humanity**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

## **Impartiality**

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## **Neutrality**

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## **Independence**

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## **Voluntary service**

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## **Unity**

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## **Universality**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.





**Funded by  
the European Union**

### **European Union**

Whenever there is a disaster or humanitarian emergency, the European Union (EU) provides assistance to affected countries and populations around the world. The EU has been funding humanitarian projects in Türkiye to help vulnerable refugees and their host communities, in coordination with the Government of Türkiye. Since 2016, the EU has been supporting its biggest humanitarian project ever, the Emergency Social Safety Net, ensuring 1.5 million refugees in Türkiye can buy what they need most through cash assistance.



### **The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**

is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 190 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.



**The Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay)** is the largest humanitarian organization in Türkiye, helping vulnerable people in and out of disasters for years, both in the country and abroad. Since 2011, the TRC has been providing first-line response to the refugee influx, supporting millions of people in camps and urban settings. Through the largest cash programme in the world, the TRC supports 1.5 million vulnerable refugees in Türkiye to cover their basic needs.

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