

UNHCR TURKEY

HUMAN STORIES

UNHCR's Cash-Based Incentives provide opportunities for refugees to shape their lives and accomplish their dreams.



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Istanbul, Turkey- “This summer was more of a studying summer”, jokes Ahmad*, a 22-year-old Afghan refugee who recently started the second year of his architecture degree in Istanbul, at a top tier university.

Ahmad is not only a good student but also a keen linguist. Fluent also in Turkish, he has just completed an English language summer school, as a follow-up to his preparatory year of English language learning that was necessary for his architecture degree.

After fleeing from Afghanistan, Ahmad arrived in Turkey at the age of 14 in 2012. As an unaccompanied child, he was housed in a child care institution for minors in Istanbul. “I love living in Istanbul” he tells us. Ahmad speaks fondly of the days he used to spend with his friends in the child care institution and with those residing in Istanbul, he has kept in touch with and when he is not studying, they like to hang out.

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*

It was in the child care institution where he found out about the higher education and cash support programmes he could enrol in. A team from one of UNHCR's partners, the Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF), visited the child care institution to provide information about the educational and support opportunities available to them. When Ahmad was about to turn 18, he went straight to HRDF, who assisted him with his applications for the education and cash programmes. Ahmad is now a beneficiary of UNHCR's cash-based incentive programme which supports young adults after leaving child care institutions at the age of 18.

The support Ahmad receives from the cash programme provides him with a stipend which helps him finance his student life and transportation. He reasons that while his circumstances still aren't the best, "if it wasn't for the programme, I would be in a far worse position". He says that if the programme helps him to become an architect, then it will also have helped him accomplish his dreams for the future.

Ahmad's motivation to go to university was nurtured with the encouragement from his teachers at high school, and he warmly recalls a teacher stating: "education is one of the most valuable things you can have". With this in mind, he decided to study so that he could apply for university. And study he did, Ahmad did extremely well in his university entrance exams and got into the university of his choice with full tuition support.

For Ahmad, one of the best things about studying at university is the people; "people are just more

adult at university, and therefore more understanding and easier to get along with". At high school he was a year behind his peers because he spent a year studying Turkish and this always made him feel older than his classmates. With people more mature at university, there is no longer this divide and he feels that he has far more friends and this is something he feels deeply happy about.

Perhaps in reference to his previous experiences prior to arriving in Turkey, Ahmad is uncertain of what might happen in the future as the political state of the world is constantly in flux. While he says he cannot foresee tomorrow, this outlook does not appear to have impacted his fervour for working towards his goals.

Looking back on his 14-year-old self, he admits that if his younger self could see him now, he would simply not believe it. "When I was that age I couldn't even imagine going to university, being a university student and getting to study architecture, I would be completely surprised". Even today he is surprised by his own success, but with him achieving the impeccable grades that he worked so hard for, it does seem that the surprise element will no longer be the driving force in Ahmad's future.

With thanks to the flexible funding and generous support of France, Norway and the Republic of Korea, UNHCR supports refugees like Ahmad, with cash-based incentives, so that they may begin their adult lives. Through these small-scale cash-based incentives UNHCR Turkey is also able to support people with a range of specific needs.

CONTACTS

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