

Staying clean, healthy and happy

With its clear focus on health and hygiene, the Government of Italy by funding WASH containers – showers, toilets, washing containers in the camps – and hygiene kits for out of camp refugees has helped Syrian refugees in Turkey to remain healthy and has also contributed towards preventing major outbreaks of disease.



The female WASH area (on top), the toilet and shower containers, clothes being washed in the private space within; and the male WASH area, with all facilities arranged in one place at Kahramanmaras camp. ©UNHCR/N.Bose

KAHRAMANMARAS, AKCAKALE and HARRAN, Turkey. 8 September (UNHCR): It's the splashing of water and chatter that one hears, entering a washing area in Kahramanmaras camp, where more than 17,600 Syrian refugees live. Provided by UNHCR and supported by the Government of Italy, there are a total of 34 new WASH containers in the camp – 10 shower containers, and 24 WC containers.

Mariam (62) lives with her daughter Amina and five grandchildren. They fled the war in Aleppo three years ago, crossing over with 40 other people, helped by locals to reach Turkey. Her eyes light up when she talks of the WASH containers: "This is so much more hygienic and clean. We don't have to wash our clothes outside our tents anymore. We are very happy to have these." Amina (34) adds that the new containers are well located. "It is very convenient for us to use these ones, the other ones were quite far from our tent."

Mustafa (34) lives in the camp with his wife and son. They came from Hama three years ago, barely escaping the bombing that flattened their home. "Luckily, we were in another village at the time," he says thankful to be alive. There is pride in the new containers and one volunteer each from the refugee community – male and female – keeps the area clean. "Each tent gives one lire a month to the volunteer to wash clothes and keep the area clean," he says. To the credit of the camp management, the containers have been set up in a rectangular formation,

creating a private space within for washing, bathing and going to the toilet. This is much appreciated by women but also by the men. "Earlier, we had all facilities but in different areas," says Mustafa. "It was not easy to access all at one time. Now we can access the toilets and the showers at one time. It is much better this way."

Not only are the WASH containers helping to improve health and hygiene, so important to keep sickness away, but they are also a source of much needed extra income for some. Raja (38) works as a volunteer in one of the female WASH areas doing the laundry for refugees and keeping the showers and toilets clean, as a way of earning some extra money. Originally from Latakya, her husband was killed by the

bombings and she came to Kahramanmaras with her children two years ago. “I collect the clothes, wash them in the machines and give them back to the residents,” she says. “I earn about 150 TL (US\$ 30) per month and I use the money to take care of the children. It is a little bit of extra income for us –I have four children and any extra money is important for us.”

In addition to a total of 45 WASH containers (of which 34 are in Kahramanmaras camp), the Government of Italy has also funded hygiene kits for 10,000 non-camp families. Each hygiene kit consists of washing powder, bathing/hand washing soap, kitchen washing liquid, shampoo and sanitary napkins. With its clear focus on health and hygiene, the Government of Italy with its support for better conditions in and out of the camps, has helped prevent major outbreaks of disease and illness.



Khalid with his family, recent arrivals in Turkey who were given the hygiene kits. They live near Akcakale town. ©UNHCR/N.Bose

Khalid (45) recalls the fighting among various groups in his village near Tel Abyad, the clashes more violent each day, the terrible bombs, their ransacked homes and their desperate flight to safety. “We were frightened, and had to leave. My brother and cousin are still missing,” he says. He has four children and lives in a village near Akcakale town with this wife. They are among the 25,000 refugees who recently entered Turkey from the Akcakale border gate and surrounding entry points in June, escaping escalated fighting. Deeply grateful for the assistance they received, Khalid is emotional. “It was like a cold glass of water in the desert from heaven. We are so thankful –we could sleep, clean ourselves, work. We received both the kitchen sets and the hygiene kits and this is what has kept us alive.”

everything was, but if I had to choose one item, I would say it was the washing powder,” she says. For Husina (34) who has a seven-day old baby, the most useful was the washing soap. In a village near Harran with her husband and mother, she says that without the kit, they would have not been able to manage. “I have no money, without your help, it would have been difficult to clean.” They are also recent arrivals, from Deir ez Zor about a month ago.

His wife Hanna (35) adds that the hygiene kit lasted nearly a month for the family. “It’s not easy for me to say what was the most useful, because



Husina with her baby and mother watch as a relative shows what is left of the hygiene kits. ©UNHCR/N.Bose

Another family add that the hygiene kit has helped in savings. Mohammad (30) and his wife Majida (24) have a five-month baby boy and they live in an abandoned warehouse along with 15 other families, in Harran. They are also recent arrivals and came to Turkey three months ago from Aleppo. “We had to. Our lives, our homes were destroyed. We crossed the border in Kilis.”

Majida says the hygiene kit lasted a month as well, and is grateful to have received it. “It was very, very useful for us. Before we used to buy these things, and we are lucky to get this. For one month, we were able to save money.”

UNHCR remains grateful to all its donors and in particular the Government of Italy, for impacting the

lives of refugees in such a positive and important way. Health and hygiene is paramount in a refugee situation and cannot be comprised. UNHCR is also grateful to the Government of Turkey for its continuing assistance to those fleeing the most horrific of situations.

Turkey now hosts nearly half of all Syrian refugees (1.9 million out of an estimated 4 million). It has been extraordinarily generous and remains a welcoming host country. Refugees are able, through the Temporary Protection afforded to them, to access schools and health care. They are safe and can begin to lead their lives again. And no one knows this more than the refugees themselves.

“We are very, very lucky to be in Turkey,” says Khalid. “I know of people who are dying trying to get to Germany. Here we have a chance to look after ourselves and our families and we are grateful to have been accepted in this country.”

“A million thanks to Turkey,” says Amina. “If they did not accept us, where would we go, how would we live?”

BY: *Nayana Bose, in villages around Akcakale, Harran and Kahramanmaraş camp.*

Next month: Focus on the contribution from the Big Heart Campaign, to refugees in Turkey supported by H.H Sheikh Jawaher Bint Mohammed Al Qasimi of the UAE.

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