



Kristina Edwards

In her own words, GenNext Fellow, Kristina Edwards shares her transformative journey to Gaziantep, Türkiye with her host organization, CARE, for the kick-off of their newly awarded BHA HEARTS program.

If I had to use one word to describe my trip to the country of Türkiye, I would say it was enriching. I was able to network with an amazing group of individuals at the CARE Türkiye office, immerse myself in the rich culture of Türkiye, and visit the magical city of Istanbul, which is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Türkiye.

Indulging in delicious Turkish baklava, spending time with the local cats, and exploring the bustling area of Beyoglu near the famous Galata Tower were some of my favorite moments of my trip. The main purpose of my



Kristina visits CARE Türkiye's Country Office in Gaziantep, Türkiye.

travel to Türkiye was to visit the CARE Türkiye office for the kick-off of the recently awarded BHA HEARTS (Humanitarian Emergency Assistance, Recovery, and Transition for Vulnerable Communities across Northern Syria (HEARTS) Program. This program will be operated through partners in Northwest and Northeast Syria. It is a multi-sectoral program including Food Assistance, Nutrition, WASH, Shelter & Settlements, Health, Protection, MPCA, and HCIMA interventions.

Before the kick-off, I supported the editing process of the proposal development phase and the review of the issue letters from the donor in preparation for the award being granted. I also created an updated information management product in Excel that will be utilized to manage bills of quantities under the award. I will be



Kristina poses with CARE team members, Kelly Kirk and Mohammad Haddad.

responsible for managing and updating this tool throughout the program award life. Once the program received the award, I supported the CARE Türkiye team in updating the presentation for the kick-off of the new award. While in Türkiye, I collaborated very closely with my manager, Kelly Kirk, the country program manager,



Kristina presents at the kick-off for the BHA HEARTS program

Mahmut Cubukcu, and the assistant country director, Mohammad Haddad. I also met individually with the country office director, Rishana Haniffa, and separate sub-teams of risk management, finance, compliance, and data management.

My meeting with the risk management team was a great learning opportunity for me to get an in-depth understanding of the historical context of Syria and Türkiye, understand the risks associated with traveling there, and what to do in the situation of a natural disaster like an earthquake. I ended up witnessing

a small aftershock of an earthquake in Syria while there, so I was incredibly grateful for having that briefing in preparation for this. My meeting with the compliance team helped me understand the diversion challenges that may come with operating a program, the process of reporting incidents, and the importance of strong verification processes to mitigate fraud.

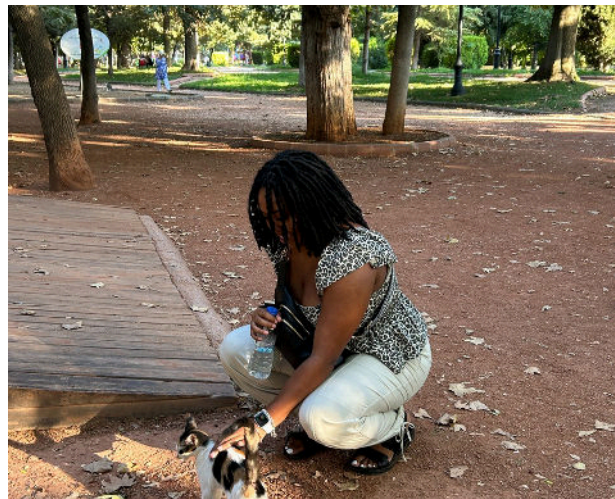
Lastly, the data management team gave me a detailed introduction to the systems that they carefully craft to collect data for the registration, eligibility, and verification phases of program operations. Witnessing the hard work, time, and dedication that CARE Türkiye's teams put into their programming made me proud to be supporting this project.



Kristina exploring the Beyoglu district, near Galata Tower in Istanbul.

At the start of the week, I participated in brainstorming sessions with country office leadership team members to help bridge the gap between the old and the new program and plan for the kick-off presentation in the week ahead.

Then we went on to start planning our lessons learned session for the prior program. I co-led this session with Kelly and some key challenges that were discussed in the session included aid diversion, budget cuts, staff worker permit limitations, and donor approval timing. Major successes from the prior program included skillful proposal development, data workflow, and integration across sectors. There was also a successful creation of new program controls (SOPS), improved accountability, and increased female beneficiary participation in FCRM.



Kristina meets a feline friend while exploring Engelliler Park.

By the end of the trip, I felt an immense feeling of gratitude and personal growth. I was particularly thankful for Kelly's support which made navigating the challenges of traveling alone as a young Black woman and a minority in a different culture much easier. While I experienced discomfort and moments of questioning my place there, the overall warmth of the Turkish people and the CARE Türkiye team made for a positive experience. My ability to navigate a new city in a foreign country without fear, left me feeling refreshed with a newfound confidence.

