

Changing Lives

Registration helps Syrian refugees in Turkey get documented, access education and health care and makes their stay in the country legal. Given the vast numbers in Turkey, the authorities were able to register 1.7 million refugees in record time, with assistance from UNHCR and its donor countries such as the United States, whose generous funding made it possible to provide mobile registration centres to the Turkish authorities.

KILIS, Turkey. 1 April (UNHCR): They fled escaping bombs, death, violence and fear. Some lived in abandoned buildings, dangerously damaged by the fighting, close to collapse. Some watched as their relatives were killed in front of their eyes. Some survived explosions, miraculously. “We were inside my son’s store when it was bombed,” says Hayriye, (53) from Aleppo. “We were saved as we ran to the other side of the building,” she says. “Some of our relatives were killed before we were able to leave.” Hayriye is one of 1.7 million Syrian refugees who have made Turkey their home. Her son and young family are with her in Kilis.

Safia (58) is originally from Deir

Ezzor. Also in Kilis with her son and her grandchildren, Safia speaks of the horrors of flight. “Da’esh slaughtered 700 young men of our tribe in just three days,” she says. “They threw us out of our homes and burnt them. We sent young men of our families away and they took the Euphrates river route. Women and children travelled separately and we met in Azaz from where we crossed into Turkey.” Her story is similar to millions of Syrians, 3.9 million of whom are now refugees in exile.

The government of Turkey has done a commendable job of registering 1.7 million Syrian refugees since the crisis began. This is a staggering number and makes Turkey the country hosting the most number of Syrian refugees globally, as well as the largest refugee hosting country in the world today.

UNHCR was able to help the authorities with registration formalities as donors, such as the United States, contributed generously to the operation in Turkey. With funding from the United States, UNHCR was able to provide the Turkish authorities—the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) -- with 11 mobile registration centres in 2014, at a total cost of a little over US\$ 4 million. This is in addition to 23 mobile registration centres given to the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) earlier, who were registering Syrian refugees before DGMM took over.

The advantage that the mobile registration centres have is that they are able to access locations, particularly in south-eastern Turkey, where most of the Syrian refugees are. It makes it easier for refugees to approach the authorities, more so in slightly inaccessible areas. These centres are where refugees like Hayriye and Safia have found a new lease of life.



Hayriye with her grandson, outside the mobile registration truck used by Turkish authorities in Kilis. Funding from the United States to UNHCR’s operation in Turkey made it possible to provide these mobile registration centres to the authorities. @UNHCR/A.S. Baran

“The most important thing is education for our children,” says Safia. Once refugees are registered, their children are able to go to school. Families are able to access health care.

“My grandson is a new born baby and he needs medical care,” says Hayriye. “At the hospital, they helped us but said that I need to get registered as well.” The family was registered on the spot on 31 March, 2015 and she was able to take the baby to the hospital for further medical care and the surgery he so desperately needed to survive.



Hatice and her young family being registered in the truck in Kilis. @UNHCR/A.S. Baran

Hatice (32) also from Aleppo is grateful that registration has helped her four young children go to school. “Educating my children is my top priority,” she says. “They have not been able to go to school for the last three years.” The family fled to Turkey in February this year. Her husband Akil pointed out why registration was so important to them. “We benefit from health services, and receive help from NGOs. We can stay legally in Turkey.” He adds that it is important that his children learn Turkish.

With registration, Syrian refugees are concretely benefitting from Temporary Protection in Turkey which entitles them to education and health care as shown above, and also access to the labour markets. Most importantly, it gives them a clear legal status in Turkey.

“I was a civil servant in Syria,” says Safia. “I lost everything, even my identity when I left,” she says, breaking down. For refugees like Safia, registration and the temporary protection it affords, gives

them a sense of identity and a sense of purpose, again.

UNHCR remains grateful to donors such as the United States that make it possible to provide such assistance to refugees, directly impacting their lives for the better.

By Aynur Seda Baran in Kilis and Nayana Bose in Ankara.

Donor Countries of UNHCR's Regional Syrian Refugee Programme for Turkey:



Other Donor Countries Contributing to UNHCR's Regional Syrian Refugee Programme in alphabetical order:

