

Helping those most desperately in need

With its support to the UNHCR/IMC cash voucher project in Gaziantep, the Government of Switzerland has touched the lives of those refugees living almost at the fringes of poverty. The voucher has been used by some 34,000 refugees to buy food and hygiene products, helping them to make ends meet.



Fatima, with her neighbour and their children outside her one-room home.
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GAZIANTEP, Turkey. 13 October (UNHCR): Fourteen families live in a cramped area of Gaziantep, the Sahinbey neighbourhood, in houses that are unfinished and where water is taken from a nearby mosque. Many are in one-room spaces and families are large. Fatima (34) has six children and is in Turkey with her husband. Her mother, Ayse (67) also lives with them in one large room where they eat, cook and sleep. They had a home in Aleppo but were forced to leave when a missile hit the wall of their home. “I hurt my leg,” says Fatima, “and I now have a steel plate there. I have had to have three surgeries for this; the first one was in Syria. We crossed in Kilis and I had to go to a hospital straight away.”

Halima is nearly sixty years old. A widow, she lives with one of her daughters in the same area and collects and cleans garbage for a living. She sells the plastic and tins and breaks down, talking to us. “This is the first time I have ever worked in my life,” she says. “I couldn’t find any other job, so I clean the garbage and sell what I can.” She has eight children, married who live in other parts of Turkey, except for one daughter who is with her. “They are not in a good condition either, and cannot send me money,” she explains. “Neighbours and other Turkish people help me, as I only earn maybe five and on a good day, ten lira in a day.” (approx. 3 TRY =1 USD). She’s been in Gaziantep for more than a year and a half and it is her pride and rather independent nature that prevents her from going to live in a camp, where she would be much better cared for.



Halima, showing us her cash voucher. UNHCR/N.Bose

It is to these refugees, perhaps the most desperate of all, living on the edge of poverty, that the cash voucher from the International Medical Corps (IMC) is distributed. This is a UNHCR supported initiative and in turn, it is funding from the Government of Switzerland that makes it possible to provide these cash vouchers to the families most in need. Some 17,000 vouchers have been distributed to approximately 34,000 refugees in Gaziantep. One voucher is for three people and it is worth 80 lira (approx. USD 27). One family can get a maximum of four vouchers, depending on size, and this is a one-time assistance. The voucher is linked to different supermarkets where refugees can buy what they need.

In total, the Government of Switzerland has supported the UNHCR operation in Turkey with CHF 1,000,000 (USD 1,046,025). Other activities in which the Government of Switzerland participates alongside other

donors are the GoC-Net registration database and trainings for Government and NGO partners. The GoC-Net data base is for the registration of all foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers and was launched in May 2015 by the Directorate General for Migration Management.

Fatima’s family used the cash voucher to buy rice, sugar and food. “We also bought cleaning material—soap, detergent and shampoo,” she says, proudly holding up a packet of washing powder specially meant for black garments. “There is no water here, we use the water from the mosque. The detergent makes the clothes soft,” she says clearly grateful that they are able to afford this. “We also used it to buy drinking water for the children,” she adds. Her mother chimes in. “Hygiene is so important,” she says. “The soap, the washing powder, we could not have done without it. I wish you would give us this voucher once a month, every month,” she says. Halima used it to buy tea, sugar, rice, oil, yoghurt and eggs. “I was very happy to have this,” she says, “and I wish you would give it to us again.”



Bahar with four of her children. Her elder sons are disabled. ©UNHCR/N.Bose

Another family live down a lane, and are in a finished house. Bahar (41) has six children, of whom two sons are disabled. They also came from Aleppo, a year and a half ago. “A bomb fell in front our house and we left, immediately,” she says. “We took a bus to Kilis and had to wait two days on the Syrian side before we were able to cross safely.” Her husband has a job –he works in a parking lot nearby and earns about a 100 TRY (USD 33) in a week. “Thanks to the voucher, we were able to buy oil, sugar, tea, washing powder and soap. Before, we couldn’t,” she points out.

Turkey now hosts more than 2 million Syrian refugees and has according to Turkish authorities, spent some US \$8 billion on caring for them. Refugees are legally able to access education and primary health care and those in the camps do not have to worry about shelter or food. Ordinary people too, can be extraordinarily generous, as Bahar recounts. “We first stayed in a park. Then, a Turkish person took us in to his home and we stayed there for six months. I used to help to keep the house clean, but he wanted to help us as two of my children are disabled. He cared for my children as if they were his own and he is the best person I have met in Turkey,” she says with tears in her eyes. They had to leave when he sold the house.

“I am thankful to everyone who is helping us,” she adds. But like Fatima and Halima, she would like, someday to return home. “There is always hope that the guns will fall silent. Turkey and its people have been very kind, but as refugees, we are suffering. It is always better to be home.” “We pray to God that we can go to Syria someday,” says Ayse.

Until that time comes, UNHCR remains grateful to all its donors, in this case to the Government of Switzerland for helping a population so desperately in need. More than half of all Syrian refugees now live in Turkey and despite the remarkable efforts of the Government of Turkey and donors, more is needed given the huge numbers.

By: *Nayana Bose, in Gaziantep*

Next month: Focus on the contribution from the Government of Denmark to refugees in Turkey

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الدول المانحة الأخرى الداعمة لمفوضية شؤون اللاجئين في المنطقة - Other Donor Countries Contributing to UNHCR in the Region - Bölgede UNHCR'yi Destekleyen Diğer Donör Ülkeler



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