

Providing a roof over your head, literally

Tents and blankets from the State of Qatar has provided Syrian refugees in Turkey, who now are 1.8 million strong, shelter and a space to call “home”. High quality tents have brought relief to 10,000 families, in various camps in Turkey, and the high thermal blankets supported 315,090 individuals during the past winter.

KAHRAMANMARAS, Turkey. 12 August (UNHCR): The traumas of war never really leave. Hamide’s son, now seven years old, would vomit every time a bomb exploded in his home town of Idleb, in Syria. Fatima’s elder son, now 11, used to hit the ground every time a bomb hit Idleb –even in Kahramanmaras camp in Turkey’s south-east home to 17,300 refugees, he runs into a tent when a plane flies by.

Hamide, (24) is a widow with two children, her son is disabled. He husband was killed by a bullet in Idleb and she crossed over to Turkey after he died, with her uncle and his family, who are also in this camp.



Hamide with her children outside their tent in Kahramanmaras camp.
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To add to their traumas, the tent they were originally allotted burnt down in an unusual accidental small electric fire in the camp. Hamide and her children were in the market when it happened and the camp authorities were very quick in providing relief. Within an hour, they were given a replacement tent, and this is what Hamide calls “home”. The tent they are now in was donated by the State of Qatar. “It is more than a tent,” she says. “This is where I live and this is my home. I have no complaints, everything is good about it.”

Fadiya (31) and her family also live in a Qatari tent. Originally from Hama, they fled to Turkey three years ago. “The bombs just would not stop and then the

soldiers came,” says Fadiya. “My brother is a journalist and he was writing about the misbehaviour of the soldiers. He told me to leave, saying that they will come after my girls. That is why we left –I have four daughters.” She looks at the tent and says with a tinge of regret, “this is my home, now.”

The State of Qatar, through the Qatari Red Crescent has provided 10,000 tents and 315,090 high thermal blankets for the harsh winter worth USD 10 million to help the Syrian refugees in Turkey, both inside and outside of the refugee camps.

Fatima (35) and her husband and their five children, and were allotted a Qatari tent as they were originally living with extended family and needed extra space. “I have no complaints about being in the camp,” she says, happy with the tent and other assistance given by the Government of Turkey and the UN to all refugees who live in the 24 refugee camps in the south east of the country. This includes tents, food ration cards, and core relief items.

For those living in urban areas (and this is the vast majority), Syrian refugees in Turkey after being registered with the authorities, have access to education and primary health care through the Temporary Protection Regulation. Speaking of her tent, Fatima points out that it was waterproof in the rains—“no leakage” she says with a smile and withstood winds and with the higher ceiling, she says it is easier for the family to pray. “In the winter, it was warmer. We did not have to use the heater much.”



Fadiya with her daughters in the tent.

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Her children too, are happy. “I like how it looks from outside,” says 10-year-old Mariam. “It is more beautiful than other tents.” Adds her brother, Ahmad: “It looks bigger because it is higher.”

Grateful as they are for their temporary home, they hope someday to return. “We are not here to make our life,” says Fatima. “Whenever we can, we will go home. But I want to thank Turkey for receiving us and Qatar for giving us a roof over our heads,” she says.

Fadiya too, waits for the day they can return home to Syria. “When we left Hama, I asked my husband, what I should take. Nothing, he had said. We will be back in four –five months.” It has been more than three years for this family and counting, now.

UNHCR remains grateful to all its donors and in particular the State of Qatar for providing relief to a people so desperately in need. With more than 4 million Syrian refugees and nearly half that number (1.8 million) in Turkey, despite the remarkable efforts of the Government of Turkey and donors, more is needed.

By: Nayana Bose, in Kahramanmaras camp.

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

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